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The Return of the Franchise
Resurgence in the Domestic Insurgencies of al-Qaeda Affiliates

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Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AAS</td>
<td>Alternative Authority Structure</td>
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<td>AQ</td>
<td>al-Qaeda</td>
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<td>AQAP</td>
<td>al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula</td>
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<td>AQA</td>
<td>al-Qaeda Affiliate</td>
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<tr>
<td>AQC</td>
<td>al-Qaeda Central (the organization’s core leadership in Pakistan)</td>
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<td>AQI</td>
<td>al-Qaeda in Iraq (sometimes referred as the ISI or ISIS in other literature)</td>
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<td>COIN</td>
<td>Counter-insurgency</td>
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<td>ISI</td>
<td>the Islamic State in Iraq</td>
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<td>ISIS</td>
<td>the Islamic State in Syria and al-Sham</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>the United Nations</td>
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<td>UNSC</td>
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Introduction

As a transnational jihadist organization, al-Qaeda’s ideological doctrine and large-scale organizational objectives are primarily global in their focus. Moreover, their military operations and the rhetoric accompanying these operations have generally possessed a signature anti-Western focus. Yet, in the last half-decade, the most notable efforts associated with the organization have not been spectacular attacks against Western countries but rather domestic campaigns conducted by jihadist-insurgent organizations that either officially joined the al-Qaeda (AQ) network or were established by AQ’s central leadership (AQC). Despite a large number of analysts arguing that AQ is in decline, al-Qaeda affiliates (AQAs) are surprisingly active in theaters like Yemen, Iraq, Mali, and Somalia. In these locations, despite organizational setbacks, AQAs have carved out significant operational space for themselves and proven their status as noteworthy non-state actors. While success may be too strong of a term to describe AQA campaigns, a number of AQAs have recently demonstrated notable increases in activity after periods of significant setbacks. Given the aforementioned observations, the work presented in this paper seeks to answer the question, what accounts for the resurgence of the domestic campaigns of al-Qaeda affiliates?

To clarify, though the apparent organizational shift from global to local jihad is an interesting trend, it is not the focus of the work presented here. Numerous authors have already written extensively on this shift, eloquently addressing the potential reasons for its occurrence, the effectiveness of franchises, and what it says about AQC’s capabilities. On the other hand, there is little work that analyzes in depth the actual dynamics of recent AQA resurgence in comparison with one another. Consequently, my analysis here: 1) Examines the efforts of AQAs

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1 Bergen 2012.
as domestic insurgencies and 2) Presents a causal explanation for the resurgence of AQA insurgencies. The study begins with a detailed explanation of several fundamental concepts, with the most important being that of insurgency and the observed trend, resurgence. Next, I review literature on insurgency, terrorism, and civil war, in order to identify the mechanisms most likely to affect insurgent activity. Then, I present several conceptual schools of thought that feature hypothetical explanations for the resurgence of AQA activity. Subsequently, the aforementioned hypotheses are applied to specific cases of AQA insurgencies in order to determine which explanations appear most accurate. The cases that analyzed in this paper involve insurgencies in Iraq, Yemen, and Somalia conducted by the AQA’s respectively known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and al-Shabaab. Through this process, this thesis has identified three variables as being the most impactful on AQA resurgence: Emergent Conflict, Organizational Adaptation, and Economic Factors.

I

Typology of Internal Warfare

“Diplomacy without arms is like music without instruments.”

-Frederick the Great

Guerrilla Warfare

Before moving forward, it is first necessary to define a number of terms central to the vocabulary of internal warfare. Due to discrepancies in its meaning, the first term that must be explicated is guerilla warfare. Though Mao Tse-Tung uses the term guerrilla warfare as a label for a particular system of revolutionary war, guerilla warfare is usually discussed as a set of military tactics used by weaker forces against a conventional army. Guerrilla warfare tactics emphasize the use of small, mobile units of fighters that conduct low-intensity military operations characterized by speed and surprise. Such operations include ambushes,

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3 Mao 2000, 41-57.
assassinations, and hit-and-run attacks. While these tactics feature obvious offensive utility, they also possess a defensive purpose since units are expected to rapidly retreat and disperse following engagement. Because insurgent resources are limited, guerrilla warfare aims to maximize enemy casualties while minimizing the opportunity for insurgent losses by dedicating a minimal amount of soldiers to the operation.\textsuperscript{4} For the purposes of this paper, guerrilla warfare will be referred to from the tactical perspective and the label “guerrilla” will be interchanged throughout the narrative with terms like “rebel” and “insurgent.”

**Civil War**

Another point of terminological clarification involves the difference between an insurgency and a civil war. The most fundamental condition separating insurgency and civil war lies in the relationship between each side’s capabilities and the scale of combat. An insurgency sits at a point of significant asymmetry in comparison to the resources possessed by the state. However, as the force ratio between opposition groups and the state nears equilibrium and resources are increasingly dedicated to the fight, the scale of the conflict will escalate. As the sides become more symmetrical and fighting intensifies, the conflict will more likely be classified as a civil war. Thus, civil wars are commonly differentiated from an insurgency because they feature combat on a greater scale and a more symmetrical balance of power between the state and its challengers. In this regard, state’s experiencing a civil war record higher casualty rates, a wider geographic distribution of fighting, greater mobilization of resources statewide, and a larger percentage of citizens involved with and affected by the fighting than would be seen by a state experiencing an insurgency. It should be noted that civil wars also differ from insurgencies via the tactical nature of military operations. Though unconventional warfare may feature prominently in a civil war, combat primarily follows conventional means and takes

\textsuperscript{4} Joes 2004, 11-23.
places between the incumbent government and at least one other military challenger. While civil wars may include combative sides classified as insurgent groups, insurges frequently occur in states not actually experiencing a full-blown civil war. Despite the differences, theories on civil war offer valuable insight into variables and mechanisms that affect an insurgency.

**Terrorism**

Terrorism can be defined as the deliberate targeting of non-combatants in order to influence the actions of a state’s citizens and leaders.\(^5\) While insurgency is a political movement that typically operates with specific set of strategic limitations, terrorism is a tactic insurgents can choose to use. The terrorism-insurgency binary is a popular discussion point, particularly with authors who wish to categorically distinguish actors as terrorists or insurgents. Many analysts believe this can be accomplished by analyzing differences in the degree of violence used by a movement’s participants, the primary recipients of that violence, the method of employing the violence, and the movement’s ability to generate public support and control territory.\(^6\)

However, much of the debate on whether a violent movement’s participants should be labeled as insurgents or terrorists is rather arbitrary. For the purpose of this paper, instead of focusing on simplistic labels, our analysis will examine the role of terrorism as a tactic and highlight its possible effects on a movement’s objectives. A more thorough explication of terrorism, including its role in specific military strategies as well as its pitfalls, will be discussed during the literature review.

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\(^5\) Arquilla 2007, 370; Pape, 2006.
\(^6\) Khalil 2013, 419; Sullivan 2005; Hashim 2009, 46.
**Insurgency**

“Armies were like plants, immobile, firm-rooted, nourished through long stems to the head. We might be a vapour, blowing where we listed. Our kingdoms lay in each man’s mind; and as we wanted nothing material to live on, so we might offer nothing material to the killing.”

-T.E. Lawrence

An insurgency can be best understood as a political movement that utilizes violent and non-violent means to combat an opposing state authority. While there are several different types of insurgencies, including secession, anti-regime, and anti-occupation, the insurgencies analyzed in this piece will primarily fall under the category of anti-regime. Anti-regime movements seek to force a radical change in the social, economic, and political structures of the state by defeating an incumbent government. This objective entails a number of significant obstacles for the movement. To understand these obstacles, it is necessary to understand the objective at the center of an insurgency’s struggle is not simply the state, or the right to govern, but the population the opposing forces wish to govern. Both insurgent and counter-insurgent strategists recognize that the most important objective for each side is not merely surviving and killing enemies but winning support from the population at the heart of the fight.

As Ayman al-Zawahiri wrote in a letter to al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, “the strongest weapon which the mujahidin enjoy…is popular support from the Muslim masses.”

In order for the population to see the proposed replacement system as a viable alternative, insurgencies require not only military capabilities but also intensive political and administrative

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7 With the exception being the anti-occupation campaigns AQI and Shabaab fought during the early stages of their organizational history. Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 13.
8 Manwaring 2008, 15.
9 Kilcullen 2012, 144.
10 JDW 2010.
11 Evans 2010.
engagement that will provide the basis for a new government.\textsuperscript{12} The importance of popular mobilization and political action lies in one of the distinguishing characteristics of an insurgency: the glaring asymmetric relationship between the combating sides and the inherently political objectives of the insurgents.\textsuperscript{13} This asymmetric balance of power pervades nearly every element of an insurgency’s means for achieving its objectives. For instance, an insurgency lacks the military power or capabilities to simply topple the state via conventional warfare but, because of its clandestine nature and entrenchment among the population, insurgencies are seen as possessing an information advantage.\textsuperscript{14} Thus, an insurgency must use its information advantage to pursue other strategic avenues and shrink the gap in capabilities.

The most cited approach involves using political tactics in which, “propaganda might substitute for weapons, subversion might substitute for air power, manpower for mechanisation, political mobilisation for industrial mobilization.”\textsuperscript{15} Political action and popular mobilization are not only necessary to undermine the state but also to survive against the repression of a more powerful opponent. Mao Tse-Tung and Abu Musab al-Suri have both emphasized the defensive role of these two means, stipulating how a base of popular support is an essential survival tool once military confrontations with an opposing government begin. As Mao put it, to survive, “the guerrilla must be in the population as the little fishes in the ocean.”\textsuperscript{16} In summary, an insurgency’s strategic implementation of violent and non-violent tactics theoretically provides the basis for which a weak military force can mobilize popular support and most effectively overcome military repression.

\textsuperscript{12} Rice 1988, 66.
\textsuperscript{13} Khalil 2013, 421.
\textsuperscript{14} McCormick, Giordano 2007, 308; Metz 2011; Kalyvas 2004, 109.
\textsuperscript{15} Beckett 2001, 73.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
### III

**Resurgence and Activity**

“When the sword of rebellion is drawn, the sheath should be thrown away.”

-English Proverb

As we have established, an insurgency occupies the first phase of a violent revolutionary movement in which the conflict is characterized by a clearly asymmetric balance of power between the revolutionary organization and the opposing state authority. Accordingly, an insurgent organization must progressively work to shift the balance of power in its favor to be capable of victory. The trend this paper seeks to explain, resurgence, implies that an organization is actively augmenting its strength, undermining the state, and shifting the balance of power by mobilizing human and material resources and executing military operations. For an organization to be classified as resurgent, there must be an observable increase in organizational activity following a period characterized by a plateau or drop in activity. While resurgence can certainly be quantified as an indicator that the organization is on its way to ultimate success, it more importantly implies an upward trajectory in demonstrated capabilities and renewed momentum in its efforts against the state. The dependent variable in this paper, activity, can be defined as observable efforts on the part of the insurgent organization to meet the aforementioned strategic demands. Though military operations are an obvious form of organizational activity, activity also includes recruiting, propaganda output, seizure of territory, and political engagement with local institutions, whether they are political organizations or tribes. Thus, activity does not simply entail military endeavors but also political efforts and developments in an insurgency’s organizational infrastructure such as an improved media apparatus and increased membership.

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17 This framework combines determinants proposed by Schock 2005; Weinstein 2006, 37; and Metz 2011, 123-124.
An important relationship to understand is the one between military operations and mobilization. Efforts in these departments work on an interdependent, rather than independent, basis to aid an insurgency’s efforts. For example, mobilizing resources and popular support provides an insurgency with the means to continue conducting military and political operations. At the same time, the execution of military operations can serve as a means of mobilizing support for the movement by undermining the state’s legitimacy, degrading its capabilities, and projecting an appearance of insurgent strength. In this regard, mobilization and military action not only help an insurgency withstand repression; they also help the organization demonstrate its capability as a legitimate challenger to the state.\textsuperscript{18} Similarly, surges in military action after organizational setbacks can act as a valuable propaganda tool for an insurgency by demonstrating the organization’s capability for success even when it appears to have lost momentum.\textsuperscript{19} In his work on rebellion, Weinstein describes an insurgency’s ability to recover from losses as a vital mechanism in engendering popular participation and maintaining group cohesion. This is because setbacks theoretically reduce an insurgency’s chances for victory and the likelihood that group members will receive rewards for their commitment to the cause.\textsuperscript{20} Thus, setbacks decrease the attractiveness of participation while successes increase the attractiveness. Consequently, an opposition group that is unable to recover from losses will find it increasingly more difficult to recruit new members, prevent defections, and convince fence sitters of the group’s ability to win.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{18} Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 57.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Weinstein 2006, 262.
\textsuperscript{21} Weinstein 2006, 261. A common concept is that popular support for an insurgency is highly sensitive to the population’s perceived expectations of insurgent victory or loss. Also see: McCormick, Harrison, Horton 2007 and McCormick, Giordano 2007.
IV
Situating AQA Insurgencies

“In today's wars, there are no morals...we do not have to differentiate between military or civilian. As far as we are concerned, they are all targets.”
-Osama Bin Laden

Prominent authors like John Mackinlay and David Kilcullen describe many modern insurgencies, including AQ’s own global jihad, as post-Maoist in that they have morphed from purely national struggles into globally minded movements.22 Other authors have also challenged applying classical views of insurgency to modern conflicts. Steven Metz has similarly claimed, “To continue conceptualizing contemporary insurgency as a variant of traditional, Clausewitzean war, where two antagonists each seek to impose their will on and vanquish the opponent in pursuit of political objectives, does not capture today's reality.”23 However, I disagree with Metz in regards to this notion’s application to the domestic insurgencies of AQAs. Much of Metz’ conclusion is influenced by a recent trend in scholarship that looks at economic incentives of rebellion and often assumes insurgents don’t actually have a final objective of overthrowing the state. Indeed, Metz’ theory understands contemporary insurgency as resembling a violent competitive market in which most groups can only hope to gain periods of market domination.24

Though it may eventually turn out that AQAs will be unable to ever fully control a state, there is little reason to believe that simple market domination is the actual objective of AQAs. The inability of AQAs thus far to “vanquish an opponent” government neither disproves the existence of such an ultimate objective nor disproves the role of this objective in shaping the nature of the conflict. Indeed, based on many readings of al-Qaeda strategic doctrines and analysis of numerous AQAs, I have seen very little evidence to suggest that AQAs are not

23 Metz 2011, 136.
24 Metz 2011, 132.
antagonists legitimately seeking to destroy their opponent in pursuit of political objectives.\textsuperscript{25} The inability of AQA’s to yet achieve ultimate domestic victory could simply be attributed to factors such as an inability to execute their strategic frameworks successfully. In conclusion, tenets of classical theories on insurgency will be used when examining strategic objectives and mechanisms for insurgent capabilities.

The domestic efforts of AQAs can be classified as anti-regime insurgencies because their ultimate objective lies in removing the existing regime and radically changing the state’s socio-political structure. Consequently, AQAs experience many of the previously discussed challenges of other anti-regime movements. However, though many classical concepts apply to AQA efforts, their movements are unique in several ways. First, while their objectives are political in nature, the Salafi-jihadist ideology of AQAs adds an important component of religious identity to their movement. Secondly, on a more political level, AQAs specifically seek to lead a revolution in which the existing regime is overthrown and replaced with an Islamic emirate governed by a strict adherence to Sharia law. Though studies have identified religiously minded insurgencies as being harder to defeat, the ideological tendencies of AQAs present several obstacles for mobilizing support.\textsuperscript{26}

First, since they promote the notion of a universal ummah and wish to eradicate the existing state, AQA insurgencies are unable to reap the mobilizing power that comes with a strategy espousing existing nationalist ideologies. Second, though Muslims are the overwhelming religious demographic inside AQA’s theater of operation, most Muslims do not subscribe to Salafism or the tenets of jihadism preached by AQA’s. Furthermore, the majority of the populace AQAs wish to engage desire neither a political system dominated by this specific

\textsuperscript{25} Michel Ryan’s 2013 text “Decoding Al-Qaeda’s Strategy” reinforces this assertion.

\textsuperscript{26} Jones and Libicki 2008.
form of Islam nor a theocratic system of government like the type AQAs espouse. Thus, from both a political and religious standpoint, the core identity of AQAs is one that promotes an unpopular ideological platform. This discrepancy means AQAs lack a specific political or religious identity that evenly matches up with the population it seeks to mobilize. Considering the documented importance of identity and ideology as mechanisms in facilitating mobilization, AQAs inherently face a significant obstacle in their efforts to generate popular participation.27

Though experts like Michael Ryan argue that religious ideology plays a marginal role in the group’s strategic military frameworks, an extensive study by RAND concludes that AQ adheres to its ideological system with a degree of strategic inflexibility not typically seen in other insurgent organizations.28 Indeed, I argue that the extreme religious ideology of AQAs certainly contributes to their uncompromising approach and influences their tendency to use military means for mobilization instead of political means. Pape has noted that ideological doctrines stressing religious differences reduce room for compromise because belligerents view the conflict as a zero-sum game.29 Accordingly, the tendency of AQAs to categorize conflicts in absolute terms influences their military strategy and their use of extreme tactics. As Clausewitz has commented, total war tactics will likely be implemented by a belligerent force if the force believes the enemy’s military must be destroyed, their leaders eliminated, and the population made to submit.30 Furthermore, in her study of clandestine violence actors, Della Porta detailed how AQ’s ideological encapsulation over time has contributed to its overwhelmingly deontological mindset and tendency to place absolute value in martyrdom.31 Though clandestine actors like AQA’s are harder to target and more capable of demonstrating resilience, they tend to

27 Metz 2011, 119-120.
28 Ryan 2013; Davis 2012; Della Porta 2013.
29 Pape 2005, 89
31 Della Porta 2013, 225-232.
be compartmentalized, strategically constrained, and path dependent. In summary, many of the aforementioned organizational characteristics and ideological tendencies of AQAs are not advantageous for the organization’s ability to gather resources and generate operational capabilities. Thus, it is important to determine which mechanisms can theoretically support an AQA’s ability to overcome these obstacles and remain active.

5 Literature Review

Overview

In order to gain more a complete understanding of the mechanisms that affect AQA activity, this paper analyzes three different bodies of literature. The first and most prominent body of literature encompasses empirical and theoretical pieces by academics, military analysts, and experts in the fields of insurgency, terrorism, civil war, failed states, and ethnic/identity conflict. The second body of literature contains the writings and classic models of insurgency proposed by revolutionaries like Mao Tse-Tung and Che Guevara. The third body of literature includes the writings of the most prominent jihadi military strategists including Abu Musab al-Suri, Abu Bakr al-Naji, Abd-al-Aziz al-Muqrin, and Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi. Strategic and ideological recommendations from figures like Abdullah Azzam, Osama Bin Laden, and Ayman al-Zawahiri are also considered.

By analyzing this breadth of academic and non-academic literature, it is possible to determine a thorough set of conditions that empirically or theoretically correlate with an insurgency’s capability to act. Relevant conditions can then be grouped into hypotheses that seek to explain resurgences in AQA activity. Before moving on, it is necessary to acknowledge that the body of literature on internal warfare discusses a number of mechanisms that are excluded

32 Della Porta 2013, 150; Weinstein 2006
33 Stern 2003 argues that successful groups must adapt ideologies to political realities.
from the analysis in this paper. For instance, factors like organizational will and rough terrain, have been omitted for reasons such as empirical insignificance, lack of observable variance, and pre-determined conclusions regarding their potential impact on the resurgence of AQA insurgencies. The most important point to be made in this regard is the simple fact that insurgencies are remarkably complicated and multi-faceted occurrences affected by a diverse range of factors. Furthermore, as is the bane of social science analysis, none of the independent variables presented in this paper can be absolutely isolated from one another. Conditions related to an insurgency are highly interdependent and frequently occur as both indicators and mechanisms for activity. As a result, I will tease out certain concepts as much as possible in order to understand what processes are actually occurring and how they specifically can affect insurgent activity. However, there will always be room for error, omission, and distortion.

**Structure vs. Agency**

Factors that affect an insurgency’s ability to operate primarily fall under two broad categories: structural and organizational mechanisms. The structuralist approach tends to classify the dynamics of political violence as being a product of political, economic, or social strain. In the case of anti-regime insurgencies, structural conditions are those that are relative to the state. Certainly, since the state represents the theater of operation and the primary opposing force to an insurgent campaign, its role in stimulating an insurgency is important. Analysis in this regard focuses specifically on the role of the state in creating what are known as political opportunity structures. Political opportunity structures are defined as the opportunities and constraints an insurgent group faces in their operational environment. Examples include the nature and degree of repression against an insurgency and the political inclusiveness of the state. Indeed, authors

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34 Hegghammer 2008, 702.
35 Esman 1994, 32.
frequently point to these structural tendencies when examining the radicalization of opposition
groups and the ability of insurgent groups to mobilize more-moderate segments of the
population. Esman has shown that without considerable opportunity structures, like deprivation
or threats to a community’s interests and values, collective action for the purpose of larger
political objectives is unlikely.

However, it is important to understand that the structural environment an insurgent group
operates in cannot itself be a sufficient explanation for insurgent capabilities and activity. One of
the primary critiques of structuralist interpretations comments that the type of small-scale
violence associated with insurgencies cannot solely be explained by linear structuralist accounts
because capable campaigns require actors who can craft an effective strategy to generate
participation and undertake combat. Chenoweth and Stephan have similarly argued that it is the
manner in which resistance groups craft a strategy to engage their environment that explains their
level of success. Moreover, though rational-choice processes frequently influence strategic
decisions, characteristics at the organizational level are essential in explaining variation in
strategic choices. Characteristics like ideological orientation and organizational endowments can
affect a group’s perceptions of their operating environment and the effectiveness of violence,
which can affect strategic approaches to structural opportunities. Thus, as Brubaker and Latin
argue, the actions of an organization cannot simply be examined as a natural occurrence when a
conflict reaches a certain stage or occurs in a particular environment. Consequently this

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36 Tilly 1978.
37 Esman 1994, 30.
38 Hegghammer 2008, 702.
39 Chenoweth and Stephan 2011.
40 Krause 2013, 274; Dellaporta 2013, 35.
41 Brubaker and Laitin 1998, 426.
literature review will analyze both structural and organizational factors in order to demonstrate the significance of their interdependence and their role in affecting an insurgency’s ability to act.

**State Based Factors**

**Regime Type**

The principal connection between regime type and insurgent activity pertains to the nature of the state’s response to the opposition movement either through repression or political engagement. For instance, in democracies, insurgencies are purportedly less volatile because the state offers mechanisms for addressing grievances and facilitating political inclusion.\(^{42}\) Whereas authoritarian regimes are characterized as more effective in quelling political violence because of the strict security environment and the tendency to crush mobilization at the early stages of opposition development.\(^{43}\) Yet, regimes that operate in a space between these two systems are said to create more mobilization opportunities for an insurgency because they offer neither effective repression nor political engagement.\(^{44}\) Furthermore, young democracies are often especially fearful of threats to their power and their security forces tend to be steeped in authoritarian values, increasing the likelihood that the state uses counterproductive repressive measures against perceived opposition.\(^{45}\) These fledgling states may also wish to consolidate power by using repressive measures to extend control into societal realms previously lacking in central state authority.\(^{46}\)

**Repression**

Despite many studies identifying regime type as an important variable for the viability of an insurgent organization, regime type is actually of marginal importance for the analysis here as

\(^{42}\) Fearon and Laitin 2003; DeRouen and Sobek 2004, 306; Goodwin 2004; Connable and Libicki 2010.
\(^{43}\) Connable and Libicki 2010.
\(^{44}\) Kavanagh 2010, 108.
\(^{45}\) Della Porta 2013, 18.
\(^{46}\) Boudreau 2005.
it is more useful to focus on the state’s specific approach to addressing violent opposition movements.\textsuperscript{47} Since each of the insurgencies in this paper’s case study analysis experience opposition, the important element is the specific nature and degree of repression being applied and the effects of this repression on the insurgency’s ability to engender participation and conduct military operations. Indeed, the style and degree of repression employed by a state is of the utmost importance. Insufficient repression will allow insurgent groups to gather resources and conduct operations at a reduced cost to the organization. However, repression that is applied broadly against whole communities can inflame the situation and drive non-combatants towards the opposition.\textsuperscript{48} If the repression against the opposition movement and its perceived support base is uniquely severe, it may motivate fence sitters to join the insurgency and legitimize further violence by producing an environment of injustice in which protestors and insurgents possess a shared sense of victimization.\textsuperscript{49}

Broad repression is predominantly considered harmful because of its tendency to feature indiscriminate violence that leads to the death of civilians and the empowerment of those involved in the movement.\textsuperscript{50} Analysts of social movements have argued that indiscriminate violence creates a degenerative climate of crisis in which each side increases their level of violent contention in response to the perceived aggression of the opposing force.\textsuperscript{51} The random nature of indiscriminate violence may also push neutrals into the hands of an insurgency by removing noncombatant’s ability to determine an effective means of compliance. Civilians are therefore motivated to join the opposition in order to benefit from a support system that can offer

\textsuperscript{48} U.S. Army 2007, 15; Fearon and Laitin 2003, 75-76; Schock 2005, 60; Walsh 2009; Walsh and Piazza 2010 both show that state responses that include extrajudicial killings and disappearances make matters worse. Fuller 2002; Lafree, Dugan and Korte 2009; Young 2007; Cohen 2010; Adler 2010.
\textsuperscript{50} Downes 2008; Young 2007; Dugan and Chenoweth 2012.
\textsuperscript{51} Hafez and Wiktorowicz 2005, 71.
some degree of protection. As Kalyvas and Kocher comment, “Individuals may participate in a rebellion not in spite of the risk but in order to better manage it.” Thus, misguided state repression may actually help solve an insurgency’s collective action problem by facilitating participation or, at the very least, rendering the population less willing to cooperate with the regime.

However, repression is also capable of reducing the opportunities that facilitate a movement, imposing costs that inhibit collective action, and facilitating internal discord. Affirming the importance of repressive tactics, Jones and Libicki’s study determined that 40 percent of all terrorist groups end as a direct result of police action and intelligence efforts. Thus, terrorists groups are less likely to survive in states with an effective counterinsurgency (COIN) apparatus. Selective targeting and more discriminate COIN tactics, like leadership decapitation, raids, and military checkpoints, are categorized as more effective means for COIN since they undermine the insurgency while limiting civilian casualties. However, while one major study concluded that insurgencies are more likely to decrease in intensity after leadership decapitation, another concluded that insurgencies rebound more often than not, especially those with religious ideological orientation. Fielding and Shortland’s analysis also determined that arrests and security raids targeting insurgent organizations correlated with an increase in attacks in the months following intervention. Though repression against a specific organization can certainly force the group underground and reduce its capability to mobilize, isolated clandestine

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52 Kalyvas 2004, 104-105.  
55 Jones, Libicki 2008.  
57 Johnston 2010; Jordan 2009.  
58 Fielding and Shortland 2010.
movements are quite dangerous given their ideological extremism, penchant for destabilizing terrorism attacks, and remarkably resilient nature.\(^5^9\) Furthermore, though repression-induced isolation may indirectly force insurgencies to use self-defeating tactics, it does not eliminate their theoretical ability to operate, influence conflict dynamics, and engender participation. Indeed, even when an organization has experienced setbacks and finds itself facing a state authority applying periods of selective repression, it can undertake strategic actions in order to turn the tide of conflict. Such strategic action will be discussed at a later point in this literature review.

**State Weakness**

Likely the most discussed structural mechanism in literature on civil war and insurgency is the notion of state weakness. State strength can be measured by the government’s ability and willingness to provide the basic political goods associated with statehood including security, genuine political institutions, social welfare, economic management, and political inclusion.\(^6^0\) The logic here is that the government’s inability to fulfill the requirements of statehood creates opportunities that foster insurgent livelihood. Proponents of weak state theories identify governmental capacity as the key mechanism in a variety of developments including the outbreak, duration, and termination of internal warfare.\(^6^1\)

Nonetheless, the weak state school is not without critics. Several major studies have found no relationship between the capabilities of the targeted state and insurgent success while others have empirically discounted the structuralist approach altogether.\(^6^2\) One of the most important points that can be made regarding this approach is the fact that state weakness is a

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\(^5^9\) Della Porta 2013; Dalacoura 2006; Hafez and Wiktorowicz 2004, 38.

\(^6^0\) Patrick 2006, 29.

\(^6^1\) Hironka 2005, 45; Doyle and Sambanis 2006, 5.

\(^6^2\) Contains annual values for a state’s total population, urban population, iron and steel production, energy consumption, military personnel, and military expenditure.

constant in all insurgencies to a certain degree. Unless foreign interests solely empower the movement, the occurrence of an insurgency inherently reflects a weakness in the state’s stability, legitimacy, and strength. Completely stable states simply do not experience prolonged efforts by insurgencies. Though state weakness is valuable in explaining how insurgencies form, because of its broad nature, it is important to identify specific flaws in a weak state in order to see how they may affect an insurgent group’s resilience. Accordingly, the following section will highlight a number of conditions associated with weak states and discuss their ability to affect an insurgency’s capabilities.

**Economic Factors**

In the past two decades, a growing body of literature has emerged focusing on economic opportunities and the power of greed in influencing the dynamics of internal warfare. The most prominent aspect of this discussion argues that rebels are primarily motivated by economic incentives and opportunity costs when choosing to rebel. Clearly, this aspect of the framework is not relevant since our analysis does not focus on the start of insurgencies but instead on dramatic increases in activity.\(^{63}\) However, economic opportunities associated with state endowments, such as natural resources and primary commodity exports like food, oil, and raw materials, are relevant conditions to examine.\(^{64}\) Evidence that AQA is either seizing or selling primary commodity exports or extorting businesses involved with such commodities could indicate a valuable revenue stream contributing to renewed activity.

The effect of a state’s economic conditions on engendering participation in an insurgency is also worthy of discussion. Poor economic conditions in a state are said to contribute to civil unrest and an insurgency’s recruitment capabilities by lowering the opportunity cost of

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\(^{64}\) Collier and Hoeffler 2004.
participation. Thus, insurgents may be sensitive to a state’s labor market since recruiting is theoretically made easier when young, urban males struggle to find employment. Collier and Hoeffler assess the state of the labor market with two measures: rate of economic growth per capita and the proportion of young males enrolled in secondary schools. Their analysis of these measures found that a high enrolment rate of males in secondary schools reduces the rate of participation. However, numerous studies discount the link between education, poverty, and political violence by finding no sufficient causality between the three criteria. Other examinations have found no quantifiable relationship between income inequality, national wealth, and militancy.

Research that focuses more on the affect of financial considerations for individual participants also does not support the viability of economic mechanisms. For example, separate works by Berman and Kruger show no connection between economic deprivation and individual participation. Research conducted by Pape concludes that suicide bombers tend to have above-average education levels and a lower-middle class background. Instead, individual case studies of militancy in countries like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan point to political and ideological considerations as being more important in motivating individual participation than socioeconomic status. Even large-scale research on participation has pointed to collective grievances, identity, intimidation, and conceptions of honor and duty as more important than

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65 Miguel, Satyanath, Sergenti, 2004; Collier and Hoeffler, 2002; Li 2005; Li and Schaub 2004.
66 Collier and Hoeffler 2002, 10.
67 Collier and Hoeffler 2002.
71 Hassan 2006; Pape 2005.
72 Hegghammer 2006.
personal motives like financial incentives. Based on my own observations of AQA recruiting tendencies, the intense commitment required of recruits and the potentially high costs of membership suggest that political motivations and ideological radicalization are more powerful in influencing participation than economic considerations. Looking at this from a rational-choice perspective, for personal economic motivations to cause participation during a time where the AQA is experiencing a plateau or decline in activity, the AQA would have to offer economic incentives that not only improve upon the potential recruit’s current situation but also are attractive enough to outweigh the costs of joining the organization during such a period. In summary, it is highly unlikely that state economic failures would result in enough recruits to substantially benefit AQA mobilization efforts and thus, resurgence. Instead, economic failures are more likely to create broader group grievances that facilitate passive support for an insurgency.

**Anarchy and Internal Security**

Another oft-cited mechanism involves popular support shifting away from a government and toward a viable opposition movement because of a state’s inability to provide security for segments of the population. The domestic security responsibilities of a state can be broken down into two categories: internal and external dimensions. External dimensions include the ability of the state to provide protection against outside threats while the state’s capacity to provide domestic law and order, in accordance with the monopolization of the use of force, compromises the internal dimension. Likely the most frequently discussed link between insurgent activity and weak states involves the concept of internal anarchy and security vacuums. Security vacuums occur when the central state is unable to project authority, usually through the presence

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73 Davis, 2012; McCauley and Moskalenko 2011; Sageman 2008.
74 Rear 2008, 84.
of security forces, and enforce law and order.\textsuperscript{75} The assumption in most literature on the subject is that the more extreme the absence or decline of state authority in a region, the more vulnerable its inhabitants become to violent political actors; less authority projected by security forces means greater ability for insurgents to use tactics like coercion to impose their will and take control of territory.\textsuperscript{76} Many scholars have adopted this line of thought, arguing that the government’s inability to project authority in rural areas increases an insurgency’s ability to mobilize support and conduct military operations.\textsuperscript{77}

While a lack of law and order certainly benefits an insurgency’s ability to act, the relationship between anarchy and opportunity is not simply a linear mechanism where the absence of authority is directly proportional to insurgent viability. For one, the findings of multiple empirical studies show that a strong military presence does not always aid the state’s efforts to defeat an insurgency.\textsuperscript{78} Furthermore, pure anarchy inside a state rarely exists and if it did, such conditions would not be useful to an insurgency given the fundamental need to engage and mobilize a population base. Once again, we are presented with a matter of causality and correlation: insurgents may frequently operate in areas lacking a significant presence of security forces but this degree of anarchy may have little affect on organizational resurgence. More importantly, the standard discourse on security vacuums and insurgent capabilities neglects the role of civilian, state, and insurgent agency in the adapting to the anarchical environment.

Lt. Col. Victor Sundquist laments the fallacy regarding central state authority and insurgency and advises against reliance on such frameworks when interpreting insurgent success.

\textsuperscript{75} Jones 2008, 8-9, 16-17; Posen 1993.
\textsuperscript{76} Crenshaw 1981; Napoleoni 2003, 140-141.
\textsuperscript{77} Fearon and Laitin 2003, 80; DeRouen, Goldfinch et al. 2010; Nacos 2012.
\textsuperscript{78} Lyall and Wilson 2009; DeRouen and Sobek 2004; Jones and Libicki 2008.
On the subject of perceived power vacuums and the rise of violent non-state organizations, Sundquist eloquently remarks:

Fundamentally, however, this perception is oversimplified as many ungoverned spaces actually possess loosely defined control structures formed through either tribal rule or military alliances established between local warlords. Hence, the concept of true anarchy or ungoverned spaces rarely exists...as some form of political or military style control is always present – whether well established or not. Interestingly, if anarchy did exist in a specific region it would be of little utility to a developing violent non-state actor, as these groups would experience difficulty establishing influential control over the population in such an extreme chaotic environment. More importantly, the idea that a political or military vacuum is the only precursor to the establishment of an extremist organization misses the basic premise of how and why these groups emerge in the first place.\textsuperscript{79}

Indeed, Sundquist provides evidence for this line of thought by examining AQ’s efforts to establish a base in Somalia the early 1990’s. In this instance, Bin Laden thought Somalia’s anarchical environment would provide sufficient conditions for influencing control over the population. However, due to substantial misunderstandings of the cultural and political dynamics between tribes and warlords, AQ’s efforts eventually failed. In fact, the non-state system that developed in the anarchy-fueled environment of rural Somalia worked as a detriment to al-Qaeda’s campaign.\textsuperscript{80} Only later when al-Qaeda created ties with al-Shabaab, an organization with deep Somali roots and an understanding of the tribal political systems, was al-Qaeda able to successfully influence a Somali-based Salafi-jihadist insurgency.

As Sundquist touches on, much of the literature on weak governance focuses gratuitously on state-based authority without sufficient consideration of systems of civilian self-governance. These alternative authority structures (AAS) are often traditional systems of communal organization that have formed societal cornerstones in underdeveloped nations for centuries. AASs, likes tribes, that have historically been the dominant form of cultural and political organization in a region often feature remarkably entrenched value systems grounded in group

\textsuperscript{79} Sundquist 2013, 12-13.
\textsuperscript{80} Sundquist 2013, 19.
cohesion and solidarity. Such cultural characteristics pose astonishing difficulties for a group like an AQA that seeks to impose an unfamiliar and extremist belief system. In addition to providing civil services and governance to their population base, AASs often maintain security in their region. For example, COIN theorist David Kilcullen has explicitly documented tribes in Iraq effectively conducting COIN operations and avoiding many of the mistakes committed by central government efforts. Still, purveyors of weak state theories describe regions lacking strong central state authority as “ungoverned,” completely ignoring the presence of alternative authority structures. Discussions of ungoverned regions continually assume that increasing the number of security forces stationed in these areas will lead to a decline in insurgent activity. However, as Kilcullen has pointed out, force ratios are a deceptive indicator of COIN capabilities as they frequently ignore the tactical nature of COIN operations. Furthermore, such an approach forgets that communities in “ungoverned” regions are almost inherently resistant to central state intrusion. Likewise, regions governed by alternative authority structures that have not experienced recent conflict with the central state often lack the grievances AQA’s frequently require to generate support.

Thus, in areas where there is a lack of strong state authority but prominent insurgent activity, it is necessary to identify the specific nature of the relationship between civilians and insurgents. If cooperation is actually occurring, determining how the relationship benefits the civilian population may reveal the actual cause for engagement with the AQA. For example, if the insurgency’s interaction with the AAS involves economic ventures like smuggling, a weak state argument could legitimately claim that a stronger state capable of providing economic opportunities to these regions would reduce incentive for coordinating with insurgents. However,

81 Jones 2008, 17.
82 Kilcullen 2009, 163
83 Kilcullen 2009, 33.
if the tribes were cooperating with rebels for reasons such as a shared identity or ideological values, than ineffective governance would be a less substantive argument. The ideological values and interests of a particular tribe and the tactics the insurgent group uses to engage these interests would provide more appropriate explanations for the positive engagement.  

Institutional Weakness and Grievance

The previous discussion detailed the theoretical relationship between a state’s inability to demonstrate authority throughout the country and an insurgency’s ability to operate. Another element of state weakness involves the inability to provide fair and effective governance. In this regard, a state will not only lose legitimacy and sow popular discontent if it is unable to guarantee security for its citizens but also if it is unable, or unwilling, to deliver fundamental social services, political opportunities, and legitimate state institutions.  

For instance, states lacking functional institutions and plagued by corruption often directly provide opposition groups with material resources.

More common however, is the process by which deficiencies in the provision of services and political opportunities generate grievances among the population that indirectly support an insurgency. Rice writes that, “Insurgencies cannot prosper in the absence of a cause that enlists the support of a population.” Similar to how voids in security and insufficient military opposition provide opportunities for insurgents to operate, voids in the basic tenets of civil governance manufacture grievances that can supply a cause with which an armed opposition group can use to acquire a foothold of legitimacy. Ann C. Mason and David Gairdner have both written on the subject, arguing that when states fail to provide security and effective

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84 Koehler-Derrick 2011.
85 Chenoweth 2010; Berman et al. 2008 found that the provision of social services reduced violence.
87 DeRouen and Sobek 2004; DeRouen, Goldfinch et al. 2010.
governance for portions of the population the affected populace will transfer allegiance to other actors, including violent non-state movements like AQA’s.\textsuperscript{88}

Yet, political and societal grievances are a constant factor in virtually all insurgencies and in all populations. In stable states, constraints exist that prevent willing political actors from formulating significant violent opposition whereas failed states typically remove these constraints. Though weak states are more likely to produce grievances and opportunities for insurgent groups, they rarely create grievances significant enough to organically empower a violent opposition movement during periods of irrelevance. Instead, there is often some type of support mechanism that engages opposition groups and helps create conditions favorable for violence.\textsuperscript{89}

**Marginalization, Identity, and Mobilization**

Somewhat ironically, the state itself can frequently act as a support mechanism for an insurgency by directly inciting groups to rebel and empowering those already in rebellion. Governments that intentionally marginalize a population base by denying political opportunities, social services, and equal treatment under the law can act as a support mechanism for insurgencies by directly provide political opportunity structures.\textsuperscript{90} Literature on jihadist-insurgency has linked government abuse and individual feelings of humiliation, shame, and discrimination with the identity sentiments of radical Islam.\textsuperscript{91} While the presence of individual grievances may not necessarily make a population susceptible to recruitment, McCauley and Moskalenko have argued that group grievances may be more important than individual ones given they often include a strong commitment to reciprocity and entail norms that attach long-

\textsuperscript{88} Rear 2008, 84-85; Gairdner 2012.
\textsuperscript{89} Collier and Hoeffler 2003, 6.
\textsuperscript{90} Rear 2008, 84.
\textsuperscript{91} Juergensmeyer 2000.
term emotions to perceived grievances. Along this line of thought, political groups as well as ethnic and sectarian communities that have been victimized by the government can be potentially powerful allies for an AQA.

The point of this discussion is to highlight the distinction between an absence of effective governance and governance directly harmful to the stability of the state. Weak states often lack institutions to provide effective administration, maintain checks on power, administer justice, facilitate political participation, and ensure rights. However, when the regime of a weak state intentionally marginalizes a population base, the connection between grievance, mobilization, and insurgent resilience becomes more plausible. Likely the most impactful mechanism on insurgent capability in this regard is the existence of a shared identity between the insurgents and an aggrieved community. Many of the theoretical constructs of identity politics, mobilization, and conflict can be gathered through the wealth of literature on ethnic conflict. In his work on ethnic politics, Esman defines identity mobilization as “the process by which…(a community defined by its identity)…becomes politicized on behalf of its collective interests and aspirations.” Since ethnic conflict is grounded in a similar type of identity-based collective action, literature from sources examining ethnic conflict can provide valuable theoretical frameworks for analyzing sectarianism.

Sectarianism can be defined as political mobilization based on identification with a particular religious sect. Sectarian identity is similar to other forms of identity in its ability to be constructed, imposed, and manipulated by elites. In tumultuous political environments, the malleable nature of sectarian identity gives leaders the opportunity to craft polarizing narratives

92 McCauley and Moskalenko 2011
93 Walsh and Piazza 2010 show that regime abuse promotes terrorism.
94 Esman 1994, 28.
95 Nasr 2000, 172.
96 Inman, Peacock, Thornton 2007, 9; Makdisi 2000, 52.
that can work to reassure a power base or incite violence against a community perceived as a threat.\(^{97}\) In the case of Iraq, there is extensive documentation of similar exploitative processes during the reign of Saddam Hussein and the American state-building efforts after 2003.\(^{98}\) At first glance, it may seem illogical for a government to undermine the stability and cohesiveness of the state by promoting hostilities between various identity groups. However, fledgling regimes that are focused less on long term stability and more consolidating power often employ divide and rule strategies in order to compensate for their inability to demonstrate governing capabilities in the short-run.\(^{99}\) Furthermore, as Wimmer describes, state’s that lack capable institutions will often selectively distribute available resources in order to promote cohesion with their power base.\(^{100}\)

Top-down identity manipulation is an important phenomenon to understand in our analysis because of the political opportunities it presents to an insurgent group like an AQA. As Maarten Rothman has observed, “A public that already regards the victim (of terrorist violence) as hostile to its own identity is more likely to support the perpetrator.”\(^{101}\) In addition, Barry Posen’s seminal work on domestic security dilemmas and identity groups argues that when a community’s security is threatened, the affected community will violently defend itself against the perceived threat.\(^{102}\) Drawing from Posen’s work, Seth Jones also makes the astute observation that atrocities committed on either side of an identity-based conflict, like the theoretical one described above, can make post-war reconciliation difficult, especially when

\(^{100}\) Wimmer 2002, 173.
\(^{101}\) Rothman 2006, 10.
\(^{102}\) Posen 1993.
ethnic or religious identity continues to be the dominating force in post-war politics. These dynamics are important to understand given the current situation in Iraq in which the continued hardening of sectarian violence and political identity is giving a resurgent AQI many strategic opportunities.

**Organizational Characteristics**

**Membership**

In his renowned work *Inside Rebellion*, Jeremy Weinstein argues that an organization’s human and material endowments influence strategic action and frequently lead to path dependency. Path dependency is most directly caused by the fundamental need for leadership to satisfy the demands of group members in order to maintain cohesion and solidarity. However, this requirement can limit an organization’s strategic options and operational capabilities because the demands of group members often clash with external realities. Normative factors in particular, like the ideological tendencies and ethical beliefs of group members, can negatively influence strategic decisions. For example, ideological preferences may influence the continued use of indiscriminate violence despite public backlash or newfound resources that allow for more conventional and less controversial operations.

Thus, organizational characteristics like the normative inclinations of membership can determine strategic decisions even when endowments improve or structural conditions change. Della Porta’s analysis of violent opposition groups reinforces the logic in this construction by demonstrating how organizational activity becomes increasingly focused on maintaining group

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103 Jones 2008, 10.
104 Della Porta 2013, 151.
105 Della Porta 2013, 16-17; Weinstein 2006, 260.
cohesion over time. Consequently, in cases where AQA’s previously employed strategic action that led to significant organizational decline, changes in the makeup of group membership in correlation with variant strategic execution could indicate causation with increased levels of organizational activity. Observable changes might include the percentage of foreign or indigenous fighters in an organization, including among the upper leadership.

Structure

Structure can affect insurgent operations by playing a definitive role in the offensive and defensive capabilities of an insurgency. Insurgent organizations like AQA’s tend to possess an organizational structure that consists of a defined leadership cadre, support units directly below the top leaders, and branches designated tasks such as fundraising and propaganda. However, the rest of the organization, including operational units, follows a decentralized networked structure characterized by nodes and semi-autonomous cells. Decentralized structures of this type are mentioned in numerous works as enhancing organizational capabilities. Defensively, networked organizations are more capable of withstanding repression, avoiding detection, and protecting intelligence. Since decision-making is not centralized, networks are less susceptible to decapitation strikes and the loss of branches that could end the organization’s operational capabilities. Offensively, decentralized networks are defined by a horizontal flow of information that allows for greater speed in planning and executing operations because there are less bureaucratic levels interfering with decision making and slowing down the movement of information between decision-makers and operatives. Networked structures also promote

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107 Della Porta 1995, 120-123.
109 Rice 1988; Weinstein 2006; McCormick 207, 331-333.
110 Schock 2005, 143; Bunker and Begert 2005, 158-159.
111 Schock 2005, 143; Bunker and Begert 2005, 158-159.
112 Bunker and Begert 2005, 152; Shock 2005, 144.
greater tactical diversity and dispersion of operations over a wider geographic area.\textsuperscript{113} Dispersion allows for a more effective means of projecting insurgent capabilities, weakening perceptions of state control, and reducing the effectiveness of repression.\textsuperscript{114}

**Size**

Though size may seem to be an obvious indicator rather than a mechanism for capabilities, its significance is much more nuanced. For one, empirical research has highlighted the importance of group size in affecting organizational success.\textsuperscript{115} This is because size is directly related to an organization’s ability to mobilize support. To elaborate, one of the collective action problems facing any insurgency surrounds the fact that mobilization is heavily dependent on the public’s perception of the insurgency’s ability to succeed. However, an insurgency’s perceived prospects for success are deeply dependent on the group’s perceived strength, which is most notably influenced by the size of the group. Accordingly, popular support is expected to increase in direct response to an insurgency’s perceived potential for success and its perceived potential for success will increase as its base of popular support grows. Herein lies a paradox: until an insurgent group establishes substantial membership levels, they will not appear strong enough to win but they cannot generate participation on a large scale unless people believe they are strong enough to win.\textsuperscript{116}

Considering the fact that AQA’s are typically small and radical organizations lacking in mass appeal, we must examine what strategic actions an AQA’s can implement in order to engender popular participation and increase its operational capabilities.

\textsuperscript{113} Schock 2005, 143.
\textsuperscript{114} Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 56.
\textsuperscript{115} Jones and Libicki 2008; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011.
\textsuperscript{116} McCormick and Giordano 2007, 300.
Organizational Strategy

Political Action

Propaganda and Media Efforts

As we have previously discussed, the mere existence of broad grievances in a society is typically not a sufficient mechanism for mobilization. Correspondingly, Stathis Kalyvas has commented that popular anger will only result in sustained mobilization when there is an opposition organization capable of manipulating these sentiments.\footnote{Kalyvas 2004, 16.} In order to engage political opportunities, an insurgent organization must create credible claims that revolutionary efforts will alleviate grievances by yielding tangible benefits such as material goods, increased political power, or greater security.\footnote{Esman 1994, 30; Wiktorowicz 2004, 153.} Though economic incentives are unlikely to exist in a form substantial enough to attract participation, AQAs can use media and propaganda efforts as a vehicle for convincing fence sitters to join the movement. Effective propaganda clearly defines a collective identity, a criterion for membership, emphasizes grievances, and highlights the ills of the opposing force.\footnote{Esman 1994, 34; Mao 2000.} According to Abu Musab al-Suri, in order to attract followers, propaganda must articulate a movement’s importance and its ideology including its goals and vision of the post-victory political system.\footnote{Al-Suri, CTC.} Furthermore, the framing of rhetoric in public statements can manipulate symbols and events in an attempt to generate sympathy and appeal to aggrieved portions of the population. Literature on social movement theory has highlighted how framing can assist collective action by articulating to potential participants why they should sacrifice their time, money, and lives for the movement.\footnote{Hafez, Wiktorowicz 2004, 39.} During times of setbacks, propaganda can promote an insurgency’s ability to act by maintaining group solidarity, promoting mobilization, and
engendering external support. Propaganda can promote each of these respective efforts by reassuring membership, inspiring participants, and projecting a desired image to outside forces examining the conflict.\textsuperscript{122}

*Grassroots Engagement*

Though we do not always think of insurgencies, let alone AQA campaigns, as providing social services and taking part in local politics, these are both essential elements in the strategic models provided by jihadist and non-jihadist insurgent writers. Mao’s writings conclude that the greatest asset of an insurgency is its ability to mobilize popular support via grassroots political action.\textsuperscript{123} AQ strategist Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi similarly argues that an insurgency’s military actions should merely compliment political engagement.\textsuperscript{124} In his model for rebellion, jihadi-strategist Abu Bakr al-Naji even stresses the importance of civil-service activities such as “the provision of food and medicine.”\textsuperscript{125} Lastly, according to the Abbotabad documents, AQ founder and former emir Osama Bin Laden spoke frequently about the importance of AQAs pursuing grassroots political development and engaging the interests of local communities.\textsuperscript{126} The belief among these thinkers is that by directly engaging communities on a political level, via the provision of social services and recognition of grievances, an insurgency could develop a base of support to rely on for resources and protection during times of oppression.

While strategic models of insurgency certainly emphasize political engagement, it is worth asking whether or not AQA commanders on the ground actually utilize such frameworks. Clint Watts of the Foreign Policy Research Institute has written extensively on the subject and argues that it is doubtful today’s AQA leaders are knowledgeable on such theories, especially

\begin{footnotes}
\item[122] Esman 1994, 35; Byman 2001, 89-90.
\item[124] Ryan 2013, 88.
\item[125] Naji 2005, 15-19.
\item[126] SOCOM-2012-0000016 and SOCOM-2012-0000017.
\end{footnotes}
considering the dramatic reduction of AQ training camps that historically served as the primary means for indoctrinating fighters and commanders.\textsuperscript{127} It may also be argued that AQA’s simply lack leaders capable of executing these strategic frameworks in a real-time setting. Regardless, even if AQA leaders actually are interested in testing the strategic recommendations of ideologues like al-Suri, it appears such ambitions are frequently abandoned in order to make practical decisions relative to developments on the ground. As is commonly stated in the armed forces, even the best plans often fail to make it past first contact with the enemy.\textsuperscript{128}

\textbf{Military Action}

From a classical perspective, the military strategy of AQA insurgencies appears to most closely follow the framework of focoism put forth by Che Guevara and his ideological peer, French Marxist Régis Debray. The revolutionary model of focoism begins with a core military unit, the “foco,” launching attacks against the government. As these attacks become successful and the population recognizes the foco as a capable challenger to the state, the masses will mobilize in support.\textsuperscript{129} As Che claimed, “it is not necessary to wait until all conditions for making revolution exist; the insurrection can create them.”\textsuperscript{130} Unlike Mao, Che and Debray do not detail prolonged stages for planning and political preparation. In their view, only a minimum level of societal discontent and a cadre of capable fighters are needed to create favorable revolutionary conditions.\textsuperscript{131} Here we can identify a military-first approach to mobilizing support for an insurgent campaign when the organization lacks the manpower, resources, or political capital to engender collective action through other means.

\textsuperscript{127} Watts 2013b; Lia 2007.
\textsuperscript{128} Watts 2013b.
\textsuperscript{129} Beckett 2001, 170.
\textsuperscript{130} Guevara 1985, 1.
\textsuperscript{131} Zabel 2007, 9-10.
Abd-al-Aziz al-Muqrin, the deceased leader of the Saudi branch of AQAP, echoes the sentiments of Che and Debray in his work “A Practical Course for Guerrilla Warfare.”\textsuperscript{132} As one analyst has superbly noted, the strategic framework presented by Muqrin is essentially a reversal of Clausewitz’s mantra; instead of war being the continuation of politics by other means, the political struggle is the result of warfare.\textsuperscript{133} Though Muqrin’s doctrine is well articulated, this military-first philosophy has been characteristic of AQ since it inception. An early internal document tellingly described AQ’s primary duties, saying, “We don’t do social services, we are fighters of jihad.”\textsuperscript{134} Muqrin even repeats almost verbatim the infamous mantra of early AQ ideologue Abdullah Azzam: "jihad and the rifle alone: no negotiations, no conferences, no dialogues."\textsuperscript{135} In his manual on urban guerrilla-warfare, Brazilian theorist Carlos Marighela espouses a similar violence-first approach: “full revolutionary war…can be waged only by violent means.”\textsuperscript{136}

Jihadi strategists like Muqrin and Azzam view military operations as “diplomatic messages” written in “the language of blood and fire.”\textsuperscript{137} Indeed, organizations like AQAs who are lacking in capabilities and popular support frequently execute military operations to substitute for political action via an approach known as “propaganda by deed.”\textsuperscript{138} On oft-cited observation on this phenomenon is that, “terrorists want a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead.”\textsuperscript{139} In this instance, violence is not simply used to degrade the state but to rally support for movement. While Mao has discussed how political action can substitute for military

\textsuperscript{132} Cigar 2009, 19.
\textsuperscript{133} Zabel 2007, 9-10.
\textsuperscript{134} CTC, “Interior Organization.”
\textsuperscript{135} Azzam 1987; Cigar 2009, XII.
\textsuperscript{136} Marighela 2008, 4.
\textsuperscript{137} Cigar 2009, 18
\textsuperscript{138} Rothman 2006; Della Porta 2013, 148, 151.
\textsuperscript{139} Jenkins 2007, 4.
deficiencies, many modern insurgencies do the opposite and use strategically executed violence to achieve political goals. As Thomas Hammes comments, “insurgent campaigns have shifted from military campaigns supported by information operations to strategic communications campaigns supported by guerrilla and terrorist operations.”140 The following section will identify a number of military strategies AQAs use to undermine the state and promote participation. These strategies include provocation, agitation, and demonstration. Lastly, considering its prominence in the military operations of AQAs, it is important to discuss the strategic utility and pitfalls of terrorism.

**Provocation**

Though insurgents face a significant force disadvantage, they innately possess an information advantage in that they can identify targets easier than the state. Defensively, the insurgency’s advantage stems from its small size, mobility, and diffusion among the local population. Offensively, the insurgency’s advantage lies in its ease of targeting and attacking the state since the majority of state targets are immobile institutions residing in known locations. Because of the state’s marginal ability to effectively identify and distinguish between insurgents and non-combatants, insurgents can conduct a campaign of low-intensity warfare that will provoke the state into using ineffective and harmful repression.141 The ultimate goal of provocation is to provoke state violence against a segment of the population the AQA is capable of co-opting. Via appropriate framing in its statements, particularly those surrounding attacks, an AQA can place itself between the oppressive state and the victimized population.142 Mark Juergensmeyer elaborates on this objective, writing that, “What the perpetrators of such acts expect…is a response as vicious as the acts themselves…they want tangible evidence for their

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140 Hammes 2007, 2.
142 Rothman 2006.
claim that the...enemy is a monster.” Thus, with proper manipulation, AQA’s can manufacture a situation that encourages collective action from an otherwise uninterested populace. Moreover, if an AQA recognizes a regime’s tendency to respond with an iron fist, the AQA can attempt to use the state as a weapon against itself by staging attacks and provoking repression in regions where the state typically exercises greater control.

A more extreme result of a successful provocation strategy would be the occurrence of a negative radical flank effect. This occurs when a violent opposition movement causes the regime's supporters to unite in mass against the opposition while failing to distinguish between violent and nonviolent challengers during repressive measures. While this may seem like an ideal political opportunity for an AQA, regime supporters in this instance will increasingly view the conflict as zero-sum game and may target the AQA with particular vigilance. Nonetheless, both Muqrin and Marighella categorize this strategy of provocation and manipulation as ultimately necessary to the mobilization efforts of an insurgent movement during its development period.

David Kilcullen has proposed a similar provocation model, known as “Accidental Guerrilla Syndrome,” though he focuses on AQA engagement with rural population groups like tribal units. Kilcullen argues that without an existing conflict, AQA’s must provoke state repression since its Salafi-jihadist ideology does not usually align well enough with traditional communities or tribal societies. Based on his observations on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan, Kilcullen argues that when the co-opting does not work or does not last, AQA’s will respond by using intimidation tactics, killing problematic community leaders and moderates,
and funneling money into the local economy. Thus, his accidental guerrilla model assumes AQA’s are unable to co-opt locals for sustained period of time using military means.  

**Demonstration**

Considering the aforementioned connection between strength, mobilization, and public perception, an insurgent organization must demonstrate strength and an ability to succeed via activity. Accordingly, Debray has commented that in order for small, guerilla forces to attract support, they must appear strong by executing successful attacks that make the state look weak. On a similar note, Muqrin believes that conducting “spectacular” military operations can increase the rate of mobilization by exaggerating impressions of strength.

**Agitation**

Described as “malignancy” by Steven Metz, an agitation approach uses violence to shatter the system's appearance of stability. Via prolonged low-intensity warfare, the insurgency creates a climate of instability that gradually severs the socio-psychological bonds tying the population to the state. While the population becomes increasingly restless and distrustful of the state’s ability to rule, insurgents offer free riders a choice between a crumbling status quo and an emergent alternative. Muqrin has infamously referred to this methodology as a strategy of 1,000 cuts that bleeds the state of its ability to govern and project legitimacy. Drawing on the work of Marighella, Qurashi comments that producing a climate of collapse can grant an organization lacking in military strength the opportunity to win by defeating the state’s authority instead of its army.

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148 Killcullen 2009, 52.
149 Debray 1967, 52-52.
150 Cigar 2009, 21, 96.
152 Cigar 2009.
153 Ryan 2013, 94.
**Terrorism**

The three previous strategies primarily involved using attacks against the state to indirectly stimulate support for the insurgent movement. However, terrorism differentiates from these methods in that it involves directly targeting civilians in order to influence the actions of both civilians and the state. Terrorism is a violent, coercive strategy that uses tactics like kidnappings, assassinations of civilian leaders and suspected collaborators, and indiscriminate violence.\(^{154}\) When it comes to influencing civilians, terrorism’s ability to psychologically intimidate a population can create operational space for insurgents by deterring civilians from either acting against insurgents or simply forcing them to comply with insurgent activity.\(^{155}\) Regarding its ability to influence the state, terrorism’s use of violence against civilians can impose political costs, damage the government’s legitimacy, and force concessions from the state.\(^{156}\) Thus, terrorism can theoretically compliment an organization’s ability to mobilize support and combat the state by neutralizing critics, mobilizing participants, and undermining regime legitimacy.

Many contemporary insurgent groups employ terrorism as a tactic primarily because they lack significant resources and must choose tactics that maximize effects while minimizing operational costs.\(^{157}\) In this sense, terrorism is a sign of organizational weakness and the asymmetric relationship between opposing sides.\(^{158}\) Indeed, authors have argued that terrorism is widely used by insurgent groups today because of its positive cost-benefit ratio.\(^{159}\) As one analyst states, “(terrorism) is easier and cheaper to undertake than conventional military


\(^{156}\) Hultman 2007, 206; Pape 2006; Huth and Lichbach 2010.

\(^{157}\) Metz 2011, 131, 135.

\(^{158}\) Laitin and Shapiro 2008.

\(^{159}\) Pape 2006; Metz 2011.
operations. It is less costly and risky to insurgent organization’s as a whole. It is efficient when psychological effects are compared to resource investment. It allows insurgents to conjure an illusion of strength when they are weak.”\textsuperscript{160}

 Nonetheless, the majority of literature argues that terrorism is an ineffective mechanism for generating sustained participation. Numerous authors classify terrorism’s use of indiscriminate violence as being ultimately harmful to a movement’s long-term objectives and reflective of organizational weakness.\textsuperscript{161} Unlike discriminate violence, in which targets are chosen based on specific information about their individual activities and affiliations, indiscriminate violence entails targeting groups of people based on more obscure associations like identity affiliation.\textsuperscript{162} Many problems arise from such broad targeting and the death of non-combatants. For instance, even if a movement using indiscriminate violence succeeds, reconciliation and the consolidation of power can be more difficult since the killing of civilians and fence-sitters creates long-term animosity and a wider pool of individuals hostile to the movement. Furthermore, the random and unpredictable nature of indiscriminate violence often fails to craft an identifiable system of incentives for non-collaboration with the state.\textsuperscript{163}

 The biggest issue with indiscriminate violence employed by AQAs is the fact that it overwhelmingly results in the death of Muslims. Given AQ’s efforts to portray itself as acting in the interest of the Ummah by occupying the role of the vanguard in the fight against the West, the killing of Muslim civilians is highly problematic. Indeed, the negative implications for group legitimacy and generating public support have caused a great deal of debate within the jihadist

\textsuperscript{160} Metz 2011, 136.
\textsuperscript{162} Kalyvas 2004, 101.
\textsuperscript{163} Kalyvas 2004, 117.
community. In the case of AQI under Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, their use of indiscriminate attacks on Muslims caused a great deal of outcry including rebukes from prominent jihadist leaders and AQC leaders like Ayman al-Zawahiri, who was fearful the group was doing irreparable damage to its mobilization efforts. In this sense, indiscriminate violence may reduce a group’s capacity for resurgence by creating residual animosity and disenfranchising potential participants.

**Territorial Control**

Though the seizure of territory can be an indicator of insurgent activity, it can also act as a means of empowering and reinvigorating a floundering campaign. From a political standpoint, seized territory can benefit mobilization efforts by demonstrating an insurgency’s capability for governance via the development of a counter-state. Furthermore, during periods of organizational setbacks, an insurgency with territorial control could theoretically retreat to such a space in order to minimize losses, regroup, and prepare for a new campaign of operations. Theorists including Mao and Naji have stipulated that a successful insurgency must seize territory eventually, as it is one of the most obvious means of controlling the population and undermining the state. While Che, Debray, and al-Suri believe that controlling territory presents COIN forces with stagnant targets, territorial control has been empirically shown to improve an insurgencies ability to execute military operations and gain forward momentum against the state. Mao has summarized the issue best, saying, “To gain territory is no cause for

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164 Helfstein, Abdullah, Obaidi 2009.
165 Arreguín-Toft 2005, 103.
166 Zabel 2007.
167 Connable and Libicki 2010, 36; Zabel 2007, 8.
joy and to lose territory is no cause for sorrow…the important thing is to think up ways of destroying the enemy.”

**External Support**

External support can be defined as military, economic, or political aid for an insurgent organization that originates from a diaspora, foreign government, or an insurgency’s foreign leadership. Third party support on behalf of an opposition group can help level the balance of power in an asymmetric conflict by improving an insurgency’s resources and ability to conduct operations, especially during periods of domestic opposition and setbacks. Though state sponsorship is arguably the most influential type of external support, it is not particularly relevant to our analysis since AQA’s rarely receive direct aid from state governments. Although external support is described by some sources as a means for mobilization, this is predominantly the case when a violent opposition movement is unable to generate collective action and support in the domestic sphere.

On the necessity of external support, numerous authors have argued that, unless a government’s COIN tactics are utterly incompetent or the state itself is lacking in will and resources, insurgents must obtain some form of external support to experience success. It should be noted that the importance of external support in aiding insurgent capabilities does not discount the necessity of domestic mobilization. Instead, its importance is a sign of the innate difficulties in mobilizing support largely due to the previously discussed relationship between perceived strength and public expectations of victory. In this regard, external support can often

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168 Beckett 2001, 73.
169 Sambanis and Elbadawi, 2000.
allow an insurgent group to acquire enough material resources and manpower to generate popular participation despite its domestic hurdles.

However, the influence of external actors is not without danger. For starters, depending on the character of the sponsor and the visibility of their sponsorship, external involvement can delegitimize a movement and lead to a loss in credibility.\textsuperscript{174} Secondly, analysts frequently point to local mobilization as a more reliable source of power for an insurgency because foreign sponsors are often manipulative and unreliable allies.\textsuperscript{175} It is for such reasons that jihadist ideologues like Abu Musab al-Suri and Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi have warned against the involvement of external powers in jihadist insurgencies.\textsuperscript{176} One of the dangers particular to an insurgent movement fiercely driven by ideological factors, like that of an AQA, is that external sponsorship may negatively affect the narrative of the conflict and push strategic agendas that are detrimental to the long term goals of the organization. Reliance on external support, whether it is financial assistance, provision of weapons, or strategic guidance, can also foster organizational dependency and vulnerability. Such dependency is often not in the best interest of the movement’s long-term development of assets like effective leadership.\textsuperscript{177}

In the case of AQAs, external support can also theoretically originate from other salafi-jihadist organizations outside the domestic theater or from AQC in Pakistan. Indeed, AQ’s recent franchising trend could offer a possible explanation for the demonstrated spikes in activity seen with AQAs. Such a hypothesis might be true if AQC was supplying AQA’s with strategic direction or material resources to assist in their campaigns. However, evidence for such an explanation is severely lacking. Given the well-documented decline of AQC operational and

\textsuperscript{174} Byman 2001, 100.
\textsuperscript{175} Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 11.
\textsuperscript{176} al-Suri, CTC; Ryan 2013, 95.
\textsuperscript{177} Byman 2013; 2001, 101.
financial capabilities, there is little reason to think AQAs are subsisting because of strategic or material benefits from the central command.\textsuperscript{178} Since AQAs have traditionally been tasked with fulfilling the vast majority of their financial needs, there is also little reason to think AQC, in its decrepit state, is able to provide substantial material assistance.\textsuperscript{179} In fact, there are reports indicating AQC has increasingly relied on affiliates in fundraising for the central organization.\textsuperscript{180}

In addition, the relationship between AQC and AQA-leadership in recent years has been either non-existent or highly contentious; only in the case of AQAP does there seem to be a relevant relationship.\textsuperscript{181} One of the most recent examples of strain between AQC and AQA-leadership lies in the three-way spring dispute between Abu Bark al-Baghdadi, the emir of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), current al-Qaeda emir Ayman al-Zawahiri, and Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, the leader of AQ aligned Jabhat al-Nusrah in Syria. Less than a year after the combative spat, Zawahiri announced that AQ was abandoning its formal connection with ISIS. In a recent piece, renowned analyst Will McCants highlighted the discord between AQC and its franchises under the leadership of Zawahiri, noting a lack of strategic direction and minimal positive engagement with affiliate commanders.\textsuperscript{182} In summary, the possibility of AQA capabilities being substantially affected by support from AQC is unlikely and not worth further examination. However, other identifiable forms of external support are worthy of examination since they could theoretically explain spikes in AQA capabilities and activity.

\textsuperscript{178} Mendelsohn 2011; Watts 2012b.  
\textsuperscript{179} Giraldo and Trinkunas 2007, 126.  
\textsuperscript{180} Gomez 2010.  
\textsuperscript{181} Berger 2014.  
\textsuperscript{182} McCants 2013.
6
Research Design

Though there is a great deal of literature examining insurgencies and terrorist groups like al-Qaeda, there are few pieces that examine the domestic efforts of AQAs using the frameworks of insurgency. Furthermore, despite the resilience of AQA campaigns, there is a shortage of work that examines and explains periods of resurgence in the campaigns of multiple AQAs. Consequently, the analysis presented here will fill this void by applying a qualitative analysis to several case studies featuring AQA insurgencies. Based on our analysis of concepts from the literature review, it is possible to identify several schools of thought that affect insurgent activity and contribute to resurgence. Each school of thought presents at least one hypothesis and each hypothesis highlights a particular independent variable that can potentially explain resurgence.

Operationalization of Dependent Variable

As was previously established, resurgence entails an increase in insurgent activity after a period characterized by a plateau or decline in activity. Since the dependent variable of this study is insurgent activity, when establishing resurgence, it is necessary to identify levels of activity at the bottom of the trajectory in comparison with the levels of activity during the upward trajectory. Furthermore, understanding conditions at the low-end of the activity spectrum allows for a better understanding of what mechanisms are affecting the insurgency’s newfound form. The types of insurgent activity that can be observed and quantified include propaganda output, military operations, fundraising activities, and recruitment and membership levels. Though it is not a necessary indicator, resurgence is made all the more significant if organizational activity continues despite COIN efforts or intense opposition.

Beyond indicators, it is important to develop a scale for resurgence since it is a trend that can vary in value. Rather than establishing numerical values for different levels of resurgence,
we can specify low, medium, and high levels of resurgence. When considering which degree of resurgence an organization demonstrates, it is more important to consider the relative level of activity and the length of organizational marginalization that occurred before the period of resurgence. For instance, a high level of resurgence would be one in which an organization’s operational levels doubled after a lengthy period of cessation. A low level of resurgence would include gradually increasing levels of activity after a relatively short period of cessation. The total lifespan of the insurgency is also important to consider when establishing levels of resurgence. For instance, two years may be quantified as lengthy period of cessation for an organization that has existed for ten years. However, for an organization that has only existed for five years, six months to a year may quantify a significant period of inactivity. Lastly, beyond extended periods of cessation, resurgence can also occur after strings of setbacks characterized by dips in activity.

Due to the clandestine nature of AQAs and our reliance on open-source material, it is impossible to completely identify the full extent of AQA activity. Even indicators of mobilization efforts, like membership and fundraising levels, are difficult to accurately quantify and track. Consequently, the work here will be augmented by judgments made by scholars who are experts on the AQAs and nations in question. Moving forward, media output can be easily identified given the public nature of AQA statements and propaganda. Quantifying levels of military operations is a slightly more difficult task since AQAs frequently do not take credit for many of the military operations they execute while they often receive blame for attacks in which they may have had no role. As a result, many of the measures that this report will use to determine AQA capabilities and establish resurgence will be undeniably imperfect.
The analysis here will consider admissible attacks claimed by AQA’s as well as attacks in which reliable sources corroborate the role of an AQA. For large-scale assessments of the military operations of all three AQAs analyzed, this thesis will primarily rely on the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) produced by University of Maryland’s START program.\footnote{A detailed explanation of the GTD’s methodology can be found here: http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/using-gtd/} The analysis in this paper will consider attacks classified by the GTD as unambiguous in their association with an AQA. While the GTD is an impressive resource, there are several limitations with its data. First, it has only published data up until the end of 2012 meaning that information on AQA activity in 2013 must be extracted from other sources. Secondly, the GTD’s data before 2011 on AQA attacks is undoubtedly underrepresenting actual attack numbers. This assertion is based on two observations. First, the GTD’s database shows an almost exponential increase in activity for many of the organizations in this paper at a time when the GTD itself was improving its collection methods. Secondly, my own comparative analysis of GTD attack logs before 2011 with other sources simply indicates a dearth in recorded attacks during periods known to be more active for the AQA’s in question. Thankfully, issues of underreporting only serve to strengthen the case for resurgence considering identification of the trend using understated attack rates.

While the most comprehensive method for compiling data on AQA attacks involves intensive collection of local-newspaper reports, time constraints on this research require reliance on databases like the GTD and secondary sources such as expert assessments and reports published by sources like the State Department. Furthermore, for the case of AQI in Iraq, databases like the Iraq Body Count and the Brooking’s Iraq Index will be used to verify levels of violence and other statistical measures that are potentially connected to AQA activity. For the case of Shabaab in Somalia, I will also use an exclusive database of Shabaab attacks that I helped
create under the guidance of Daveed-Gartenstein Ross, an expert in the field of violent non-state actors and a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD). This database was compiled by Mr. Gartenstein-Ross, myself, and a number of other researchers at FDD by compiling local news reports on Shabaab attacks. Lastly, other resources like United Nations’ Monitoring Reports and publications from the International Crisis Group will be used in all of the case studies.

**Hypotheses**

**State Weakness**

**H1: Domestic Anarchy**

_An increase in domestic anarchy results in an increase in AQA activity levels._

In this instance, resurgence is due to the government’s failure to project authority across state territory by demonstrating a monopoly on force. To clarify, the key mechanism at place here is legitimate and effective authority in the security apparatus. Furthermore, this hypothesis does not pertain to broader instability in the state or ineffectiveness in civil institutions. Rather the focus is on the state’s security apparatus and ability to enforce law and order across its territory.

Supporting indicators for this hypothesis on the insurgent side include AQA fighters occupying “ungoverned” regions, administering social services in these areas, and co-opting alternative authority structures on issues that indicate a failure in the state provision of services to these communities. Related indicators include the establishment of checkpoints and Islamic courts that enforce sharia law. Lastly, regional changes in force ratios in correlation with increased insurgent activity and the existence of training camps would support the validity of this hypothesis.
H2: Institutional Weakness

A decline in the state’s institutional capabilities results in an increase of AQA activity levels.

Here, resurgence is empowered by the degradation of the state’s ability to provide social services, legitimate civil institutions, and act as a functional governing force. While the previous hypothesis looks at state weakness and resurgence from the perspective of internal security, this hypothesis contends that civic and social failures of the government present insurgents with opportunities that can act as a catalyst for increased levels of activity. Conditions for this hypothesis include significant levels of government corruption, the absence of functional institutions to effectively manage economic, social, and political issues, failures in the provision of social services, and broad societal grievances stemming from such deficiencies. Supporting indicators would include corrupt government officials positively interacting with insurgents, institutional failures directly contributing to the insurgency’s acquisition of resources, and other active opposition movements protesting the state’s deficiencies.

H3: Emergent Domestic Conflict

An increased degree of internal political conflict results in increased levels of AQA activity.

The focus here is primarily on the presence of an emerging, violent political conflict that is increasing in intensity along with increased AQA activity. Though conditions outlined in H1 and H2, such as internal security failures and broad societal grievances, may have influenced the development of the internal conflict, H3 focuses specifically on how the actual conflict and its dynamics catalyze AQA activity. The basic idea in this regard is that the AQA can benefit from a violent conflict in a number of ways including either co-opting segments within the opposition movement or capitalizing on any internal anarchy stemming from the conflict. In this way, a violent internal conflict creates opportunities through which the AQA can acquire resources,
manpower, and operational space, allowing for an increase in activity. Thus, the timeline of the conflict and the timeline of AQA resurgence are particularly vital to consider when evaluating this particular hypothesis and the relationship with increased AQA activity.

The main support mechanism for AQA activity during an emergent conflict is often state use of destructive governing tactics like the political marginalization or maltreatment of a population base as well indiscriminate repression against the opposition movements. Such tactics generally create and inflame political conflict, resulting in an atmosphere of instability and violence that AQAs will use as a means of reinvigorating their campaign. Indicators particular to this hypothesis include the escalation of internal political and/or violent conflict characterized by indiscriminate security crackdowns, direct political marginalization and ineffective COIN operations that have harmed specific communities more likely to be sympathetic to an AQA. Other indicators include AQA propaganda and framing focused on these issues, signs of AQA co-opting leaders of aggrieved communities efforts, AQA attacks targeting regime supporters, and coordinated military efforts with the militias of aggrieved communities.

**Organizational Adaptation**

H4: *Improvements in the AQA’s internal structure and strategic path result in increased activity levels.*

Here, positive changes relative to the organization can result in a more adept insurgency that is increasingly capable of activity. Internal changes include the introduction of new leadership, transformed membership, and a modified structure that lead to improved AQA capabilities and increased activity. Indicators would include the introduction of new leadership in occurrence with increased operational tempo, successful utilization of new operational tactics, implementation of a strategy cognizant of past failures, an improved media apparatus, and
increased number of either successful and/or more complex military operations. Furthermore, a visibly modified organizational structure and changes in membership dynamics, such as nationality of members, might also indicate organizational characteristics playing a role in increased activity.

**Economic Factors**

**H5:** *As the AQA mobilizes financial resources, activity levels increase.*

In this instance, the mobilization of material resources and the exploitation of economic opportunities provide the AQA with the necessary resources to invigorate their efforts and foster participation. Indicators would include AQA recruiting efforts directly benefitting from increased levels of income inequality, high youth unemployment, and general economic degradation. Furthermore, evidence of AQA extorting primary commodity exports or the natural resource trade would indicate that the organization’s resources are improving and allowing for greater operational capacity.

**External Support**

**H6:** *Increased levels of external support for the AQA result in increased activity levels.*

The theory of external support rests on the basis that the AQA is receiving significant assistance from an external actor(s) that is providing the organization with sufficient resources, such as fighters, money, weapons, or a safe haven, to reinvigorate their efforts. If external support is influencing resurgence, then AQA activity will be observed increasing in tandem with the introduction of external support or an increased degree of external support. Indicators for this hypothesis include direct or indirect insurgent sanctuary in a nearby state, identifiable state sponsorship, and material support from foreign non-state actors, whether these actors are individuals or groups that are part of an apparently sympathetic community.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Anarchy</td>
<td>As domestic anarchy increases, so too does AQA activity.</td>
<td>- AQA occupying ungoverned regions and administering social services, co-opting AAS, installing checkpoints, and enforcing shari’a law</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Changes in force ratios correlate with AQA activity levels</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutional Weakness</td>
<td>As institutional capabilities decrease, so too does AQA activity.</td>
<td>- High corruption levels</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Failing institutions</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Failures in social service provision</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Societal grievances stemming from said failures</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Government officials and institutions aiding the AQA via resource leakage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emergent Conflict</td>
<td>As domestic conflict increases, so too does AQA activity.</td>
<td>- Worsening or emerging violent domestic conflict</td>
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<td>- Political marginalization or maltreatment of a political base involved with the insurgency</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Indiscriminate repression against said opposition</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- AQA co-opting opposition groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational Adaptation</td>
<td>As the AQA makes improvements to its organization, activity will increase.</td>
<td>- Timely leadership changes</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Transformed membership base</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Modified organizational structure</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Varied strategic approach in media and military operations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic Factors</td>
<td>As economic opportunities increase, so too does AQA activity.</td>
<td>- AQA extorting primary commodity resources</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- High youth unemployment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Low secondary education rates</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- General economic degradation</td>
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<tr>
<td>External Support</td>
<td>As external support increases, so too does AQA activity.</td>
<td>- Material support for AQA from external actors</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- State sponsorship</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Official or unofficial sanctuary in a neighboring state</td>
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**Case Selection**

Though it is difficult to pinpoint the exact number of groups affiliated with al-Qaeda, there are well over a dozen organizations with direct ties to AQC. Thus, the universe of cases available for analysis is somewhat limited. Nonetheless, this thesis examines three different al-Qaeda affiliate organizations and their domestic insurgent campaigns. The cases that will be analyzed in this paper involve insurgencies in Iraq, Yemen, and Somalia conducted by the AQA’s respectively referred to as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and al-Shabaab. Despite the recent disaffiliation of AQI from the official al-Qaeda organization, the case is still relevant for analysis for a number of reasons explained in the introductory section of that particular case-study. Besides similarities in ideology and the possession of an al-Qaeda brand at some point in their history, all three of the aforementioned groups have been chosen for analysis because their campaigns have featured clearly identifiable periods of resurgence. However, their respective levels of resurgence have varied with AQI demonstrating the highest degree followed by AQAP and Shabaab.

Each case study will feature a brief history of the organization under examination as well a short overview of the respective conflict being fought. Once the necessary background narrative is established, I will operationalize resurgence and demonstrate its occurrence during a particular period of time for each AQA. Next, the discussion will critique the applicability of the aforementioned hypotheses by observing the value of the independent variable featured in each hypothesis in juxtaposition with levels of organizational activity. It is important to understand that different hypotheses will be compatible with each case. Furthermore, the value of the dependent variable will vary to a certain degree between the respective AQA campaigns. However, the objective is to determine which hypotheses appear the most relevant and impactful
for the most cases. Identifying the viability of each hypothesis for each case will help determine which variables appear to play the biggest role in the resurgence of AQA campaigns. Moving forward, the next section will analyze the resurgence of al-Qaeda in Iraq followed an examination of the cases of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and al-Shabaab.

7

Case Studies

Case #1: Al-Qaeda in Iraq

"The history of modern Iraq indicates that trust among society's major groupings has mostly been in pitifully short supply. In the absence of any developed sense of national identity, a basic consensus over the legitimacy of the Iraqi state, and a reservoir of mutual trust and understanding to draw upon, it is difficult indeed to locate the foundation on which a liberal democratic Iraqi state can be constructed."^{184}

Introduction

After a period of relative irrelevance in 2009 and 2010, al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) has demonstrated significant resurgence and proven a renewed ability to execute coordinated high-profile attacks and wage a prolonged campaign of attrition warfare. Even more impressive is the fact that AQI’s resurgence has come during a time when the organization is simultaneously devoting resources to their efforts in Syria. The following section will establish the resurgence of AQI starting in 2011 and then examine the role of the previously outlined variables in order to determine which hypotheses are most relevant to the case of AQI.

Before moving forward however, it is necessary to clarify a number of taxonomical issues with this case. First, the organization being examined was officially titled al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) after its pledge of allegiance to Osama Bin Laden in 2004. Then in 2006, the official name was changed to the Islamic State of Iraq. Seven years later, in April 2013, the group modified its name to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in order to demonstrate its operational interest in

^{184} Anderson, Stansfield 2005, 10.
Syria.\textsuperscript{185} In spite of the numerous name changes, this paper will use the term AQI for the purpose of clarity and simplicity.

A final point must also be made in regards to the organization’s official status as an al-Qaeda affiliate. In February 2014, after months of quarrelling and insubordination, AQC disavowed its formal connection with AQI. The move was likely caused by continual disobedience from AQI leadership as well as the group’s widespread use of violence against civilians and fellow jihadis in northern Syria. Though the move was shocking, it was hardly unexpected; internal documents have revealed great discontent with AQI as recently as 2011.\textsuperscript{186} Despite the recent disaffiliation with the al-Qaeda organization, the analysis in this paper will qualify AQI as an AQA because its official affiliation with AQC lasted for the overwhelming majority of the operational timeline under examination. Furthermore, the organization’s formal affiliation with al-Qaeda is of less importance in connecting it with other AQA’s than shared characteristics such as ideology and domestic objectives. In this respect, like all other AQA’s, AQI remains a Salafi-jihadist organization with domestic objectives that include affirming *tawhid* and waging jihad by violently expelling apostates and establishing an Islamic Emirate governed by sharia law. In conclusion, as a U.S. counterterrorism commenting on the disassociation remarked, since AQI “has never been dependent on AQ core for resources or direction…the tangible impact of the decision may not be that significant.”\textsuperscript{187}

\textbf{Background}

\textbf{The Zarqawi Era: 2003-2006}

Al-Qaeda in Iraq was formed by Jordanian Salafi militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi sometime in 2002. Despite U.S. officials like Colin Powell claiming an operational link between

\textsuperscript{185} BBC 2014.
\textsuperscript{186} Gadahn 2011.
\textsuperscript{187} Sly 2014.
al-Qaeda and Zarqawi in Iraq, documents later de-classified by the Pentagon identified the pre-war connection between Zarqawi’s operations in Iraq and AQC as operationally insignificant.\textsuperscript{188} Though Zarqawi had connections with al-Qaeda, it was not until 2004, following eight months of negotiations, that Zarqawi officially pledged alliance to Osama Bin Laden. Al-Qaeda in Iraq, also referred to as Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia and Al-Qaeda in the Land of Two Rivers, was subsequently born.\textsuperscript{189} On March 19, 2003, the United States military began combat operations in Iraq, marking the beginning of the first era, as defined for the purposes this paper, of al-Qaeda in Iraq’s operations. During this period of time, AQI’s organizational prominence and operational capabilities gradually demonstrated an upward trend.

Under Zarqawi’s audacious rule, AQI became the premier jihadist organization in the world. However, despite the initial success of Zarqawi’s four-point plan to defeat the American occupation, several aspects of Zarqawi’s approach proved highly problematic, particularly his strategy pertaining to Iraq’s Shi’a population.\textsuperscript{190} To elaborate, Zarqawi’s Shi’a-provocation strategy involved attacking Shi’a civilians, religious leaders, and politicians in order to provoke retaliatory strikes against Sunni communities. By provoking such retaliatory violence, Zarqawi hoped that Sunnis would eventually view the Coalition forces and the interim Iraqi government as unsuitable protectors, instead throwing their support behind AQI.\textsuperscript{191} Yet, Zarqawi’s Shi’a-provocation strategy created a great deal of conflict between AQI, AQC, and other jihadist figures. While the organization’s campaign of extreme violence helped incite a sectarian civil war in 2006-2007, these operations were detrimental to the group’s image. Fearing the erosion of public support for al-Qaeda, second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri wrote Zarqawi a letter

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{188} Smith 2007.
\item \textsuperscript{189} Weaver 2006; Napoleoni 2012; BBC 2005.
\item \textsuperscript{190} Masters 2012.
\item \textsuperscript{191} Zarqawi 2004.
\end{itemize}
criticizing his divisive methodology and excessive violence against Muslims. Zawahiri demanded a shift in tactics and lectured AQI’s leader on the importance of maintaining popular support.\(^{192}\)

Other leaders inside the jihadi movement also lamented the group’s unnecessary brutality. For instance, AQI’s extensive suicide-bombing campaign killed hundreds of Iraqi civilians and Muslims. Over time, AQI’s brutality and indiscriminate violence damaged the organization’s legitimacy and left Zarqawi with the reputation of an out-of-control sadist who had lost focus of the movement’s broader goals. AQI’s military tactics were not the only issue the group faced. Despite desperately needing their support, Zarqawi was less-than-subtle about his poor opinion of Iraq’s Sunnis. He criticized the Iraqi mujahidin, labeling them as inexperienced, and expressed contempt for insurgents who were unwilling to engage in suicide operations.\(^{193}\)

**Operational Peak and Decline: 2006-2008**

On June 7, 2006, as Iraq’s sectarian civil war was accelerating in ferocity, the United States Air Force dropped two 500-pound bombs on an al-Qaeda safe house north of Baqubah, killing Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Zarqawi’s untimely death occurred almost a year before AQI’s operational peak in June 2007 and right before the group’s June 2006 operational peak in the Anbar province.\(^{194}\) Indeed, between August 2006 and August 2007, the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) recorded 394 suicide attacks that produced over 16,000 casualties.\(^{195}\) Zarqawi’s death also occurred just months before the AQI led Mujahidin Shura Council announced the creation of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). The ISI’s creation possessed

\(^{192}\) Evans 2010. 
\(^{193}\) Ibid. 
\(^{194}\) Lewis 2013b; Rabasa 2011. 
\(^{195}\) Fishman 2008.
two primary motives: 1) To establish an umbrella organization for jihadi resistance groups led by AQI; 2) To signal the creation of a counterstate in the country’s Sunni-dominated Western regions. Thus, at their peak in strength, AQI began preparing for a campaign focused on seizing territory and uniting other Sunni militant groups against the government. However, the organization’s inflexible ideology and outrageously violent methodology began to backfire. With the creation of the ISI and the naming of Ayyub al-Masri as Zarqawi’s successor, many analysts expected the group to take a more cooperative strategy with fellow insurgent groups. Instead, in early 2007, AQI began to violently clash with a former ally, Ansar al-Sunnah (AAS), after the apparent killing of AAS fighters at the hands of AQI.\textsuperscript{196} Soon enough, Al-Zawraa, a pro-insurgent television channel, began to attack AQI by criticizing its sectarianism, terrorist tactics, and arrogance.\textsuperscript{197}

Despite AQI’s undeniable strength, opposition to the organization also gradually increased among Sunni tribal militias during this period. Though significant organized Sunni resistance to AQI can be observed as early as 2005, 2006 marked the beginning of the Sunni Awakening, as the trend has been labeled. In January 2006, an attack by AQI in Ramadi killed 70 Sunni police recruits. The recruits hailed from local tribes and enlisted at the request of their sheikhs as a means of lessening Shi’a influence in the local ISF detachments. After the attack, tribal chiefs in Ramadi informed AQI that it was no longer welcome in the area.\textsuperscript{198} Predictably, AQI ignored the request and continued to operate in the region. Then in September 2006, a minor tribal leader Abd al-Sattar Abu Risha established the Anbar Salvation Council with the goal of uniting militias against AQI.\textsuperscript{199}

\textsuperscript{196} Fishman 2008.
\textsuperscript{197} Hashim 2009, 62.
\textsuperscript{198} Hashim 2009, 63.
\textsuperscript{199} Lynch 2011, 37.
While AQI originally built relationships with Anbari tribes based on a shared Sunni bond and anti-occupation stance, the organization’s brutal violence, emphasis on Salafism, and disregard for tribal custom fostered resentment. For most Sunni tribes in Western Iraq, traditional tribal customs carry a greater importance than religious duties, especially the ones espoused by AQI. Zarqawi demonstrated his disregard for tribal customs through a variety of encroachments including his attempt to assimilate AQI with the local tribes by arranging marriages between fighters and tribal women, despite such a practice being forbidden by tribal law. Eventually violence began to break out on a larger scale, particularly after AQI started attacking tribal smuggling operations in retaliation for the growing resistance.

Prominent tribes like the Dulaim and the Zobai quickly took up arms against AQI and local shaykhs began allying with coalition forces. Soon, militias like the Sons of Iraq were formed and AQI found itself battling insurgent groups, like the 1920 Revolution Brigades, who had once been allies in the fight against coalition forces.\footnote{Kilcullen 2008.} By 2007, around 100,000 Awakening fighters were on American payroll and AQI faced a formidable local army funded by the Americans and staffed by tribal councils and neighborhood watch forces.\footnote{Lynch 2011, 38.} One member of the 1920 Revolutionary Brigades commented on the turn of events, saying that despite once sharing a common goal, his organization developed “some disagreements with al-Qaeda, especially about targeting civilians, places of worship, state civilian institutions and services.”\footnote{Hashim 2009, 60.} The Sunni Awakening destroyed AQI’s center of gravity in Anbar and significantly restricted the group’s operational capabilities. In the end, AQI’s tone-deaf approach to local politics, rigid ideology, and ruthless use of violence caused the insurgency to lose its most valuable asset: local support.
As the Sunni Awakening flourished, the United States military simultaneously embarked on an improved counter-terror course much to the detriment of AQI. For starters, the Coalition Troop Surge in 2007 added an additional 20,000 American soldiers to the war. Then, thanks to the introduction of counter-insurgency guru David Petraeus, the U.S. adopted a more nuanced COIN strategy that included immersing troops more intimately in the Iraqi population, co-opting local militias against AQI, and emphasizing clear and hold campaigns. AQI’s leadership also experienced an increasingly effective decapitation campaign. According to a Multi-National Force Iraq spokesman, the number of senior AQI leaders killed or captured between October and December 2007 was over 130.  

With AQI’s southern and western fronts constrained, the battered group shifted its center of gravity northwards in 2008 to the Ninewa province and its capital, Mosul. Nonetheless, even here they faced heavy anti-terror efforts, with the U.S. claiming another 30 leadership targets captured or killed in Mosul in early 2008. 

By February 2008, U.S. military officials said they had killed around 2,400 suspected members of AQI and captured another 8,800, whittling the group’s strength down to an estimated 3,500 members. This series of setbacks prompted CIA Director Michael Hayden to declare AQI on the verge of defeat. Internal documents captured in the fall of 2008 also reveal the degree of internal discord afflicting the organization at this period. A number of letter’s between AQI and AQC portray Zarqawi’s replacement, Ayyub al-Masri, as an ineffective leader isolated from field commanders and unable to communicate effectively with AQC. Other letters show leaders within AQC and the broader jihadist movement lambasting AQI under al-Masri for

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203 Knights 2008.  
204 Ibid.  
205 Fishman 2008.  
206 Masters 2012.
its shoddy media efforts. As one leader claimed, “(the videos) are all old from the archives and were presented as if they new operations, and this is fraudulent and concealment of the truth.”

Operational Low Point: 2009-2010

As AQI’s strategic center shifted towards Mosul and Ninewa, Sunni Arab areas north of Baghdad witnessed a far larger share of violent incidents than AQI’s traditional operational theaters like Baghdad, Babil, and Anbar. Then in 2009, the ISF began to progressively take over as non-U.S. coalition forces completely withdrew from the country and American troops withdrew from cities to designated military bases. Despite the decreased number of oppositional forces, both 2009 and 2010 were quiet periods for AQI and Sunni insurgency in Iraq. As Kenneth Pollack commented, early-2010 was likely the apex of stability for post-invasion Iraq. Provincial and national elections were held and secular parties emerged as the victors instead of the parties defined by their sectarian extremism and connection to militias. In fact, for a brief period, militias across the state faded into the background and AQI gasped for air.

In April 2010, Ayyub al-Masri and Abu ‘Umar al-Baghdadi, AQ’s top leaders in Iraq, were killed in a joint ISF-Coalition raid in the Salahaddin province. Soon afterwards, General Ray Odierno proclaimed 34 of the 42 top-known AQI leaders as captured or killed. Based on Multinational Force-Iraq statistics in 2010, high profile attacks were at their lowest levels since the conflict began and there was a large decrease in casualties among U.S. troops, ISF, and civilians. However, AQI was far from dead in the water; as a sign of their resilience, in late May/early June 2010 the group carried out a series of bombings and shootings that left 119 dead and more than 350 injured. Nonetheless, 2010 represents a low point for AQI activity as

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207 Roggio 2008.
208 Byman, Pollack 2013.
209 Benraad 2010.
operational levels between 2010 and 2011 plateaued under the leadership of new emir Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, also known as Abu Dua.

Resurrection: 2011-2014

Starting in 2011, AQI began to show considerable signs of life via renewed attack waves targeting government officials and the ISF. Between July 20th, 2011 and October 15th 2011, sixty-seven attacks against government officials occurred in regions featuring strong AQI presence, including Baghdad and Diyala. In the first three months of 2011, there was a 70% increase in bombings and by the end of the year, 609 Iraqi police and 458 soldiers had been killed. Furthermore, the second half of 2011 registered more civilian casualties than the first. The upward trend of AQI activity continued into 2012; to start off the year, AQI executed several spectacular attacks against Shi’a civilians in Karbala, Nasiriyah, and Kadhimiyah. February featured a rise in Vehicle-Born Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIED), an attack type overwhelmingly used by AQI. By October 2012, U.S. officials confirmed the organization more than doubled in strength from 1,000 to 2,500 identifiable fighters since the withdrawal of U.S. forces in 2011. By year’s end, AQI had conducted nearly 200 more attacks than in 2011. According to the “Iraq Index” published by the Brookings Institution, 2012 was also the deadliest year since 2009 for Iraqi police and the ISF, largely because of AQI’s renewed operations against security forces. Lastly, according to the Iraq Body Count, the average number of monthly attacks carried out by non-state actors nearly doubled between 2010 and

\[\text{ SIGR 2011.} \]
\[\text{Cordesman, Khazai 2013.} \]
\[\text{Wing 2013.} \]
\[\text{Roggio 2012.} \]
\[\text{Based on author’s analysis of GTD data.} \]
\[\text{O’Hanlon, Livingston 2012.} \]
2012 while the average number of bombings by non-state actors increased by almost 50% in the same time period.\textsuperscript{216}

Despite the intelligence windfall that occurred following the withdrawal of U.S. forces, there is still a substantial amount of information that shows the accelerating resurgence of AQI between 2012 and 2013. When it comes to more general levels of violence, January 2013 recorded more civilian deaths than any of the last three months in 2012.\textsuperscript{217} Suicide bombings also rose from 5-10 per month in 2011 and 2012 to an average of 30 per month in 2013, as noted by a senior U.S. official.\textsuperscript{218} Considering the fact, acknowledged by most Iraq analysts, that the majority of suicide attacks in the nation are conducted by AQI, these statistics reveal a significant increase in activity.\textsuperscript{219} Lastly, the average number of quarterly attacks in Iraq more than doubled from 358 to 804 between the first quarter of 2011 and the first quarter of 2013.\textsuperscript{220}

Research conducted by Jessica Lewis at the Institute for the Study of War has thoroughly identified AQI’s increased operational activity since early 2012. As Lewis details, violence in Iraq sharply escalated in June 2012 with the start of AQI’s “Breaking the Walls” campaign. This campaign, which lasted from mid-2012 to mid-2013, featured 20 waves of VBIED attacks, 8 strikes on prisons, and an increased degree of territorial control. In a remarkable demonstration of operational capabilities, each of the VBIED waves featured eight or more bombings on the same day and increased in lethality as well as frequency as the campaign entered the spring of 2013.\textsuperscript{221} The geographic spread of these operations also suggested a high level of coordination between operational cells. By the end of the campaign in July 2013, violence levels in the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{216} Assessment made based on author’s own analysis of IBC data.
  \item \textsuperscript{217} Wyer 2013.
  \item \textsuperscript{218} Cordesman, Khazai 2013.
  \item \textsuperscript{219} Knights 2012b.
  \item \textsuperscript{220} Knights 2013a.
  \item \textsuperscript{221} Lewis 2013a.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
country were equal to those in April 2008 when the nation was still in the middle of a war. Furthermore, the raid on Abu Gharib prison that signaled the end of the “Breaking the Walls” campaign was an astonishing success and a frightening indicator of AQI’s strength. The first wave of the attack involved multiple VBIED’s, suicide bombers, and RPG strikes against the prison’s perimeter. Then, AQI used mortars to pin down the ISF inside the facility while fighters breached the walls and used megaphones to identify specific prisoners for rescue. Once the dust settled, 68 ISF were dead and 500 had escaped, including dozens of AQI members and several senior commanders.

On July 29 2013, AQI announced the start of a new campaign, titled the “Soldiers Harvest,” with the goal of establishing greater territorial control in Iraq and Syria and targeting the ISF with increasing volatility. On the subject of territorial control, the group has exhibited capabilities in Jurf al-Sukhar, Northern Babel, Diyala, eastern Salahaddin, and north of Salahaddin in the Za’ab Triangle. AQI operations in mid-2013 in Baquba indicate the group progressively advancing from strongholds in Ninewa towards Baghdad. Furthermore, the group’s footprint in Anbar is strong enough to allow for temporary seizures of territory, as demonstrated in Fallujah and Ramadi at the end of December 2013, as well as direct engagements with ISF detachments. In August-September of 2013, AQI was observed attempting control portions of Ninewa. In support of these efforts, AQI has been attempting to isolate the ISF from the region by continuously attacking supply lines in Qayara, Shirqat, and Shura between Mosul and Baghdad. AQI’s current operational strength in Ninewa can most notably seen in its increased

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222 Lewis 2013b.
223 Lewis 2013a.
224 Lewis 2013c.
225 Lewis 2013d.
226 Lewis 2013c.
targeting of Sawha, invigorated assassination campaign against government officials in Mosul, and threats issued to rural tribal leaders regarding the presence of their sons among the ISF.\textsuperscript{227}

A number of other indicators show the extent of AQI’s resurgence in 2013. By the fall of 2013, the organization’s membership was estimated to have grown to around 4,000-5,000 fighters.\textsuperscript{228} In August 2013, AQI was observed carrying out VBIED operations in both the Southern and Northern areas of Baghdad with an equal level of effectiveness.\textsuperscript{229} Increases in the implementation of House Borne Improvised Explosive Device’s (HBIED’s) against the homes of ISF members have also been directly connected to AQI. Finally, one of the most revealing indicators of AQI strength lies in the increased number of AQI ground assaults on ISF fixed locations as well as a number of prolonged gun battles with ISF forces.\textsuperscript{230} For example, in November 2013, the ISF carried out a large-scale attack against roughly 300 AQI gunmen in Babel only to be repelled by the insurgents. The area of the engagement was interestingly enough the location of an AQI training camp and VBIED factory circa 2006-2007.\textsuperscript{231} Likewise, clusters of AQI activity have cropped up in other historical support zones, such as Northern Diyala and the Za’ab triangle, in the form of VBIED attacks and population displacement.\textsuperscript{232}

Year-end figures from 2013 reveal a steady trend that demonstrates not only resurgence in AQI activity but increased levels of violence and instability across most of Iraq. By the end of the year, based on reports from the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the Brookings Institute, more Iraqi police and ISF were killed in 2013 than in the last 7 years.\textsuperscript{233}

\textsuperscript{227} Lewis 2013c.
\textsuperscript{228} Noonan 2013.
\textsuperscript{229} Lewis 2013b.
\textsuperscript{230} Lewis 2013d.
\textsuperscript{231} Lewis 2013c.
\textsuperscript{232} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{233} This assertion is based on the author’s analysis of data provided in monthly UNAMI casualty reports from 2013 as well as data from the Brookings Institute’s Iraq Index.
Figures being reported in 2014 at the time of this thesis’ construction are equally disturbing. January 2014 experienced a rate of 33.2 attacks per day, an 83% increase from the rate witnessed in January 2013.\textsuperscript{234} Violence in February was largely concentrated in the provinces where AQI has been the most active: Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Diyala, Ninewa, and Salahaddin. AQI is also attributed with launching the majority of the 42 car bombs witnessed in February.\textsuperscript{235} Furthermore, two more instances of AQI capturing territory and resisting ISF assaults were documented. As Joel Wing commented, “(in February) the Islamic State (AQI) was not only able to carry out its latest wave of car bombings in Baghdad but fought off the security forces in Northern Babil and attempted to take over a town in Salahaddin.”\textsuperscript{236}

**Hypotheses**

**Organizational Adaptation**

**Structure**

Based on sources like the Sinjar Records, we know that AQI circa 2006 was a highly bureaucratized organization with a demanding oversight chain. During this time, the group performed audits of sub-units, forced operatives to provide detailed accounts of expenditures, and mandated contracts for many fighters leaving and entering Iraq.\textsuperscript{237} However, according to U.S. military officials and other analysts, the group began to adapt its structure as early as 2008.\textsuperscript{238} As one senior official commented, “…what you see is no longer a vibrant network but a number of small cells.”\textsuperscript{239} Reports in 2010 also identified the group as operating primarily

\textsuperscript{234} Wing 2014d.
\textsuperscript{235} Wing 2014g.
\textsuperscript{236} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{237} Fishman 2008.
\textsuperscript{238} Peter 2008; Knights 2008.
\textsuperscript{239} Peter 2008.
through independent cells with minimal hierarchical oversight. During the group’s period of resurgence, attack data demonstrates the type of operational reach and mobility associated with a networked organizational structure. For instance, AQI’s campaign of attacks during the summer of 2012 featured seven simultaneous and coordinated waves that on one occasion targeted 10 cities in a single one day. Strikes during this campaign ranged all the way from Mosul to Basra, reflecting a remarkable degree of coordination across a wide geographic plan.

While AQI may have adopted a de-centralized, networked structure, it is difficult to determine using open source intelligence whether there has actually been any variation in AQI’s structure between 2009/2010 and its resurgence since 2011. The aforementioned attack waves obviously show that the group has active cells in many provinces but that does not mean AQI was not using such a structure during periods of marginal activity. For instance, the bombings in Amarah, Nasiriyah, and Basra for the first time as part of an AQI/ISI coordinated attack wave may certainly indicate the establishment or reactivation of cells. Yet, the reason for this reactivation could be more directly related to other mechanisms such as enhanced recruiting capabilities in those regions. As a final note, AQI did not even appear to defensively benefit from its supposed shift in structure in 2008. Indeed, shortly after the adaptation, the group’s leadership experienced brutal targeting and a decline in activity levels. For instance, AQI suffered the loss of 30 commanders in early 2008 and by 2010, 34 of the top 42 known AQI commanders had been captured or killed. During this same time, the type of high profile attacks associated with AQI operations were at the lowest level since the Iraq war began.

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240 Benraad 2010.
241 Wyer 2012.
242 Ibid.
243 Benraad 2010.
244 Knights 2008; Fishman 2008; Benraad 2010.
Membership

One of the most interesting organizational changes AQI has undergone over time involves the nature of its membership. During the Zarqawi era, AQI featured primarily foreign commanders and operatives, with Iraqi militants drastically underrepresented in the higher ranks of the organization. Over time however, specifically after Zarqawi’s assassination, the movement had to overcome a crisis of identity and legitimacy. The growing marginalization from its Sunni Arab base in Iraq helped motivate AQI to embark on campaign of Iraqifying the group. Indeed, developing a localized identity is an important part of any insurgent organization. As Michael Scheuer commented, “The historical reality is that insurgencies win or lose based on their authenticity…(they) must be led, supported, and overwhelmingly manned by local inhabitants.” While AQI’s Iraqification features heavily in literature surrounding its resurgence, the role of this characteristic in powering the group’s recent resurgence is dubious. While the first couple years of AQI’s existence featured a rate of Iraqi participation around 10%, studies show that Iraqis made up 90% of the group’s membership as early as 2007 when the organization was experiencing fierce domestic opposition. Arrest records of ISI members from 2010 also confirm the predominantly Iraqi identity of the group at a point of low activity levels.

A likely more revealing relationship between membership and activity involves the role of foreign fighters in funding and participating in military operations. One of the consequences of AQI’s Iraqification was a decrease in foreign funding, a major source of finance for the movement. During the Zarqawi era, in AQI’s Border Sector 1 near Sinjar, incoming foreign

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245 Scheuer 2010.
246 Evans 2010.
247 Benraad 2010.
248 Knights 2008.
fighters contributed more than 70% of the group’s operating budget.\textsuperscript{249} As foreign fighter participation dropped, AQI increasingly relied on its mafia-esque criminal network in Mosul and Ninewa to raise funds via racketeering, extortion, kidnapping, and real-estate theft.\textsuperscript{250} While AQI may not rely on foreign fighters for revenue, it is hard to deny their role in advancing the group’s operational capabilities. Foreign fighter entry rates fell from over 100 per month in 2007 during the group’s operational peak to 10-20 per month in 2010 during its period of operational insignificance.\textsuperscript{251} Likewise, the rate of foreign fighters entering Iraq has increased in tandem with its accelerated operational tempo in 2012 and 2013, largely because many fighters intended for Syria have been pulled into AQI’s Iraqi operations. Though the details of this trend will be explicated in a different section, foreign fighters can stimulate activity levels in several ways. For one, there is evidence suggesting the foreign fighters have historically been more enthusiastic participants in suicide operations than native Iraqis.\textsuperscript{252} According to the Sinjar records, between August 2006 and August 2007, foreign fighters carried out 75 percent of AQI’s suicide bombings.\textsuperscript{253} Furthermore, foreign fighters are not only more willing to engage in military operations but they are typically better trained to successfully execute operations and live to fight another day.\textsuperscript{254}

\textbf{Strategic Adaptation- Local Cooperation and Political Engagement}

Though many Sunni militias remain opposed to AQI, a growing body of evidence suggests that AQI has forged tactical links with Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al-Naqshabandi (JRTN), a Sufi organization largely controlled by former Baathists. Despite its nationalist and anti-civilian

\textsuperscript{249} Fishman 2008. \\
\textsuperscript{250} Knights 2008. \\
\textsuperscript{251} Adams 2010. \\
\textsuperscript{252} Fishman 2008. \\
\textsuperscript{253} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{254} Shapiro 2008.
violence stance, JRTN has been linked to several AQI car bombings and has jointly claimed a number of attacks with AQI. JRTN is known to outsource commissioned attacks to groups like AQI and Ansar al-Sunna when the attack target is one that could potentially damage its nationalist credentials. Sources even report that the JRTN has been funneling money from Saudi Arab donors back to AQI. However, the relationship between these two groups remains somewhat mysterious and the documented instances of collusion do not match up well with AQI’s resurgence.

At some points during AQI’s resurgence, the group has appeared to shift away from ideological rigidity and towards great local cooperation. For one, there have certainly been fewer attempts by AQI to impose Shari’a law and take over the leadership of Sunni militias. Reports from spring 2014 also show the group providing social services, implementing Sharia law, fixing utility infrastructure, and providing law and order in Fallujah. Residents in the city have addressed these activities in both positive and negative terms. AQI has also used propaganda to engender support with the Sunni community; in 2013, AQI distributed leaflets across Diyala in accompaniment with several attacks against government targets. Likewise, following the battles in Fallujah and Ramadi, AQI distributed pamphlets asking residents to join the fight, give money, or shelter fighters. During this same period, the group also attempted to engage residents in Fallujah via a grassroots political strategy that included an announcement that AQI was forming a “Commission for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice” to help Fallujah residents with local disputes.  

255 Knights 2011.  
256 Stanford 2012.  
257 AP 2014b.  
258 Lewis 2013d.  
259 AP 2014a.
On the other hand, much of these outreach efforts and attempts at re-establishing bonds do not match up well with the timeline of AQI’s revival. In fact, these tactics began in earnest soon after Zarqawi’s assassination and the ascension of al-Masri as the head of AQI largely as a reaction to the growing large-scale opposition from Sunnis and other jihadists in 2006. For instance, when the Sunni awakening was increasing in intensity, AQI sent letters to tribal sheikhs, apologizing profusely for targeting them and promising to "pay any compensation" if damage was done.\textsuperscript{260} Statements like the following one from Abu Ayyub al-Masri, early in 2009 before the group’s resurgence, demonstrate a notably conciliatory and open-armed tone in their media to Sunni’s who had once discarded AQI:

\begin{quote}
If our mistakes prevented you from seeking unity, we have never pretended to be infallible. Today and tomorrow we will admit that there are mistakes, and all the mistakes will not end, but by God we did not commit those mistakes intentionally and we are not pleased with them. If mistakes happen, we rush to fix them.\textsuperscript{261}
\end{quote}

Communication efforts in 2014 have been similarly eager to positively engage Sunnis and feature rhetoric on subjects like Sunni solidarity and Sahwa repentance.\textsuperscript{262} Nonetheless, considering the near-constant nature of this rhetoric since 2006, there is little reason to believe such efforts have played a significant role in engendering support for AQI.

**Military Strategy**

Looking at a number of factors, there is little reason to think that a significant change in operational strategy has occurred during the period of AQI resurgence. Despite strategic recommendations from AQC, AQI has continued to carry out controversial attacks like its bombing of a church in Baghdad on Christmas Day 2013.\textsuperscript{263} Though a substantial amount of

\textsuperscript{260} Jones 2012  
\textsuperscript{261} Al-Furqan 2009.  
\textsuperscript{262} ISW 2014a.  
\textsuperscript{263} AP 2013.
literature emphasizes the role of local cooperation during the group’s operational void in 2009 and 2010, AQI has largely stuck to extreme tactics during the last two to three years of resurgence. In the mind of many analysts, active participation with AQI among Sunnis is likely low given the persistent targeting of Sahwa, protest movement leaders, and Sunni politicians.\(^{264}\) Ahmed Ali of the Institute for the Study of War has also reported that AQI appears to be assassinating protest leaders in an effort to gain influence among followers of the movement.\(^{265}\) In addition to the return of brutal tactics against Sunni leaders, AQI appears to be increasingly targeting of Shi’a civilians and politicians. Notable assassinations of high-ranking security officials inside the Shi’a government in 2012 include Brigadier General Abdul Hussein Mohsen and Brigadier General Nadhim Tayeh, commander of emergency police in west Baghdad.\(^{266}\)

As previously established, AQI’s military strategy continues to use to controversial tactics that are not indicative of engendering popular support. On the other hand, certain strategies seen in a number of the group’s campaigns do suggest strategic prowess assisting in resurgence. In a recent interview, AQI-expert Jessica Lewis commented, “I do not see AQI’s activities in Iraq as geared towards garnering popular support...I believe their manpower comes from two primary sources: prison breaks and foreign fighters.”\(^{267}\) While the influx of foreign fighters has little to do with AQI strategy, the group’s targeting of prisons as a part of the “Breaking the Walls” campaign was a successful strategic endeavor that replenished the group’s membership. American officials estimate that around several hundred escapees have joined AQI, including a man named Abu Aisha who is now leading a group of AQI fighters near Fallujah. As one counterterrorism expert commented, “The influx of these terrorists, who collectively have

\(^{264}\) Wing 2013.
\(^{265}\) Ali 2013b.
\(^{266}\) Wicken 2012.
\(^{267}\) Wing 2013.
decades of battlefield experience, probably has strengthened the group and deepened its leadership bench.” Nonetheless, while AQI’s efforts during “Breaking the Walls” campaign demonstrated tactical prowess that clearly benefitted resurgence, there are few other examples that suggest a positive relationship between the organization’s military strategy and resurgence. The success of AQI’s current “Soldier’s Harvest” campaign, with its focus on capturing territory and attacking more government installations, appear to be a reflection of existing strength rather than a strategic mechanism for resurgence.

**Economic Factors**

The economy of Iraq is undoubtedly rebuilding itself in the aftermath of the U.S. invasion. In 2012, Iraq’s GDP surpassed 1990 levels and registered an annual estimated growth of 12%, demonstrating a broad improvement in basic economic conditions. Another indicator of economic improvement is the rise in Foreign Direct Investment rates since 2009, largely due to the reconstruction of the oil industry. Indeed, reports from February 2014 showed oil experts at 35-year high for the country. At the moment, with 2.8 million barrels being exported per day, Iraq is on track to post one of the biggest rises in annual output in the country’s history. While oil wealth is streaming into the country at an accelerated rate, most of the money has remained with the state’s elite upper class. On the issue of oil production and income inequality, Ned Parker commented:

Progress in boosting production and revamping antiquated infrastructure is impeded by excessive bureaucratic controls, corruption, and security concerns. Revenues increase, but the challenge is that Iraq’s government is so corrupt and there’s no real transparency or accountability for where these revenues go. It doesn't benefit the people.
Simply put, the manner in which oil wealth is being distributed only serves to further marginalize those not connected with the elite upper class and ruling political parties.

However, anger over the distribution of oil profits is also extremely prevalent among governing officials across the state. Harith Hasan has described much of the political conflict between governing officials as a competition between “centripetal and centrifugal forces in which oil resources” are the prize at stake. While Baghdad wants centralized control over the industry and income distribution, most of the provinces wish to build up their own institutional capabilities and controls. Consequently, by the end of 2013, six provincial councils had voted in favor of becoming autonomous regions, accusing Baghdad of hindering the reconstruction process by withholding funds from oil production. Instead of attempting to mend the situation, Maliki has presented a budget to his cabinet for 2014 that reduces revenues for oil producing provinces by 80%. Additionally, in a move reminiscent of Hussein’s coercive strategies, Maliki is threatening to carve away territory from dissenting provinces by redrawing their boundaries and creating new provinces via cooperation with non-threatening minority groups.

There is little doubt that the political conflict stemming from regional oil disputes is contributing to state instability. However, the connection with AQI activity is dubious since much of the conflict remains at the elite scale and even the moderate degree of societal discontent on the issue lacks prominence among violent opposition movements. Though oil can be classified as a primary commodity export, there is little evidence that the group has exploited oil production during its period of resurgence, though at one point in the organization’s early stages AQI received $50,000-100,000 per day in smuggled profits from an oil refinery in

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273 Wing 2014d.
274 Ottaway 2014.
275 Ibid.
Baiji.\textsuperscript{276} Instead, AQI has relied on its criminal enterprises for fundraising. As previously mentioned, one of the consequences of declining revenue from decreased foreign fighter participation was the criminalization of AQI’s fundraising tactics. Despite the dangers associated with such criminal activities, particularly their tendency to disenfranchise local populations, AQI has continued to use such means for generating income throughout its period of resurgence. Analyses in 2013 showed that AQI takes in $8 million per month from its network of extortion in Mosul. The group collects “taxes” from businesses large and small and enforces these policies with penalties including murder and abduction.\textsuperscript{277} As Hasan Harith reports:

No major or minor commercial activity can be carried out without al-Qaeda taking its share. This ranges from small-scale operations like selling vegetables to larger undertakings...According to Mosul residents...mobile phone companies have had to pay lump sums to the organization to keep their transmission facilities up and running.\textsuperscript{278}

Thus, AQI appears to be generating a substantial amount of finances through its extensive extortion network. However, it is difficult to tell whether there has been any variance in the scale and profitability of these activities between the group’s resurgence and previous period of ineptitude. Instead, the most impactful economic mechanism for AQI activity involves recruiting abilities and unemployment. In 2011, 25\% of Iraqis lived below the poverty line while the nation’s direct unemployment was also least 15\%, with real direct and indirect rates likely around 25\%. Furthermore, unemployment is heavily weighted towards Iraq’s youth; one report claims that direct unemployment in Iraq is highest among males aged 18-30.\textsuperscript{279} On the other hand, the unemployment rate has reflected marginal change between 2010 and 2012, the period in which AQI resurgence began.

\textsuperscript{276} Freeman 2012.
\textsuperscript{277} Hasan 2013.
\textsuperscript{278} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{279} Cordesman 2011a, 2011b.
External Support

While AQI has recently relied on internal sources for material support, as the Syrian war has intensified since 2012, AQI has increasingly benefitted from direct and indirect sources of support outside Iraq’s borders.\textsuperscript{280} Much of the resource wealth sent from Saudi Arabia and other gulf states to fund Sunni militant groups in Syria has been funneled through a tribal delivery system that stretches from Northern Saudi Arabia to Western Iraq and Eastern Syria.\textsuperscript{281} As one Saudi source commented, “We see the Syrian civil war and the Iraqi civil war as the same and we will treat them as the same.”\textsuperscript{282} Though AQI’s operations in Iraq lack official state sponsorship, the group has capitalized tremendously on resources sent by state and non-state financiers to rebel groups in Syria, including AQI’s own Syrian branch. Most of AQI’s resource acquisition in this regard originates from the group’s extensive smuggling network. According to members of the Shammar tribe, AQI has a “virtual monopoly on the flow of arms and fighters to Syria.”\textsuperscript{283} Thus, AQI is able to acquire resources by taxing smuggling operations into Syria while also delegating resources intended for Syria and instead using them for their Iraqi operations. Indeed, reports have claimed that AQI skims many of the fighters destined for Syria and instead uses them in Iraq.\textsuperscript{284}

In addition to receiving material resources from external sources, the Syrian conflict has provided AQI with a mutually supportive rear that makes it tactically difficult for COIN operations to trap the group or cut it off from its resource supply. Here, Syria is providing AQI with a type of indirect sanctuary that has undoubtedly benefitted AQI activity. Rather tellingly, Anbar and Ninewa, the two Iraqi provinces that border Syria, currently represent AQI’s

\textsuperscript{280} See Freeman 2012; Fishman 2008.
\textsuperscript{281} Byman 2013, 997.
\textsuperscript{282} Byman, Pollack 2013, 8.
\textsuperscript{283} Dagher 2012.
\textsuperscript{284} Byman, Pollack 2013.
operational stronghold. Furthermore, the timeline of AQI resurgence in Iraq matches up well with the progressive expansion of the Syrian civil war and AQI’s involvement in the conflict. In conclusion, all of the indicators for this particular variable have increased in positive correlation with the increase of AQI activity, presenting a strong case for the impact of external support.

**Domestic Anarchy**

**Force Ratios and ISF Tactical Capabilities**

The still-maturing Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) undoubtedly represents a decrease in effective military opposition to AQI during the period of analysis. Likewise, most of the clear counter-insurgent successes against AQI over the course of its operational history occurred during periods defined by deep military cooperation between U.S. forces, the ISF, and local civilian groups such as the Awakening Councils. Even though the Brooking Institute’s Iraq Index estimated the strength of the ISF to be 670,000 members in 2011, internal cohesiveness and functionality appear lacking. Recent reports on ISF capabilities in 2013 have identified whole unit defections, the resignations of senior commanders, and field commanders disobeying direct orders.\(^{285}\) Police forces are also suffering from dramatic internal struggles. In March 2014, the Iraqi government discharged 1200 police officers in Anbar after the officers failed to report for duty during clashes with AQI militants.\(^{286}\)

Though the ISF’s internal failings are certainly impactful, botched COIN operations and tactical ineffectiveness has benefitted AQI’s resurgence. For one, the shelling of Fallujah in 2014 in the aftermath of the city’s fall to AQI fighters was a foolish decision; a number of civilians were killed and numerous homes were also destroyed, which only fueled anger against the government. Furthermore, in response to dissent from Sunni protest leaders, the ISF has carried

\(^{285}\) Ali 2013c.
\(^{286}\) Turkish Press 2014.
out indiscriminate mass arrests.\textsuperscript{287} Even when the ISF has achieved purported COIN victories, AQI has managed to effectively respond. On November 6\textsuperscript{th}, 2012, only one day after the Iraqi Defense Ministry claimed security forces had arrested 11 AQI gunmen and thwarted a major plot, an AQ suicide bomber attacked a group of Iraqi Army recruits outside a base in Taji.\textsuperscript{288} In another instance, the ISF drew an impressive number of civilian volunteers for combat operations in Anbar against insurgents. However, AQI quickly counterattacked by bombing a group of said volunteers waiting in line outside an army base.\textsuperscript{289}

Another serious issue with Iraq’s security apparatus involves the state’s problematic prison system. According to the Human Rights Watch, the ISF has incarcerated thousands of primarily Sunni women without charge for extended periods of time and subjected them to torture. Sexual violence is apparently so commonplace in these facilities that one prison employee was quoted as saying, “We expect that they’ve been raped by police on the way to the prison.”\textsuperscript{290} Considering the well-documented importance of female honor in Iraqi society, particularly among Iraqi’s Sunni tribes, and the reactionary violence such violations of honor can invoke, the ISF’s systematic abuse of female prisoners is undoubtedly engendering hatred that serves to fuel the fires of an already virulent Sunni insurgency.\textsuperscript{291}

Another practice that is fueling Sunni angers rests with Iraq’s practice of conducting mass executions for prisoners guilty of terrorism charges. According to the Human Rights Watch, Iraq hung 151 people in 2013, up from 129 in 2012 and 68 in 2011.\textsuperscript{292} AQI has strategically responded to this trend in both its media releases and attacks. In 2012, AQI issued-

\textsuperscript{287} Wing 2014c.
\textsuperscript{288} Roggio 2012.
\textsuperscript{289} Institute for the Study of War 2014b.
\textsuperscript{290} BBC 2014.
\textsuperscript{291} See Meijer 2004, 28 for a discussion of how violations of female honor has led to Sunni rebellion.
\textsuperscript{292} Gulf Daily News 2014.
statement claiming the Iraqi government would “pay dearly” if it continued to execute Sunni prisoners. Not long after this statement, AQI fighters attacked a prison and freed hundreds of inmates. A more recent AQI statement from 2014 also posed the relevant question, “What did the Sunnis in Iraq gain from participating with the Rafidha in the political process? They filled the prisons with Sunnis and built a Rafidha army.”

Here, we are presented with a security-related grievance among Sunnis providing perfect fodder for AQI propaganda and military operations. It is also worth noting that targeting prisons not only serves a symbolic purpose but, when successful, also acts as a unique means of invigorating participation. Indeed, numerous reports including those using sources from inside the Iraqi government, have documented the role of escaped prisoners in assisting AQI operations.

**Territorial Control**

An important element of domestic anarchy involves evidence of AQI capturing, holding, or controlling territory. However, evidence on this subject is mixed. Only very recent reports from Fallujah provide an example of AQI controlling territory, providing social services, and attempting to enforce Sharia law. Nonetheless, since the beginning of 2013, AQI has exhibited an increased ability to hold chunks of territory for at least temporary periods of time. Joel Wing has documented two recent instances of AQI capturing territory and repelling ISF counterattacks while Jessica Lewis’ reporting in 2013 documents instances of AQI establishing greater territorial control in regions including Jurf al-Sukhar, Northern Babel, Diyala, eastern Salahaddin, north of Salahaddin in the Za’ab Triangle, and Ninewa. Lewis defines territorial control using less strict parameters though, referring to the occurrence as the “capacity to repel

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293 ISW 2014a.
294 Benraad 2010.
295 Lewis 2013c; Wing 2014g.
opposing forces from that location and often the ability to govern or compel behaviors of a population within a defined space.”

Using this definition, leaving governing abilities aside, AQI has certainly demonstrated increased territorial control. Yet, most of the regions where AQI has done so are areas that have not experienced radical changes in force ratios. Furthermore, up until mid-2012, AQI demonstrated few signs of controlling or attempting to control territory. Although its “Breaking the Walls” campaign declared reclaiming lost territory as an objective, the group’s focus appeared more on reasserting lost influence and breaking out former members from jail.

Recent instances of territorial control have primarily occurred in 2013, sometime after the U.S. drawdown created security vacuums. Thus, it is more likely that other factors, particularly the emergent Sunni insurgency, are catalyzing territorial seizures. Moreover, AQI’s increased territorial control appears to be a result and an indicator rather than a cause of resurgence.

**Regional Activity, Ungoverned Spaces, and AASs**

Because coalition forces withdrew occurred in a staging process with the ISF progressively taking their place, few regions experienced significant security vacuums during the withdrawal process. Furthermore, operational data simply does not reinforce the idea of AQI rushing back into regions to fill the power vacuum after the coalition withdrawal. Based on AQI statements following the group’s “Destroying the Walls” campaign, the group claimed most of its purported 276 operations in the same regions where it had already been operating, including Ninewa and Diyala. While open-source data from 2013 shows rising AQI activity in Anbar, these spikes are more closely correlated with sectarian conflict and Sunni militancy rather than anarchical trends. Likewise, while substantiated reports suggest amplified AQI presence in Iraq’s

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296 Lewis 2013c.
297 Crimi 2012.
298 SITE 2012.
ungoverned far-western regions, this increased activity is less influenced by a power vacuum and more by the Syrian Civil War and resource flows across the border. For example, last year Iraqi police reported destroying three AQI training camps 120 km west of Mosul. Yet, AQI activity in this region is most notably influenced by the prolific smuggling economy the Syrian war has pumped with adrenaline. AQI’s expansion into Syria and need for transit areas, not a change in security force influence, have revitalized the importance of establishing training camps in the Jazeera Desert Zone west of Mosul. 299

Alternative Authority Structures

Though one could rightly argue that non-existent border security is a condition of domestic anarchy, there has been minimal variance in the level of Iraqi border security between periods lacking in AQI activity and the recent resurgence. Instead, AQI involvement in the smuggling is likely due to the establishment of mutually beneficial relationships between AQI and local civilian forces. To elaborate, fighters, weapons, and other resources have been travelling between Syria and Iraq at an elevated rate since 2012, resulting in substantial opportunities for tribes and locals that have in turn motivated returned relationships with AQI. Here, it is not the withdrawal of United States troops or a lack of state authority but rather shared local interests that re-invigorated AQI’s capabilities. This point is validated even more when we consider how in 2006-2007, AQI’s encroachment on tribal smuggling operations in Anbar and a decline in shared interests led to the group’s demise.

In fact, the recent dynamics of smuggling grant us valuable insights into the relationship between AQI and anarchy in Iraq. Throughout 2006, when AQI was peaking as an organization, the organization’s border transit operation was remarkably fluid. According to the Sinjar records, the network delivered a new group of fighters and suicide bombers every 4.5 days over a span of

299 Lewis 2013c.
six months with almost perfect reliability. Most importantly, this robust trafficking network took place against a back-drop of significantly heightened efforts to improve security on the Iraqi-Syria frontier. According to recovered AQI documents, the U.S.-backed border control efforts do not seem to have increased the financial cost of border transportation for AQI. This is largely because tribes dominate the social and economic realities of the border, including smuggling operations, meaning that AQI’s efforts were not restricted until the group experienced backlash from the local population.\footnote{Fishman 2008.}

**Institutional Weakness**

**Social Services and Societal Grievance**

The Iraqi State is undeniably among the most fledgling in the entire world, earning itself a ranking of 9\textsuperscript{th} on the Failed State Index.\footnote{Foreign Policy 2012.} While pre-2003 Iraq was able to deliver some of the existential qualities of a state, i.e. the capacity to impose the rule of law, manage sub-state dynamics, and deliver basic public goods and services, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki’s government is unable to effectively do so. Research and opinion polls show that as violence subsided in Iraq circa 2008-2009, employment and the provision of public services replaced security as the number one concern for the Iraqi public. Yet, polls in 2011 have documented countrywide dissatisfaction with the provision of social services.\footnote{Sky 2011; SIGR 2011.} A 2012 survey of Iraqis 15 and older revealed that, since 2010, there has been an increase in Iraqis who say they are suffering. The same survey also showed that the number of Iraqis reporting stress during the day doubled between June 2008 and September 2011 to 70%. Furthermore, the percentage of respondents experiencing anger increased from 38\% to 60\% over the same period while more than half of those polled felt corruption was more prevalent. Lastly, 8/10 households from a
survey of nearly 29,000 found rated their electricity service as bad or very bad while another 6/10 rated sanitation services just as poorly.\textsuperscript{303} Though electricity output has increased gradually since 2009, with output sufficient on average to provide the typical Iraqi consumer with 10-12 hours per day, many still complain about its reliability.\textsuperscript{304}

As we can see, Iraqis across the country have grown increasingly dissatisfied with their quality of life and the government’s inability to provide services. Sunnis in particular however have complained of government corruption and services failures.\textsuperscript{305} Polls from 2010 and 2011 showed that the majority of Sunnis felt the country was headed in the wrong direction and that the Iraqi democracy was not a true one.\textsuperscript{306} Furthermore, respondents from provinces such as Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa, and Salahhadin were among the most aggrieved.\textsuperscript{307} Tellingly, these are the same provinces that have experienced political unrest, protest movements, and insurgent violence during AQI’s resurgence. Furthermore, these are also the same regions where AQI activity has most notably increased.

**Institutional Dysfunction**

Institutional dysfunction has spiraled downwards in tandem with the inflamed Sunni insurgency and the resurgence of AQI in the last three years. Beyond the provision of social services, political institutions such as parliament are barely functional. The poor rate of attendance in parliament has resulted in consistent failures to pass or produce legislation for managing the state’s economic and social demands.\textsuperscript{308} Rather ironically, parliament’s attendance problem has largely been caused by the boycotts of Sunni and mixed political parties protesting

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{303} SIGR 2012.
\textsuperscript{304} O’Hanlon, Livingston 2013.
\textsuperscript{305} Katzman 2013.
\textsuperscript{306} Greenberg 2010.
\textsuperscript{307} International Republican Institute 2011.
\textsuperscript{308} Reese 2013, 11.
\end{footnotesize}
against the transgressions of Maliki’s Shi’a regime. Many of these same parties have also held up the political process by their attempts to pass votes of no confidence against Maliki. However, Maliki is certainly guilty in aiding in parliaments dysfunction, particularly considering how his considerable influence with the Iraqi Supreme Court affected a ruling in May 2012 that tightened parliament’s ability to reprimand the Prime Minister. Maliki has even promoted parliamentary ineptitude by encouraging a court ruling that would require proposals for laws to pass through the Prime Minister’s cabinet. Yet, parliament has also failed to pass laws that would restrict Maliki’s abilities and improve oversight because of insufficient attendance from parties opposed to Maliki and his bloc. Since Maliki only controls 87 of the 325 representatives in parliament, if opposition members could actually attend and come to consensus, they could at least attempt to pass legislation to limit the Prime Minister’s powers. Thus, the Iraqi people and disenfranchised Sunnis in particular, are presented with a system so wildly dysfunctional and polarized that it may seem as if there is no political means for change. However, as is the case with parliament, much of the current dysfunction is directly related to the current sectarian conflict between Sunnis and Maliki’s corrupt Shi’a-dominated government.

Corruption

Though corruption was touched on earlier, a more thorough summary is needed considering its prevalence in the Iraqi state. Iraq is currently rated as the 7th most corrupt nation in the world according to Transparency International. A 2012 UNDOC report on corruption in the nation’s public sector noted that 11.6% percent of the Iraqi population had bribed a civil

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309 Wicken and Sullivan 2013.
310 Reese 2013, 11.
311 Wing 2012.
312 Ibid.
servant in 2011, while the rate in some urban areas was nearly 30%. In many ways, corruption is endemic to the Iraqi system. As Toby Dodge argues, Iraqi society has historically been shaped by a shadow state characterized by flexible patronage networks and violence. Much of this is due to the power of alternative authority structures, their relationship with the central state in Baghdad, and the historical prevalence of carrot and stick policies that have defined this relationship. Many Iraqi communities are simply accustomed to accomplishing their goals via social channels and unofficial means; back door patronage is simply the easiest method for many groups to extract resources from the state. Unfortunately, such processes promote corruption and in post-occupation Iraq, this is an unchanged reality. Indeed, local forces have increasingly occupied a prominent role in the nation’s political system while simultaneously working to fuel violence, undermine state legitimacy, and, albeit often indirectly, aid in AQI’s ability to operate. Yet, it is necessary to define specific elements of corruption that have benefitted AQI’s operational capabilities. The following section on emergent political conflict, sectarianism, and Sunni insurgency will shed light on how such processes have directly promoted AQI activity.

Emergent Political Conflict

In this section, the relationship between AQI activity and the country’s renewed Sunni insurgency and protest movement will be analyzed. As we will see, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki’s government has marginalized Sunnis and helped to reignite violence inside Iraq at the benefit of AQI.

Sectarianism and Political Conflict Under Maliki 2010-2014

Sectarianism tension has largely been a top-down phenomenon thanks to corruption in Nouri al-Maliki’s government as well as direct political actions that have marginalized and

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313 UNDOC 2012.
314 Dodge 2003, 159.
mistreated the country’s Sunni constituency. In the last several years, Maliki has pursued a remarkable agenda of divisive power consolidation at the behest of Sunni politicians. Throughout this process, Sunni faith in the system dissipated as the community watched their political system bend to the whims of the Shi’a in power. One expert, Toby Dodge of the London School of Economics and Political Science, commented on the current state of Iraq’s government saying, “I think there are clear signs that we’re moving from an incoherent political system back to some form of structural authoritarianism…comparable much more closely to a ‘Putinesque’ show of democracy.”

Maliki’s consolidation of power in the security sector has created the means to target Sunni rivals and dissidents with remarkable efficiency and little oversight. For example, he has brought key elements of Iraq’s security forces under his personal control by appointing his own cronies to head each of Iraq’s 16 army divisions, via a process that violated parliamentary procedures for such appointments. Maliki has also created a number of elite military units and counterterrorism squads referred to as the “Nouri Brigades” by many Sunnis because of their heavy-handed tactics and sectarian tilt. A vacuum in oversight on military appointments has allowed Maliki to select loyal officers for command positions in the Operations Command, which according to Kirk Sowell, has no legal basis, and, along with the Interior Ministry, frequently makes warrantless arrests. The same degree of interference occurs in the intelligence services, now known as the National Security Advisory, since there is no parliamentary process for overseeing this body. Maliki can influence ground-level strategic actions without any accountability or oversight through the Office of the Commander of Chief (OCINC), which

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316 Dodge 2012.
317 Romano 2009.
318 Sullivan 2013; Parker and Boot 2014.
319 Wing 2012; Sullivan 2013.
reports directly to the prime minister and is staffed almost entirely by Maliki loyalists. Essentially, Maliki has crafted a remarkably centralized security apparatus that is almost entirely under his control. Many of the senior military officers that are actually Sunni are in fact former Baathists, likely included in the process because their controversial political past acts as a means for Maliki to ensure their loyalty.

Maliki’s cronyism can also be seen in his strategy of fragmenting Sunni political bodies by alienating certain leaders while cultivating specific allies, usually through promotions to government positions. For example, Maliki has given key positions in the defense and interior ministries to either himself or well-known cronies instead of more popular representatives in mixed parties like Iraqiyya. More important to the case of AQI resurgence is al-Maliki’s direct marginalization of Sunni politicians like former Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi and Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq. In December of 2011, government tanks surrounded Hashemi’s residency and two of his bodyguards were brutally beaten and arrested. Hashemi now lives in exile in Turkey after an Iraqi court dubiously sentenced him to death on terrorism charges. During this same incident, government forces stationed themselves near the residencies of Mutlaq as well as Finance Minister Rafa al-Issawi. Maliki later urged the Iraqi parliament, unsuccessfully, to pass a vote of no confidence against his Sunni rival Mutlaq. These aggressive moves by Maliki against the public face of Iraqi’s Sunni population have helped shatter the country’s unity and stability at a vital reconstruction period. Shortly after this series of

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320 Sullivan 2013.
321 Wing 2012.
322 Sullivan 2013.
323 Mockli 2012.
324 Cordesman, Khazai 2013. One of these bodyguards later died in custody three months after being arrested and his family claimed there were burn marks and other signs of torture on his body.
325 Mardini 2012.
326 Mockli 2012.
events, two Sunni-dominated provinces demanded to hold a referendum on becoming federal regions with greater autonomous powers. Maliki retaliated by arresting hundreds of Sunnis in these provinces, in the name of de-Ba’athification of course, while continuing to target the top leadership of Iraqiyya.327

The Sunni Protest Movement and Insurgency

Notwithstanding AQI activity, starting in 2011, analysts observed a seemingly stable Sunni insurgency concentrated in northern and central Iraq. One source reported that the five predominately Sunni provinces and western Baghdad were responsible for an average of 68.5% of national incidents each month for the first half of 2011.328 Sunni insurgent groups, especially those made up of former Ba’athist elements, are abundant in Ninewa and their presence has helped AQI reap and sow seeds in the region. The success and influence of outfits like JRTN is clear sign of the recent power in anti-regime anger. However, it must be noted that the Sunni insurgency has grown alongside the non-violent protest wing of the movement, which emerged quickly after the arrest of Issawi in 2012.

AQI has directly benefitted from Sunni discontent with the central, which has included the reintroduction of many Sunni Insurgents once allied with the U.S. and Iraqi government. Reports from 2012 indicate that disenfranchised Sons of Iraq (SOI) and members of the Awakening Movement frustrated with the ISF’s lack of full-integration have re-joined AQI.329 The SOI were promised during reconstruction efforts either integration into the Iraqi Security Forces or vocational training and some type of government job, a task the Iraqi government assumed responsibility for in 2009. Yet, by March 2010 only 40% of the SOI had been integrated

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327 Mockli 2012.
328 Knights 2011.
329 Williams, Adnan 2012.
into new employment.\textsuperscript{330} Though the number of participants transitioned to employment neared 70\% by 2013, 30,000 SOI are still without promised government assistance. In addition, these figures do not include the majority of 25,000 members of the Awakening Movement.\textsuperscript{331} Maliki’s government has long distrusted the SOI and former members of the Awakening councils, for fear they would threaten the authority of the Shi’a government. As a result, many SOI’s have been denied approval for employment on the basis of their tribal and sectarian affiliation. Unsurprisingly, a great number of these militiamen have found a new occupation as insurgents.

In 2013, the nature of Sunni resistance took a sharp turn for the worse as sectarian violence broke out in shocking fashion. Fighting in the end of April between government troops and Sunni tribes in northern Iraq left more than 100 dead.\textsuperscript{332} The election cycle during this time was deadlier than either of the previous two times Iraqis went to the polls in 2009 and 2010. Despite the multi-dimension nature of the violence, Baghdad received the majority of blame for violence, reflecting the anti-government sentiments of many Sunnis. Indeed, spokesmen for Iraqiya have also blamed the ISF for violence, claiming they were negligent in offering protection for Sunni candidates and took no precautionary measures despite warnings.\textsuperscript{333} In response to the uproar, Maliki used a classic carrot and stick approach to the situation. On one hand, he continued to target Sunni politicians, arresting and interrogating some while forcing others into exile.\textsuperscript{334} On the other hand, in the run up to provincial elections, he announced the release of some 3,000 Sunni prisoners and the softening of certain de-Baathification measures. However, the situation rapidly deteriorated on April 23, 2013 when Iraqi Security Forces stormed a Sunni protest camp in Hawija, a village north of Kirkuk, resulting in the death of at

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{330} Harari 2010.
\item \textsuperscript{331} O’Hanlon and Livingston 2013.
\item \textsuperscript{332} Tawfeeq 2013.
\item \textsuperscript{333} Arango 2013a.
\item \textsuperscript{334} IBC 2013.
\end{itemize}
least 42 people. “The peaceful demonstrations are over due to what happened today,” said a tribal leader in Hawija who was a leader of the protest movement. “Now we are going to carry weapons…this will not pass easily.”

After the raid in Hawija, tribal sheiks in Anbar called for armed resistance against the government, two Sunni ministers resigned from their positions, and leaders from Iraqiya announced the group’s boycott of Parliament. Commenting on the crisis, Martin Kobler, a U.N. special representative in Iraq, stated that the country was “at a crossroads.” However, a catastrophic series of events led to the further disintegration of the security situation. On December 21 2013, the army's seventh division was ambushed while conducting a raid against AQI in West Anbar and a number of senior officers were killed in the fight including the division commander. A week later, Maliki responded by ordering a raid against protest leader Ahmad al-Alqani in which Alqani’s brother and sister were shot to death. Then on December 30, only a few days after Maliki labeled the site an al-Qaeda headquarters, the Ramadi protest encampment was bulldozed. Mainstream tribal and religious leaders, like the Anbar Tribal Council, promptly called for mobilization against the state. Fearing a total rebellion, Maliki withdrew the ISF from cities and AQI forces responded with remarkable speed. In the wake of the ISF retreat, convoys of Toyota trucks carrying roughly 600 AQI fighters entered Ramadi and Fallujah, taking over government buildings, police stations, and announcing in a mosque in Fallujah’s city center the return of an Islamic emirate.

335 Arango 2013b.
336 Ibid.
337 Tawfeeq 2013.
338 Sowell 2014; Wing 2014a.
Sectarian Conflict and AQI

To capitalize on the sectarian turmoil, AQI has employed a propaganda narrative tailored around a political enemy, in the Shi’a dominated Iraqi government, on behalf of its perceived constituency, the oppressed Sunni population. As previously mentioned, the group is intertwining a carefully crafted media campaign with symbolic military operations. AQI has intelligently timed attacks around important political events in order to boost the legitimacy of their narrative. For example, after the proclamation of al-Hashemi’s death sentence in September 2012, AQI launched a wave of over 20 attacks mostly targeting Shi’a neighborhoods and killing around 100 people. In fact, AQI’s operational tempo has corresponded directly with the steadily rising political-sectarian tensions in 2012.  

Likewise, AQI has also concentrated attacks around areas experiencing anti-government protests in tandem with statement’s expressing rage at al-Maliki’s inept government. These well-timed attacks and rhetoric serve several important purposes. For one, they contribute to the de-stabilization of the Iraqi state, which in turn reinforces AQI’s position by promoting the image of state illegitimacy. Secondly, they help AQI perpetuate an already volatile climate of fear and instability, which benefits their operational capabilities and in turn, the public’s perception of their strength.

Recent reports show that AQI, the Military Council of Tribal Revolutionaries (a new umbrella organization for old insurgent groups), and the Anbar Tribes Revolutionary Council are fighting against ISF forces all over Anbar. Since the beginning of the year, Sunni tribal and religious leaders have been convening outside of Iraq and outlining detailed plans for a unified Sunni revolution against the state. The Association of Muslim Scholars of Iraq, which is led by Sunni clerics, has forged close links with a military organization called the General Military

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339 Gairdner 2012.
340 Wyer 2013; Salaheddin 2011.
Council for Iraqi Revolutionaries. AMSI has also acknowledged a temporary alliance with AQI, though the group’s link with AQI is murky.\textsuperscript{341} While there are some tribes in the region who have sought to cooperate with the ISF and others who are openly fighting AQI, the current warfare in Anbar has allowed for AQI to temporarily co-opt other militant groups and tribal forces in the fight against Baghdad.\textsuperscript{342} As fighting in February spread to Salahaddin, AQI seized a number of towns in the province.\textsuperscript{343}

Looking at targeting information, AQI actually appears to be using the same sectarian-provocation strategy implemented during Zarqawi’s reign. To elaborate, the group has returned to targeting Shi’a civilians and politicians in an effort to incite a broader sectarian conflict. Given the degree of broader sectarian-fueled political conflict since 2011, the implementation of such a strategy is hardly a shocking decision. Though the country is nowhere near experiencing the levels of sectarian violence seen between 2006 and 2008, AQI’s efforts to incite sectarian violence have been marginally successful. The Iraq Body Count has reported on the rise of sectarian violence in 2012-2013, citing the increase of deadly shootings, dumped bodies, and single-person executions as positive indicators.\textsuperscript{344} 2013 in particular has witnessed an increase in reprisal killings on both sides as well as growing evidence of Shi’a militias, like Asai’b Ahl Al-Haq, specifically retaliating against AQI bombings by executing Sunni civilians.\textsuperscript{345} In the aftermath of several AQI attack waves, Shi’a militias installed false checkpoints that were eventually connected with the disappearances of Sunni civilians.\textsuperscript{346} In May 2013, spikes in sectarian violence correlated with AQI VBIED attack waves in several of Baghdad’s Shi’a

\textsuperscript{341} Arraf 2014b.
\textsuperscript{342} Wing 2014f.
\textsuperscript{343} Adnan 2014.
\textsuperscript{344} IBC 2013.
\textsuperscript{345} Lewis, Ali, Kagan 2013; Adnan 2013c.
neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{347} Sectarian violence has spread outside of Baghdad too; Sunni tribal leaders have been found murdered in Iraq’s Shi’a dominated south while in Basra, a number of Sunni mosques closed following the displacement of 150 families from a predominantly Sunni tribe.\textsuperscript{348}

**Conclusion**

<table>
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<td><strong>H1:</strong> Anarchy</td>
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Reviewing our independent variables of low value, Anarchy, Economic Factors, and Organizational Adaptation appear the least impactful on AQI resurgence. When it comes to Anarchy, though AQI has certainly faced less of capable COIN forces since 2011, there are few other indicators that suggest a strong connection to resurgence. Economic Factors also appear to lack particular impact; the nation suffers from high unemployment levels among young males in urban areas but variance on this indicator is minimal between AQI’s period of resurgence and marginal activity. For Organizational Adaptation, there have been no observable changes in either structure, leadership, or political strategy while the group’s military strategy continues to be dominated by the same indiscriminate violence employed during its previous downfall. While

\textsuperscript{347} Lewis, Ali, Kagan 2013; Adnan 2013b.

\textsuperscript{348} Ali 2013c.
AQI has benefitted from an influx of foreign fighters, this influx has been largely caused by the Syrian civil war.

The next most impactful variable is Institutional Weakness. Over the course of AQI’s resurgence, the functionality of institutions like parliament has progressively deteriorated, corruption within Nouri al-Maliki’s government has become increasingly visible, and societal grievances, particularly among Sunnis, have grown substantially. Yet, the influence of these grievances on AQI’s resurgence has primarily been manifested through their impact on the development of the Sunni protest movement and insurgency. Indeed, while External Support is particularly strong variable with nearly all indicators positively registering during the period of resurgence, Emergent Conflict stands as the strongest hypothesis in explaining AQI’s comeback from 2011 to the present. The group’s activity has risen alongside the intensification of the Sunni protest movement and insurgency and operational data shows a strong relationship with Sunni regions experiencing unrest. The political strife and ethno-sectarian competition plaguing Iraq today has created the perfect environment for AQI maneuverability, recruiting, and engagement with other militant groups.

Many of Iraq’s Sunnis look at the widespread corruption, dysfunction, and sectarianism in Nouri al-Maliki’s government and see an enemy to their interests, security, and identity. As a result, the past several years have witnessed the rise of a virulent Sunni protest movement and insurgency that has caused many Sunnis to shift their allegiance to non-state groups. James Phillips of the Heritage Foundation commented on this issue relative to AQI: “The Iraqi Government, dominated by Shia political parties, has greatly contributed to AQI’s revival by undercutting and persecuting Sunni politicians…this has strengthened AQI’s limited appeal
inside Iraq and allowed it to position itself more convincingly as the champion of Sunni Arabs against the Maliki regime.”

Looking forward, the outlook for Iraq does not appear positive. Any conciliatory promises made by Maliki towards Sunni communities will likely fall on deaf ears, considering how the promises of integration following the insurgency’s acquiescence to the U.S. were abandoned once the United States withdrew. As Osama al-Nujaifi, the speaker of the parliament said, “From 2006 to 2008, tribesmen were able to beat Al Qaeda with the cooperation of American forces and the support of the Iraqi government...After gaining victory over Al Qaeda, those tribesmen were rewarded with the cutting of their salaries, with assassination and displacement.” Simply put, as long as the Sunni community in Iraq is in open revolt against the government, AQI will continue to benefit operationally. Nobody, including the Iraqi state or even the American government, can defeat AQI without the backing of the nation’s Sunni population and tribal councils. Incorporation is the key to AQA defeat. The success of the Awakening was made possible because AQI had alienated the people and the U.S. was able to offer both protection and rehabilitation within the new political system. Unless the Iraqi government makes substantial efforts to increase Sunni inclusion, any treaty between the tribes and the government will be temporary. Consequently, if Baghdad’s sectarian politicization continues, AQI will undoubtedly remain a potent threat to the state’s stability.

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349 Scarborough 2012.
350 Arango, Fahim 2014.
Case #2: Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

“The adherence to ethnic and tribal systems...the people's military steadfastness, the rooting of the spirit of jihad, the stockpile of weapons…make this demography a suitable human bloc for jihad.”

- Abu Musab al-Suri

Introduction

Between 2010 and mid-2012, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) executed an increasingly virulent domestic insurgency against the Yemeni government. Then, after their organizational peak in mid-2012, AQAP experienced a decline in activity and the loss of a number of previously captured territories. Yet, shortly after this series of setbacks, AQAP demonstrated signs of resurgence. The following analysis will begin by briefly examining the history of al-Qaeda in Yemen and then move on to examining the relevant operational history of AQAP. Once the background narrative is established, this study’s hypotheses can be tested against the case of AQAP.

Before moving forward, it is necessary to understand a few nuances pertaining to the case at hand. For one, due to AQAP’s previous levels of activity, the length of the recent resurgence, and the moderate degree of activity, it is possible to quantify this resurgence as being moderate in nature. Indeed, AQAP’s demonstration of resurgence is of considerably less value than that of AQI. Secondly, because the period of resurgence being examined has occurred very recently, there is limited information on a number of the indicators for each hypothesis. As a result, there are undeniably holes in the supporting evidence. Furthermore, these gaps in available knowledge have created a situation in which it is particularly difficult to identity levels of variance in variables during periods of marginal AQAP activity and periods of resurgence. Thus, the subsequent analysis will examine the value of many variables during AQAP’s recent resurgence.

351 Koehler-Derrick 2011.
as well as the group’s upward trend in activity from 2010 to 2012. By judging the role of variables during this period in tandem with the group’s resurgence in 2012-2013, we can most accurately identify trends in the impact of specific variables on AQAP activity.

**Background**

**Inactivity (2003-2006) and Rebirth (2006-2009)**

Following the dissolution of al-Qaeda in Yemen (AQY) in 2003, al-Qaeda had little activity in Yemen between 2003 and 2006. During this same time period, another al-Qaeda cell operating in Saudi Arabia, also identified as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, was in fact very active. After their defeat in Saudi Arabia, this cell eventually joined AQ’s operations in Yemen in 2009, around the same time that the formal al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula title was adopted by the organization in Yemen. Nonetheless, the organization examined in this case study will be the group in Yemen led by Nasir al-Wahayshi and Qasim al-Raymi.

On the morning of February 3, 2006, the Yemeni theater re-opened when twenty-three convicted terrorists escaped from a high-security prison in Sana’a. The jailbreak marked a turning point for jihadi-insurgency in Yemen as several of the escapes would go on to resurrect a new and remarkably deadly al-Qaeda affiliate. These men included the two current leaders of AQAP, Nasir al-Wahayshi, who served as Osama Bin Laden’s personal secretary for five years, and Qasim al-Raymi, AQAP’s military commander.\(^{352}\) Between 2006 and 2009, AQAP killed only a small number of people, however, the group proved itself to be operationally capable and startlingly efficient. For example, from 2007 to 2010, AQAP killed 37 military and government officials in Ma’rib from an initial list of 40 targets.\(^{353}\) Furthermore, AQAP executed a number of complex attacks that foreshadowed operations to come. Despite being such a young organization,

\(^{352}\) BBC 2011.
\(^{353}\) McGregor 2010b.
AQAP showed remarkable pace in throwing itself on the jihadi scene. Following several complex attacks on oil facilities, the group released a tape announcing al-Wahayshi as the head of AQLY in June of 2007. Then, in January 2008, the organization took one of the first steps in instituting its prominent media apparatus when it launched the first issue of the journal Sada al-Malahim (echo of epics).

During this same time period, a branch of AQAP under the name of the Soldier’s Brigade of Yemen (SBY) launched sixteen attacks. SBY was led by another member of the 2006 prison break, Hamza Salim ‘Umar al-Qu’ayti. While SBY operated, Wahayshi and al-Raymi’s AQLY refrained from claiming military operations for fourteen months in order to protect the core organization from counter-terror scrutiny while it built operational capacity. In the fall of 2008, the SBY’s operations ended abruptly after al-Qu’ayti was killed in a counterterrorism raid. However, in 2009 AQLY merged with al-Qaeda’s weakened Saudi affiliate and Ayman al-Zawahiri subsequently declared the new group as al-Qaeda in the Arabian Pensinula and declared Wahayshi as the emir.

Acceleration (2010-2012) and Resurgence (2012-Present)

In 2009 and 2010, AQAP leapt onto the international jihadi scene with its involvement in the Fort Hood shooting and failed Christmas Day and Times Square plots. Almost simultaneously, AQAP’s domestic campaign markedly increased in intensity. During the last five months of 2010, AQAP claimed 49 attacks while Yemeni sources also reported an increase in annual troop fatalities to 178. In 2011, according to the GTD’s database, AQAP nearly

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355 Johnsen 2010b.
356 Masters 2013.
357 Day 2012, 274.
doubled its monthly rate of attacks.\textsuperscript{358} Then in the summer of 2011, AQAP seized a number of towns in the Abyan governorate and began governing the territory. By mid-2012, AQAP’s monthly attack rate had tripled from the levels seen in 2011. Furthermore, the organization was demonstrating significant operational presence in 12 of Yemen’s 21 provinces.\textsuperscript{359}

However, in June 2012 following a peak in activity levels, government forces routed AQAP and forced the group from its territorial holdings in the south. This chain of events represented a significant setback for AQAP and overall attack levels in the second half of the year consequently declined by 50%.\textsuperscript{360} Yet, the organization quickly demonstrated signs of resurgence; between June 2012 and December 2013, AQAP conducted a countrywide assassination campaign that featured 117 assassinations.\textsuperscript{361} While some of the incidents in this campaign are not directly connectable to AQAP, many of the assassinations were defined by the same tactics also employed during AQAP’s notorious assassination campaign in 2010. Other sources have attributed the assassination of 85 middle and high-ranking government officials to AQAP in the first half of 2013.\textsuperscript{362}

According to a number of reports, AQAP’s strength also grew substantially to over 1,000 core fighters in 2013.\textsuperscript{363} Likely as a result of their increased strength, reports from this year show AQAP increasingly using resource-intensive operations like the storming of military bases and security-oriented facilities.\textsuperscript{364} We have also seen in 2013 and 2014 a number of spectacular attacks including one against the Defense Ministry hospital in Sana’a and another in Hadramawt.

\textsuperscript{358} Based on author’s analysis of GTD data.
\textsuperscript{359} Swift 2012.
\textsuperscript{360} Based on author’s analysis of GTD data.
\textsuperscript{361} Coombs, Poppy 2014.
\textsuperscript{362} Fattah 2014.
\textsuperscript{363} Johnsen 2013.
\textsuperscript{364} Gamal 2014; Roggio 2014b.
in March 2014 that killed 20 Yemeni soldiers.\textsuperscript{365} Lastly, AQAP has demonstrated a renewed degree of audacity and capabilities in 2014 by increasingly attacking prison facilities.\textsuperscript{366}

**Hypotheses**

**External Support**

The impact of external support in the case of AQAP resurgence is negligible. For starters, there is no available evidence to suggest that AQAP has possessed at any point its operational history either official or unofficial state sponsorship or sanctuary. The organization has consistently failed to spread its operations into Saudi Arabia, though it benefitted from a Saudi crackdown in late 2008 that forced a number of operatives across the border to Yemen where they likely joined up with Wahayshi’s group.\textsuperscript{367} When it comes to material resources, sources confirm that the group’s funding originates primarily from internal sources and criminal activities including smuggling, kidnapping, and robberies.\textsuperscript{368} Although reports from 2010 and 2012 suggest the migration of AQ operatives from Somalia to Yemen, the body of evidence on the relationship between these two organizations does not suggest a significant impact on AQAP’s resurgence.\textsuperscript{369} While AQAP has used Somali fighters as shock troops in forward operations, it appears that the relationship between the groups is primarily one in which AQAP has acted as a conduit of information between Shabaab and AQC.\textsuperscript{370}

On the subject of strategic direction, Yemeni expert Christopher Boucek commented in 2009 that the analytical community has failed to identity “a direct command-and-control relationship” between AQC and AQAP. However, he also noted that there have been reports of

\textsuperscript{365} Gamal 2014; Roggio 2014b.  
\textsuperscript{366} Fattah 2014; Al-Arabiya 2014.  
\textsuperscript{367} Masters 2013.  
\textsuperscript{368} Cordesman, Shelala, Mohamed 2013, 5.  
\textsuperscript{369} McGregor 2010; Watts 2012a.  
\textsuperscript{370} Watts 2013a.
“al-Qaeda operatives fleeing Pakistan and the tribal belt in AfPak” and joining AQAP in Yemen.\textsuperscript{371} More recently, reports have surfaced in 2014 detailing Saudi jihadists leaving Syria and Iraq to come fight in Yemen.\textsuperscript{372} Thus, it appears that AQAP has been able to consistently attract foreign fighters, including Somalis and Saudis at different periods of time likely because of the organization’s legitimacy in the jihadi community. Nonetheless, it does not appear that AQC or any other non-state actor is currently providing resources for the group. As will later be detailed, instead of relying on foreign assistance, the current form of AQAP is most likely benefitting from its progressive cultivation of local support networks.

**Institutional Weakness**

The two most glaring issues with the institutional functionality of the Yemeni state have involved an endemic degree of corruption in the government and a glaring inability to provide social services and basic goods for citizens across the country. While it is difficult to determine the exact degree of corruption in the Yemeni government since mid-2012, there are few indicators suggesting the fall of President Saleh actually resulted in significant improvements. Considering the amount of internal conflict in the last two years, there is also little reason to believe that social service provision has improved from the levels outlined in this section. Therefore AQAP has likely continued to thrive off societal discontent with the Yemeni government, particularly in the nation’s marginalized southern governorates.

**Corruption**

Corruption has been a rampant characteristic of the Yemeni government, particularly under the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh. In 2005, Yemen’s aid from the World Bank was cut

\textsuperscript{371} Boucek 2009.  
\textsuperscript{372} Gamal 2014.
from $420 million to $280 million because of such graft.\footnote{Johnsen 2008.} Since then, most indicators have demonstrated a continuation of corruption and cronyism within the government. In 2008, a study found that 50% of the state money allocated for diesel subsidies was being used to smuggle diesel that was then resold by elites at a widely profitable rate.\footnote{Phillips 2011, 34} Reports have shown an escalation in this trend since 2011.\footnote{al-Monitor 2014.} Corruption was so institutionalized under Saleh that he actually used the Central Organization for Control and Auditing (COCA) as a means of keeping track of which elites were stealing so that he knew which ones he could trust!\footnote{Phillips 2011, 61.} For example, one government official who was on trial for major fraud actually had his charges dropped only to subsequently receive an appointment as the head of the COCA. Amazingly, after this appointment, he was again put on trial for charges of fraud only to once again have the charges dropped. This time, he was reward with an appointment to head the country’s Judicial Inspection Board. Thus, Saleh essentially used COCA as means of channeling corruption into forms that suited the regime's interest.\footnote{Phillips 2011, 62.}

Tribal cronyism was also a distinct feature of Saleh’s regime. For instance, despite the small size of Saleh’s tribe, the Sanhan, members enjoyed incredible access to state resources under his regime. Members of the two major northern tribes, the Bakil and the Hashid confederation, which the Sanhan are part of, also possessed disproportionate influence at the political, military, and security levels of the government.\footnote{Phillips 2011, 51.} The most defining feature of cronyism under Saleh involved an intricate patronage system that connected elites in Sana’a with local governing authorities and tribal forces. This system will be explicated later due to its direct
connection to the subject of anarchy and the state’s inability to control tribes and enforce security.

Grievances and Service Provision

A wide majority of participants, including a number of elites, sampled for polls in 2010 and 2011 responded that a lack of will on the part of the country’s leadership to address the nation’s problems would result in catastrophe.\(^\text{379}\) Indeed, shortly before the Arab Spring revolution, interviews with elites demonstrated a lack of trust and confidence in the country’s government, which, despite the revolution, has changed little in its character.\(^\text{380}\) Furthermore, grievances among the country’s broader population have been extensive during the timeline of AQAP’s organizational ascension. 66.5% of the participants from a poll in 2008 believed their living situation had worsened in recent times while another 88.4% thought that the general situation for Yemenis had become worse and yet another 59.4% thought the situation was going to worsen.\(^\text{381}\) More recent figures show an increasingly debilitated state unable to meet the needs of its population. Roughly 13.1 million Yemenis currently require humanitarian aid and the percent of the population suffering from food insecurity increased from 13.2% in 2005 to 33.2% in 2010.\(^\text{382}\)

Grievances have been particularly potent in the southern provinces, where commodity shortages and anger against Northern power concentrations have been boiling over since 2008.\(^\text{383}\) Outbreaks of tribal violence in 2013 in Yemen’s southern governorates have been directly attributed to a lack of basic state services and competition for resources amongst tribes.\(^\text{384}\) AQAP

\(^{379}\) Phillips 2011, 118-119.  
^{380}\) Phillips 2011, 120-121.  
^{382}\) Fattah 2014; Maitami 2010.  
^{384}\) Gordon 2013a.
has clearly been able to directly take advantage of these grievances at the benefit of the group’s image. In 2011, Ansar al-Sharia, AQAP’s so-called insurgent branch, was documented providing services and assisting communities in the improvement of local infrastructure, including the installation of sewage pipes.\textsuperscript{385} Tribal leaders have also reportedly contracted Ansar fighters in the recent past in exchange for assistance in building new water wells, irrigation systems, and even supplying food.\textsuperscript{386}

\textbf{Economic Factors}

Yemen currently suffers from a long list of economic woes that have deteriorated during the timeline of AQAP’s organizational ascension and have not shown any signs of improvement during AQAP’s resurgence in the last year and a half. Per capita income in Yemen has contracted steadily since 2008 and the GDP shrank another 10\% in 2011.\textsuperscript{387} Likewise, poverty levels rose from 42\% in 2009 to 54.5\% in 2012. Even more revealing, particularly due to the tribal nature of these regions, is the fact that rural areas possess 73\% of the population and 84\% of the nation’s poor.\textsuperscript{388} However, poverty in urban areas has increased more than twice as much in the past five years than in rural areas.\textsuperscript{389} Thus, we can see a total degradation of economic conditions across the various locales in Yemen in the recent past. When it comes to broader demographic pressures, nationwide unemployment sits at around 40\% and the country’s population is expected to double to nearly 40 million by 2030. With 75\% of the current population already under the age of 25, AQAP has been presented with increasingly promising economic conditions for attracting prospective recruits.\textsuperscript{390} An interview from February 2011 with

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{385} Gordon 2012.
\textsuperscript{386} Swift 2012.
\textsuperscript{387} Cordesman, Shelala, Mohamed 2013, 3.
\textsuperscript{388} Cordesman, Shelala, Mohamed 2013, 5.
\textsuperscript{389} Maitami 2010.
\textsuperscript{390} Phillips 2011, 30; Riedel 2011; Boucek 2009.
\end{footnotesize}
Sheikh Abdullah al-Jumaili of the al-Jawf governorate shows that a lack of economic development and a high unemployment rate among young males has created fertile ground for AQAP recruitment. The Sheikh commented that, “Right now, I see young people joining al-Qaeda…they don’t have opportunities to work and now they’re looking for someone to feed them. They’ll be with whoever takes care of them.”

The primary force in Yemen’s economy has traditionally been oil. Yet, Yemen’s oil reserves, which make up 75% of the state’s income, are projected to run out by 2017. Between 2009 and 2010, oil extraction dropped roughly 40% and has continued to decline at a similar rate in recent years. In reality, oil wealth has provided few economic benefits for the average Yemeni citizen since the profits tend to stay with the country’s elites. However, the recent dip in oil profits has deprived the state and its elites of the funds that have kept the country afloat in the past two decades. To fully understand the impact of declining oil revenues, it is necessary to understand the nature of the patronage system between Yemen’s tribal forces and the central government in Sana’a.

**Domestic Anarchy**

The unique and incredibly nuanced role of anarchy in the Yemeni state plays a large role in the capabilities of AQAP. The findings of this section are as follow: For one, the country’s failing patronage system has causes destabilization and tribal fractures that AQAP has exploited. The alliances between AQAP and certain AASs has undeniably benefitted the group’s ability to respond to setbacks in 2012. Secondly, counterproductive COIN efforts have benefitted AQAP’s resurgence by legitimizing the group’s operations, generating recruits, and fostering greater anti-government sentiment. Thirdly, though Sana’a has co-opted AASs against AQAP, many of these

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391 Stier 2011.
392 U.S. Senate 2010.
393 Phillips 2010.
groups suffer from infighting and the elevation of tribal interests over their COIN duties. Lastly, operational data does not suggest that frequently labeled “ungoverned regions” are of particular impact on AQAP activity. Instead, operational data suggests correlation with the creation of security vacuums created by emergent internal conflicts, as well as regional grievances directly related to state failures in both civil-institutional and security sectors of governance.

Anarchy, Tribes, and the Failing Patronage System

There are few countries in the world today that exemplify weak central authority and decentralized power better than Yemen. Enlightened rulers like Ali Abdullah Saleh have understood that in a country where 70% of the population lives outside of cities and tribal authority is supreme, one must be willing to cede power in order to maintain it. Over the course of the last several decades, the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh was able to maintain power and overcome its lack of monopoly on force via an extensive patronage system that strategically coopted specific tribal authority figures using a variety of incentives. According to one recipient of financial incentives, the Department of Tribal Affairs would give sheikh’s money based on their political relevance, influence within their tribe, and acquiescence to government will. Unsurprisingly, this process was not a matter of public record and parliament had little oversight of the financial distribution. Nonetheless, the scope of the endeavor was undeniably massive; at times, Saleh’s budget discretely delegated billions of dollars to be used for financial incentives to maintain stability in the country’s unruly South.

For the most part, Saleh’s system worked remarkably well. However, it rested on the regime’s ability to produce monetary benefits for its allies. Once oil revenues began to decline and the regime’s revenue stream trickled, its bargaining power shrunk substantially. When the

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394 Koehler-Derrick 2010.
396 Phillips 2011, 66.
money stopped feeding elite recipients, Saleh himself also began to lose power among many important figures. AQAP has demonstrated its understanding of the importance of oil and regime stability by increasing attacks on infrastructure targets and pipelines in 2011 when the Saleh regime was falling apart.\textsuperscript{397} In 2014, during the group’s observed period of resurgence, one report identified 115 attacks on the country’s main oil pipelines, electricity grid, and fiber optics network.\textsuperscript{398}

**Alternative Authority Structures and AQAP Engagement**

**Tribal Fractures**

While the aforementioned patronage system helped Saleh maintain power for many years, it also undermined the legitimacy of the state in the long run and created substantial opportunities for AQAP. To elaborate, many fieldworkers have observed how the patronage system weakened the authority of many sheikhs within their own tribe.\textsuperscript{399} As certain sheikhs grew wealthier, their reliance on the regime increased and they started spending more time in the capital and less time tending to tribal concerns. Consequently, some of these leaders lost their grip on their constituency and a number of tribes, particularly in the country’s southern provinces, experienced a managerial crisis.\textsuperscript{400} Power vacuums and fractures within tribes created room for AQAP to co-opt minor leaders as well as restless youths who desired change.\textsuperscript{401} Indeed, a number of analysts have pointed to tribal power vacuums, disputes between sheikhs, and fractures as directly contributing to AQAP operations. According to Sarah Gordon, fractures in the Dhahab tribe allowed AQAP to co-opt Tareq al-Dhahab who eventually contributed fighters to the group

\textsuperscript{397} Schmitz 2012, also based on author’s analysis of GTD data.
\textsuperscript{398} Fattah 2014.
\textsuperscript{399} Phillips 2011, 53-54.
\textsuperscript{400} Gordon 2012; Baron 2014.
\textsuperscript{401} Phillips 2011.
and seized the city of Rada’a.\textsuperscript{402} Fractures amongst tribes in Shabwa and Marib, including the Awalek’s and Abeeda’s, have also allowed various AQAP members to obtain tribal protection. In one instance, the Yemeni government tried to get the Abeeda’s to hand over AQAP commander Qasim al-Raymi. However, despite the tribe’s generally pro-government stance, they refused likely because Raymi had nestled himself in with a number of disenfranchised minor sheikhs who were likely being rewarded by AQAP for their assistance.\textsuperscript{403}

AQAP’s exploitation of inter-tribal conflicts and coopting of minor sheikhs and youths is remarkably reminiscent of the tribal restructuring that occurred with the Taliban and AQC in Pakistan's FATA region.\textsuperscript{404} There, al-Qaeda was able to achieve success in tribal areas largely because of a long-term campaign that destroyed much of the existing tribal structure and created a system that suited the goals of al-Qaeda and the Taliban.\textsuperscript{405} Calls for the dissolution of tribal custom and affiliation can be seen in various al-Qaeda strategic writings and internal documents. For example, in Abu Bakr Naji’s \textit{The Management of Savagery}, Naji writes:

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“When we address these tribes that have solidarity we should not appeal to them to abandon their solidarity. Rather, we must polarize them and transform them into praiseworthy tribes…then after a period of time in which their followers have mixed with our followers and their hearts have been suffused with the picture of faith, we will find that their followers do not accept anything which contradicts sharia.”\textsuperscript{406}
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Naji’s strategy was implemented rather effectively in Pakistan for instance, as highlighted in the works of Saleem Shahzad and Nasreen Ghufran. Just like in Pakistan, according to tribal leaders in Yemeni provinces like al-Jawf, Lahij, and Marib, Ansar al-Sharia has targeted youths by offering them a new rifle, a new car, and steady salaries.\textsuperscript{407}

\textsuperscript{402} Gordon 2013a.  
\textsuperscript{403} Phillips 2010b, 6.  
\textsuperscript{404} Swift 2012; Shahzad 2011; Ghufran 2009.  
\textsuperscript{406} Naji 2005.  
\textsuperscript{407} Swift 2012.
**Ideological Dissonance**

AQAP is likely employing a long-game strategy that eventually seeks to install AQ-friendly sheikhs and transform the tribal system into one grounded in Shari’a law. Considering the power of Yemen’s tribes, such a transformation could eventually lead to the toppling of the central government and the establishment of an Islamic emirate. However, the viability of these efforts in the long run is highly questionable, largely because the stronger AQAP’s gets, the more territory they will desire which will put them in competition with many tribal powers. Considering the inherent desire of tribes from a central authority figure, including a hypothetical AQ inspired theocratic government, AQAP’s ability to eventually integrate these forces into an Islamic emirate appears unlikely.

Although the Jadana Tribe in Northern Abyan was actually witnessed handing over one of its own members to Ansar’s Sharia courts in April 2012, AQAP’s long-term organizational goals are either incompatible or irrelevant to most Yemeni tribes.\(^{408}\) While concepts like local jihad do resonate with tribes, Shari’a law is not an appealing system for tribes who prefer their own customary systems of order. In fact, such customs are so prevalent that according to one author, 90% of conflicts within the Yemeni state are resolved using the Tribal Customary Law system.\(^{409}\) Rather tellingly, at several points in Yemen’s history, imams tried to impose Shari’a on tribes with negligible success and much rebellion. Subordination to Islamic political authority like the caliphate or Shari’a law simply contradicts the tribes’ long history of political independence.\(^{410}\) When AQAP seized territory in Abyan and attempted to implement Shari’a law, the group experienced fierce opposition at times from tribes such as the Bal’id. Likewise, tribesmen in the towns of Mudiyah, Mehfed, and Ja’ar forced the mujahideen out of their

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\(^{408}\) Gordon 2012.

\(^{409}\) Dawsari 2012.

\(^{410}\) Horton 2011a.
settlements with many interviewed tribesmen claiming the rift in ideological systems was too incompatible.\textsuperscript{411}

While a number of reports claim AQAP has tried to leap ideological hurdles by marrying unaffiliated fighters into tribes, such a strategy lacks sufficient supporting evidence. Even Gregory Johnsen has admitted that specific details on the oft-mentioned phenomenon are scarce and largely anecdotal. The most referenced instance of this phenomenon is based on a July 2009 issue of \textit{Sada al-Malahim} where Al-Qaeda congratulates one of its members on his marriage.\textsuperscript{412} According to fieldwork by one author, this frequently mentioned marriage was between Fawaz al-Rabay’i and the niece of another 2006 prison escapee, Arif Salih Ali Mujali, and was not motivated by strategic tribal concerns. The same author’s 12 months of fieldwork concluded there was no indication that AQAP had established sanctuary for its members by marrying into tribes. Tribesmen in both Marib and al-Jawf also commented that by convention, allowing marriage outside the bride’s sub-tribe is extremely rare yet alone outside of the macro-tribe or governorate.\textsuperscript{413}

Beyond the aforementioned AQAP manipulation of in-group fractures, specific instances of tribal engagement are primarily motivated by factors including shared economic interests and anti-government grievances stemming from misguided COIN efforts. When it comes to the former, despite the Houthi grip on much of Northern Yemen, AQAP has capitalized on the cross-border qat trade between Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Reports from 2010 estimated that the smuggling of qat generates an estimated $30 million per year and AQAP is known to be involved with smuggling operations across the border, which suggests the development of ties with tribes

\textsuperscript{411} McGregor 2011.
\textsuperscript{412} Johnsen 2010b.
\textsuperscript{413} Koehler-Derrick 2011, 99.
and local authorities in small border towns. Moreover, one tribal figure in Marib claimed that the AQAP cells he encountered generated around 80% of their revenue from trafficking operations across the Saudi border. Considering the degree of turmoil in the northern provinces since 2012, opportunities for smuggling have likely increased, granting AQAP a larger revenue stream to help aid in the group’s resurgence.

**COIN Capabilities and Alternative Authority Structures**

Before discussing how tactical COIN failures have benefitted AQAP, it is necessary to discuss the broader dearth in capabilities experienced by Yemen’s security forces. For one, the previously discussed shortage of state funds has rendered persuasive COIN strategies used in the past obsolete. For example, according to Yemen’s Prime Minister at the time, payoffs to tribes helped slowly dismantle 90% of the AQY cells in the country in 2003. However, such endeavors are not possible considering recent economic degradation. Secondly, Yemen’s available manpower in the armed forces in 2013 is reported to be around 67,000 soldiers for a population of 24 million people. Iraq in comparison has nearly 670,000 bodies in the ISF to regulate a population of 33 million people.

Thirdly, Yemen’s security forces are not simply lacking in their force ratio but also in their internal cohesion. In regards to the former, during the Arab Spring protest movement, nearly half of the regular army was in rebellion under the command of Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, presenting a significantly distracted oppositional force to AQAP’s efforts. More recently, since new President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi assumed office on February 25 2012, at least 22 brigades and one battalion have experienced rebellion and mutiny. More than half of these

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414 Horton 2010.
415 Koehler-Derrick 2011, 103.
417 Cordesman, Shelala, Mohamed 2013, 5.
rebelling units were part of the Republican Guard, which is supposed to be the most elite and best-trained segment of the armed forces.\textsuperscript{418} The problem of insubordination is also prevalent among the lower levels of the security forces. For example, in October 2012, hundreds of police officers in Sana’a refused order to relocate to the southern governorates and staged violent protests against the reassignment.\textsuperscript{419}

Lastly, Yemen’s security forces are tactically deficient and operations against AQAP suspects have featured costly errors. On a number of occasions, tribal homes have been destroyed and innocent civilians killed. Correspondingly, reports from 2013 identify Dahabbi tribesmen fighting alongside AQAP against government forces after COIN efforts were perceived by tribal elements as violations of their sovereignty.\textsuperscript{420} However, perhaps the most significant tactical error regarding anti-AQAP efforts has involved the U.S. drone strike campaign, in which the Yemeni government is directly complicit. Despite the number of AQAP commanders these drone strikes have eliminated, errant missile attacks also serve as a means for AQAP recruiting. Numerous field workers and analysts have described how tribal anger over civilian casualties from drone strikes, which low-end estimates place around 100, has pushed fighters into the hands of AQAP.\textsuperscript{421}

The unpopularity of drone strikes has grown increasingly potent during AQAP’s resurgence in the last year and a half. A strike in December of 2013 created a great deal of outrage after the missiles struck a wedding procession, killing at least ten civilians.\textsuperscript{422} While civilian casualties in drone strikes provide AQAP with excellent propaganda material, the most direct link between drone strikes and AQAP recruitment lies with the tribal custom of tha’r,\textsuperscript{418} Gordon 2013b.\textsuperscript{419} Ibid.\textsuperscript{420} Michaels, Ayyash 2013.\textsuperscript{421} Roggio, Barry 2014.\textsuperscript{422} Serle 2013.
blood revenge. Fieldwork has connected AQAP recruitment with tha’r, demonstrating how collateral damage from drone strikes can place an obligation on many tribal members to join AQAP’s jihadi efforts in order to avenge the loss of relatives.\footnote{Horton 2011a, Johnsen 2013.}

The last point regarding tactical COIN failures involves Yemen’s counterproductive system of incarceration. Potential terror suspects are often held in prisons for extend periods of time without formally being tried or charged. When suspects leave, they are often more radical than when they entered, creating a revolving door effect that only compounds the problem of anti-government violence. As one author commented, through indiscriminate arrests and misguided detention policies, the state itself rather than AQAP is laying the groundwork to prepare many young men for recruitment.\footnote{Koehler-Derrick 2011.} Lastly, Yemen’s security forces have failed to adequately protect prison facilities, allowing AQAP to stage attacks to free imprisoned members. In February 2014, AQAP attacked the central prison in Sana’a, killing seven police and freeing 29 inmates including 17 AQAP members.\footnote{Al-Arabiya 2014.} When AQAP fighters seized territory in Radaa, they released hundreds of inmates from the city’s prison. Only when local tribes deployed armed men to protect government and military buildings was the damage reduced.\footnote{Dawsari 2014, 7.}

Alternative Authority Structures Working Against AQAP

It is worth noting that instances of locally based resistance to AQAP are hardly scarce. In 2013, after 200 AQAP-affiliated fighters seized control of Rada’a for ten days, the insurgents retreated following a process that involved tribal mediation and demonstrations of force from both tribal and government fighters.\footnote{Gordon 2013a.} The weakness of Yemen’s security apparatus, particularly following the removal of President Saleh from power, has caused Sana’a to rely on AASs to
combat AQAP. So-called Popular Committees have been established in Abyan and maintained through monthly stipends, government jobs, and other perks for members.\footnote{Coombs 2013. Gordon 2013a.} However, many of these committee members were allied with Ansar al-Sharia in 2011-2012 and seem follow a trend of shifting their alliance based on whichever faction possesses momentum in the conflict and/or can provide better incentives for participation.\footnote{Coombs 2013.} Fighting between Committee groups also has occurred on numerous occasions and it appears that some groups are using AQAP as an excuse to settle tribal scores.\footnote{Ibid.} In this case, while AAS's might help thwart AQAP, they can also create instability and opportunities for AQAP to exploit.

When we consider these developments as well similar events in Yemen’s history, one can conclude that arming local militias to do the bidding of the state often results in the local militias using their resources for their own interests and even challenging the state in their own territory when said interests are threatened. Indeed, the presence of government troops in tribal regions on the basis of COIN operations has been a point of discontent for numerous tribes in regions like Bayda where AQAP frequently operates. In Shabwah, anti-government anger spurred an attack by tribesmen on a truck transporting oil. When the tribesmen seized the cargo, the region’s governor sent military forces to reclaim the truck, prompting an attack on the governor’s home.\footnote{Gordon 2013a.}

“Ungoverned Regions” and AQAP activity

Based on drone strike data, AQAP has historically been present in two of the three so-called ungoverned regions in the “Triangle of Death:” Marib, Shabwah, and al-Jawf. Out of a total of 91 strikes, 14 have occurred in Shabwah and 15 in Marib, while al-Jawf has only

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{Coombs 2013. Gordon 2013a.}
\item \footnote{Coombs 2013.}
\item \footnote{Ibid.}
\item \footnote{Ibid.}
\item \footnote{Gordon 2013a.}
\end{itemize}}
experienced four such strikes. Correspondent with other data on activity levels from 2010 to 2013, Abyan has experienced the most drone attacks of any governorate with 18 such strikes.\textsuperscript{432} Thus, the trend in drone strikes seems to reflect AQAP presence less in “ungoverned” regions and more in the southern provinces. Additionally, a 2011 report by The Combating Terrorism Center at West Point includes interviews with tribesmen in both Marib and al-Jawf who say concerns over operational security, particularly drone attacks, have kept AQAP members from starting training camps in these provinces.\textsuperscript{433} Since the group’s expulsion from territory in Abyan in 2012, AQAP activity levels in a number of provinces have spiked. The eastern governorate of Hadramawt has been particularly affected by increasing assassinations of government officials and the temporary seizure military bases and other government installations by AQAP militants.\textsuperscript{434}

When it comes to the provision of social services in ungoverned regions, the only concrete example occurred during the summer of 2009, when more than a dozen AQAP members were sent to the village of Rafd in western Shabwah. The men took over an abandoned school and began holding instructional religious classes for children in the village. Reports quote the villagers claiming that though they were uncomfortable with the presence of AQAP members, they would accept any literacy instruction for their children considering the previous non-existence of such education. AQAP’s endeavor ended when a U.S. drone strike destroyed the schoolhouse and killed five of the militants along with an estimated 30 civilians.\textsuperscript{435}

Interviews and demographic details of shooters and suicide bombers additionally indicate a diminished significance of the tribal badlands. Instead, Sana’a, Aden, Mukalla, Ta’izz, and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[432] Roggio, Barry, 2014.
\item[433] Koehler-Derrick 2011, 103.
\item[434] Roggio 2014. Based on author’s analysis of the International Crisis Group’s monthly updates on the Yemeni security situation.
\end{footnotes}
Hudayda seem to be stronger recruiting grounds for the group. The group’s attack on the U.S. embassy in 2008 for instance predominantly drew its operatives from the port city of Hudayda.\textsuperscript{436} Based on operational data from 2011, AQAP engaged Yemeni forces in the village of Huta in Shabwah and attacked checkpoints in Marib while also executing checkpoint strikes in Abyan and Hadramawt.\textsuperscript{437} Other historical data on operational distribution suggests that AQAP has benefitted more directly from security vacuums in a variety of governorates in the wake of the Arab Spring protests. As a result of the Arab Spring opposition movement, many Yemeni military units in the south withdrew from the region to protect Sana’a, resulting in a security vacuum that Ansar al-Sharia rushed in to fill. The group subsequently seized significant chunks of territory in Abyan including the city of Azzan and the governorate’s capital Zinjibar.\textsuperscript{438} In many areas, Ansar also installed checkpoints and begun enforcing Shari’a law.\textsuperscript{439} Furthermore, during this series of events AQAP looted an arms factory in Jaar and acquired cash and weapons from numerous abandoned military posts.\textsuperscript{440}

However, AQAP activity during its period of resurgence has not solely been focused on tribal badlands. While we can see instances of Al-Qaeda attacks in desolate tribally controlled areas, there is equally as much activity, if not more, in other portions of the country including urban centers like Sana’a. Since the Ansar retreat from captured territory in Abyan in 2012, their forces have shown a strong territorial presence in Bayda and Hadramawt with active cells remaining in Abyani cities like Zinjibar and Mudiyya.\textsuperscript{441} AQAP has also reportedly established strongholds in the mountains of Maraqisha and in Mahfad. Although the organization is not

\textsuperscript{436} Koehler-Derrick 2011, 138.
\textsuperscript{437} Boucek, Revkin 2011.
\textsuperscript{438} Zimmerman 2012; Johnsen 2011b; Boucek 2010.
\textsuperscript{439} Shishani 2011.
\textsuperscript{440} Johnsen 2011a; Boucek 2010; Roggio 2011.
\textsuperscript{441} Michaels, Ayyash 2013.
demonstrating the counterstate efforts or governing abilities it once possessed, it remains highly active in the south.\footnote{Michaels, Ayyash 2013.} Furthermore, the group appears to still have strong roots in areas where it was able to assert authority following the collapse of the Saleh regime in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

**Emergent Conflict**

In the case of Yemen, the country’s several violent opposition movements are directly connected to the anarchical and decentralized nature of the Yemeni state. Indeed, the Houthi Rebellion, Southern Secession Movement, and the Arab Spring protests in 2011 have created substantial power vacuums within the country, creating operational space and political opportunities for AQAP. Accordingly, by 2010, the Yemeni government could not reliably access the majority of seven different governorates: Abyan, Shabwa, al-Dhala’e, Marib, al-Jawf, Sa’da, and Lahj.\footnote{Phillips 2011, 26.} While Marib and al-Jawf are notoriously isolated, the other governorates have become increasingly hostile to the central state due to the Houthi Rebellion and Secessionist movement. Furthermore, in the last year and a half as AQAP has demonstrated resurgence, these two conflicts have experienced periods of escalation.

**Southern Secessionist Movement**

The Southern Secessionist Movement, known as al-Hirak, has likely been the most impactful conflict on AQAP resurgence considering both historical and recent correlations between the movement and AQAP activity. After coming to a peace deal with the Houthis in early 2010, Saleh moved his military south and aggressively confronted al-Hirak. For the first time in five years, more people were killed in those provinces than in Sa’da and the regions north
of Sana’a. The brutal fighting and often-indiscriminate crackdowns significantly elevated tensions in a region already experiencing broad grievances and virulent anti-government sentiments. In response to the aggression from Sana’a, Hirak began to adopt more insurgent-like tactics including the use of bombings and low-intensity warfare against state targets. As attack data has shown the addition of another violent opposition movement in the region provided a valuable defensive cloak for AQAP, granting the group greater operational mobility. At the same time, identity-based violence between Yemenis of Northern descent and local southerners began to increase. Furthermore, the entry of many local clerics into the dialogue surrounding the conflict helped promote an environment more sympathetic to AQAP’s religious-based calls for resistance.

In the last couple years, violence stemming from al-Hirak has correlated with AQAP activity. For instance, while the International Crisis Group (ICG) reported on increasing violence between separatists and the government in spring 2013, fighting between AQAP and security forces and pro-government fighters also raged in Abyan and Bayda. For example, while clashes between government forces and separatists in Dalia and Shabwa erupted in January 2014, AQAP focused a number of operations in the region, including an attack on a military camp in Bayda that killed 9 soldiers. Though operational relationships between AQAP and al-Hirak do not appear to exist in a substantial form, the unstable environment has undoubtedly granted AQAP both operational space and propaganda platforms for engaging aggrieved locals.

444 Day 2012, 265.
445 Day 2012, 265-266.
446 Phillips 2010.
447 Shishani 2010.
448 Based on author’s analysis of the International Crisis Group’s monthly updates on the Yemeni security situation.
449 ICG 2014.
The Huthi Rebellion

Although the Huthi Rebellion has been raging since 2004, the conflict has escalated significantly during the period of AQAP’s ascension. By the end of 2010, Houthis had gained majority control of both Sa’da and al-Jawf and by 2012 they were expanding outwards from these two governorates.\(^{450}\) In an interview from February 2011, Shaykh Abdullah al-Jumaili of al-Jawf commented that outrage stemming from the destruction of farms and schools during the war with the Houthis fueled anger and caused many to take up arms with AQAP.\(^{451}\) Al-Jawf has been a particularly contentious battleground considering the firepower of Sunni tribes in the governorate and the support of the Hashid tribal confederation and noted Salafi firebrand cleric Abdal Majid al-Zindani.\(^{452}\) While the Huthis have served as a bulwark against AQAP development in the north, the Huthis own expansion in 2013-2014 created significant instability in correlation with AQAP’s recent resurgence. Here, it is important to remember that the participants in the Houthi Rebellion are Shi’a Muslims of the Zaidi sect. These ideological differences, along with the fact that the Houthis have been rather successful in their conquests, resulted in intense fighting between Houthis, Sunni tribes, and Salafi groups.

AQAP has sought to capitalize on the ideological nature of the conflict, pledging revenge against the Houthi rebels for their assault on a Salafi school in Dammaj. In a video recording, one AQAP commander proclaimed, “We declare our total solidarity with our Sunni brothers in the centre in Dammaj, and in other Sunni areas that the Houthi group had attacked…Your crimes against the Sunni people will not pass without punishment.”\(^{453}\) Around this same time in late 2013, fighting between the Houthi and Salafi factions spread to five different northern

\(^{450}\) Phillips 2011, 26; Winter 2012.
\(^{451}\) Stier 2011.
\(^{452}\) Winter 2012.
\(^{453}\) Reuters 2013.
President Hadi has thus far chosen to remain neutral in the conflict and as a result, has largely been a spectator to the violence in the North. Nonetheless, the conflict has not fared well for the Sunni side: in January 2014, a ceasefire favoring the Huthis was signed in Dammaj, requiring Salafi fighters to evacuate the area and relocate to Sana’a. Ideological resentment from this turn of events will likely fuel AQAP efforts in the year to come.

**Organizational Adaptation**

More so than any other AQA, AQAP has demonstrated a degree of strategic pragmatism and ingenuity that matches up best with the strategic models of insurgency espoused by thinkers like Mao and jihadists like Abu Bakr al-Naji and Osama Bin Laden. Though the degree of variation in the group’s membership and structure has been minimal over time, its extensive media apparatus and ability to co-opt local grievances, engage with AASs, and execute a cautious campaign of attrition warfare has undoubtedly contributed to the group’s ability to rebound following setbacks.

**Membership**

AQAP’s membership demographic since inception has primarily consisted of Yemenis followed by Saudis and other foreign fighters including Somalis. Reports from 2010 identified 60% of the group’s recruits as Yemeni nationals. Within this broad membership umbrella, analyst Christopher Swift has outlined in detail four different contingents: 1) Ideological purists primarily of Saudi origin; 2) Political pragmatists primarily of Yemeni origin with Saudi educational backgrounds; 3) Indigenous Salafis, many of whom are veterans of the Soviet War in Afghanistan; 4) Foreign fighters who are primarily used as shock troops in military operations.

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454 ICG 2014.
455 ICG 2014; Dawsari 2014, 6.
456 Shishani 2010b.
457 Swift 2014.
This diversity in membership background and ideological grounding highlights the strength of AQAP’s leadership and its ability to use these various constituencies in a cohesive manner that is beneficial to the organization’s goals. Nonetheless, little to no evidence exists to suggest that the group has over time experienced a significant shift away from its notorious Yemeni makeup. Consequently, it does not appear that changes in membership can explain AQAP resurgence

**Structure**

One of the most vital characteristics of AQAP’s organizational strength lies in the structure created by its leaders, specifically Nasir al-Wahayshi. The five years al-Wahayshi spent as Osama Bin Laden’s secretary were evidently impressionable as al-Wahayshi has used many of the same tactics Bin Laden promoted. For one, Bin Laden favored what he referred to as “centralization of decisions and decentralization of execution,” often leaving the details of a given attack up to his men on the ground. With its moderate tempo of small attacks at various locations throughout the country, AQAP has shown how well this tactic can work when executed by an organization with quality leadership. Underscoring Bin Laden’s ideology was al-Qaeda’s initial failure in Yemen after 9/11. After a drone strike killed AQY’s top commander, Abu Ali al-Harithi, the organization withered. Seeking to avoid a similar outcome, Wahayshi adopted the Bin Laden blueprint to fit the context of Yemen by appointing local emirs in governorates across the country and thus, exhibiting a level of organizational sophistication never achieved by previous Yemen-based groups. When the United States finally began targeting AQAP with drone strikes in 2009, this structure was well entrenched and the loss of several key commanders did not result in the collapse of AQAP. Though there is no evidence to suggest a variation in structure concurrent with the group’s recent resurgence, AQAP’s decentralized and regionally-

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458 Johnsen 2011b.
459 Ibid.
focused structure has likely benefitted its ability to shift operations to various locations across the country after experiencing setbacks in one locale.

Propaganda

AQAP undoubtedly profits from its careful domestic maneuvering in the realm of propagation. The organization’s publication *Sada al-Malahim* boldly articulates the group’s strategy and provides a diagnosis for Yemen’s problems; particular emphasis is placed on how Yemen’s experiments with democracy and socialism have failed, leaving jihad and governance through Sharia law as the logical answer.\(^\text{460}\) AQAP’s propaganda also wisely engages national grievances and discontent with the central government, saying in one media release, "The people of Yemen are suffering from the decline of their living standards… and the discriminatory practices with which the government deals with them in employment, the distribution of wealth and its looting, the misappropriation of lands, and the absence of someone to defend their rights."\(^\text{461}\) Nasir al-Wahayshi’s statements often touch on issues that are sensitive to both tribal and non-tribal Yemenis, including the possession of weapons, infractions on autonomy, and foreign interference in the country. For instance, one statement claims that that AQAP attacks undermine the institutions upon which the Yemeni government “depends on to collect information and to spy for the sake of the American warplanes.”\(^\text{462}\) The organization has consistently portrayed itself as a force dedicated to fighting government corruption and protecting Yemeni citizens in the tribal portions of the country.\(^\text{463}\) As another media release says:

“This military campaign concentrated in Marib, Jawf, Shabwa, Abyan, Sana’a, and Hadr Mawt that they have concealed from the media, what is it other than a step to strike the

\(^{460}\) Koehler-Derrick 2011; Harris 2010, 5.
\(^{461}\) Harris 2010, 6.
\(^{462}\) Loidolt 2011, Gallagher 2011.
\(^{463}\) Macintyre 2010.
tribes and their sons [based on] frail and erroneous pretexts? Its true aim is to break the tribes’ prestige, strip them of their weapons, control their land, and kill their sons.\footnote{Loidolt 2011, 85.}

AQAP has done more than simply preach support and offer praise in its media. Calculated efforts have been made to project an image of oneness with the Yemeni people and empathy for those who have been victimized by the government. Ansar al-Sharia published a video in which the group showed how soldiers were treated after being captured by the mujahideen. In the video, a sheikh explains to the prisoners their policy of not fighting soldiers who don’t fight them and, after the soldiers pledge not to work for the military or fight Muslims, the jihadists are seen distributing money to the soldiers.\footnote{SITE 2011.} AQAP has also frequently alleged that its operatives have been tortured in Yemeni prisons in an attempt to connect the group with a common grievance claimed by many in the opposition movements.

AQAP’s domestic maneuvering goes beyond intelligent, locally focused propaganda and extends to the group wisely picking its battles. AQAP has avoided entrenching itself in the domestic conflicts that weakened other Al-Qaeda affiliates. For example, despite Al-Qaeda’s strong ideological opposition to socialism, AQAP has taken a subdued approach to the southern socialist movement. Instead of outright declaring war against a group traditionally seen as apostates, al-Wahayshi simply commented, “we know that many of you crave freedom and reject tyranny…but you have followed an erroneous path.”\footnote{Barfi 2010.} One only needs to look at past statements by either AQAP or Al-Qaeda central to understand this mild position does not stem from socialist sympathies. Instead, this restrained domestic strategy stems from recognition among the leadership that the group is too weak to confront the multiple enemies it potentially faces in the tumultuous and nuanced Yemeni theater.

\footnote{Loidolt 2011, 85.} \footnote{SITE 2011.} \footnote{Barfi 2010.}
Military Action

Seemingly following the advice of numerous insurgent strategists, AQAP spent a great deal of time developing its political structure and establishing communal inroads before undertaking significant military operations. In some regions, the organization waited for as long as three years before actually mounting a military operation. During these developmental stages, the organization also focused on attacking Western targets less likely to draw ire from Yemenis. Only in 2010, in correlation with the acceleration of the group’s operational levels, did AQAP began to focus more on military and security targets. Even then, these attacks were concentrated in places like Aden, Abyan, and Lahij, where discontent with the government is high. Such a strategy protected the group from popular backlash and helped cultivate roots that would later contribute to greater territorial presence and the ability to mount operations from secure regions.

Despite a few isolated incidents, AQAP’s use of violence in the past several years has been remarkably discriminate compared to most other AQAs. AQAP has been consistent and diligent in attacking security forces and western targets, while generally avoiding targets like Yemeni civil infrastructure and service orientated buildings that could result in negative reactions amongst the general populace. For example, at the beginning of 2010, AQAP launched a brutal assassination campaign in Yemen’s southern provinces that lasted throughout the summer, coinciding in the group’s largest domestic gains at the time. One Yemeni outlet reported up to 60 intelligence and security officers killed along with the deputy governor of Marib. The campaign also featured repeated ambushes of lightly defended convoys and checkpoints, demonstrating not only the group’s operational capability, but also an effective

467 Swift 2012.
468 Ibid.
469 Boucek 2010.
strategy of weakening government authority in an area where anti-Sana’a sentiments among the population are particularly high.

One recent attack highlights AQAP-leadership’s sensitivity to operations that could damage the group’s legitimacy. On December 5 2013, an AQAP attack against the Defense Ministry hospital in Sana’a killed 52 people, the bloodiest incident in Yemen in 18 months, and featured the execution of numerous civilians. In an attempt to deflect outrage, AQAP blamed a renegade foreign fighter for slaughtering medics and patients against the orders of the leadership.\footnote{470} However, this incident is an outlier in the operational history of AQAP. Even when the group imposed Shari’a law in territory under its control, it rarely imposed the death penalty for offenses. During Ansar al-Sharia’s period of control in the South in 2011, when it selected three men to execute for “spying,” the group made sure each of the men was from a northern province.\footnote{471}

In a strategic letter to fellow AQA al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, AQAP recommends a strategy that focuses on winning over locals by accommodating their daily and providing services in order to engender sympathy and tie the communities together. AQAP also advises a gradual process for implementing Sharia law that uses various stages for administering punishments rather than immediately implementing severe and violent reprimands.\footnote{472} Thus, AQAP more than any other AQA appears to follow the writings of thinkers like Mao, Abu Bakr al-Naji, and Osama Bin Laden. For example, in one captured document, Bin Laden advised AQAP leaders to implement a gradual process of grassroots engagement, saying:

The reasons are that the people have needs and requirements, and the lack of these requirements is the main reason for their revolt. We cannot provide for these needs in light of the battle...it is human nature that they will align with whoever better meets their

\footnote{470} Gamal 2014.  
\footnote{471} Gordon 2012.  
\footnote{472} Green 2013b.
needs...no matter how much they love the mujahidin, the few amongst them will not stand beside the mujahidin under these circumstances.\textsuperscript{473}

Based on the actions of Ansar al-Sharia, AQAP appears to have heeded this advice. During its occupation of towns and cities in Abyan and Shabwa, Ansar attempted to develop a counterstate by implementing a robust governance program.\textsuperscript{474} Indeed, the entire purpose and name of Ansar is based on this locally oriented strategy. As one senior AQAP official commented, “the name Ansar al-Shari’a is what we use to introduce ourselves in the areas where we work, to tell people about our work and goals, and to show that we are on the path of Allah.”\textsuperscript{475}

However, it must be noted that AQAP has not been entirely docile in its relationship with local elements. In 2011, attacks involving civilian casualties and targets increased and the group also began to target members of the Popular Committees established to expel the group from southern governorates.\textsuperscript{476} In another incident, when a pro-AQAP leader of the Dhahabi tribe was killed, AQAP retaliated by targeting the culpable tribal leaders.\textsuperscript{477} Furthermore, when the government co-opted tribes in Abyan to fight against AQAP, the organization began to kill belligerent tribesmen.\textsuperscript{478} Nonetheless, AQAP has crafted a nuanced strategy that recognizes the difficulties facing a group of its nature and the importance of developing local support through political action. Though AQAP lacks a broad base of popular support in the country, with the exception of suicide bombings, certain elements of the group’s message are popular within the country and resonate with many groups. As one Yemeni stated, “I can no longer tell the difference between al-Qaeda in the caves and Al-Qaeda in the mosques,” illustrating the

\textsuperscript{473} Koehler-Derrick 2012.
\textsuperscript{474} Green 2013b.
\textsuperscript{475} Swift 2012.
\textsuperscript{476} Green 2013a. Civilian attack statement based on author’s analysis of GTD data.
\textsuperscript{477} Gordon 2013a.
\textsuperscript{478} Zimmerman 2012.
popularity of the group’s rhetoric on certain issues.\textsuperscript{479} Considering the lack of widespread backlash against the group, its unique strategic execution, and its remarkable resilience over time, it is hard to deny the role of organizational prowess in benefitting the organization’s activity.

**Conclusion**

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Starting from the bottom, there is no noteworthy evidence suggesting the role of External Support in aiding AQAP’s resurgence. Several other variables though all fall within a more intermediate range of impact. Economic Factors have certainly played a role in AQAP’s recruiting abilities during resurgence, especially considering the high rate of youth unemployment and the progressive degradation of Yemen’s economy in the past five years. Emergent Conflict also appears to have positively affected AQAP’s resurgence, particularly in the country’s southern region. However, the most impactful variable on AQAP’s resurgence lies in Organizational Adaptation. Although variance has been non-existent in leadership,

\textsuperscript{479} Johnsen 2010b.
membership, and structure, AQAP’s broader strategy has allowed the group to not only survive but rebound from the setbacks in mid-2012.

Indeed, AQAP profits highly from a number of structural conditions including highly fractured and dysfunctional Yemeni state, a significant degree of domestic anarchy, and numerous internal conflicts, all of which have intensified at various points during the period of AQAP’s resurgence. However, AQAP also possesses a talented cadre of leadership that has overseen the execution of a remarkably patient, pragmatic, and disciplined strategy. AQAP’s manipulation of tribal divisions, exploitation of COIN failures, cultivation of anti-government sentiment, and engagement with AASs has provided the necessary support to rebound from losses. All the while, the group’s military operations have largely avoided mass civilian casualties and its substantial media apparatus has carefully controlled the group’s brand, allowing for a degree of organizational legitimacy enjoyed by few, if any, other al-Qaeda affiliates. Interestingly enough, as one analyst observed, very few of AQAP’s core leaders boasts any religious credentials, charisma on film, or a background that suggests crucial military skills. Yet, it is this core group that has avoided strategic mistakes committed by other jihadi groups and kept AQAP relevant in a highly competitive domestic environment for opposition groups.

Koehler-Derrick 2011, 148.
Case #3: Al-Shabaab

“Me and my clan against the world; Me and my family against my clan; Me and my brother against my family; Me against my brother.”

– Somali Proverb

Introduction

Although al-Shabaab, officially known as Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen or “the Youth Movement,” did not become a recognized al-Qaeda affiliate until 2012, the group has been a Salafi-jihadist organization for the vast majority of its existence and possesses many of the same goals as other AQAs. Furthermore, Shabaab has possessed ideological and strategic connections with AQC since at least mid-2008. Therefore, Shabaab has consistently contained all the ingredients of an AQA even when it lacked the official affiliation. The following case study will begin with a brief overview of Shabaab’s history including the group’s rise and organizational peak from 2007 and 2010, its operational peak and simultaneous degradation from 2010-2012, and its resurgence in early 2013.

The case of al-Shabaab possesses many similarities to those of AQI and AQAP. When it comes to the former, Shabaab’s ascension as an insurgent group similarly began in the midst of a foreign invasion and the group’s degradation also occurred around the same time that its activity levels peaked. In regards to AQAP, Shabaab also operates in an incredibly decentralized and anarchical state. Moreover, at one point or another, both Shabaab and AQAP established themselves as legitimate governing forces and alternative ruling authorities to the central government. However, from an analytical perspective, the case of Shabaab provides similar issues to that of AQAP because its period of resurgence is so recent. Consequently, there is limited information for the indicators of a number of the hypotheses during this period of resurgence. These conditions make it particularly difficult to identify levels of variance in

481 Shultz, Dew 2006.
variables during the period of resurgence. As a result, this case will at times examine the value of variables across the spectrum of Shabaab’s operational timeline in juxtaposition with the nature and degree of the group’s activity level. By examining the role of each variable during both the period of resurgence in 2013 and during Shabaab’s previous operational history, we can more precisely determine the accuracy of each hypothesis in explaining Shabaab activity.

**Background**

**Rise and Insurgent Success (2007-2010)**

Shabaab began as a military wing of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), which was a composite group of Sharia courts that established itself as a governing rival to the Transnational Federal Government of Somalia (TFG). The ICU remained in power as unified organization for only a short period of time and was eventually defeated in late 2006 by the TFG. Following this defeat, Shabaab became an independent organization led by Aden Hashi Ayro until his death in May 2008 from a U.S. airstrike.\(^482\) After Ayro’s death, Shabaab was taken over by Ahmad Abdi Godane who rules the group to this day. During the first two years of its independent existence, Shabaab embarked on a virulent guerrilla campaign against the TFG and occupying Ethiopian forces, using hit and run attacks, assassinations, bombings, and occasional IED strikes.\(^483\) Data from the Global Terrorism Database shows the group progressively increasing its operation tempo to at least 4.8 attacks per month by the end of 2009.\(^484\)

Between 2007 and 2009, Shabaab was able to generate popular participation largely because of nationalist indignation against Ethiopia’s occupation of the country.\(^485\) Most of Shabaab’s attacks at this stage focused on TFG and Ethiopian military targets. In this

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\(^482\) Daniels 2012, 57.

\(^483\) Wise 2011.

\(^484\) Based on author’s analysis of GTD data.

\(^485\) Bryden 2013.
environment, Shabaab was able to rally significant support, with membership jumping from 400 core fighters to several thousand in the space of a year. \footnote{Wise 2011.} By late 2009, the group was a full-fledged insurgency, with significant local participation, territorial control, and the development of parallel institutions and counterstate functions. Furthermore, the movement was primarily an indigenous phenomenon with a small contingent of foreign fighters and commanders. As a result, many analyses see the period of time from 2007 to 2010 as the group’s “golden era.” Indeed, looking at measures including membership size, national makeup, and degree of territorial control during these years, Shabaab at this point was arguably the most successful insurgent organization of all the AQAs analyzed in this paper.

Shabaab’s operations, particularly its governing activities, were performed most predominantly in the country’s southern regions including Lower Juba, Bay, Bakool, and Lower Shabelle regions. These areas, more so than the regions north of Mogadishu, are known for their lack of central state authority and the prominent role of clans as governing forces in the rural areas. Shabaab was able to capitalize on these anarchical structural conditions and the hostility generated by the Ethiopian occupation by co-opting AASs, providing social services, and offering stability particularly in urban areas. The organization offered a system of justice, via the creation of Sharia courts and a police force, and even performed governing duties such as tax collection. Furthermore, the group took control of local radio stations and print media and established training camps. \footnote{Wise 2011, 5-6.} Though Shabaab’s propaganda consistently possessed Islamist and Salafist framing, the group’s stated goals and media releases at this stage were primarily nationalistic; rhetoric focused on the Ethiopian military presence in the country. Accordingly,
nearly all the media statements ended with the line: “Defeat the Ethiopian crusaders and their apostate brothers.”488

Organizational Strife (2010-2012)

During this period, Shabaab’s monthly attack rate progressively intensified to at least 6 incidents per month in 2010 and then 13.4 in 2011.489 However, despite the elevated number of identifiable attacks, fractures began to form in Shabaab’s organization. Though Shabaab began to reach out to AQ in 2008, by 2010 despite a lack of formal affiliation, AQ’s global ideology appeared to be notably affecting the group. Their rhetoric increasingly included anti-Western sentiments and a more globally oriented narrative of grievance and injustice. Military operations also expanded outside of the country for the first time with the bombing of a group of World Cup viewers in Uganda that killed 74 people.490 The group’s less Somali-friendly military tactics and its increased connection with AQ drew the ire of moderate-nationalistic leaders in the organization. Although the nature and consequences of this internal discord will be discussed in greater detail at a later stage, disputes between the group’s contingents undoubtedly caused internal instability and losses in membership and capabilities.

In addition to these internal issues creating a perception of organizational weakness, Shabaab began to face a greater degree of opposition from local forces as well external intervening powers. Beginning in 2010, the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) decided to expand its role from a simple peace-keeping force to one that would directly confront Shabaab.491 Over the next two years, AMISOM gradually increased its size and in the fall of

488 Curran 2011.
489 Based on author’s analysis of GTD data.
490 BBC 2010.
491 Kazooba 2012.
2011, Kenyan and Ethiopian troops aggressively entered the conflict.\textsuperscript{492} The CIA supplemented these efforts by training intelligence operatives inside the country to infiltrate Shabaab while also simultaneously co-opting local warlords against the group.\textsuperscript{493} In response to these measures, Shabaab launched a two-staged counter-offensive, known as the Ramadan Offensive, in which the group suffered heavy casualties. Due to the overwhelming oppositional force, Shabaab strategically withdrew from Mogadishu in August 2011 in order to cut its losses.\textsuperscript{494}

The failings of Shabaab in 2011 led many scholars to declare the group as dead in the water.\textsuperscript{495} However, these assertions were slightly overzealous, as the group remained a potent force in the country; operational data from 2012 shows a peak in activity with 227 attacks recorded at a rate of 18.9 per month.\textsuperscript{496} Other analyses showed the group continuing to control significant pockets of rural territory in Southern and Central Somalia as well as the sustained ability to mount ambushes, targeted killings, and complex operations.\textsuperscript{497} Nonetheless, the majority of Shabaab’s recorded operations occurred in the first half 2012. By the second half of the year, the group had lost control of most of its urban territory and substantial amounts of territory in the rural South. After two months of marginal activity levels, Shabaab’s territorial decline culminated with its eviction from Kismayo by Kenyan forces in October of 2012.\textsuperscript{498} Shabaab soon found itself tactically retreating from many regions; Ethiopian troops captured the border town of Beledweyne in the Hiran province and two months later they seized the city of Baidoa in the Bay region.\textsuperscript{499} Consequently, the two months followings Shabaab’s eviction from

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{492} Anzalone 2013.
\item \textsuperscript{493} Meleagrou-Hitchens, Solomon 2012; Scahill 2013
\item \textsuperscript{494} Anzalone 2013.
\item \textsuperscript{495} See Menkhaus 2012; Gatsiounis 2012.
\item \textsuperscript{496} Based on author’s analysis of GTD data.
\item \textsuperscript{497} Bryden 2013, 12.
\item \textsuperscript{498} Anzalone 2013. Assertion regarding activity levels is based on analysis of GTD and FDD data.
\item \textsuperscript{499} Anzalone 2013.
\end{itemize}
Kismayo featured a significant decline in activity that eventually bottomed out in December 2012-January 2013. Furthermore, after registering a membership of roughly 9,000 fighters in 2011, recent estimates have shown Shabaab’s size to be around 5,000.

**Resurgence (2013)**

Beginning in February 2013, Shabaab’s operational levels rebounded and by May, the organization was demonstrating a consistent upward trend in activity. Over the course of the next three months, Shabaab’s activity accelerated and attack levels reached rates not seen since the spring and early summer of 2012. Reports from 2013 show a reinvigorated campaign across broader geographic parameters, including notable levels of targeted killings, ambushes, IED attacks, and complex operations. According to figures in a recent United Nations report, the number of Shabaab-related military attacks (ambushes, direct combat, hit-and-run and artillery/mortar attacks), IED incidents, and assassinations increased respectively by 11.42 %, 54.5 % and 20.9 % between January-March 2013. Furthermore, between February and October 2013, Shabaab recorded an average monthly attack rate of 16.8, superseding its monthly average in 2011. Far from dead in the water, Shabaab appeared to be successfully fighting back. In March 2013, Shabaab captured Hudur, the capital of the Bakol region, after the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops. Shabaab has also shown reinvigorated operations in Lower Juba including an increased role in the region’s violence and an improved degree of territorial control. Several analyses from early 2014 detail Shabaab trading territory with Ethiopian and

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500 Based on author’s analysis of FDD data.  
501 Anzalone 2011; BBC 2014c.  
502 Bryden 2013.  
503 UNSC 2013.  
504 Based on author’s analysis of FDD and GTD data.  
505 UNSC 2013.  
506 Ibid.
SFG forces in the Bakool region while also executing a number of large-scale raids on SFG garrisons in Lower and Middle Shabelle.\textsuperscript{507}

**Hypotheses**

**External Support**

The impact of external support on Shabaab activity appears noteworthy, though not during the recent period of resurgence. Shabaab has unofficially received funds from both state and non-state sources in the past and likely continues to do so to this day. While the group has received strategic and indirect material assistance from AQC, both of these specific forms of assistance are unlikely to have occurred during Shabaab’s resurgence in 2013.

**State Sponsorship and Sanctuary**

There is a mixed body of evidence suggesting that Shabaab has possessed at any point in its operational history either official state sponsorship or sanctuary. On the issue of state sponsorship, past reports have indicated Yemen as a significant supplier of weapons to insurgent groups in Somalia, with one assessment labeling Yemen as the number one supplier of guns and ammo to rebel groups within Somalia and Ethiopia.\textsuperscript{508} However, such reports lack substantial backing in other literature and it is unknown whether any of the supposed aid from Yemen ended up in the hands of Shabaab. A more commonly cited relationship is the one between Shabaab and Eritrea. Numerous sources claim Eritrea has provided Shabaab with material resources and Kenyan Intelligence Reports have explicitly implicated Eritrea in selling arms to Shabaab.\textsuperscript{509} When it comes to sanctuary in nearby state, even if there was evidence suggesting such an occurrence, it would likely have marginal impact on the group considering its continued ability to control territory within Somalia and the opportunities provided by the anarchical Somali state.

\textsuperscript{507} Sheikh 2014; Bryden 2014, 12.
\textsuperscript{508} Daniels 2012, 55.
\textsuperscript{509} Ibid.
Regional Recruiting

It is necessary to acknowledge that Shabaab’s military operations outside of the Somali state have drawn the ire of numerous foreign governments, leading to invasions from Ethiopia and Kenya as well as increased American Counter-terror efforts. Thus, Shabaab’s attempts to draw support for its insurgency in Somalia by expanding operations into other countries have caused the group to suffer significant losses. However, its recruiting activities in Kenya have been a significant boon to the group’s membership, particularly in the past several years. An estimated 500,000-1,000,000 Somalis live in Kenya and Shabaab has shown itself capable of tapping into this diaspora.\footnote{Anzalone 2012.} Reports from early 2014 show Shabaab directing a substantial amount of resources towards recruiting efforts in Kenya, particularly targeting marginalized slum-dwellers and marginalized Somali nationals. One study found a single training camp in the Juba valley of Somalia with 200-500 East African recruits, the majority of which were Kenyan.\footnote{Menkhaus 2014.}

The Somali Diaspora and Humanitarian Extortion

One point that comes up frequently in the literature entails the role of the massive Somali diaspora, which sends an estimated $1-1.5 billion dollars from overseas to Somalia each year.\footnote{Harper 2012, 120.} However, it is unclear whether any notable portion of this money ends up in Shabaab hands. Though the role of the broader diaspora remains ambiguous, a more interesting and documented area of material support for Shabaab lies with the foreign humanitarian organizations operating within Somali borders. Indeed, Shabaab has generated considerable financial revenue by extorting and taxing humanitarian organizations seeking to provide aid to Shabaab controlled areas. Though such a practice could be categorized under the hypothesis regarding domestic
economic mechanisms, since many of these organizations are of foreign origin and are supplied by foreign aid, it can be seen as a unique form of external support. Moving on, a report by the Overseas Development Institute and the Mogadishu-based Heritage Institute for Policy Studies details how Shabab demanded and received "registration fees" of up to $10,000 from numerous aid agencies. Shabaab even created a “Humanitarian Coordination Office,” which featured a sophisticated system for monitoring and extorting aid agencies.\(^{513}\) A number of aid groups that thrive on lucrative foreign contracts have reportedly provided funds to Shabaab in order to directly receive protection from its violence and to support the conflict that their organizations thrive on.\(^{514}\) For example, during the famine in 2011, the World Food Program was controversially discovered to have diverted millions of dollars in food aid to Shabaab.\(^{515}\) While the continued occurrence of humanitarian extortion is unclear, and thus not a reliable indicator for this variable, Shabaab has made considerable financial gains in the recent past by extorting aid groups.

**Non-State Support and the al-Qaeda Network**

Shabaab has proven itself remarkably capable of external fundraising by tapping into global jihadi community. In one instance, Shabaab generated $40,000 in a three-day fundraiser using a prominent jihadi internet forum.\(^{516}\) The organization has also apparently received significant resource support from unidentified donors in the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula.\(^{517}\) However, the role of the AQ network and AQC in affecting the group’s recent capabilities is murky. There are many past instances of AQC providing Shabaab with strategic assistance. For example, during the group’s internal crisis in 2011, prominent AQ leader Abu

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\(^{513}\) BBC 2013.  
\(^{514}\) Daniels 2012, 60.  
\(^{515}\) Daniels 2012, 60.  
\(^{516}\) Harper 2012, 95.  
\(^{517}\) Bruton 2010.
Yahya al Libi encouraged Shabaab’s emir Godane to be more moderate and reconcile with disparate factions. Furthermore, in autumn of 2011, six AQC officials were sent to Somalia to help promote organizational unity in the face of the impending Kenyan advance. Yet, there is little evidence to suggest Shabaab has ever received direct material support from AQC. Though there is substantial evidence of interactions between AQAP and Shabaab, these reports shed little light on the impact and strength of the relationship between the two groups during Shabaab’s respective period of resurgence. The biggest benefit Shabaab likely received from its increased ties with AQ lay was an improved ability to attract foreign fighters due to Shabaab’s adoption of a more global ideology.

**Institutional Failures**

Detailing the failures of the Somali state is a task without end. Over the past two decades, Somalia’s ceaseless civil warfare and inability to construct an even remotely functional government, yet alone one that can project authority outside of the capital, has resulted in the country’s designation as the paradigm for the failed state. One expert even described the current regime, the SFG, as being the “the worst government in the world.” Though this paper will not delve into cultural and anthropological discussions of state failure and violence in Somalia, Hazel McFerson sums up the connection quite nicely: "...scarcity and uncertainty have a profound influence on the frequency and intensity of conflict. Force and the threat of force are always present, and violence is an institutionalized and socially approved means of settling disputes." Nonetheless, there a number of specific institutional failures in the Somali state that have benefitted Shabaab’s ability to act, including the leakage of state weapons to the group and

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520 Bruton 2013.
521 McFerson 1996.
corruption across a number of institutions that has weakened the power of the central government and presented Shabaab with greater opportunities for extortion. Furthermore, several of the following indicators are either present or have increased in value during Shabaab’s period of resurgence.

**Weapons Leakage**

Shabaab has directly benefitted from the leakage of resources from the Somali state, particularly the mismanagement of weapons and ammunition. A 2011 investigation by the United Nations found that most of the ammunition available in Mogadishu gun markets originated from AMISOM stores.\(^{522}\) Considering Shabaab’s control and taxation of the Bakara Market, Mogadishu’s largest weapons bazaar, the group likely earned significant profits from the sale of AMISOM weapons. More recent analyses have shown little improvement in the leakage of firearms to insurgent groups like Shabaab. After the SFG completed efforts in 2013 to lift the United Nations arms embargo, evidence surfaced showing not only the rampant theft of ammunition and arms from government facilities but also the sale of these stolen armaments to insurgent groups.\(^{523}\) A 2014 report by the United Nations also confirmed the systematic abuse of weapons stores and distribution systems.\(^{524}\) Thus, Shabaab has likely continued to capitalize on such institutional failures by acquiring state weapons and earning revenue from selling these munitions.

**Corruption**

None of the state-building efforts in the last several decades have been able to solve the corruption prevalent in Somalia’s transitional governments. One of the largest reasons for this endemic corruption lies in Somalia’s clan-based system of order, which has resulted in the

\(^{522}\) Bryden 2013, 10.
\(^{523}\) Bryden 2013.
\(^{524}\) BBC 2014b.
domination of clan politics even in central state organizations. Leaders have consistently placed their clan loyalties above statewide interests, which has at times even resulted in government collusion with Shabaab elements.\textsuperscript{525} However, beyond clan influence, individual corruption, cronyism, and fraud have pervaded numerous levels of recent Somali governance. Despite optimism surrounding the relatively-new SFG, the United Nations Monitoring Group for Somalia and Eritrea documented wide spread manipulation, financial bribes, and threats occurring before and during the September 2012 elections.\textsuperscript{526} The UN report also pointed to the presence of individuals in the SFG from previous regimes, including a number of warlords known who are known for their corruption and abusive practices. Though it may appear as if Somalia simply lacks the personnel to form a functional and legitimate government, outside forces have contributed to the dysfunction. Captured documents have revealed large-scale financial contributions from Gulf States that were used by a number of candidates to purchase political support at various points during the 2012 elections.\textsuperscript{527}

Past Somali governments have been unable to control and manage their finances. Between 2009 and 2012, 70-80\% of government revenues went unaccounted for and the offices of the country’s top three officials absorbed much of the remaining funds.\textsuperscript{528} The SFG has also failed to legitimately manage government finances. Numerous reports have highlighted how significant amounts of state funds frequently go missing. One recent estimate claims that systemic corruption and looting of state coffers continues to consume an estimated 70\% of state revenue.\textsuperscript{529} Another investigative report shows incredible discrepancies in the recording and distribution of aid received from foreign governments in 2013. Apparently $48 million in aid

\textsuperscript{525} Reno 2013.
\textsuperscript{526} UNSC 2013.
\textsuperscript{527} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{528} Bryden 2013.
\textsuperscript{529} Bryden 2013; Harper 2013.
from the United Arab Emirates was not recorded in the Central Bank’s records and $20 million from Iran also disappeared. Additionally, only one-fifth of the $25 million contributed by Qatar was ever identified as being deposited in public institutions. The report goes on to suggest, based on anecdotal evidence and the author’s own experience in the government, that some of these funds were likely leaked to Islamic militias, clan-based cartels, and regime cronies.\footnote{Warah 2014.}

As a final point, a number of authors have pointed to disillusionment with corruption contributing to a growing Islamic consciousness that has in turn energized Islamic political movements like Shabaab.\footnote{Gatsiounis 2012.} However, studies of Shabaab recruits from Somalia do not seem to suggest religious or ideological motivations as being significant mechanisms for participation.\footnote{Hassan 2012.} Instead, religion is likely a more potent recruiting mechanism in Kenya, where extremist Muslim violence and broader Muslim discontent has spread in the last several years.\footnote{Gatsiounis 2012.}

The Crisis Economy

Similar to how former Yemeni President Ali Saleh manufactured crises in order to attract foreign aid, much of the Somali state seems dependent on an economy of turmoil powered by crisis rents and humanitarian aid. As one author commented, the Somali state runs on a “political economy of state collapse.”\footnote{Bryden 2013.} War and famine in the past two decades has displaced 1.3 million Somalis, creating significant opportunities for financial gain via the illegal manipulation of humanitarian aid.\footnote{Harper 2012.} For example, TFG leaders in 2011 were frequently guilty of diverting food intended for famine victims and instead selling it for their own benefit.\footnote{Menkhaus 2012; Bruton, Pham 2011.} A June 2012 report by the United Nations also found that managers of refugee camps, as well as district officials for

internally displaced persons, were using their authority to manipulate the distribution of aid. These figures were documented charging refugees for access to camps, micro-managing resources, and preventing the effective monitoring of aid distribution so that they could skim resources. Some officials even inflated refugee numbers by establishing ghost camps, hoping to stimulate the flow of more aid money from humanitarian groups.\textsuperscript{537} Considering how these same officials are known to pay Shabaab protection money, their own skimming of resources has likely benefitted the group. Moreover, there is little reason to believe such practices have discontinued in recent years including during Shabaab’s resurgence.

**Economic Factors**

The role of economic factors in supporting Shabaab’s insurgency appears to be dramatic. Impoverishment and a lack of economic opportunities in the Somali state appear to directly benefit Shabaab’s recruiting capabilities. Taking into account a lack of substantive or identifiable economic improvement in Somalia, such capabilities likely persisted during Shabaab’s resurgence. Furthermore, despite losing territory and revenue streams in 2012, the organization not only still earns substantial profits from other territories under its control but has also improved upon previous revenue streams. Considering the necessity of resources in maintaining an insurgency as well the documented importance of economic incentives in Shabaab recruitment, these factors have undoubtedly played a large role in the organization’s resurgence.

Before moving forward, it is important to note that due to the rural, undeveloped, and decentralized nature of the Somalia state, it is difficult to ascertain some of the more typical measures of a state’s economic status. For instance, standard measures like GDP and unemployment rates are deceiving and not frequently available in accurate quantities.

\textsuperscript{537} Bryden 2013, 16.
Furthermore, since a Somali government barely exists, government influence on the economy is marginal. Indeed, economics in Somalia are a largely local and communal phenomenon. Interestingly enough, studies by the UN and World Bank that have taken into account these factors actually show the economy of Somalia growing during years of instability. On these findings, the US-based Independent Institute commented, “Far from chaos and economic collapse…Somalia is generally doing better than when it had a state. Basic economic order is possible because of the existence of a common law dispute resolution system and a non-state monetary system.”

Economic Incentives and Recruiting

Considering the difficulty in applying general economic measures to Somali, a more specific analysis of the relationship between Shabaab and relevant indicators is necessary. Based on interviews with former Shabaab participants, analyses of the group’s membership pool, and identifiable Shabaab recruiting tactics, economic incentives appear to play a large role in generating participation. A study by Mushin Hassan examining Shabaab recruiting mechanisms identified unemployment as the primary reason for Shabaab participation among 30% of the sampled deserters. Though ideological and religious motivations also played a role for some participants, these concerns were among the least significant in the study. A number of other studies highlight the role of financial rather than ideological factors in motivating recruits. Kenyan recruits for example are particularly lured by financial means; Shabaab recruiters in the

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538 Harper 2012, 112.
539 Hassan 2012.
540 Ibid.
541 Hansen 2013, 94.
country apparently use the prospect of substantial monthly salaries as their principal tool in enticing newcomers.\(^542\)

**Taxation and Primary Commodity Extortion**

Considering the degree of opposition Shabaab has recently faced, one could easily assume the organization’s revenue streams are no longer viable enough to support financially based recruiting mechanisms. However, the most recent information coming from Somalia suggests otherwise. In the past, Shabaab generated revenue from a diverse array of sources; they taxed black market enterprises like piracy, at a rate of 15-20\%, and weapons bazaars like the Bakara Market in Mogadishu.\(^543\) The organization also generated substantial profits by taxing legitimate businesses and charging travellers at checkpoints in regions under its control.

According to the defectors from Shabaab in Jowhar, the group was collecting an average of 25,000 USD per day from local checkpoints and businesses. Shabaab also earned a substantial amount of money by taxing ship’s at Kismayo’s port $1,000-2,000 per each docking at the port. Furthermore, the group taxed imported goods at the port such as food (.60 cents per kg bag), cars ($200 per car), and trucks ($400-500 per truck).\(^544\) In fact, between 2009 and 2012, Shabaab raised hundreds of millions of dollars in revenues at ports, airports, markets, and checkpoints.\(^545\) Interestingly enough, prior to 2011, business activity and employment increased in Shabaab controlled areas due to the security the group provided.\(^546\) Thus, the group’s governing efforts generated economic growth in areas it controlled, which in turn benefitted the group’s own revenue stream since it had more businesses to tax.

Despite the loss of the Bakara Market and a number of territories that provided tax

\(^{542}\) Daniels 2012, 58.  
\(^{543}\) Hansen 2013.  
\(^{544}\) Hansen 2013, 91.  
\(^{545}\) Hansen 2013, 91.  
\(^{546}\) Hansen 2013, 91.
revenue, over the course of its resurgence, Shabaab has continued to earn substantial profits from businesses and checkpoints in areas still under the group’s control. Furthermore, Shabaab has continued to exploit primary commodity exports and natural resources in an extremely profitable manner. Nuanced evidence from 2013 and 2014 suggests that the group has actually diversified its revenue stream and improved upon existing streams over the course of its resurgence. For starters, Andrea Crosta, executive director of the Elephant Action League (EAL) and a researcher of Shabaab’s economic activities, claims that the group’s recent expansion into the ivory trade is now generating roughly $600,000 a month. Crosta estimates this revenue can pay the monthly salaries of nearly 40% of the organization’s soldiers.547

On a related note, despite Shabaab’s removal from Kismayo and a change of management at the port, Shabaab apparently appears to still be receiving taxes and royalties from the notoriously lucrative charcoal business. A 400-page report by the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea details the phenomenon, explaining that shareholding exists between Shabaab, Ras Kamboni militiamen who now control the port, and local businessmen in Kismayo. In fact, the UN report estimates that the revenue being generated, an estimated $25 million per year, exceeds the profits Shabaab earned when it physically controlled Kismayo. Shabaab apparently is also benefitting from checkpoint taxes on truckloads of Somali coal and charcoal at the beach port of Barawe, where the group still exhibits influence.548

**Anarchy**

The role of anarchy in benefitting Shabaab’s activity as well as its resurgence cannot be understated. Shabaab’s ability to earn popular and financial support by governing controlled territory is both directly influenced by the weakness of the Somali state and the lack of cohesive

547 Doshi 2014.
548 UNSC 2013.
and functional AASs. During its period of resurgence, Shabaab has seized territory following the withdrawal of opposing forces while also continuing to both operate heavily in anarchical regions and co-opt clans in said territories. Lastly, though variance on this particular factor is unclear, the group has certainly benefitted in the past from Somali government and AMISOM COIN deficiencies.

**Ungoverned Territory**

Shabaab’s recent activity continues to benefit from the lack of state control across the country. Despite increased assistance from foreign military powers, the SFG exercises authority only in Mogadishu and a few cities in the country’s south.\(^{549}\) Shabaab’s supply lines in particular exploit remote areas that are not controlled by state forces. Despite significant seizures of arms reportedly destined for Shabaab cells in Puntland, the group’s IED capabilities further south, where state control is minimal, have not been disrupted. Shabaab thus still maintains supply routes sufficient enough to sustain the group’s current guerrilla warfare strategy.\(^{550}\) Furthermore, though Shabaab exhibits operational reach in a number of cities, as well territorial control in a few others, the group’s activity levels have significantly shifted towards rural areas. AMISOM forces possess enough firepower to prevent Shabaab from engaging in open battles but they do not have the ability to restrict Shabaab’s operations in the countryside. Data on recent Shabaab attacks confirm this relationship. Between October 2012 and October 2013, the group operated predominantly in the country’s southern regions, exploiting the lack of capable oppositional forces by planting IED’s, ambush AMISOM convoys, and staging mass attacks against weakly defended military outposts.\(^{551}\) In addition to military operations, Shabaab continues to control territory, maintain checkpoints, provide social services, and manage governing

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\(^{549}\) Bryden 2013.

\(^{550}\) UNSC 2013.

\(^{551}\) Ibid.
institutions in southern regions lacking in oppositional forces.

**COIN Failures**

One of the problems with combating Shabaab’s insurgency in Somalia lies in the fact that COIN methodology rests on two principles: 1) the existence of a government with the political will and capacity to positively engage citizens; 2) the existence of cohesive, indigenous armed forces capable of protecting the government and civilians.\(^{552}\) Yet, Somalia possesses none of these capabilities. The cohesiveness and functionality of Somalia’s security forces have been particularly horrible since the inception of Shabaab. During the reign of the TFG, former ICU factions dominated many positions of the government and COIN initiatives were often derailed by the leakage of intelligence to militias including Shabaab.\(^{553}\) Intelligence leaks and damaging relationships between government officials and militia members likely still exist considering the presence of many officials from previous governments in the SFG.

Corruption and dysfunction in the SFG has also created financial deficiencies in the security sector. Experts claim the SFG has been unable to consistently pay soldiers and police officers.\(^{554}\) As a result, according to Bronwyn Bruton, Somalia’s retention rate for soldiers trained by foreign forces is an abysmal 30%.\(^{555}\) Many of these soldiers have likely returned to clan militias, contributing to the country’s ceaseless internal violence and instability. Lastly, blatant corruption and fraud by commanders within the armed forces have derailed security efforts. In one instance, an AMISOM-affiliated militia commander sent troops under his command to fire on African Union positions at night. He then reported the incident as being an attack by Shabaab.

\(^{552}\) Reno 2013.  
\(^{553}\) Ibid.  
\(^{554}\) Hansen 2013.  
\(^{555}\) Bruton 2013.
forces that his units were unable to respond to because they lacked ammo and supplies.\textsuperscript{556}

Though his fraud was later uncovered, militia commanders are frequently abusing their power and cheating the system in order to acquire more resources for their units, which are typically characterized by allegiances to clans rather than the state. By arming and training soldiers who frequently engage in non-state warfare, the Somali government is basically placing bodies into the field that Shabaab can co-opt and exploit.

Tactical failures on the part of Somalia forces as well foreign militaries have disenfranchised many Somalis and pushed them into the hands of Shabaab. Such indiscriminate bombings have caused a great deal of uproar among Somalis. In Mushin Hassan’s study of Shabaab recruitment mechanisms, a number of the sampled participants identified anger at AMISOM bombings and revenge against abusive TFG soldiers as playing a large role in their decision to join Shabaab.\textsuperscript{557} Indeed, Somali security forces, which are often little more than warlord militias, are notoriously undisciplined and prone to abusive tactics against civilians. Countless soldiers have been guilty of rape, theft, murder, kidnapping, and extortion.\textsuperscript{558}

However, it is unclear whether there have been significant tactical failures during the period of Shabaab’s resurgence, particularly ones that have galvanized portions of the population against the SFG.

**Force Ratios and AASs**

Even if Somalia possessed a larger and more competent indigenous army, it would likely struggle to destroy the Shabaab insurgency. At the height of its occupation of Mogadishu in 2008, the Ethiopian army controlled six to eight battalions of highly trained troops and as many as ten battalions of Ethiopian-trained Somali troops. When we count the role of African Union...
peacekeeping troops and anti-Shabaab militiamen, the Somali government side had at least fifteen thousand men directed at curtailing Shabaab efforts. Nonetheless, these efforts failed to stem the Shabaab insurgency largely because of the organization’s indigenous backing and maneuverability throughout the country. Thus, it is not simply force ratios and COIN capabilities that are required to blunt Shabaab efforts but the extensive support and co-opting of clans, particularly in the country’s south.

In the past, Shabaab understood this fact and used its governance system and political savvy to co-opt local civilian populations and clan leaders. For example, before capturing a territory, Shabaab would engage in an extensive public relations campaign that combined public rallies with an influx of propaganda material emphasizing the group’s ability to provide stability and governance. Furthermore, the group would specifically meet with clan leaders in order to integrate them into the new political system. While Shabaab often fought larger clans like the Ogadeen and Marehan who resisted such efforts, it was usually able to exploit fractures within these groups, similar to the strategy AQAP has employed in Yemen. As one author details, when Shabaab’s aforementioned occupation strategy failed, the group would provide weapons and ammunition to minority clans and help them fight against their perceived overlords. By using propaganda, political engagement, and divide-and-conquer military tactics, Shabaab was able to establish control over most of Southern Somalia. Though Shabaab lacks the degree of indigenous backing it received in its earlier years, the organization has still demonstrated an ability to win support and mobilize clans in the country’s anarchical south.

559 Bruton 2010.
560 Daniels 2012, 58.
Emergent Conflict

Unlike in Iraq and Yemen, there are few violent domestic conflicts in Somalia that do not directly involve Shabaab. Indeed, Shabaab and its allied Islamic militias have been at the center of warfare in Somalia for the past six to seven years largely because they have often been the cause of such warfare. Though clan-on-clan and clan-on-foreign occupier violence is prevalent, Somalia has not experienced any significant ethnic or identity-based conflict that Shabaab could latch onto. Instead, rather than thriving on conflicts exclusively between domestic actors, Shabaab has at times lived and died by the sword of foreign intervention. However, there does not appear to be an enlightening degree of correlation between the presence of foreign troops and the success or failure of Shabaab’s campaigns.

Foreign Intervention

If we recall, Shabaab came to power in 2007 following the foreign invasions that dismantled the ICU. After Shabaab’s independent formation, the group thrived as an insurgency by occupying the role of a indigenous force fighting against unwelcome occupiers. Indeed, following the Ethiopian invasion in 2006 when Shabaab was still just a military wing in the ICU, the group rapidly recruited as many as 5,000 fighters from Mogadishu alone. However, while Shabaab was still in the midst of combating TFG and Ethiopian forces in mid-2008, the group began to experience significant armed opposition from local groups including the Somali Sufi organization Ahlu-Sunna wal-Jama (ASWJ) in the central province of Galgaduud. Despite the presence of unpopular foreign forces, locals in this area grew fed up with Shabaab’s disrespect for Sufism and its attempts to alter the local culture. Shabaab was eventually defeated in the region by ASWJ largely because of ASWJ’s superior numbers and the increased degree of local

\[^{561}\text{CTC 2008.}\]
\[^{562}\text{Hassan 2009.}\]
backlash. As one resident tellingly commented, “if Shabab had not intervened in people’s freedom, their way of worshipping and exterminated elders who disagreed with them…then they would have been here for quite a long time.” 563

Ever since the Ethiopian withdrawal in 2009, Shabaab itself has been the main attractor of foreign military interventions. At times, Shabaab has been able to generate support amongst certain portions of the population by exploiting anger at foreign occupation. Yet, the group’s reputation for extremism and disregard for Somali culture has diminished its ability to portray itself as a protector of Somali nationalism against foreign armies. “They have brought peace back to Kismayo,” commented one resident, “but I do not like them when they destroy our national flag.” 564 As a result, foreign armies have been a significantly more potent mean for degrading Shabaab capabilities since 2011. More conclusively, the timeline of Shabaab’s various periods of success and failure do not correlate with the operations of foreign interveners. Though these forces undoubtedly played the largest role in Shabaab’s decline in 2012, there is little evidence that Shabaab profited on a local-support basis from the presence of foreign armies during operational peaks in 2011 and 2012. The only possible suggestion of a correlation with Shabaab’s resurgence in 2013 lies in Ethiopian operations, which have primarily been in areas that have also featured substantial Shabaab activity, including the Gedo, Bakool, and Bay regions. However, Ethiopia’s focus on these areas could be targeting Shabaab activity and not a mechanism for the activity itself. Few other indicators from the period of Shabaab’s resurgence suggest that Ethiopian troop presence has helped the group rebound.

563 Ibid.
564 Hassan 2009.
Domestic Conflict

One instance of Shabaab directly benefitting from a purely domestic conflict comes from spring 2013, when tensions between the SFG and Ahmed Madoobe’s Lower Jubaland administration came to head. In Kismayo, both the SFG and Madoobe began to mobilize and arm various clan militias. Al Shabaab quickly got involved as they had an axe to grind against Madoobe, a former leader in the group who left in 2008 and has denounced Shabaab ever since. Shabaab banded with a number of disgruntled militias and began conducting operations against Madoobe. By May 2013, substantial evidence of collusion between Shabaab and pro-SFG forces emerged. Shabaab militias began allowing pro-SFG forces to move troops and weapons through their territory and in early July, the SFG’s principal ally in Lower Juba, Barre Hiiraale, announced that his forces were working alongside Shabaab.\(^565\) Around this same time, SFG-affiliated leaders in Lower Juba and Bakool announced tactical alliances with Shabaab.\(^566\) The outbreak of this conflict and the temporary alliances between a number of pro-SFG militias and Shabaab shielded the organization from greater opposition at a time when it was demonstrating resurgence. The operational space these alliances granted to Shabaab cannot be overemphasized, especially given their correlation with Shabaab’s timeline of resurgence and regional distribution of attacks. Indeed, this crisis occurred in the spring and summer of 2013 when Shabaab’s attack levels were rising substantially.

Organizational Adaptation

Though Shabaab’s indigenous makeup from 2007-2010 likely benefited the group’s legitimacy, there does not appear to be any significant changes in broader membership composition or structure during the group’s resurgence in 2013. However, Godane’s purge of

\(^{565}\) Bryden 2013.
\(^{566}\) Bryden 2013, 11.
dissenting leaders and their factions has likely benefitted Shabaab’s strategic execution and internal cohesion at the expense of domestic support and overall manpower. When it comes to strategic execution, Shabaab has continued to focus on governance efforts as it has throughout most of its history. However, variation in its ideological imposition on civilians in controlled territory is unclear. The most impactful strategic adaptation on Shabaab’s resurgence has been its shift to a guerrilla-warfare campaign, which has saved the group resources and allowed it to strike back against oppositional forces at an impressive rate.

Membership

As previously touched upon, though Shabaab did not officially join the AQ network until early 2012, there is anecdotal evidence suggesting that the two group’s prior relationship promoted the influx of foreign fighters starting in 2010. During the following years, foreign fighters provided training to normal Shabaab fighters on insurgent tactics, explosive devices, and Wahhabi ideology. These fighter’s military experience and willingness to engage in combat likely contributed to Shabaab’s operational tempo in 2011 and 2012 while the group was experiencing significant opposition. However, the increased role of foreign fighters also led to Shabaab adopting more extreme tactics like the implementation of suicide bombings, which are highly unpopular among numerous audiences in Somalia.

More important to the case of resurgence is variation in levels of foreign fighters between 2011-2012 and 2013. Kenyan military officials identified the presence of 750-1,000 foreign fighters in Shabaab by late 2011, when the group’s total membership was around 9,000 fighters. Reports from 2014 place overall group membership around 5,000 while the United Nations assessed, based on a classified military intelligence report, that in mid-2013 Shabaab’s

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567 Lahoud 2012.
568 Bruton 2010.
569 Herridge 2011; Anzalone 2011.
foreign fighter constituency consisted of only 300 soldiers.\textsuperscript{570} If we assume a minimal change in foreign-fighter participation between mid-2013 and early 2014, then the percentage of foreign fighters in the group was roughly 6\% during Shabaab’s resurgence in activity. This is slightly less than the rate of foreign fighter participation in late 2011, which registered between 8.3-11.1\%.\textsuperscript{571}

Though Shabaab appeared to become a more foreign-friendly organization over time, a number of other sources suggest a diminished rate of foreign fighter participation in the last two years. There are three likely reasons for Shabaab’s recent inability to attract more foreign fighters. The first entails the increased allure in the last two years of Syria, North Africa, and Iraq as more relevant theaters for jihad. The second, which can be concluded by looking at captured documents, statements from deserters, and chatter on jihadist forums, argues that the departure of foreign fighters occurred because perceptions of weakness stemming from the group’s military setbacks in 2012 and the intense internal discord.\textsuperscript{572} The final reason involves Godane’s purges in 2012 and 2013. According to Clint Watts, who meticulously documented the Shabaab infighting, Godane attempted to solidify his control over foreign fighters following the merger with al-Qaeda and in the process, killed many foreigners resistant to the new changes. During this period, Godane assassinated famed American jihadi Omar Hammami, who had become a vocal opponent of Godane’s strategic actions and was often seen in the company of other Godane dissidents.\textsuperscript{573} Thus, Godane’s targeting of unruly foreign contingents dissuaded many foreigners from joining the group, removing their ability to have impacted resurgence.

\textsuperscript{570} UNSC 2013; BBC 2014c
\textsuperscript{571} Based on author’s analysis of information from Herridge 2011; Anazalone 2011; UNSC 2013; BBC 2014c.
\textsuperscript{572} Pantucci 2013; UNSC 2013.
\textsuperscript{573} Watts, Lebovich 2012; Watts 2013a.
Moving forward, Shabaab’s membership has been historically and numerically dominated by Somalis with minimal variance over time. Most of Shabaab’s Somali fighters are illiterate youths and many of these youths were forced to join the group by gunpoint. These fighters have little military training and unsurprisingly are prone to defection.\(^{574}\) The next largest contingent of Somali volunteers appears to have joined Shabaab because of the specific economic incentives the group offers as well as the influence of temporary alliances between their clan leaders and Shabaab. Likewise, though the organization is not exclusively clan-based, many of its militias are dominated by clan affiliations and as a result, the group’s internal cohesion has suffered at times due to divergent interests between armed factions. As one source reported in 2010, Shabaab controlled neighborhoods in Mogadishu would host as many as seven separate militia factions identified as Shabaab that would nonetheless compete, sometimes violently, for tax rights and territory.\(^{575}\) However, as the next section will detail, Godane’s consolidation of power and centralization of top-tier authority resulted in greater control among the group’s remaining core leadership.

**Internal Discord, Consolidation, and Structure**

Beginning in 2010, Shabaab’s emir Abdi Godane and the group’s more radical leadership contingent, including Ibrahim Jai Jama and Fu’ad Shangole, began to increasingly promote a ideologically uncompromising and less-nationalistic strategic agenda. Accordingly, this contingent is known for its deep commitment to the Salafi-Wahhabist strand of Islam and was the driving force behind Shabaab’s increased ties with AQC.\(^{576}\) Over time, Godane’s efforts generated a great deal of outcry from the more moderate and domestically focused leaders in the group including Muktar Robow, Hassan Turki, and Sheikh Hassan Aweys. For example, by

\(^{574}\) Bruton 2010; Daniels 2012.
\(^{575}\) Bruton 2010.
\(^{576}\) Ibid.
2010, Robow began publically dissenting against Shabaab’s harsh rigid imposition of Sharia law, instead calling for pragmatic strategies that co-opted nationalist concerns and respected local traditions, like Sufi practices. After the failed Ramadan offensives in 2011, public bickering between factions increased with leaders like Robow and Hassan Yaqubi withdrawing forces from the command hierarchy. Then in early 2012, the group suffered defections in the hundreds including a portion of Turki’s Hisbul Islamiyya fighters.

Despite their representation of large local constituencies, Robow and Turki’s influence progressively waned since they were neither radical enough to attract substantial external backing nor moderate enough to generate larger domestic participation. Thus, their bargaining power in the Shabaab command chain consistently faltered against the will of Godane. By 2012, Godane was actively consolidating power and violently pushing dissenting commanders to the organization’s fringes. Godane assassinated several unruly leaders, including Omar Hammami and Ibrahim al-Afghani, and marginalized a number of foreign fighter contingents. By the end of 2013, Godane’s purge has come to close with his cadre emerging victorious.

The negative effects of the group’s infighting were substantial. By the end of the year, Shabaab was suffering from a drain in membership and infighting between numerous factions. Godane’s secret service unit, the Amniyat, apparently suffered roughly 200 casualties during the conflict and private contractors in Mogadishu also noted that Shabaab operational cells were at times unwilling to aid each other in battle. While Shabaab’s attack levels began to resurge, Godane loyalists simultaneously clashed on a number of occasions with Robow’s forces in the

577 Bruton 2010; Ferguson 2013.
578 Hansen 2013, 104.
579 Anzalone 2013.
580 Hansen 2013, 103; Watts, Lebovich 2012.
582 Hansen 2013, 107.
Bakool and Bay regions, where Robow’s clan exercises greater control. As previously discussed, infighting certainly promoted perceptions of Shabaab weakness among both local militiamen and potential foreign fighters. Additionally, the group’s new image as a more globally minded organization does not appear to have played a role in attracting greater participation from either foreigners or locals. Such a fact makes sense considering studies in which former Shabaab members highlighted economic incentives, the co-opting of clans, and anger over foreign intervention as being more impactful mechanisms than ideological factors.

One potentially positive effect of Godane’s consolidation of power includes increased cohesion among top-level commanders and an improved ability to dictate strategic execution. Such a relationship is difficult to prove however with the information currently available. When it comes to structure, though Godane has undoubtedly centralized power and crafted a more potent hierarchy among the group’s upper echelon, there is little evidence to suggest structural changes from previous periods of declining activity levels. Instead, the organization’s structure at the operational level has remained relatively decentralized and flexible. In Shabaab’s current form, there are six brigades each assigned to a specific region and each brigade also possesses a political and administrative entity. Godane is still able to rely on the autonomy of commanders at the operational level largely because his purge included the streamlining of many loyalists into such leadership positions. In this way, Shabaab likely continues to benefit from a networked structure but Godane now has greater strategic control over operations and regional actions when he desires. Though this may make Shabaab more vulnerable to a fatal leadership decapitation, such a possibility has little bearing on demonstrated resurgence.

583 Roble 2013.
584 Hassan 2012.
585 UNSC 2013.
586 Bryden 2014.
Strategic Execution

Local Engagement and Governance

Shabaab’s ascension to prominence from 2007-2010 was characterized by the group’s remarkable degree of local engagement and legitimate governing activities. In 2009, a vehicle journey from the Kenyan border to Mogadishu could reach sixty-seven checkpoints, 61 of which of were manned by Shabaab. According to one author, at the non-Shabaab checkpoints, militiamen usually demanded money and often stole items from travellers. However, at the overwhelming majority of Shabaab checkpoints, their members did not demand any form of bribery beyond the established fees.\textsuperscript{587} Indeed, according to a large amount of fieldwork and numerous statements from local Somalis, the law and order aspect of Shabaab’s governing system was particularly well received by local populations during the group’s first several years. Citizens in towns like Jowhar commented that under Shabaab rule, crime was non-existent. Shabaab’s court system featured both regional and district courts and local observers often noted how popular the Mogadishu, Baidoa, and Kismayo courts were among the people, citing long queue lines of Somalis who wanted to take civil cases to court.\textsuperscript{588} These relatively successful judicial institutions generated sympathy among a local population accustomed to predatory warlords and corrupt governance.\textsuperscript{589}

However, from 2010 to 2012, local support for Shabaab began to dwindle. Though the group tried to reverse the trend by holding clan outreach events and organizing communal Eid al-Fitr prayers in areas of growing opposition, it was unable to stem the tide of discontent.\textsuperscript{590} Despite the security Shabaab provided, a number of communities grew tired of the group’s rigid

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{587} Hansen 2013, 85; Harper 2012, 74; Hansen 2013
\textsuperscript{588} Hansen 2013, 86.
\textsuperscript{589} Hansen 2013, 85.
\textsuperscript{590} Anzalne 2011.
\end{footnotesize}
policies and governance, which included no freedom of speech, no entertainment, and segregated schools. In 2010, Shabaab made local enemies by destroying the graves and mosques of revered Somali religious leaders, completely disregarding local customs in an attempt to impose the group’s Wahhabi-Salafist beliefs. The group began to more harshly and broadly enforce Sharia law in territory under its control, executing alleged spies and Christians, chopping off the limbs of thieves, and beating men for petty violations like beardlessness. Furthermore, Shabaab’s mishandling of the drought and famine in 2011, in which the group banned aid groups from accessing afflicted areas under its control, contributed to deaths of 260,000 people and a large amount of outcry against the organization.

It is unclear whether Shabaab has reduced its rigid implementation of Sharia laws and similarly inflammatory political operations. However, the group continues to engage in substantial governing activities. In fact, many analyses point to Shabaab’s continued influence as being due the organization’s skill in recognizing and addressing grievances through governance efforts. Despite losses in territorial control, Shabaab can still be witnessed providing basic administration services, including the oversight of education and health sectors and the provision of judicial and security-based bodies. These efforts are likely promoting Shabaab’s operational capabilities by maintaining a moderate level of support among local civilians. Yet, there is minimal observable variance in the nature of governing tactics in areas under Shabaab control, meaning that “adaptation” has neither occurred nor contributed to resurgence.

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592 Daniels 2012, 59.
593 Daniels 2012, 58.
595 Bryden 2013, 13.
596 Menkhaus 2014.
Propaganda

Though not quite as extensive as the media apparatus of AQAP, Shabaab’s propaganda efforts are remarkably encompassing. For instance, Shabaab’s radio station al-Andalus draws a remarkable numbers of listeners. According to a poll conducted in Mogadishu in December 2012 by the African Union/Information Support Team, 56% of respondents listened to the station “daily” or “several times a week.”\(^{597}\) Despite organizational setbacks, Shabaab’s radio stations have continued to pump out propaganda material in urban and rural areas. Furthermore, since these stations continue to be the sole media agencies in many rural areas, Shabaab possesses domination on the information market in areas under its influence.\(^{598}\)

The framing and content of Shabaab propaganda is similar to other AQA’s in its combination of domestically focused rhetoric placed in a global context. A message from Godane in 2014 lashed out at Mogadishu’s Western-backed government and the United States, claiming the two groups seek to destroy Somali culture: “Somalis, your religion has been attacked, your land divided, your resources looted directly and indirectly through the puppet government - our victory lies in Jihad (holy war).”\(^{599}\) To counter these supposed apostates, Shabaab frequently focuses on its governing efforts and public works projects. It has also published material on its education and social programs, a clear sign of the group’s conscious effort to portray itself as an alternative governing force.\(^{600}\) Lastly, Shabaab has effectively targeted Kenyans in its propaganda efforts, releasing numerous materials in Swahili and proclaiming, “to our people/family in East Africa we say, ‘welcome to Somalia, hakuna

\(^{597}\) UNSC 2013.
\(^{598}\) Ibid.
\(^{599}\) Sheikh 2014.
\(^{600}\) Anzalone 2011.
Despite a lack of variance in the focus of media operations over the course of the last several years, it is hard to deny the combined power of Shabaab’s propaganda efforts and political engagement with local communities.

**Military Strategy**

Between mid-2011 and the end of 2012, as the group’s foreign fighter participation increased and Shabaab’s leadership adopted more extreme tactics, the organization began to implement suicide attacks. According to the GTD, Shabaab executed around 366 attacks during these three years, of which 26, or 7%, were suicide strikes. The tactical implementation of suicide strikes occurred as Shabaab experienced significant domestic opposition, eventually leading to the group’s losses in 2012. However, between October 2012 and October 2013, there were 219 Shabaab attacks of which only 8, or 3.6%, were suicide strikes. In this same time frame, the targets of the group’s attacks were overwhelmingly state-based military forces. As we can see, during the Shabaab’s period of resurgence, the group’s military operations featured significantly less controversial tactics and targets.

More important to the case of resurgence is the broader military strategy Shabaab adopted in late 2011 and early 2012. Following the group’s defeat in the Ramadan Offensives, Shabaab leadership announced it would shift towards a guerrilla-warfare style campaign to minimize resource expenditure. Subsequently, over the course of 2012, Shabaab strategically withdrew from a number of cities and progressively shifted its military tactics. By mid 2013, the group had reduced frontline assaults on enemy positions and refocused on checkpoint attacks, IED attacks, assassinations, and ambushes of government convoys and poorly defended

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601 Anzalone 2012.
602 Based on author’s assessment of GTD data.
603 Based on author’s assessment of GTD data.
604 Based on author’s assessment of FDD data.
605 Based on author’s assessment of FDD data.
outposts.\textsuperscript{606} Attack data from Shabaab’s period of resurgence reinforces these claims, especially the documented increased use of IED’s.\textsuperscript{607} Shabaab’s strategic shift has likely played a large role in their continued vitality despite inter-group conflict and domestic opposition. By returning to the style of guerrilla warfare the group employed during its ascension from 2007-2009, Shabaab has been able to turn the tide of its setbacks by conserving resources and chipping away at oppositional forces via a campaign of low-intensity attrition warfare.

\textbf{Conclusion}

\begin{tabular}{|l|l|}
\hline
\textbf{Hypothesis} & \textbf{Value} \\
\hline
\textbf{H1}: Anarchy & Moderate \\
\hline
\textbf{H2}: Institutional Weakness & Low \\
\hline
\textbf{H3}: Emergent Conflict & Low \\
\hline
\textbf{H4}: Organizational Adaptation & Moderate \\
\hline
\textbf{H5}: Economic Factors & High \\
\hline
\textbf{H6}: External Support & Low \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

As is now apparent, the case of Shabaab is a remarkably difficult and complicated study because of the sheer disaster that is the Somali state and a lack of reliable information during the period under examination. Nonetheless, looking at variables that registered low values, Institutional Weakness is difficult to examine because of the remarkable lack of government institutions functional enough to even merit judgment. While Shabaab likely continues to benefit from the leakage of weapons and finances, such ineptitude has been characteristic of Somali

\textsuperscript{606} Anzalone 2013; author’s assessment of FDD data
\textsuperscript{607} UNSC 2013; author’s assessment of FDD data.
governments for last decade, meaning there has been little variance over the course of Shabaab’s history. Though there is one instance of domestic conflict during Shabaab’s period of resurgence that clearly benefitted the group’s activity, the variable of Emergent Conflict registers a low value because of the lack of any other domestic conflicts that have coincided with Shabaab’s resurgence.

External Support also lacks a clear and substantial impact. While numerous sources point to funding from Eritrea and the Somali diaspora, evidence on these two occurrences, particular within the timeline of resurgence, is scarce to say the least. The same can be said regarding Shabaab’s previous extortion of humanitarian aid agencies. Evidence shows an increased recruitment of Kenyans at the benefit of Shabaab’s membership levels but the movement is still overwhelmingly Somali. Furthermore, there is little evidence to suggest that the batch of Kenyan recruits have affected operational capabilities.

The next most impactful mechanism on resurgence is Anarchy. Though Somalia has lacked a central government with security capabilities for decades, Shabaab activity during its resurgence has occurred in predominantly rural and ungoverned regions. Military operations have largely included ambushes, IED strikes, and attacks on government/military convoys in such locales. Indeed, Shabaab has used such regions as bases of operation following retreats from urban areas such as Kismayo. There have even been instances of territorial seizures in the wake of security vacuums created by withdrawing foreign military forces. Yet, Southern Somalia was also Shabaab’s operational center of gravity before its setbacks, meaning variance in regional activity on broader scale has been marginal.

The next most impactful variable is that of Organizational Adaptation. While membership and structure show little overall variance, Shabaab’s shift to a more conservative
campaign of guerrilla warfare, punctuated by spectacular terrorist attacks, has benefitted their ability to return to a high-level of activity. By tactically retreating from a number of cities in 2012 and reducing the number of costly open engagements with opposing forces, Shabaab has been able to preserve resources and manpower for a persistent but low-intensity campaign. Furthermore, Godane’s purge of dissenting factions and consolidation of power over the course of 2012 and 2013 likely allowed for a more thorough execution of such a strategy. Indeed, the fact that Shabaab was demonstrating resurgence despite organizational infighting suggests that the remaining leadership was able to use such a strategy to continue executing military operations. Finally, Economic Factors have played the most definitive role in supporting Shabaab’s insurgency. Despite setbacks, Shabaab continued to generate substantial revenue from territory under its control while also increasing and diversifying revenue streams. Considering the documented importance of financial incentives in attracting recruits, Shabaab’s financial capabilities have undoubtedly helped the group continue to attract members and maintain internal cohesion.

Only time will tell whether or not Shabaab can regroup and regain the level of control over Somalia it possessed in 2009. On one hand, Shabaab will likely continue to be provided with opportunities via continued anarchy and institutional weakness in the Somali state. Frankly, I have little faith in the ability of the SFG and its Western supporters to craft a functional government capable of both blunting Shabaab’s operations and providing Somalis with a governing force to rally around. However, Shabaab may simply be unable to sufficiently recover from its change in identity; recent reporting on the ground suggests that a large number Somalis, particularly in the country’s central provinces, are fed up with the group’s extremism. Thus, Shabaab as an insurgent organization may remain geographically constricted to the country’s
southern provinces with operational reach in Mogadishu and neighboring countries. Regardless of such postulations, the organization proved many analysts wrong by rebounding in 2013 and this alone makes Shabaab’s domestic efforts worthy of continued analytical scrutiny.

**Conclusion**

The analysis presented in this thesis sought to explain resurgence in AQA insurgencies by employing a qualitative methodology that relies on case study analyses. In order to execute such a study, I began with a basic conceptual overview of insurgency and the concept of resurgence, the dependent variable of this thesis. Then, I discussed the unique nature of AQA insurgencies and specific challenges they typically face. Next, I examined the relevant literature on insurgencies, civil warfare, and terrorism in order to determine the most theoretically impactful mechanisms on jihadi-insurgent campaigns conducted by AQAs. Afterwards, I presented a research design that consisted of a number of hypotheses, each presenting an explanation for resurgence based on the impact of an independent variable. Using this methodology, I attempted to identify the most impactful variables on resurgent activity as demonstrated by three different AQAs: al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and al-Shabaab.

There are a number of limitations when employing qualitative methodologies and relying on case study analyses, particularly with this research topic. For one, as is the issue with much qualitative research in political science, separating and isolating the independent variables and hypotheses proved exceptionally difficult. Simply put, civil warfare is messy and extremely complex; the various mechanisms that affect the dynamics of civil wars are largely interdependent and constantly affect each other’s development. Likewise, there are numerous discrepancies with the independent variables presented in this study’s research design that I
failed to adequately address due to constraints on time and the somewhat limited scope of the process. For example, the Economic Factors hypothesis occupies a somewhat problematic space between conditions of structure and agency. To elaborate, while the extortion of primary resource commodities requires the presence of such commodities, it often entails a choice by the organization to pursue such a strategy. With that in mind, elements of the Organizational Adaptation variable begin to intrude. Nonetheless, despite the overlap of many indicators and mechanisms in each hypothesis, this thesis was still able to make a number of interesting observations and findings.

To summarize the findings for each individual case starting with AQI in Iraq, based on the length of the organization’s increase in activity, the length of the preceding period of inactivity, and the actual level of activity, AQI can be classified as having demonstrated a strong resurgence. More importantly, Emergent Conflict appeared as the most impactful mechanism, particularly because of its influence on many other factors discussed in the case. For the case of AQAP in Yemen, due to the organization’s previously long period of acceleration in activity, the relative shortness of the period of setbacks, and the length of its renewed activity, AQAP’s resurgence can be classified as moderate. Furthermore, Organizational Adaptation emerged as the most important variable in affecting the group’s resurgence, while a number of other variables also played a notable role in affecting activity levels. For the case of Shabaab, because of the very short timeline of observable renewed activity, organization’s degree of resurgence can be classified as low. Lastly, I determined Economic Factors to be playing the most definitive role in powering Shabaab’s resurgence. Below, I have presented a table that shows the designated value of each hypothesis for all three of the cases examined.
One of the most interesting findings from this thesis is the relative insignificance of several mechanisms that are highly touted in literature on terrorism and insurgency. For example, though External Support appears to be playing a large role in the resurgence of AQI, its overall value among the three case studies was the lowest of all the variables. Furthermore, in the case of AQI, the group is largely benefitting from foreign support not necessarily intended for its operations in Iraq or for the organization at all. Another set of hypotheses that did not produce strong values involved two variables under the weak state school of thought. Indeed, both Anarchy and Institutional Weakness lacked a significant role in renewed activity. These two variables typically showed only minimal to moderate levels of variance between periods of inactivity and resurgence. In addition, the effects on AQA activity from both of these tended to be connected with political conflicts occurring in the country. For instance, in both Yemen and Iraq grievances stemming from governing failures were more impactful in their tendency to fuel other conflicts in the country that the AQAs were able to latch onto.

Unfortunately, not a single variable registered a notable level of impact across all three case studies. Looking at the previous chart, it is hard to determine any particular trends or patterns. However, there are two major takeaways. First, hypotheses three through four faired the best across all three cases. Emergent Conflict tested particularly well in two of the case studies, though its relevance for AQI is particularly significant. In fact, Emergent Conflict in the case of AQI stands as the most clearly influential variable in any case in this study. Secondly, the
variable of Economic Factors also tested particularly well, proving itself as highly influential to Shabaab’s ability to recruit and fund operations while also demonstrating impact on AQAP’s operational capabilities. Lastly, Organizational Adaptation tested well in the cases of Shabaab and AQAP.

The second observation that can be made simply by looking at the previous chart of hypotheses is the similarity between the resurgence of Shabaab and AQAP. These two AQAs received boons to their recruiting from Economic Factors, to name only one support mechanism from that hypothesis, while also benefitting from anarchical conditions. Both of these organizations operate in highly decentralized and anarchical countries where AASs carry a lot of power. However, it is not merely anarchy or a weak state that contributed to Shabaab and AQAP’s capabilities but rather each group’s relationship with the local populations. Certainly anarchy and the lack of a functional central state have contributed to the ability of Shabaab and AQAP to engage AASs and “neglected” civilian populations. However, even in such favorable structural conditions an insurgency must positively engage civilian groups if they want to directly benefit from their support. For example, AQI’s fall from grace in 2007 demonstrated such a point while their recent resurgence also shows that domestic support, or acquiescence at the very least, is vital to capabilities. In the case of AQI though, the operational space and resources the group has recently enjoyed does not primarily come from local support. Furthermore, environmental factors more than any AQI efforts have contributed to whatever local support AQI has actually received during resurgence.

Going back to Shabaab and AQAP, both organizations have notably profited from bases of support amongst civilian populations. For AQAP, the organization’s grassroots level engagement with tribes, cautious military strategy, and exploitation of grievances helped the
group recover and execute renewed operations in the wake of the overwhelming opposition that forced it from previously held territories. In regards to Shabaab, the group’s ability to provide effective governance in many regions has engendered support and provided territory to fall back on following their losses in 2012. Additionally, revenue generated from those territories has been essential in providing Shabaab with the means to execute its guerrilla-warfare campaign.

One of the matters discussed towards the beginning of this thesis was the issue of domestic participation in AQA insurgencies. Specifically, the question was asked how these radical organizations with their largely unpopular ideologies could generate sufficient levels of support to maintain operational capabilities. Based on my previous observations and case study analyses, I argue that agency and organizational strategies should be emphasized more when examining the capabilities of insurgent organizations. Falling back on structural considerations and weak state arguments has become far too common in literature examining terrorist and insurgent groups. Two of the cases presented in this thesis point heavily to the role of organizational factors, both before and during the periods of resurgence, as greatly affecting the resurgence itself. More specifically, the case studies presented show the importance of several factors in promoting insurgent capabilities following setbacks. These include the AQA’s use of violence, nature of engagement with local communities, and ability present itself as a viable alternative to the system of government being combated.

When there is not a great deal of external support or an internal conflict empowering the AQA, as is the case with AQI, these three factors are vital to the longevity and operational capabilities of the insurgency. Shabaab suffered losses in 2011 and 2012 not only because of foreign intervention but because many communities lost their patience with the group’s sometimes extreme use of violence and heavy handed imposition of their ideological system.
Similar practices also contributed to the downfall of AQI. Though AQAP experienced opposition from civilian forces and AAS for similar reasons during its losses in 2012, the group’s setbacks were reversible because its leaders have consistently recognized over the course of its existence the importance of limiting violence against civilians, adopting pragmatic strategies, and positively engaging with local communities on political and social levels. Thus, in many ways the writings of thinkers like Mao, Bin Laden, Naji and others have proven themselves highly relevant to the success and long-term viability of AQA domestic campaigns.

There are a number of obvious strategic implications for AQAs. For one, focusing on strategies that create roots with local populations will better the chances for the organization to survive and resist losses. Furthermore, if the group can imbed itself enough, aggression against the organization will translate into aggression against a community, which will engender support for the organization in the face of government opposition and repression. AQA’s should avoid heavily relying on indiscriminate violence in their military strategies, especially when it comes to the use of mass casualty suicide attacks. From a political standpoint, AQA’s should try to accommodate local customs and cultural practices and slowly stage the implementation of Sharia law. AQA campaigns appear unlikely to achieve success without such strategic measures or the presence of external support mechanisms or dramatic internal conflicts that can be manipulated.

Finally, I believe future research on the subject of AQA activity is needed, particularly for works that can develop more refined hypotheses to test against other cases. For instance, there are a number of other cases such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and ISIS in Syria whose efforts merit a methodical breakdown similar to the research presented in this thesis. Other Salafi-jihadist groups without ties to the al-Qaeda brand or movement should also be examined in such a light. With the collapse of several governments following the Arab Spring
revolutions, numerous Salafi-jihadist organizations are now operating in the Middle East and North Africa in countries like Libya and Egypt. Though open source information on these groups remains limited, it will be interesting to see how they progress and grow. More important to the conclusions of this thesis will be whether these groups follow the path of an organization like AQI, with its reliance on indiscriminate violence and inflexible strategic execution, or instead adhere to the principles espoused in classical theories on insurgency and focus more on political efforts.
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