

## Pakistan and al-Qaeda's Future

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For three decades Osama bin Laden, the tall, shy, lanky, but mesmerizing Saudi, has gripped the imagination of tens of thousands of Muslims and became the bane of the world's armies and intelligence agencies. Now he has been killed in a US commando raid on his safe house thirty miles from Islamabad, ten years after he carried out the worst attack ever suffered by the United States and the worst terrorist atrocity in human history. His ideology of global jihad and his acts of terrorism changed the way we all live, our security concerns, and how we conduct politics and business while deeply scarring relations between the Muslim world and the West; his death will have similarly large-scale effects. Many of the security challenges we now face will be more subtle and intricate than the threats posed by al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups in the past.

The repercussions for nuclear-armed Pakistan and its relations with the US and the rest of the world are immense. Given the circumstances of bin Laden's death and his apparently lengthy sojourn in a fortified mansion near a military garrison well inside Pakistan, it seems more and more likely that some members of the Pakistani security services or military—or militant groups who have been supported by the state in the past—may have been involved in protecting him. Yet we should also remember that the same Pakistani security forces have killed or captured over 400 al-Qaeda members since 2001, lost over 3,000 of their own soldiers and policemen fighting militant groups in Pakistan, and, at times, cooperated closely with US and Western intelligence. Moreover, al-Qaeda tried to kill former president Pervez Musharraf at least three times.

Understanding these longstanding contradictions within Pakistan's armed forces and the security services is an enormous challenge for both Pakistan and the West. But clearly answers are now needed, and paradoxically, bin Laden's demise, though a victory for the fight against extremism in Pakistan—one that Pakistani leaders have welcomed—has made the problem more urgent than ever. There have been demonstrations in several cities condemning the government for allowing the American incursions.

The crisis is far worse for Pakistan than a previous national security embarrassment, when the world discovered that Pakistani scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan had been selling nuclear weapons technology to Iran, North Korea and Libya. At that time, the Bush administration chose to cover it up because Pakistan's cooperation in the war on terrorism was deemed to be of paramount importance. However unlike A.Q. Khan, bin Laden and his followers have been responsible for the deaths of thousands of people since the September 11 attacks, Muslims and non-Muslims, from Iraq to Afghanistan to European capitals like London and Madrid. The victims of these atrocities and the dozens of governments whose countries have been attacked are not likely to be as forgiving as Bush was about Khan if any Pakistanis are found to have been protecting bin Laden all these years.

The question of how Pakistan and its Western allies will deal with the badlands on the border with Afghanistan which remain largely under the control of a variety of terrorist groups, despite huge efforts by the Pakistan army to get rid them, is now even more pressing. Al-Qaeda and its Pakistani extremist allies need these badlands more than ever after bin Laden's killing and they will fight to the death to defend them. Pakistan is now a much weaker and more vulnerable state than it was when the hunt for bin Laden began, with multiple political and economic problems it has failed to deal with. But on top of these problems, it will have to face up to this intractable threat from the tribal areas, and it will need international help and support.

Meanwhile, in Pakistan and beyond, hundreds of dedicated extremists are in mourning and swearing to seek martyrdom and give their lives to avenge the killing of their hero and leader. There is no doubt that multiple acts of terrorism will follow, and Western and Muslim states are already bracing themselves for it. However it is vitally important that the surge in terrorist attacks, should it come, is dealt with in a sober fashion by

Western governments and does not lead to fresh tensions with Muslim nations or new repression against Muslim migrants in the West.

There will be a leadership struggle inside al-Qaeda, and terrorist acts among factions within the organization could spread to several countries as militants choose to support one or another candidate. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian doctor who was chosen by bin Laden to be his No. 2 and who has escaped at least several US drone attacks in the Pakistani mountains, is disliked by many within the al-Qaeda family for his domineering leadership style, his arrogance, and his desire to promote fellow Egyptians above those of other Arab nationalities.

It is unclear how this leadership change will occur because it is the first time since the 1980s that Arab extremists will be faced with actually choosing a new leader, while the pressure of the US and NATO intelligence will not allow al-Qaeda members to communicate easily with one another. While this struggle plays out, however, there will also be ample opportunities for Western forces and intelligence agencies to degrade and dismantle al-Qaeda further, for example by catching other leaders.

Still, we should remember that al-Qaeda has adapted extremely well to its changed circumstances since September 11 and it could adapt again to cope with the new pressures it faces after bin Laden's death. Al-Qaeda has transformed itself over the years from a highly centralized organization, with recruiting, training, policies and planning all coming from its top leaders, to a far looser and more amorphous terror network. For many years it has promoted itself as a franchise, willing to lend its name to extremist groups around the world whom it has no control over and whose policies it does not run.

As a result, al-Qaeda does not need another September 11 to sow mayhem and make its point. One bomb in Times Square placed by a single suicide bomber or a bomb in a New York subway—both attacks were attempted over the past two years—would be more than enough for the new al-Qaeda to demonstrate that it is still a threat.

The most immediate political challenge for al-Qaeda will be how to respond to the Arab awakening and the youth movement that has spread across North Africa and the Middle East, leaving it on the sidelines as young people oppose autocratic Arab governments with demands for democracy and freedom rather than martyrdom. So far al-Qaeda's response has been to fuel attacks on Christians and other minorities in Egypt, Iraq and Pakistan in a bid to foster a religious war and gain the high ground among Sunni Muslims, but clearly this is not enough to win a strong following in the new Arab world.

But the ideology of global jihad that bin Laden espoused will not quickly disappear, for it has taken root in far too many Muslim fringe groups. Beyond al-Qaeda's immediate adherents, it has had broader effects, successfully breeding intolerance in some Muslim societies against Christians, Jews, and other minority religious groups, and even against some Islamic sects, like the Sufis and the Ahmadis in Pakistan. In the decade since the September 11 attacks, al-Qaeda has also voraciously expanded its global network, setting up branches in every single European country, penetrating Muslim communities in the United States, spreading widely across the African continent. All this would imply that it will not quickly allow itself to be destroyed or implode through rivalries.

Bin Laden's death is a watershed moment. But it does not spell the end of al-Qaeda.

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