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‘Experts’ Argue Over Al-Qaeda Strength as US Militarism Inspires More Hatred

By John Glaser

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As so-called “experts” argue over whether al-Qaeda is strong or ailing one year after the assassination of leader Osama bin Laden, [the grievances which impel Muslims to militancy against America have only piled up.](#)

Many observers point out that the enormous swelling of defense budgets and the ballooning of a predatory national security state at home and abroad is way out of proportion to the actual threat any Americans face of Islamic terrorism. After a decade of war, they say, al-Qaeda is weakened and unable to orchestrate significant or even minor attacks on U.S. soil.

Other “experts” less uncomfortable with the destruction that warfare and civil liberties abuses have wrought, disagree about the capabilities of al-Qaeda and its affiliates.

“It’s wishful thinking to say al-Qaida is on the brink of defeat,” says Seth Jones, a Rand analyst and adviser to U.S. special operations forces. “They have increased global presence, the number of attacks by affiliates has risen, and in some places like Yemen, they’ve expanded control of territory.”

While the U.S. may or may not have crippled al-Qaeda, America's rampant, lawless militarism and expansion of the empire all over the Middle East continues to inspire hatred and, as was evident on September 11th, violence.

“U.S. officials say bin Laden's old team is all but dismantled, “writes the Associated Press. “But they say new branches are hitting Western targets and U.S. allies overseas, and still aspire to match their parent organization's milestone of Sept. 11, 2001.”

Bin Laden inspired Muslims to attack America primarily [by emphasizing American militarism and empire in the Middle East](#). More of that in the post-9/11 era may well have broadened the appeal.

The 2006 National Intelligence Estimate on [Trends in Global Terrorism](#) found the Iraq war was “breeding deep resentment of U.S. involvement in the Muslim world and cultivating supporters for the global jihadist movement.” Similarly, former head of the CIA's Counterterrorism Center Robert Grenier [said](#) the war “has convinced many Muslims that the United States is the enemy of Islam and is attacking Muslims, and they have become jihadists as a result of their experience in Iraq.”

The war in Afghanistan, which has terrorized the country and caused immense suffering has had a similar effect. And both former CIA Director Michael Hayden and former Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair [recognized](#) that “hatred of America is increasing in Pakistan” because of the drone strikes, which [kill exorbitant numbers of civilians](#).

By most accounts, the drone war in Yemen is worsening the problem in the form of blowback. Gregory Johnsen, a Yemen expert at Princeton University, recently wrote, “Body bags are not a good barometer for success in a war like this. I would argue that U.S. missile strike[s] are actually one of the major — not the only, but a major — factor in AQAP's growing strength.”

Jeremy Scahill, [reporting for *Nation*](#), exposed in February how U.S. airstrikes that kill civilians and those ill-defined as militants – along with support for the brutal Yemeni government - foments anti-Americanism and fuels international terrorism. And Charles Schmitz, a Yemen expert at Towson University in Maryland, tells [told the *Los Angeles Times*](#), “The more the U.S. applies its current policy, the stronger Al Qaeda seems to get.”

The situation begets losers. Washington gets to simultaneously claim its aggressive policies are effective and that more are needed. Americans thus suffer a loss of civil liberties and transparency in an ever-expanding government, while also suffering a loss in security because of the hatred their government's unaccountable militarism inspires.