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AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITY OF BARCELONA

THE COMPETITION FOR JIHADIST HEGEMONY IN AFGHANISTAN

FINAL DEGREE PROJECT

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1. ABSTRACT AND KEYWORDS

This work analyzes the competition for the jihadist hegemony in Afghanistan between the two predominant jihadist terrorist organizations, Al Qaeda, and the Islamic State, following the withdrawal of the American troops in 2021. A topic like the one presented is currently very relevant and it is important to be studied and analyzed because of the serious consequences resulting from these casualties. From the theoretical framework of the Sociology of Power, this research aims to analyze the resources of both terrorist organizations and the relationship with their objectives in Afghanistan. From these resources, an intelligence analysis will be drafted, applying the analysis techniques established by the US Intelligence Community Directive 203, to detail the possible scenarios and the probability of threats to the security of Afghanistan and the Middle East and North Africa region. This research takes as a starting point that ISIS is the dominant terrorist organization in Afghanistan and, in general, dominates the region due to the general decline experienced by Al Qaeda. However, the investigation concludes with a different perspective contrary to the initial hypothesis, establishing Al Qaeda as the dominant group in Afghanistan due to the Taliban return, and ISIS as the relevant regional organization.

Key Words: Afghanistan, Al Qaeda, ISIS, Sociology of Power, jihadist hegemony

SUMMARY

ABSTRACT AND KEYWORDS	2
INTRODUCTION	4
FROM AL QAEDA TO THE ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND SYRIA	5
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	6
The Sociology of Power as an analytic framework	6
The use of Intelligence Standards in the analysis	7
METHODOLOGY	8
AL QAEDA’S RESOURCES	9
Al Qaeda’s actual context	9
Tangible and intangible resources	9
Relation of Al Qaeda’s resources with objectives in Afghanistan	10
ISIS’ RESOURCES	10
ISIS’s actual context	10
Tangible and intangible resources	11
Relation of resources with objectives in Afghanistan	11
ANALYSIS	12
CONCLUSIONS	13
REFERENCES	14

2. INTRODUCTION

This research refers to the issue of jihadist hegemony in Afghanistan between the two predominant jihadist terrorist organizations, Al Qaeda, and the Islamic State (ISIS). The terrorist group led by Osama Bin Laden (OBL) suffered the consequences of counter-terrorism measures because of the terrorist attacks at the World Trade Congress and the Pentagon on 9/11, 2001. These measures influenced the weakening of the group's structure, causing a split from one of the most important affiliated groups, Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), who created a new terrorist organization, ISIS. Terrorism can be understood as a way of doing politics, a coercive form that allows terrorist organizations to influence the international system. Al Qaeda and ISIS are currently fighting for jihadist hegemony, to have more power and influence in the international system than their opponent. The withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan in 2021 caused a potential power vacuum in the government, as the predominant elite pledged to leave the country. According to the theory of the sociology of power, Al Qaeda and ISIS are considered to be elites who compete to occupy a position of power within the Afghan political system. Thus, this investigation takes as a starting point that ISIS is the dominant terrorist organization in Afghanistan and in general in the region due to the general decline experienced by Al Qaeda.

The aim of this research is to analyze the resources of both terrorist organizations and the relationship with their objectives in Afghanistan. From these resources, an intelligence analysis will be drafted, applying the analysis techniques established by the US Intelligence Community Directive 203, to detail the possible scenarios and the probability of threats to the security of Afghanistan and the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA). This analysis is aimed to check the veracity of the starting hypothesis by seeing if ISIS is really the predominant and hegemonic jihadist group in Afghanistan.

The methodology of this work is based on the investigation of reports carried out by the organization Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), and annual reports of the Analytical Support and Surveillance of Sanctions Team established by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2004 as a result of the resolution 1526 (2004). These reports refer to ISIS, Al Qaeda, and their associated individuals, groups, companies, and entities. The most relevant document used in this research was the report of the Analytical Support and Surveillance Team in 2022, the S/2022/83.

This investigation has been conducted in the interest of evaluating the possibility of a confrontation between Al Qaeda and ISIS for jihadist hegemony in Afghanistan, following the withdrawal of American troops. A topic like the one presented is currently very relevant and it is important to be studied and analyzed for the serious consequences of events like these. Firstly, this is a current issue where the actors involved can be considered important actors in International Relations, as they are able to influence the international system. Both Al Qaeda and ISIS have become international actors perpetrating terrorist attacks in the MENA region and around the world. It is a matter of particular concern since a possible competition between these jihadist groups can have global consequences initiated in Afghanistan, where the current lack of persecution of jihadism due to the withdrawal of American troops and the return of the Taliban, might be the perfect environment for the resurgence of Al Qaeda resulting in an increase in tensions with ISIS. This competition between terrorist groups can lead both actors to perpetrate attacks worldwide in order to demonstrate their strength. Without adequate security research and analysis, it will be impossible to detect, deter and defeat the jihadist

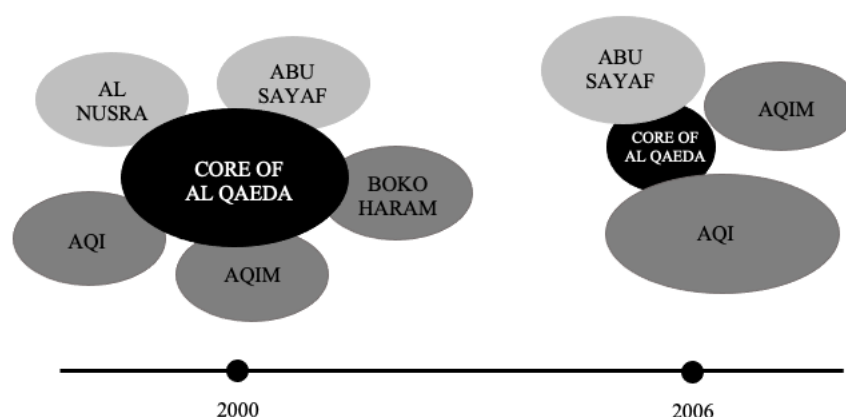
terrorist threat caused by this competition between Al Qaeda and ISIS. We must avoid such terrorist attacks from happening, where some of them are likely to occur close to our homes.

3. FROM AL QAEDA TO THE ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND SYRIA

Al Qaeda's structure at the end of the nineties was a decentralized organization composed of associated groups and franchises where the weight of the organization resided at the core of it, which was led by Osama Bin Laden (OBL). This flexible structure was the cause of the expansion of this terrorist group around the world. The associated groups were already existing terrorist organizations that decided to follow Al Qaeda's values and started working for OBL's organization. Some examples of these associated groups were the Abu Sayaf, from the Philippines, and Al Nusra, in Syria. In addition to these associated groups, Al Qaeda had different franchises distributed throughout the world, especially in the Middle East. Some examples of these franchises were Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and the well-known Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), which is the root of ISIS. After the 9/11 attacks on the WTC and the Pentagon, the US foreign policy started to be more aggressive with more counterterrorism raids against the core of Al Qaeda, which started to lose power in the structure of the terrorist organization. Since 2006, some franchises had become more powerful and influential than the core of Al Qaeda, which was losing weight progressively. The case of AQI is of particular relevance as it became a terrorist organization independent from Al Qaeda transforming itself into the actual ISIS. In 2014, the jihadist scenario, which was historically led by Al Qaeda, ceased to be unipolar, starting a new jihadist bipolar era with a competition for the hegemony between Al Qaeda and the new and ambitious ISIS.

FIGURE 1

Evolution of Al Qaeda's organization



Note. This figure illustrates the evolution of Al Qaeda's organization from 2000 to 2006. Black circles represent the core of Al Qaeda, dark gray ones are franchises and light gray are associated groups. We see a reduction in the weight of the core of Al Qaeda in comparison with the franchises and associated groups. Own elaboration retrieved from Moreno, 2019.

FIGURE 2

The transformation from Al Qaeda in Iraq to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria



Note. Own elaboration retrieved from Moreno, 2019.

There are fundamental differences between Al Qaeda and ISIS beyond their influence or capacity. Their views of the ideology of terrorism are different. Al Qaeda is known to be a pioneer of the New Terrorism while ISIS is more prone to a traditional way of terrorism. These types of terrorism differ in terms of nature, goals, violence, means, and organization. New terrorism has a religious nature and broad goals, while the traditional one has a more secular nature and more concrete goals, for instance, the independence of a territory. For Al Qaeda, violence is the objective while for ISIS violence is the tool to get to their objective. In terms of organization, New Terrorism establishes a decentralized organization of the terrorist group, as we can see in Al Qaeda and the associated groups and franchises, while Traditional Terrorism has a more hierarchical and structured organization. While ISIS is a clear example of New Terrorism in terms of nature, as it is based on Islam, it is more prone to a Traditional terrorist group in terms of goals, the use of violence, and the organization's structure.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, there is an explanation of the theoretical tools that are key to developing and understanding the analysis of this project. In the first section, there is a definition of the theory of International Relations on which this research is based, and the definition of concepts. In the second section, there is an explanation of the tools used to develop a truthful analysis.

4.1 The Sociology of Power as an analytic framework

The analysis of the competition between Al Qaeda and ISIS for the hegemony of the jihadist movement in Afghanistan has been based on the theoretical perspective of the Sociology of Power. This theoretical approach will allow the systematization of the analysis of power structures and, therefore, identify the actors, their relevance, the resources of power they have as well as their weight in the system. Feliu *et al.* (2018) p. 15 argue that “the interest of actors must be defined in terms of power (...) and their priority goal will be to improve their position by competing to accumulate more power resources, regardless of their typology. The Sociology of Power has as its fundamental

principle “the competition of elites for the differential accumulation of power” (Feliu *et al*, 2018, p. 15).

According to the Sociology of Power, there are five main elements to consider in an analysis: actors, objectives, resources, relationships (circular or linear), and structure. One of the goals of both Al Qaeda and ISIS is to be the predominant jihadist group in Afghanistan. Therefore, in order to determine the positions of Al Qaeda and ISIS in Afghanistan, an analysis of the resources at their disposal is needed. On this basis, it will be determined who is the predominant group in Afghanistan. With this in mind, this work will analyze the position of Al Qaeda and ISIS in Afghanistan concerning the resources at their disposal and how they strategically seek to achieve their goal. As far as the relationship and structure elements are concerned, these will not be addressed because of the limited extension of this work and, at the same time, because of the focus put on this research work.

In the definition of concepts, it is understood as a resource, the definition of the Cambridge English Dictionary, “a useful or valuable possession or quality that a person or organization has, for example, money, time, or skills” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Within the resources, we find the tangible and the intangible. Tangible resources are defined as those assets that have monetary value, and usually have a physical form (Westreicher, 2021). As far as intangible resources are concerned, they are defined, according to Vittori (2008) p. 83, as those “without which a group cannot act, but which are not material, nor can they be given a monetary value”.

4.2 The use of Intelligence Standards in the analysis

The analysis is a detailed examination of anything complex in order to understand its nature or to determine its essential features. Intelligence analytic standards have been used in order to develop a real in-depth intelligence analysis of the competition between Al Qaeda and ISIS in Afghanistan. The US Intelligence Community Directive 203 (ICD 203) defined by the National Security Act of 1947, establishes the Intelligence Community Analytic Standards that govern the production and evaluation of analytic products; articulates the responsibility of intelligence analysts to strive for excellence, integrity, and rigor in their analytic thinking and work practices; and delineates the role of the Office of the Director of Intelligence (ODNI) Analytic Ombuds (ODNI, 2015). In other words, the purpose of ICD 203 is to establish a universal set of standards and analytical language within the Intelligence Community that guides analysts to deliver credible, quality products. By following the guidance of ICD 203, analysts can create intelligence products that are objective, logical, accurate, and legally sound (ODNI 2015).

ICD 203 establishes a common language for the likelihood of events. The implementation of a common language is important to avoid using a confidence level and degree of likelihood together in reports, making analytic judgments on the likelihood of an event happening or not happening clearer for intelligence consumers and other analysts from different agencies. In addition, the use of common language decreases the scope of subjective bias, affecting the credibility of the intelligence product. A common language also allows for analytic intelligence products to be understood promptly.

FIGURE 3

ICD 203 sets of terms for expressions of likelihood or probability

almost no chance	very unlikely	unlikely	roughly even chance	likely	very likely	almost certain(ly)
remote	highly improbable	improbable (improbably)	roughly even odds	probable (probably)	highly probable	nearly certain
01-05%	05-20%	20-45%	45-55%	55-80%	80-95%	95-99%

Note. Analysts are strongly encouraged not to mix terms of different rows. Retrieved from ODNI, 2015

5. METHODOLOGY

This work has been divided into three main important sections. First, research on the resources of each actor has been done. This research is based on several official sources, among which the reports of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) stand out. The resources of both Al Qaeda and ISIS have been researched and described in the following parts of the work, which are divided into a brief description of the actual context of each group, the tangible and intangible resources they possess, and a relation of the resources and their objectives in Afghanistan. Therefore, this work will follow an empirical-descriptive investigation.

Second, based on the resources researched for each actor, intelligence analysis has been developed. This section evaluates the possible future scenarios and events occurring in the region concerning the actors involved in this work. In this section, the already mentioned ICD 203 language has been used to establish the likelihood of possible events affecting the Afghan national security and the International Security, caused by the competition between Al Qaeda and ISIS for the jihadist hegemony in Afghanistan.

Finally, thanks to the research of the resources and the intelligence analysis, the conclusions of this work will be reached. In this section, the hypothesis established in the introduction will be considered and the whole project will be summarized.

6. AL QAEDA'S RESOURCES

6.1 Al Qaeda's actual context

The counterterrorism measures coming from the US and its allies have considerably weakened Al Qaeda, above all the core of the terrorist organization. It's been nearly 11 years since the death of OBL but Al Qaeda remains active worldwide according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data

Project (ACLED). Al Qaeda is still operating as a complex network connected through different affiliated groups and direct branches. The most active Al Qaeda-affiliated groups since 2017 are the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the Group for Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM), the Al Shabaab, and Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) (ACLED, 2019). Although the Afghan Taliban agreed under the 2020 Doha peace deal with the US not to allow Al Qaeda to operate in areas under their control, they have not publicly rejected the terrorist group, which are bounded by a pledge of allegiance since the 1990s (El-Bay, 2021). Some of the Al Qaeda sympathizers are occupying positions of power in the Afghan Taliban government at the moment. The Taliban seizure of power in Afghanistan is making it easier for Mohammed Salahaddin Abd El Halim Zidane (Sayf-Al Adl) to be the next Al Qaeda leader, the successor of Al Zawahiri (UNSC, 2022, p. 6). Al Qaeda's leadership is still facing difficulties as the counterterrorist measures are not decreasing. However, Al Qaeda remains a threat according to UNSC member states, as the number of sympathizers keeps growing in Somalia or the Sahel, and the terrorist group is still controlling the Syrian Idlib area (UNSC, 2022, p. 13). In 2018, Al Qaeda affiliated groups carried out a total of 316 attacks around the world and they are still doing so nowadays, for instance, an attack on a convoy of a senior military leader in the Yemen Abyan governorate claimed by AQAP in March 2022 (ACLED, 2022a). Afghanistan, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen are the four countries with the most Al Qaeda-related activity across the Middle East (ACLED, 2019).

6.2 Tangible and intangible resources

One of Al Qaeda's main intangible resources is the number of terrorist groups that pledge allegiance to Al Qaeda and its cause. As explained earlier, Al Qaeda is a terrorist organization with a very decentralized structure made up of associated groups and franchises. Some of the most important groups supporting Al Qaeda are Al Shabaab, Al Nusra, AQAP, AQIS, JNIM, and HTS. The more groups pledge allegiance to Al Qaeda and act on behalf of it, the more power the terrorist organization will have. It is for this reason that Al Qaeda has remained active despite multiple counterterrorism operations against Al Qaeda and its leadership.

Most of these terrorist groups that pledge allegiance to Al Qaeda are active and are controlling some areas of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Thanks to their presence they can control the resources of the area, that is, they collect funds through different methods such as illicit taxes, the exploitation of hydrocarbons, minerals, and other natural resources (UNSC, 2022, p. 21). In this way, these groups obtain tangible resources for Al Qaeda by exploiting the territories they control. The Syrian area of Idlib is dominated by HTS, which has between 6000 and 15000 fighters and is dedicated to raising funds through taxes (UNSC, 2022, p. 13). As for AQAP, its objective is to control the ports of the Gulf of Aden, gas facilities, and other infrastructures, in order to obtain economic resources (UNSC, 2022, p. 43). The JNIM is still present in the Gurma region of Mali where it is trying to control the gold extraction areas. Al Shabaab continues to consolidate its position in Somalia, where it has between 7000 and 12000 fighters, and where it manages to relapse between two and 10 million USD per month through an illicit tax system on different properties and services (UNSC, 2022, p. 9). Other methods of fundraising for Al Qaeda include extortion, looting, drug, and illegal immigrant trafficking as well kidnappings (UNSC, 2022, p. 21).

Another resource currently available to Al Qaeda is the terrorist organization's relationship with the Taliban, which once again rule Afghanistan, and as it is mentioned earlier, many of them are Al Qaeda

affiliates. Thanks to the Taliban's return, Al Qaeda members now have greater freedom than at any other time in recent history. For instance, Amin Muhammad ul-Haq Saam Khan, the former OBL security coordinator, was able to return to Afghanistan at the end of August 2021. Additionally, OBL's son Abdallah also was able to visit Afghanistan in late October 2021 to meet with the Taliban (UNSC, 2022, p. 17). Al Qaeda franchises such as AQIS maintain their presence in Afghanistan, with between 200 and 400 fighters, as well as affiliated groups such as Khatiba Imam al-Bukhari (UNSC, 2022, p. 18).

6.3 Relation of Al Qaeda's resources with objectives in Afghanistan

Al Qaeda is currently at a stage in its history where it has lost relevance. Obtaining resources is currently intended to survive as a terrorist organization. Al Qaeda is currently recovering from a series of losses of leaders, and it is believed to lack the capacity to develop an attack abroad with a big repercussion such as 9/11, which remains its long-term goal (UNSC, 2022, p. 17). Until recently, Al Qaeda has been widely distributed in the MENA region without being able to establish its base in a specific location. That is why the Taliban's return to Afghanistan opens a new door for the organization. Since the Taliban's return, Al Qaeda has maintained a strategic silence, probably in order to not compromise the Taliban's efforts to gain international recognition and legitimacy (UNSC, 2022, p. 17). Thus, the goal of Al Qaeda in Afghanistan is to facilitate a Taliban government in order to be able to act with impunity in the country, organize itself, and grow as a terrorist organization capable to commit terrorist attacks abroad again. In this sense, one of Al Qaeda's resources, the relationship with the Taliban in Afghanistan, is key to pursuing its global objectives.

7. ISIS' RESOURCES

7.1 ISIS's actual context

The counterterrorism measures against ISIS and its leadership have had little effect on the activities of this terrorist organization. Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic are still the areas where ISIS is more influential in the MENA region, advancing its domains in North Africa, particularly in the Sahel. Recently ISIS has increased its attacks in Iraq and Syria during the Ramadan with attacks in Diyala and Al Anbar Iraqi provinces demonstrating that the terrorist organization is still alive (ACLED, 2022b), such as the August 2021 attack on Kabul's airport with more than 180 deaths (UNSC, 2022, p. 17). ISIS has become a mainly rural insurgency resisting the counterterrorism efforts carried out in the region. The actual ISIS leader, Amir Muhammad Sa'id Abdal-Rahman a-Salbi remains hidden as the organization is trying to recover from the death of its previous leaders, although it is believed he is hiding in Syria (UNSC, 2022, p. 5). The Islamic State in the Khorasan Province (ISKP) controls a limited territory in Afghanistan and has demonstrated the capability of organizing sophisticated attacks in the area (UNSC, 2022, p. 31). Since the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan, ISIS activity in the country has increased with violence targeting civilians in the east of the country, mainly in the cities of Kabul, Kunar, and Nangarhar (ACLED, 2022c). It is believed ISIS has between 25 and 50 million USD in Iraq. A recent arrest of the ISIS finances responsible in Iraq has raised the chances of Iraqi authorities having more information on the financial status of the terrorist organization (UNSC, 2022, p. 3).

7.2 Tangible and intangible resources

The intangible resources currently available to ISIS also have to do with groups affiliated with the terrorist organization throughout the MENA region. Some of these groups include Boko Haram, which is the ISIS branch in Nigeria, Cameroon, Mali, Chad, and Niger; ISKP, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama'a (ASWJ) (UNSC, 2022). These organizations are active in their respective regions, follow ISIS orders, and raise resources for the terrorist organization. Again, the more affiliated groups ISIS has, the more powerful the terrorist organization is.

The tangible resources have to do with the resources available to ISIS in order to carry out terrorist attacks. ISIS' reserves are between 25 and 50 million USD, though the organization is currently believed to spend more than it raises. These funds are mainly intended to pay wages for fighters and relatives of dead fighters, operational activities, and the release of arrested fighters. These resources are still obtained by extortion, looting, and kidnappings to obtain ransoms. One of the most recent kidnappings is estimated to have generated nearly one million USD. One of ISIS' main sources of income comes from the alternative remittance system or *hawala*. In general, the *hawala* is an informal anonymous channel of transfer of funds from one place to another. *Hawala* usually is intended to transport cash from abroad to the provinces where ISIS is present. Currently, transfers to these provinces can add up to a total of 40000 USD each month. This system is not only used to finance ISIS but also is used to distribute funding to branches. For instance, ISIS is believed to have recently sent about 50000 USD to ISKP through the *hawala* system (UNSC, 2022, p. 24). Other means of resource obtention continue to be the exploitation of hydrocarbons, drugs and illegal immigrant trafficking, as well as the exploitation of minerals, precious metals, and other natural resources of the territories that ISIS dominates (UNSC, 2022, p. 25). For instance, the ISGS is fighting against the JNIM in the Gunma region of Mali for the control of the areas of gold extraction (UNSC, 2022, p. 10).

7.3 Relation of resources with objectives in Afghanistan

ISIS' goal in Afghanistan is to position itself as the main opposition force in Afghanistan, obtaining a broader regional agenda that threatens neighboring countries in Central and South Asia (UNSC, 2022, p. 17). That is why ISKP needs resources in Afghanistan in order to commit attacks against the Taliban that, albeit in a dissimulated way, are linked to Al Qaeda. As mentioned above, ISIS sent about 50000 USD to ISKP since the Taliban seized power, through the *hawala* system in order to help the ISIS branch in Afghanistan to carry out attacks (UNSC, 2022, p. 24). On the other hand, it is believed that if Afghanistan becomes chaotic due to the Taliban's return and incapacity to keep the country stable, some Afghan and foreign extremists will change their allegiance to ISKP (UNSC, 2022, p. 17). That is why one of ISIS' goals is to destabilize the Taliban government in Afghanistan in order to have the ability to gain more followers and increase its power in Afghanistan. The ISIS insurgency in Afghanistan has sparked clashes with the Taliban since the fall of Kabul in 2021. ISIS terrorist activity has increased, with further attacks in the east of the country (ACLED, 2022c).

8. ANALYSIS

Al Qaeda will very likely dominate the jihadist movement in Afghanistan due to the return of the Taliban to the country. Al Qaeda will very likely use Afghanistan to regrow as a terrorist organization in the following years, almost certainly establishing its base in the country as it did at the beginning of the century. Afghanistan's fragility will very likely be beneficial for Al Qaeda in order to raise its power in the country. The relations with the Taliban will almost certainly remain secret to avoid sanctions on the Taliban movement. With the Taliban's support, Al Qaeda will likely increase the exploitation of Afghan resources, such as oil, gas, minerals, and taxes, to finance its terrorist actions. Such resources will very likely increase Al Qaeda's chances of developing terrorist attacks, almost certainly endangering Afghan citizens' security.

Terrorist groups, such as HTS, AQAP, AQIS, and JNIM will likely continue to support Al Qaeda as its regional relevance will likely increase in the following years thanks to its return to Afghanistan. HTS will very likely increase its activity in the Syrian region of Idlib, with more terrorist attacks. AQAP will very likely continue to be present in the ports of the Gulf of Aden to control resources and raise funds for Al Qaeda. Other ways of raising funds will almost certainly increase, such as extortion, kidnappings, looting, and drug trafficking. People living in Afghanistan, either nationals or foreigners, will very likely suffer the consequences of these ways of raising funds, likely being targets of kidnappings and extortions.

Al Qaeda's regional relevance will very likely increase in the following years thanks to its return to Afghanistan. Al Qaeda will unlikely dominate the jihadist movement internationally but will very likely return and increase its relevance and activity, particularly in Afghanistan and the neighboring political-fragile countries. Al Qaeda's return to Afghanistan and increased funds will very likely increase the terrorist activity in the MENA region, very likely entailing confrontations with rival groups. Regional security will almost certainly decrease as regional terrorist activity will increase.

ISIS will very likely increase its terrorist activity in Afghanistan to destabilize the Taliban rule and Al Qaeda. ISKP will almost certainly continue to target big cities such as Kabul, as the consequences of terrorist attacks in high populated areas are more severe. ISKP's chances of getting resources in Afghanistan will be unlikely due to the rise of Al Qaeda's power in the country. ISKP will almost certainly continue receiving resources from the *hawala* in order to be a strong competitor in Afghanistan against Al Qaeda. The competition for the same resources in Afghanistan will very likely increase tensions between Al Qaeda and ISIS. Increased tensions will almost certainly result in further attacks and casualties in Afghanistan, almost certainly causing injuries and deaths of Afghan citizens.

ISIS will very likely continue to be the predominant group in other MENA countries such as those in the Sahel but will almost certainly struggle to dominate the jihadist movement in Afghanistan. The competition between ISIS and Al Qaeda will very likely result in more terrorist attacks in the region, but also in foreign countries such as those in Europe. Al Qaeda and ISIS will very likely increase targeting European countries in order to show other world powers their jihadist dominance and hegemony. The competition for jihadist hegemony in Afghanistan will very likely have consequences abroad, endangering global security due to the violence of their attacks.

The counterterrorism measures will unlikely be efficient to reach a ceasefire as the structural causes of the Islamist terrorism rise will not be solved. During the past decade, the US and its allies have deployed their armies in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan in order to solve the terrorist issue by trying to dismantle the groups. However, such groups have not disappeared and will very likely continue developing terrorist attacks. This is very likely caused by the fact that the structural causes are not solved, such as the fragility of governments in the MENA region likely to be monitored by terrorist groups.

9. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this investigation, the competition between Al Qaeda and ISIS in Afghanistan has been studied, and the resources of each group are analyzed in order to establish which of the two terrorist organizations has more power in the studied country. It has been observed that the tangible resources of both groups in order to dominate Afghanistan are very similar. However, there is an intangible resource that will make one of the two groups more powerful in Afghanistan: the relationship with the current Taliban government. As mentioned above by the Sociology of Power, the competition between Al Qaeda and ISIS in Afghanistan is a struggle of elites trying to have more power than the other. Since the withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan, terrorist organizations are no longer persecuted and have a new opportunity to act with impunity and influence Afghanistan's political system for their benefit. It is in this sense that Al Qaeda and ISIS are entering a competition that has already led to deaths and injuries due to the perpetuated attacks in the country.

Once the investigation has been carried out, we can say that the hypothesis presented in the introduction is not corroborated: ISIS is not the predominant terrorist organization in Afghanistan due to the decline experienced by Al Qaeda for years. The main reason why we can confirm that this hypothesis is false and that it also allows us to establish that it is Al Qaeda that will dominate jihadism in Afghanistan is the intangible resource of the relationship between Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Although the 2020 Doha agreement between the Taliban and the United States establishes a commitment by the Taliban to prevent Al Qaeda operations under its control, Al Qaeda members have already been seen to have more freedom now than at any other time in recent history. Amin Muhammad ul-Haq Saam Khan, the former OBL security coordinator, was able to return to Afghanistan at the end of August 2021. This fact places Al Qaeda in a privileged position with respect to ISIS, which is not backed by the Taliban.

The intelligence analysis predicts that ISIS will very likely continue to be the predominant group in other MENA countries such as those in the Sahel, but will almost certainly struggle to dominate the jihadist movement in Afghanistan. The competition between ISIS and Al Qaeda will very likely result in more terrorist attacks in the region, but also foreign countries such as those in Europe. Al Qaeda and ISIS will very likely increase targeting European countries in order to show other world powers their jihadist dominance and hegemony. The competition for jihadist hegemony in Afghanistan will very likely have consequences abroad, endangering global security due to the violence of their attacks. During the past decade, the US and its allies have deployed their armies in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan in order to solve the terrorist issue by trying to dismantle the groups. However, such groups have not disappeared and will very likely continue developing terrorist attacks. This is very likely caused by the fact that the structural causes are not solved, such as the fragility of governments in the MENA region likely to be influenced by terrorist groups. The counterterrorism measures will

unlikely be efficient to reach a ceasefire as the structural causes of the Islamist terrorism rise will not be solved.

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