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Al-Qaeda Attempting a Comeback in Afghanistan

By John Glaser

October 20, 2012

Al-Qaeda “is attempting a comeback in Afghanistan’s mountainous east,” [according to the Associated Press](#), in yet another example of how 11 years of war have failed to accomplish its most basic aims.

The news that elements of al-Qaeda, notably, distinct from the traditional Taliban insurgents that have been fighting US-NATO forces for years, are trying to regenerate a presence in Afghanistan also undercuts President Obama’s campaign narrative that the war is coming to an end and al-Qaeda is greatly diminished.

“They are trying to increase their numbers and take advantage of the Americans leaving,” the police chief of Paktika province, Gen. Dawlat Khan Zadran, told AP this month. He did not mention specifics or numbers, but insisted al-Qaeda has moved more weapons across the border from Pakistan.

Afghanistan was always useless to al-Qaeda, except insofar as it drew America into a long and costly war, in an attempt to repeat the defeat of the Soviets. Now that the Obama administration is announcing a withdrawal at the end of 2014, al-Qaeda is attempting a provocative comeback.

But the State Department is already involved in talks with the Kabul government to come to an agreement that will govern the presence of US forces in Afghanistan [beyond 2014](#). As many as 25,000 troops will remain, perhaps until 2024.

One might expect that after more than a decade of applying military means to the problems of Afghanistan without anything constructive to show for it, a change in strategy would garner support. Instead, the US occupation of Afghanistan continues to drive an insurgency and the drone war across the border in Pakistan continues to drive anti-American sentiment and al-Qaeda recruitment.