

**FAILED STATES: AN EXAMINATION OF THEIR EFFECTS ON  
TRANSNATIONAL TERRORIST ORGANIZATION MOVEMENTS AND  
OPERATIONAL CAPABILITIES**

by

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## **Abstract**

The overarching goal of this portfolio is to analyze poorly performing states in an effort to determine if transnational terrorist organizations gravitate towards those nations whose limitations in state capacity would facilitate their ability to operate from within them. Drawing largely from the Fund For Peace's Fragile State Index, case studies are performed to examine al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen, al-Shabaab in Somalia, and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria in the Middle East region. In addition to Fund For Peace data and analysis, this portfolio draws upon research performed by various scholars and journalists, as well as discussions held at Congressional hearings.

Research found within this work produces three main findings. First, it acknowledges that failed or failing states pose as attractive environments to transnational terrorist organizations. While poor state performance does not guarantee the presence of terrorist networks, it does enhance the probability of their existence, particularly if terrorist groups are already operating within other areas in the region. Second, research provided shows that allowing a state to completely fail is not a valid approach towards ensuring that terrorist groups are deterred from operating within a particular state. Finally, this portfolio provides the academic community a framework for the prediction of transnational terrorist movements by identifying poorly performing states and assessing their capacity to defend against a transnational terrorist group's incursion, while taking that particular terrorist group's ambitions into consideration.

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## **Thesis Introduction**

The United States has been at war with transnational terrorist organizations in the Middle East region for more than 13 years. For much of this time, the United States has been reacting to the actions and objectives of these organizations, and only after they establish themselves firmly within various nations in the region. It is my opinion that while the United States has performed superbly at finding and subsequently eliminating terrorists from their operational footholds, we fail to take a more proactive stance towards predicting where those footholds might be, and ensuring terrorist networks can't establish themselves there to begin with. In other words, I beg the question, why fight a prolonged counter-insurgency if you can prevent the insurgency from occurring in the first place?

Because the United States tends to turn a blind eye to the development of terrorist networks until they begin to affect our nation directly, we find often find ourselves providing a somewhat haphazard and militaristic response to the security challenges these organizations create after they grow into a substantial size and possess a substantial amount of power. I would argue that if the United States could closely monitor, and subsequently better predict where transnational terrorist organizations might be moving next, the U.S. could take alternative approaches to thwarting terror group objectives aside from placing American boots on the ground and performing massive amounts of costly air strikes.

The main focus of this thesis revolves around taking a hard look at how transnational terrorist organizations choose territories to operate out of. Heading into the development of this thesis, it was my observation that groups like al-Qaeda in Iraq and

the Taliban in Afghanistan were largely operating out of states that did not have the capacity to provide for their own internal stability. Furthermore, emerging organizations such as AQAP in Yemen and al-Shabaab in Somalia were gaining prominence in nations that were likewise, if not more unstable.

The overarching purpose of this thesis portfolio is to answer the question as to whether or not we can draw a nexus between transnational terrorist organization movements and poorly performing states. After answering the question of whether or not a nexus between transnational terrorist organizations and poorly performing states exists, this portfolio seeks to identify the extent to which poorly performing states affect the manner in which terrorist organizations operate from within them. Finally, this portfolio seeks to determine whether or not it is possible for the international community to monitor state performance and use downward trends in state performance to serve as an indicator to government officials (and others) that transnational terrorist organizations might be seeking to gain footholds within them.

The first chapter of this portfolio examines the rise of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) within Yemen. I examine Yemen's performance as a nation, compared to other nations in the region, and find that she performs comparatively low. I also show how her poorly performing status limits her capacity to defend against outside threats, which in turn, provides an attractive environment for the establishment of al-Qaeda cells to conduct operations out of. While analyzing the emergence of AQAP in Yemen, I note that the United States had very early indications that her security situation was deteriorating, highlighted best by the bombing of the USS Cole in October of 2000.

Despite these early indications, the United States did little other than provide financial aid that was subsequently squandered by a corrupt government until it was too late. As a result, the United States now finds itself in a long-standing air campaign against AQAP operatives within Yemen, and the situation does not look like it will be improving anytime soon.

In the second chapter of this portfolio, I explore a train of thought discovered in chapter one. While conducting research in chapter one, I came across a few scholars who felt that letting a state completely fail was a valid alternative approach to deterring terrorist organizations because terrorist organizations require certain levels of operational infrastructure in order to carry out their desired operations. For example, a terrorist organization that sought to promote their cause via social media campaigns, would not want to operate out of an environment that was so deteriorated that the internet was not available. Following this train of thought, chapter two examines al-Shabaab in Somalia in order to determine to what extent a failed state hinders or helps a terrorist organizations operational capability. Somalia was used for this study because she is by almost every measure, the most failed state in the international community. I felt the answer to this question might be particularly useful for policy makers if we were to find that truly failed states are in fact less favorable to terrorist organizations than those which are poorly performing but still functional.

The third chapter of this portfolio focuses on determining whether or not we can use the identification of states that are failing in order to predict the movements of transnational terrorist organizations. In this chapter, we analyze the Islamic State of Iraq

and Syria (ISIS), which has grown to a substantial size and taken over large swathes of territory in little over a year. My intent is to analyze nations in the middle east region that are performing particularly poorly compared to others, and from there, determine if there are indications that ISIS is targeting those territories as potential areas to operate from in the near future. This section of my thesis identifies Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen as states that are of particular risk to a future insurgency by ISIS militants.

The chapter continues further to identify potential partners in the region that the United States could utilize given their desire to possess a much lessened troop footprint within the Middle East, while still leading the charge against transnational terror organizations that pose stability threats to the region. The significance of this chapter is particularly relevant to policy makers because the ability to quickly and accurately identify nations which are at risk to a particular threat allows us to take a more proactive approach to supporting those nations as they brace for the challenges associated with deterring organizations with ill intent.

I feel that this portfolio is relevant because it allows the international community a chance to place themselves a few paces ahead of transnational terrorist organizations. If we can identify a way to predict where terrorist organizations will be moving next, we can prepare for these movements. Proper preparation for these movements could come at much lesser cost, and could also serve to save a great number of lives. Instead of reacting to insurgencies, we can work with at-risk nations to determine what levels of assistance they need in order to prepare for the defense of their territories. Assistance could come in the form of military training, financial aid, or merely assisting the nation in good

governance practices in hopes of winning over the regard of its citizens. Doing so, would assuredly incur a much lesser cost than putting troops on the ground and jets in the air in order to fight counterinsurgencies, which have proven to last decades under certain circumstances.

In summary, we must continually seek ways to gain an advantage over the terrorist networks we face. One important step in doing so is to learn how we can better predict where those organizations are heading next, and take all measures available to us to prevent those organizations from gaining a foothold from within those territories of interest. If we continue to wait for the next big terror cell to rear its ugly head before we react, we will never be able to feel that we have won the “Global War on Terror.”

## Literature Review

### **Challenges in Defining Failed States**

A long-standing struggle within the sector of the academic community which studies failed state theory is the lack of a consensus on a way to effectively define a failed state. As an example, Liana Wyler, in a 2008 CRS Report for Congress, notes that most governments “describe state weakness as the erosion of state capacity — a condition characterized by gradations of a regime’s ability to govern effectively, which, in its most extreme form, results in the complete collapse of state power and function.”<sup>1</sup>

A contrasting definition is presented by Robert Rotberg, in *Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States: Causes and Indicators*, where he seeks to identify failed states from an internal conflict perspective, defining failed states as those states which “are tense, deeply conflicted, dangerous, and contested bitterly by warring factions” in which “much of the violence is directed against the existing government or regime, and the inflamed character of the political or geographical demands for shared power or autonomy that rationalize or justify that violence in the minds of the main insurgents.”<sup>2</sup>

The struggle to define what exactly “failed states” are stems from deeper level inconsistencies in terminology associated with the topic. As one researches failed state theory, they will notice that terms such as “failed,” “failing,” “weak,” “poorly

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<sup>1</sup> Liana Wyler, CRS Report for Congress, “Weak and Failing States: Evolving Security Threats and U.S. Policy,” Congressional Research Service, updated August 28, 2008. Accessed 14 July, 2014. pp. 4. <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34253.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Robert Rotberg, “Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States: Cause and Indicators,” *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2003), pp. 5, accessed July 14, 2014. [http://www.brookings.edu/press/books/chapter\\_1/statefailureandstateweaknessinatimeofterror.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/press/books/chapter_1/statefailureandstateweaknessinatimeofterror.pdf)

performing,” “collapsed,” “underperforming,” and “fragile” are all used to generalize similar conditions of failure and are seemingly used interchangeably, with no clear delineation or understanding of what might differentiate a state from another in the context of each term. To complicate matters, scholars such as Rosa Brooks would argue that the term “failed state” is illegitimate on its own accord, as she claims that “most ‘failed’ states were never ‘successful’ states” to begin with.<sup>3</sup>

Another challenge, noted by Stewart in the study of state failure, is that there exists a “cavalier tendency to apply this single label [“failed state”] to a heterogeneous group of countries; and inattention to the specific histories, trajectories, and regimes of the countries so designated.”<sup>4</sup> Because of this tendency to generalize many different nations under the “failed state” label, we find that it becomes difficult to effectively draw lines at which a state could be more definitively characterized as “poorly performing,” “failing,” or one that has by all measures effectively “failed.”

Weinstein and Vaishnav, in *A Mismatch with Consequences: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Security - Development Nexus*, highlight how international security largely depends on a country’s ability to govern itself effectively: “They must be capable of patrolling their borders; monitoring the inflow and outflow of people, resources, and money; and preserving internal security.”<sup>5</sup> The authors present that one of the greatest

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<sup>3</sup> Rosa Brooks, “Failed States, or States as Failure?,” Vol. 72 of *The University of Chicago Law Review*, (Chicago: Chicago, 2005), pp. 1159-1196.

<http://scholarship.law.georgetown.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2117&context=facpub>

<sup>4</sup> Stewart Patrick, “‘Failed’ States and Global Security: Empirical Questions and Policy Dilemmas,” Vol. 9 of *International Studies Review*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 646.

<sup>5</sup> Jeremy M. Weinstein and Milan Vaishnav, “A Mismatch with Consequences: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Security-Development Nexus,” in *Short of the Goal: U.S. Policy and Poorly Performing States*, ed. Nancy Birdsall et al. (Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development, 2006), 2.

challenges for policymakers is identifying those states which have the potential to greatly affect the stability of a region in an adverse manner, naming such states “pivotal” states. According to Weinstein and Vaishnov, “a pivotal state is defined as a hot spot that could not only determine the fate of its region, but also affect international stability.”<sup>6</sup> By identifying pivotal states, Weinstein and Vaishnov hope that the international community may better focus attention and resources to the states that matter most.

Weinstein and Vaishnov attempt to simplify the terminology regarding failed states by grouping “weak,” “fragile,” and “failing states” into an all-encompassing term of “poorly performing states.”<sup>7</sup> They further note that “the range of terms used to describe poor performers illustrates the complexity and difficulty of precisely defining and assessing gradations of state weakness.”<sup>8</sup> According to Weinstein and Vaishnov, poorly performing states are “states that exhibit a combustible mix of poverty and deficient government institutions that appreciably raises the risk of a collapse into conflict.”<sup>9</sup>

As seen from the analysis provided above, the academic community is far from coming to a consensus on many definitional problems surrounding the identification, and subsequent labeling, of failed states. First, the academic community has yet to come to an agreement on whether or not a condition of state failure even exists in a world where a particular state’s performance is constantly evolving and is largely measured in a relative

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<sup>6</sup> Jeremy M. Weinstein and Milan Vaishnav, “A Mismatch with Consequences: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Security-Development Nexus,” in *Short of the Goal: U.S. Policy and Poorly Performing States*, ed. Nancy Birdsall et al. (Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development, 2006), 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

manner to other states around the globe. Second, there are varying viewpoints on what characteristics or conditions a state must possess or meet in order to be considered a failed or failing state. And finally, there is no consensus on the terminology associated with certain thresholds of state performance, which complicates the academic communities ability to perform analysis in a manner where results are generally accepted and understood without being muddled by somewhat irrelevant questions regarding whether or not a state should be labeled as “poorly performing,” “weak,” or “failing.”

### **Challenges in Measuring Failed States**

Before outlining various models and theories of what may or may not constitute a failed state status, it is appropriate to address the fact that there currently are no universally accepted criteria by which nations may unquestionably consider a state as having failed. Stewart Patrick, in *Weak Links: Fragile States, Global Threats, and International Security*, confirms this dilemma, stating that “there is little consensus about the number and identity of today’s weak, failing, and failed states, nor about the criteria that would warrant such designations.”<sup>10</sup> Global Policy Forum agrees, claiming, “this definitional vacuum has inevitably led to polarized interpretations of this political condition.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Stewart Patrick. *Weak Links: Fragile States, Global Threats, and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 18.

<sup>11</sup> “International Law and the Problem of Failed States,” Global Policy Forum, last modified January 27, 2012, accessed April 13, 2012, <http://www.globalpolicy.org/nations-a-states/failed-states/51213-international-law-and-the-problem-of-failed-states.html>.

A second issue which must be addressed up front is that because there is no formalized definition or criteria through which to designate failed states, the numerous theories or models pertaining to them often use different terminology, which complicates the greater understanding of the problem being addressed. While one scholar may describe a nation as “failing,” a second scholar may describe that same nation as “weak” or “fragile.” Still others, such as Jeremy Weinstein and Milan Vaishnav attempt to simplify the confusion by categorizing weak, fragile, and failing states as “poorly performing states.”<sup>12</sup>

Weinstein and Vaishnov define and measure poorly performing states in accordance with performance based criteria provided by the Millenium Challenge Account (MCA), which was proposed by President George W. Bush in March of 2002.<sup>13</sup> The MCA identifies that “Ruling Justly, Investing in People, Promoting Economic Freedom, and Controlling Corruption” are dimensions of performance by which nations can be measured. The intent of the MCA was to “deliver substantial new flows of foreign assistance to low-income countries” that were performing well in the criteria listed above with a “commitment to providing assistance only to select countries whose governments already have established the policies and institutions most conducive to development.”<sup>14</sup>

A second and more modern approach to measuring state “weakness” or “fragility” is proposed by Stewart Patrick, in what he presents as “The Index of State Weakness in

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<sup>12</sup> Jeremy M. Weinstein and Milan Vaishnav, “A Mismatch with Consequences: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Security-Development Nexus,” in *Short of the Goal: U.S. Policy and Poorly Performing States*, ed. Nancy Birdsall et al. (Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development, 2006), 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

the Developing World.”<sup>15</sup> This index measures state performance based on “four critical sets of goods: physical security, legitimate political institutions, effective economic management, and basic social welfare.”<sup>16</sup> Patrick believes that “a state is weak (or fragile) to the degree that it has deficits in one or all of these dimensions.” Patrick acknowledges limitations in his Index of State Weakness in the Developing World in that while it provides a “useful snapshot of state performance at a single moment in time,” it does not “capture critical dimensions of state fragility, including whether weakness is caused primarily by an inherent lack of capacity, or by inadequate will on the part of the ruling regime.” He continues further to note that his Index of State Weakness does not “specify the trajectory of the state.” The Index of State Weakness in the Developing World ultimately provides us with a tool in which users may place states into four main categories: “failed,” “critically weak,” “weak,” and “states to watch.”<sup>17</sup>

In addition to providing his index, Stewart Patrick proposes that a state’s will and capacity to improve its condition plays an important role in defining state fragility. By measuring a state’s “willingness to pursue constructive policies and reforms intended to provide its citizens with fundamental goods,” Patrick suggests that states can be aligned into four categories: those with the will and the way, weak but willing states, states with the means but not the commitment, and those with neither the will nor the way.<sup>18</sup> By comparing variations of will (strong / low) against variations of capacity (high / low),

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<sup>15</sup> Stewart Patrick. *Weak Links: Fragile States, Global Threats, and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 19.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

Patrick is able to conclude that well performing states will generally possess both a strong will and high capacity to implement effective policies and reforms. Conversely, those states which possess low will and low capacity to progress will generally be poor performers as developing countries.

Note that capacity and willingness are terms that can greatly change the perspective of one's view when determining whether or not a state should be labeled as failed. One could argue that certain states have a willingness to perform better among these four categories, but simply lack a capacity, and therefore should not be considered as failed. Another might argue that other states, such as those which may be governed through a dictatorship, have the capacity to uphold acceptable standards across these four criteria, but simply do not have a willingness to do so, and thus should also not be considered as failed, as the current conditions within that country are a result of that nation's cognizant choices.

Perhaps the most publicly accessible and more robust failed state index is the Failed State Index maintained by The Fund For Peace (FFP), an "independent, nonpartisan, non-profit research and educational organization that works to prevent violent conflict and promote sustainable security."<sup>19</sup> Working with over 50 nations and all sectors of industry (governments, international organizations, military, non-governmental organizations, academics, journalists, civil society networks, and the private sector) The Fund For Peace utilizes a software based data analytics application

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<sup>19</sup> "About the Fund for Peace," The Fund For Peace, accessed April 5, 2012, <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/?q=aboutus>

which measures conflict risk in 12 indicators in order to provide an annual ranking of each nation relative to the international community.

Those 12 indicators are grouped by FFP into three main categories: social, political and military, and economic. Social indicators would include mounting demographic pressures, massive movement of refugees or internally displaced persons, vengeance-seeking group grievance, and chronic / sustained human flight. Political and Military indicators would encompass the legitimacy of the state, progressive deterioration of public services, violations of human rights and rule of law, security apparatus, rise of factionalized elites, and intervention of external actors. Finally, economic indicators would include uneven economic development and poverty experienced by sharp economic decline.<sup>20</sup>

Given these three models, it becomes fairly obvious that there are a lot of variables involved in determining what may or may not constitute a failed state. However, establishing a consensus among scholars regarding the typical characteristics of a failed state is a bit easier to attain than it may initially appear.

The characteristics of failed states that are most commonly measured by scholars fall into four main categories. Those areas revolve around a nation's capacity or willingness to provide internal security for its population along with an effective form of border control, economic opportunity and prosperity, political stability found in a government free of corruption, and a system of providing for the social welfare of its

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<sup>20</sup> "Conflict Indicators," The Fund For Peace, accessed April 5, 2012, <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/?q=indicators>

people by meeting basic human needs.<sup>21</sup>

For the purposes of this thesis portfolio, we will utilize a nation's capacity to uphold acceptable standards across these four broad categories as a means of measuring the extent to which that nation has failed. Because a country's will is much more difficult to determine and quantify, we will avoid using it as a formal basis for measurement throughout this paper.

### **Do Weak States Attract Terrorist Groups?**

A final academic debate, which serves as a platform for the research performed in the following chapters, regards the question as to whether or not terrorist groups are inherently attracted to weak nation states, which would serve as ideal territories to infiltrate and operate from within. If one were to following their own logical assumptions, particularly when looking at where terrorist groups are conducting a majority of their operations today, it would be fairly easy to make the statement that weaker states are more susceptible to the incursion of a terrorist network due to numerous factors. For the sake of brevity, in this section I provide the points and counterpoints delivered by scholars James Piazza and Edward Newman, which highlight the arguments central to this debate.

James Piazza, in "Incubators of Terror: Do Failed and Failing States Promote Transnational Terrorism," states:

both failed and failing states, scholars argue, are theoretically more likely

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<sup>21</sup> Stewart Patrick, "'Failed' States and Global Security: Empirical Questions and Policy Dilemmas," Vol. 9 of *International Studies Review*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 650.

to contain terrorist groups, experience terrorist attacks, have their citizens join and perpetrate terrorist acts, and see their territory used as bases from which to launch attacks abroad.<sup>22</sup>

Piazza explains his observations of this common theoretical assumption further, stating three reasons why it is generally made. He notes first that scholars assume failed and failing states, “lack the ability to project power internally and have incompetent and corrupt law enforcement capacities.”<sup>23</sup> Because of this, it is assumed that failed states pose as attractive areas of operation because terrorist groups can infiltrate and conduct operations within them largely unchecked by the host government, and should a functioning governing body exist, its political officials would be more likely to be swayed to turn a blind eye, or in more extreme cases, provide some level of state sponsorship.

Second, Pizza notes that scholars often assume that, “failed states offer terrorist groups a larger pool of potential recruits because they contain large numbers of insecure, disaffected, alienated, and disloyal citizens for whom political violence is an accepted avenue of behavior.”<sup>24</sup> The assumption being made in this statement is that failed states create a base of unhappy citizens who would be inclined to willingly support terrorist group objectives as a means of expressing their discontent with the state of their current disposition.

While this statement may likely be true to some degree, one must be careful to

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<sup>22</sup> James Piazza, “Incubators of Terror: Do Failed and Failing States Promote Transnational Terrorism,” Vol. 52 of *International Studies Quarterly*, No. 3 (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 471.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

assume that because a citizen is unhappy, that they are likely to become disloyal to their nation. Furthermore, it is very much a stretch to assume that unhappy citizens are likely to take on acts of terrorism as an extreme means of expressing their discontent. I would argue, that citizens are just as likely to become inspired to attempt to improve the state of their living conditions through peaceful means.

Finally, Piazza observes that conventional wisdom assumes that failed states possess “outward signs of sovereignty” which “places legal limits on intervention by other states” and provides its corrupt government officials a means to provide terrorists “with access to legal documentation, such as passports, visas, and end-user certificates to import and export arms, in exchange for money, political support, and physical protection.”<sup>25</sup> The first portion of this statement is difficult to disagree with. It is unarguably harder for the international community to interrupt terrorist operations within a nation whose government has made it clear that they do not want outside intervention. However, as can be observed through cooperation efforts between the governments of the U.S. and Afghanistan, failing or failed states are not always averse to outside assistance, particularly when a failed state’s government knows this is their only true avenue towards providing stability and security to their nation.

Edward Newman, in “Weak States, State Failure, and Terrorism” notes that while the drawing a correlation between transnational terrorist group movements and failed states “seems intuitively feasible, it is difficult to analyze the subject with a rigorous

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<sup>25</sup> James Piazza, “Incubators of Terror: Do Failed and Failing States Promote Transnational Terrorism,” Vol. 52 of *International Studies Quarterly*, No. 3 (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 472.

methodology and there is significant evidence to challenge the relationship.”<sup>26</sup> He continues further to note reasons why this correlation cannot be conclusively drawn.

First, Newman notes that “terrorist groups have emerged from, and operated within, countries which have strong, stable states and a variety of systems of government.” If one were to consider the recent uptick in what many consider “lone-wolf” terror incidents within the United States alone, Newman’s statement holds true. While lone-wolfs are unarguably a far cry from being considered an organized terrorist group, it can be argued that they should be considered an extension of an organized terrorist groups global reach and influence, and that the actions of lone-wolfs can be claimed by certain terrorist networks. An example of this influence can be found in recent news regarding Major Nidal Hasan, notorious for acting alone in his 2009 mass shooting at Fort Hood, who has purportedly written a letter to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in hopes of joining their terror network.<sup>27</sup>

A second argument Newman provides is that terrorism is “largely a ‘local’ phenomenon: directed at local structures of governance or authority, by local groups.”<sup>28</sup> The underlying point behind this statement is that an absence of some sort of functioning local governance would provide a subsequent absence of a government or authority for terrorist groups to challenge. In other words, in the absence of something to challenge,

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<sup>26</sup> Edward Newman, “Weak States, State Failure, and Terrorism,” Vol. 19 of *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Issue 4 (Taylor and Francis, 2007).

<http://www.tandfonline.com.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/doi/full/10.1080/09546550701590636>

<sup>27</sup> National Post. “Fort Hood Shooter Nidal Hasan writes letter to ISIS asking to join their terror group.” National Post. August 29, 2014. Accessed December 7, 2014.

<http://news.nationalpost.com/2014/08/29/fort-hood-shooter-nidal-hasan-writes-letter-to-isis-asking-to-join-their-terror-group/>

<sup>28</sup> Edward Newman, “Weak States, State Failure, and Terrorism,” Vol. 19 of *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Issue 4 (Taylor and Francis, 2007).

terrorist groups would have no purpose. Therefore, it could be argued that functioning states which govern in a certain way, possess differing religious beliefs, or whose citizens act in a way that terrorist groups may consider an unacceptable manner, are more attractive to terrorist groups than simply states that are merely unable to provide adequate internal security.

Finally, as already highlighted in prior sections, Newman notes that the debate regarding whether or not failed states attract terrorist groups is highly fluid because “disagreements exist about the definition of weak or failed states and how to measure or compare them.”<sup>29</sup> Newman notes that because of these disagreements, it is difficult to “identify a pattern or correlation between a phenomenon which is analytically questionable (weak and failed states) and terrorism (itself a contested concept).”<sup>30</sup>

As shown by the arguments of Piazza and Newman, there are a myriad of unsettled questions regarding the nexus between transnational terrorist group movements and failed or failing states. However, what can be drawn from their observations is an acknowledged existence of an assumption within the academic community that weaker states are more susceptible to an incursion of terrorist groups than states which possess stronger governing structures. That said, one must also acknowledge that while terrorist groups tend to operate from weaker state environments, they do exist within and conduct operations out of some of the globe’s most stable nations. In other words, the relationship between acts of terrorism and failed states cannot be considered mutually inclusive.

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<sup>29</sup> Edward Newman, “Weak States, State Failure, and Terrorism,” Vol. 19 of *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Issue 4 (Taylor and Francis, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

## **Yemen: A Failing State, Transnational Terrorism, and U.S. Policy**

Tackling the ever-evolving issue of transnational terrorism has been at the forefront of U.S. foreign policy objectives since Al Qaeda conducted a series of attacks which occurred in New York City and Washington DC on the 11th of September, 2001. In a speech given by President George Bush on 6 September 2006, he describes transnational terror organizations as groups which:

represent no nation, defend no territory, and wear no uniform. They do not mass armies on borders, or flotillas of warships on the high seas. They operate in the shadows of society; they send small teams of operatives to infiltrate free nations; they live quietly among their victims; they conspire in secret, and then they strike without warning.<sup>31</sup>

Characterized as such, terrorist organizations must constantly seek out and infiltrate new regions of the world, which may provide suitable conditions for them to operate effectively within. In doing so, terrorist organizations are likely to gravitate towards failed or failing states which do not have the means of preventing their presence, or may simply tolerate their actions within their borders.

The intent of this paper is to meet the following objectives. First, to explain a growing connection between transnational terrorism and failed or failing states. Second, to highlight how Yemen can be defined as a failed or failing state within the definitional theories and measurement models provided in the first chapter of this portfolio. Third, to

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<sup>31</sup> "Remarks by the President on the Global War On Terror," America.gov, Accessed April 02, 2012, <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2006/September/20060906155503eaifas0.8319666.html>

establish how Yemen poses as an attractive nation for terrorist organizations to operate from due to its fragile status. Fourth, to provide an account of recent U.S. policy responses to a growing presence of terrorist activity within Yemen. And finally, to provide ways in which the United States may improve its response to the issue of transnational terrorism while terrorist organizations seek to expand their operating base amongst nations that have failed or may be considered failing.

### **Where does Yemen Stand?**

According to The Fund For Peace's Failed State Index for 2011, Yemen ranked as the 13th most at risk nation out of 177 nations assessed.<sup>32</sup> Of the 12 indicators measured, Yemen's worst performance scores were achieved in the political and military category, where they are highlighted by a lack of security apparatus and a rise of factionalized elites. Other questions are raised with regards to the legitimacy of the state, and a progressive deterioration of public services. This score reflects a year in which "Yemeni citizens began protesting against corruption and eventually for the ouster of President Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime."<sup>33</sup>

According to FFP's country profile of Yemen, "the situation has further deteriorated with divisions among tribal leaders" increasing in response to the political

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<sup>32</sup> "The Failed State Index 2011 Interactive Grid," The Fund For Peace, accessed April 5, 2012, <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/?q=fsi-grid2011>

<sup>33</sup> "Background Note: Yemen," U.S. Department of State, last modified March 12, 2012, accessed April 6, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35836.htm>

instability wrought throughout Yemen's government.<sup>34</sup> While an election in February 2012 has brought President Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi to power, it will be interesting to closely monitor Yemen's developments towards improving what was largely deemed by its citizens as an illegitimate or corrupt form of government.

Stewart Patrick's Index of State Weakness in the Developing World ranks Yemen as the 30th worst performing country out of a 141-country sample. Yemen's overall score of 5.18 places them two places outside of the bottom quintile with their lowest performance ratings occurring in the Political (3.64) and Social Welfare (4.85) categories. To provide some context, Somalia ranked the lowest in this index with an overall score of .52 while the Slovak Republic ranked the highest overall with a score of 9.41 out of a best possible score of 10.00.<sup>35</sup>

When Jeremy Weinstein and Milan Vaishnav measured dimensions of poor performance based off of the MCA's 2004 selection process, Yemen was measured as a "near miss" for failing to meet the performance requirement of ruling justly. A state is considered to be a "near-miss" if it fails to meet just one of the performance driven criteria within this model: ruling justly, investing in people, and promoting economic freedom.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> "Country Profiles: Yemen," The Fund For Peace, last modified November 14, 2011, accessed April 5, 2012, <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/?q=states-yemen>

<sup>35</sup> Stewart Patrick. *Weak Links: Fragile States, Global Threats, and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 52.

<sup>36</sup> Jeremy M. Weinstein and Milan Vaishnav, "A Mismatch with Consequences: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Security-Development Nexus," in *Short of the Goal: U.S. Policy and Poorly Performing States*, ed. Nancy Birdsall et al. (Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development, 2006), 13.

Perhaps the most alarming data regarding Yemen's performance as a state arises from FFP historical reports that show Yemen as having experienced a downward trend in performance for the last five years consecutively.<sup>37</sup> Yemen ranked 15th in 2010, 18th in 2009, 21st in 2008, and 24th in 2007. Yemen's lowest-ever ranking within the FFP's failed state index was scored in 2005 with a ranking of 8th, which was also the first year FFP provided an index.

While it may be difficult to officially declare Yemen a failed state, it is certainly appropriate to suggest that Yemen is a poorly performing nation that is trending negatively and, as such, may be considered a failing state.

### **Transnational Terrorism and Failing States**

There appears to be a conventional wisdom that establishes a nexus between transnational terrorism and failed or failing states. According to Michael T. Klare, author of *The Deadly Connection: Paramilitary Bands, Small Arms Diffusion, and State Failure*, "state failure usually results from the prolonged interaction of a number of powerful corrosive factors, including economic stagnation, political and ethnic factionalism, pervasive corruption, decaying national infrastructure, and environmental degradation."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> "Country Profiles: Yemen," The Fund For Peace, last modified November 14, 2011, accessed April 5, 2012, <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/?q=states-yemen>

<sup>38</sup> Michael T. Klare, "The Deadly Connection: Paramilitary Bands, Small Arms Diffusion, and State Failure," in *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, ed. Robert Rotberg. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 116.

When states experience some or all of these factors, they are likely to see a rise in “paramilitary bands” which goes hand in hand with a “decline of state authority.”<sup>39</sup>

Klare believes that “a functioning state is expected to possess many attributes, but the most significant of these is its capacity to protect the national population from external attack and internal disorder.”<sup>40</sup> Additionally, a state should be expected to be able to defend against external influences regardless of whether the threat is posed by a state or non-state actor. In respect to the factors of decay provided above, a state can experience these factors and still exercise authority over its population, however, this is only possible so long as its “legitimate use of violence goes unchallenged.”<sup>41</sup> Klare continues this point further by explaining that “once sub-state organizations of a paramilitary nature - ethnic militias, separatist forces, guerrilla groups, warlord armies, and so on - begin to form, the central government must act swiftly to disarm and dissolve these entities or its control over the nation will rapidly evaporate.”<sup>42</sup>

Because of these factors, it is attractive for terrorist organizations to attempt to gain footholds in nations that are experiencing the corrosive factors outlined by Klare. A nation that is experiencing problems across this front, may not have the capability or the willingness to address internal or external security risks presented by the emergence of terrorist organizations while, at the same time, addressing national performance issues that may be easier or more straight forward to tackle.

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<sup>39</sup> Michael T. Klare, “The Deadly Connection: Paramilitary Bands, Small Arms Diffusion, and State Failure,” in *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, ed. Robert Rotberg. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 117.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

There are numerous modern day examples of nations that are unquestionably considered failed states and provide themselves as good cases by which to establish a nexus between poor performance and terrorism. Two of the more prominent examples can be found in Afghanistan and Somalia.

Somalia is ranked number one on the FFP's failed state index with a score of 113.4 out of a possible 120 points, performing extremely poorly in each of its 12 indicators.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, Somalia ranks number one as the worst performer according to Patrick's Index of State Weakness in the Developing World, with a score of .52 out of a best possible score of 10. Of Patrick's four performance criteria, Somalia scored zero points in both the political and economic categories.<sup>44</sup>

According to Brock F Tesson, author of *A Quantitative Depiction of Somalia at the Crossroads: Assessing National Capability and Humanitarian Development*, Somalia "functions as a battlefield for rival states such as Eritrea and Ethiopia, as well as non-state organizations such as the Union of Islamic Courts and other armed groups."<sup>45</sup> He maintains because "there is no central authority that can maintain border security and internal order in Somalia,"<sup>46</sup> there exist conditions by which Somalia has been subject to mass arms trafficking and has allowed terrorist organizations such as al-Shabaab to establish ideological and training related ties with terrorist organizations, namely Al

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<sup>43</sup> The Fund For Peace. "The Failed State Index 2011 Interactive Grid." Accessed April 5, 2012. <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/?q=fsi-grid2011>

<sup>44</sup> Stewart Patrick. *Weak Links: Fragile States, Global Threats, and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 51.

<sup>45</sup> Brock F. Tesson, "A Quantitative Depiction of Somalia at the Crossroads: Assessing National Capability and Humanitarian Development," in *Somalia at the Crossroads: Challenges and Perspectives on Reconstituting a Failed State*, ed. Abdulahi A. Osman et. al. (London: Adonis & Abbey, 2007), 36.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Qaeda.<sup>47</sup> Al-Shabaab's actions in recent years have gained noteworthy praise by leading Al Qaeda officials. In a video released in February 2009, then second in command Ayman al-Zawahiri mentions al-Shabaab stating, "the group will engage in Jihad against the American-made government in the same way they engaged in Jihad against the Ethiopians and the warlords before them."<sup>48</sup>

There is debate as to whether Somalia may prove to be a safe haven for terrorists. Some scholars will argue that their lack of law and border enforcement make Somalia an attractive area to establish as a place to hide. Others argue that Somalia's clan-based nature makes it very difficult for outside organizations to establish and maintain footholds within the country. Regardless of this argument, it is safe to say that extremist groups within Somalia have at a minimum, established and maintained an ideological tie to al-Qaeda.

Organizations such as al-Shabaab pose a clear domestic threat to the United States and the rest of the world. "Somali-Americans were arrested in Minnesota in early 2009 after returning from fighting alongside al-Shabaab, and in late August 2009, several Somalis were arrested in Melbourne for planning a major suicide attack on an Australian army installation."<sup>49</sup> The fact that organizations such as al-Shabaab are able to recruit American citizens for their cause is an issue that further complicates the United

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<sup>47</sup> Stephanie Hanson, "Backgrounder: Al-Shabaab," Council on Foreign Relations, last modified August 10, 2011, last accessed April 23, 2012.

<http://www.cfr.org/somalia/al-shabaab/p18650#p4>.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Al Qaeda in Yemen and Somalia: A Ticking Time Bomb: Hearing Before the Committee On Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred Eleventh Congress, Second Session, January 21, 2010, (Washington: U.S. G.P.P., 2010), 14.

States ability to prevent their existence domestically since American citizens can travel to and from the United States with relative ease, especially if those individuals are not already on any agencies radars.

Afghanistan serves as a much more obvious example of a connection between failed states and terrorist activity. On the FFP's failed state index, Afghanistan ranks #7 with a total score of 107.5 out of a maximum 120 points, performing poorly in each of its 12 indicators.<sup>50</sup> On Patrick's index, Afghanistan ranks number two with a score of 1.65 out of a possible 10 points. Of Patrick's four criteria, Afghanistan scored a zero out of 10 points in both the security and social welfare performance categories.<sup>51</sup>

Symptoms of terrorism in Afghanistan are largely believed to have been established by the Taliban. According to a background note provided by the Department of the State, the Taliban arose to power "in the mid-1990s in reaction to the anarchy and warlordism that arose after the withdrawal of Soviet forces."<sup>52</sup> The Taliban are known for providing a sanctuary for Osama bin Ladin beginning in the mid-1990's and providing a base for Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations to establish themselves. In return, Osama bin Ladin was known to have provided financial and political support to the Taliban. Osama bin Ladin and Al Qaeda were most famously responsible for the attacks against the United States on September 11th, which sparked the United States' Global

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<sup>50</sup> The Fund For Peace. "The Failed State Index 2011 Interactive Grid." Accessed April 5, 2012.

<http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/?q=fsi-grid2011>

<sup>51</sup> Stewart Patrick. *Weak Links: Fragile States, Global Threats, and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 51.

<sup>52</sup> "Background Note: Afghanistan," U.S. Department of State, last modified November 28, 2001, last accessed April 12, 2012.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>

War on Terror, which has U.S. troops still fighting Al Qaeda operatives within Afghanistan to date.<sup>53</sup>

The National Counterterrorism Center provides a reporting tool called the Worldwide Incidents Tracking System (WITS), which generates reports on terrorist activity within a user defined range of time. According to WITS, in 2011 alone, Afghanistan experienced 2872 terrorist related attacks while Somalia experienced 614. Whether or not these attacks are related to Al Qaeda is irrelevant, as terrorist activity is occurring within each of these countries on a regular basis.<sup>54</sup>

The bottom line is that failed or failing states lack the structural and institutional infrastructure to address issues within their own borders. In addition to lacking the ability to look after the welfare of their own people, failed or failing states do not possess the capability of providing internal security, which creates an environment which is conducive to harboring terrorist organizations. Whether failed states wish to have terrorist organizations operating within their borders or not, they do not possess the means to rid of those groups if they wanted to. Afghanistan and Somalia serve as prime examples of states which are experiencing high levels of terrorist activity due to their failed status.

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<sup>53</sup> “Background Note: Afghanistan,” U.S. Department of State, last modified November 28, 2001, last accessed April 12, 2012.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>

<sup>54</sup> “Worldwide Incidents Tracking System: Reports,” National Counterterrorism Center. Accessed April 10, 2012.

[https://wits.nctc.gov/FederalDiscoverWITS/index.do?t=Reports&Rcv=Incident&Nf=p\\_IncidentDate%7CGTEQ+20110101%7C%7Cp\\_IncidentDate%7CLTEQ+20111231&N=0](https://wits.nctc.gov/FederalDiscoverWITS/index.do?t=Reports&Rcv=Incident&Nf=p_IncidentDate%7CGTEQ+20110101%7C%7Cp_IncidentDate%7CLTEQ+20111231&N=0)

## Al Qaeda and Yemen

Jeremy M. Sharp, author of *Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations*, suggests that Al Qaeda's earliest roots in Yemen are found in a group called the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army, which was founded by an associate of Osama Bin Ladin and was directly supported by the Yemeni government in the 1990s.<sup>55</sup> According to Sharp, "this group, according to the 9/11 Commission Report, may also have been involved in a plot to kill U.S. marines temporarily transiting through Aden on their way to Somalia" which is considered to be "one of Al Qaeda's earliest known endorsed attacks against U.S. personnel."<sup>56</sup>

It wouldn't be until Al Qaeda launched an attack against the USS Cole in 2000 in the port of Aden, killing 17 U.S. service members, that Al Qaeda's presence in Yemen would again be at the forefront of U.S. interests. It is highlighted by Sharp that "in the immediate aftermath of the Cole bombing, U.S. officials complained that Yemeni authorities were not cooperating in the investigation" that followed.<sup>57</sup> However, it is believed that after the 9/11 attacks, Yemeni officials were much more willing to cooperate with the U.S. and their intent to suppress Al Qaeda in fear that the U.S. would be inclined to target Yemen in addition to Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>58</sup>

Unfortunately, it is believed that President Saleh lessened pressure on Al Qaeda and its affiliates due to a constant juggling act with competing domestic and international

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<sup>55</sup> Jeremy Sharp, "Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations," in *Yemen: Background, Issues and Al Qaeda Role*, ed. Gabriel A. Dumont. (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2010), 9.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

interests over time.<sup>59</sup> At the same time, the war in Iraq is believed to have radicalized many Jihadists, of which some have relocated to Yemen in order to support Al Qaeda's efforts there. Those militants are known to have created "an affiliate of Al Qaeda called, 'The Al Qaeda Organization in the Southern Arabian Peninsula,' though most observers simply referred to it as Al Qaeda in Yemen."<sup>60</sup> In early 2009, Al Qaeda's militants announced a merge between Saudi and Yemeni based groups, under the name of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which remains the name under which those terrorists are operating today. Al Qaeda's efforts in Yemen are now aimed at disrupting the government of Yemen, due to its gradually increasing ties and cooperation with the United States government.

Other high profile terrorist incidents have been linked to Al Qaeda's presence in Yemen. On Christmas day of 2009, the United States was reminded again of Yemen's ties to Al Qaeda when a Nigerian man named Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab attempted to detonate an explosive device on Northwest Airlines flight 253 over Detroit, Michigan. During his interrogation, Umar Abdulmutallab stated that he received training from Al Qaeda operatives in Yemen, as well as the device he intended to use in blowing up the aircraft.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan, who was responsible for a shooting rampage at Ft. Hood which left 13 persons dead, was believed to have been in communication with Anwar al-Awlaki, a now deceased Al Qaeda operative out of

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<sup>59</sup> Jeremy Sharp, "Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations," in *Yemen: Background, Issues and Al Qaeda Role*, ed. Gabriel A. Dumont. (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2010), 9.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Walker and Chris McGreal, "Al-Qaida links to Christmas Day plan bomb plot investigated," *The Guardian*, December 27, 2009, accessed April 8, 2012.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/dec/27/christmas-plane-bomber-al-qaida>

Yemen.<sup>62</sup> Awlaki is also believed to have direct ties to Abdulmutallab's failed Christmas Day operation.

The AQAP is what Patrick considers to be a "top tier" Al Qaeda linked terrorist group, which means the AQAP "may receive financial support and training from Al Qaeda, conduct joint operations and planning sessions, and have extensive leadership ties."<sup>63</sup> This ties into a greater concern the United States has regarding Al Qaeda's growing capabilities in recruiting and radicalizing American citizens, who are traveling to Yemen in hopes of establishing a more substantial affiliation with the organization while maintaining a U.S. citizenship that may be leveraged in Al Qaeda's favor down the road.

What differentiates Yemen from Afghanistan and Somalia is that Yemen is a state that can still be considered failing and has not totally failed. With this in mind, Stewart Patrick suggests a unique idea in that "truly failed states are less attractive to terrorists than merely weak ones."<sup>64</sup> He continues this point further by explaining that:

while anarchical zones can provide certain niche benefits, they do not offer the full spectrum of services available in weak states. Instead, failed states tend to suffer from a number of security, logistical, geographic, and

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<sup>62</sup> Mark Mazzetti, Eric Schmitt, and Robert F. Worth, "Two-Year Manhunt Led to Killing of Awlaki in Yemen," *The New York Times*, September 30, 2011, accessed April 8, 2012. [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/01/world/middleeast/anwar-al-awlaki-is-killed-in-yemen.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/01/world/middleeast/anwar-al-awlaki-is-killed-in-yemen.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all)

<sup>63</sup> Stewart Patrick. *Weak Links: Fragile States, Global Threats, and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 65.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

political drawbacks that make them inhospitable to transnational terrorists.<sup>65</sup>

From a security standpoint, states that have totally failed do not provide terrorists the same security options available to terrorist organizations based in failing states. A terrorist group in a failed state may find that they are required to ensure their own security, while that same group in a failing state may be able to bribe or hire local forces to provide protection. Failing states are more likely to still have a functional logistical infrastructure, facilitating an ease in transportation, transfer of goods, etc. From a political standpoint, terrorist organizations may find that a state which possesses a government with some legitimate governing authority possesses an opportunity to be leveraged in the terrorist organizations favor. In an age where means of quick and effective communication are necessary for terrorist recruitment and operations, organizations such as Al Qaeda can not afford to operate in locations that do not provide the basics, such as the internet or a wireless telecommunication infrastructure.

In this regard, Yemen poses as an even more attractive base of operations for organizations such as Al Qaeda. Patrick's conclusion is that "rather than truly failed states, what terrorists and other illicit transnational groups find most conducive are weak but functioning states, where formal state structures and trappings of sovereignty exist in a rudimentary form but are fragile and susceptible to corruption."<sup>66</sup> Under this pretext, it is safe to assume that a state such as Yemen is more likely to facilitate growth of a

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<sup>65</sup> Stewart Patrick. *Weak Links: Fragile States, Global Threats, and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 93.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

terrorist organization, providing yet another reason as to why they should be given appropriate attention with regards to future terrorist movements.

On a different note, and perhaps a bit more counterintuitive, if Patrick's theory holds true and failing states are in fact more beneficial to terrorist organizations than states that have totally failed, would it not be more beneficial to accept or perhaps even facilitate state failure to the point that Yemen is no longer beneficial to terrorist organizations? While this notion resonates with individuals who prefer a more isolationist approach to international relations and may lend itself effective in making a nation more difficult to conduct terrorist operations out of, it does not account for the fact that in addition to areas that terrorist organizations need to operate out of, terrorist organizations seek lawless areas to simply lay low in. Failed states provide just that.

It would be worth dedicating future research into testing this theory with a focus on determining if terrorist organizations are found in failed states as a result of a presence that was established when a state was failing, or if failed states alone pose an attractive enough environment for terrorist organizations to migrate to, despite more austere operating conditions.

### **Yemen and U.S. Policy**

David Carment, in Preventing State Failure, states that:

policy makers, and the research community charged with keeping them abreast of current events, too often fail to recognize the preconditions and

preliminary events that culminate in situations of ethnic catastrophe and state failure.<sup>67</sup>

The United States may have very well fallen victim to this problem with regards to their foreign policy endeavors with Yemen, in light of a continued downward trend in state performance, coupled with a growing presence of terrorist organizations and activity within its borders.

Historically, the United States has recognized Yemen's weak status and a willingness to better themselves, and has generally geared towards a foreign policy that relies heavily on foreign aid to assist Yemen with a goal of providing better living conditions for its citizens. FY2011 USAID assistance to Yemen is estimated at \$40 million dollars with a majority of that aid focused on livelihoods and governance for vulnerable populations.<sup>68</sup> Military support in the form of funding and direct security related measures has increased significantly in recent years, however, this is largely due to the Christmas Day bombing attempt that refocused American eyes on Yemen and its vulnerability to Al Qaeda's expanding reach and how that reach is still developing new ways to pose security threats to the United States.

In February of 2010, in response to Abdulmutallab's failed attempt to detonate an explosive device on an airliner over U.S. soil, the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs met to discuss Yemen and its implications for U.S. Policy. In his

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<sup>67</sup> David Carment, "Preventing State Failure," in *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, ed. Robert Rotberg. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 135.

<sup>68</sup> U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Yemen." Last modified March 12, 2012. Accessed April 6, 2012.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35836.htm>

opening statement, Chairman Berman acknowledged the United States lack of being proactive towards addressing Yemen's growing issues. "With so many pressing issues in the Middle East, the country of Yemen has received relatively little public attention since the October 2000 bombing of the USS Cole, but all that has changed in the last 3 months."<sup>69</sup> The focus of that particular hearing was to discuss challenges Yemen faced as determined by congress: the presence of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, religious and tribal conflict, separatist movements, dwindling natural resources and a failing economy. Outlined within the discussion was the Obama administration's two pronged strategy, which was geared towards "bolstering and supporting Yemen on the security side, and promoting good governance and development on the socio-economic and governance side."<sup>70</sup>

In January of 2010, the U.S. Senate's Committee on Foreign Relations met to discuss ways in which the United States could confront Al Qaeda and State Failure in Yemen. In his opening remarks, presiding chairman John Kerry acknowledges that Al Qaeda is "deeply woven into Yemeni tribal society, having married into tribes and set up a network of schools and humanitarian aid in places forgotten by the central government,"<sup>71</sup> suggesting ways in which Al Qaeda is seeking to win the hearts and minds of the Yemeni people in order to obtain more support for their cause. He continues

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<sup>69</sup> Yemen on the Brink : Implications for U.S. Policy : Hearing Before the Committee On Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, One Hundred Eleventh Congress, Second Session, February 3, 2010, (Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 2010), 1.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>71</sup> Yemen: Confronting Al Qaeda, Preventing State Failure: Hearing Before the Committee On Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred Eleventh Congress, Second Session, January 20, 2010, (Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 2010), 2.

further in detailing his concern for prior U.S. policy efforts towards Yemen in stating, “I must say, the more I examine the issues of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and now Yemen and other places, the more I have to question whether or not America, and Americans, have made the judgments necessary, to make the commitments necessary in resources and effort and patience, in order to address these kinds of challenges.”<sup>72</sup>

John Kerry’s opening speech then provided insight into the committees proposed methods of tackling the challenges Yemen presents. The first was to increase development and military aid in return for greater cooperation from then President Saleh. The second was to be wary of Anti-Americanism with careful attention being paid to the fact that narrowing a focus on Al Qaeda could limit the government of Yemen’s ability to partner with the United States. Third, he recommends that the U.S. become more realistic about Yemen’s current capacity to fight Al Qaeda, and commit to improve that capacity. Fourth, find ways for then President Saleh to address longstanding grievances in southern Yemen before unrest becomes an insurgency. His final suggestion is to view the threat posed by AQAP in the context of a global challenge.<sup>73</sup>

As evidenced by the discussions that were taking place in the U.S. legislative branch provided above, it is clear the Yemen is now again a focus of U.S. policy efforts. The question must be asked, though; Why has it taken so long for the U.S. to respond to Yemen’s poor performance and the implications it has on our domestic security? It wasn’t until late February of 2012, that the Obama administration announced its

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<sup>72</sup> Yemen: Confronting Al Qaeda, Preventing State Failure: Hearing Before the Committee On Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred Eleventh Congress, Second Session, January 20, 2010, (Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 2010), 2.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 3.

partnership with the Yemeni government to in order to “combat the Qaeda franchise that has exploited the political turmoil there to seize control of large swaths of the country’s south.”<sup>74</sup> While the Obama administration’s movement towards gaining ground on this issue is a step in the right direction, the United States’ delay in responding to Yemen’s woes is arguably a result of prior administrations making no real effort to engage this problem directly.

### **Conclusions**

Defining what constitutes a failed or failing state and the criteria for which those definitions can be based upon is a very complex task that has yet to be solved by the international community. With each new model or theory that is presented, variations in terms and metrics are generated, which seems to further complicate the general understanding of what may previously be considered common knowledge. However, all models agree that the three most important facets to be measured are the legitimacy of a state’s government, the state’s economic progress, and the state’s success in promoting the welfare of its citizens.

However unlikely it may be to occur, it would be beneficial to the international community if an overarching organization such as the United Nations would take the lead on establishing universally accepted criteria and definitions associated with measuring a state’s performance in order to allow all nations to assess internal performance and the

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<sup>74</sup> Eric Schmitt, “U.S. Teaming With New Yemen Government on Strategy to Combat Al Qaeda,” *The New York Times*, February 26, 2012, accessed April 27, 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/27/world/middleeast/us-teaming-with-yemens-new-government-to-combat-al-qaeda.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/27/world/middleeast/us-teaming-with-yemens-new-government-to-combat-al-qaeda.html?_r=1)

performance of other nations on an unbiased common ground. In doing so, intervention measures and associated performance thresholds may be defined, empowering the international community to collectively understand how it should respond to states that have failed or are trending in that direction.

Given Yemen's performance within the models provided earlier in this study, it can be concluded that Yemen has not reached failed state status, but is definitely trending in that direction as a failing state. This negative trending has been acknowledged as a major concern to the FFP, and should be regarded with the same level of concern from the rest of the international community. It would be interesting to uncover the amount of support Yemen has received from stronger nations in the Middle East region, as their fragile situation is undoubtedly affecting the regional security in a negative manner.

Future research could be focused on what support measures have been implemented, along with the observed correlating impacts on Yemen's performance. Diplomatic efforts geared towards encouraging Yemen's neighbors to assist in strengthening their ability to resist terrorist infestation will not only benefit Yemen, but it will provide positive direction for the region as a whole, and ultimately the rest of the globe. Unfortunately, the Middle East region as a whole is performing poorly relative to much of the rest of the world, with many nations currently experiencing their own set of internal unrest and security dilemmas. Their ability to focus on and dedicate resources to other nations in the region is rather limited.

There is certainly a nexus between transnational terrorism and failed or failing states. As provided through the performance data and terrorist histories of Afghanistan

and Somalia, one can conclude that poorly performing states will enhance a terrorist organization's ability to thrive. Further attention should be paid to Stewart Patrick's argument that failing states are actually more advantageous for terrorist organizations to operate in, vice states that have totally failed, because government and logistical infrastructure facilitates an environment which is more conducive to planning and conducting terrorist activities.

In light of Patrick's argument, it would be beneficial to conduct research that is focused on determining if allowing states to fail actually prevents terrorist organizations from operating effectively out of them. Research could be focused on determining whether or not states that have failed, with very minimal or no prior terrorist activity within their borders, are currently experiencing a rise in terrorist related activity despite their failed status. In doing so, one may be able to provide an alternate method of discouraging terrorist organizations from gaining footholds in certain areas. Of course, should this theory gain traction, the world would be forced to address many other issues that come hand in hand with failed states which may or may not be worth the price one would willingly accept to prevent a state from harboring terrorist organizations.

Yemen has been steadily developing a growing population of radical islamists within its borders since the early 1990's. Instability provided within Yemen's government will only prove to exacerbate that growth due to a growing dissatisfaction with living conditions amongst its citizens, and a history of corruption amongst high level officials, who may turn a blind eye to Al Qaeda activities within their borders, while at the same time appearing to be aligning with U.S. interests in the region.

Financial aid helps, but only if the monetary resources which are given are managed with great oversight by the providing nation. Seeing as all three models provided have shown Yemen to possess a somewhat corrupt government which is incapable of adequately providing for its citizens, financial aid could be injected directly to the citizens by the providing nation, but with a focus or goal of attributing the credit to Yemen's government. In doing so, supporting nations would be enabling the government to win the hearts and minds of its people, ultimately winning favor over terrorist organizations in the area that are attempting to accomplish the same feat. As a result, the government's attempts to rid terrorist organizations from within its borders would garner much more favorable support from Yemen's general population.

While the U.S. seems to be focused on dedicating financial and military efforts to aid in Yemen's challenges, policy efforts at this point may be considered to be too little too late. The U.S. has historically thrown money at Yemen's woes and has not taken their issues seriously until recent years, where a series of eye-opening terrorist related incidents on U.S. soil with direct ties to Yemen were required in order to gain the full attention of our highest government officials.

It looks as though the United States may be caught between a rock and a hard place. More involvement in the Middle East at this point is unlikely to gain much support from United States citizens, who are already exhausted with the extended status of military operations currently being conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan, with no clear picture of how the United States will eventually permanently withdraw from those countries while leaving behind a resoundingly successful legacy. Additionally, more

involvement in the Middle East could further polarize radical organizations in Yemen to take an even more hostile stance against the United States, further increasing instability in Yemen, and at the same time, increasing the terrorist threat to the United States domestically. Finally, an increase in cooperation with the United States may prove to be less beneficial for Yemen, as they would be seen as internalizing Western ideals, yet again further polarizing much of the Middle East region against their efforts.

On the other hand, simply ignoring Yemen's troubles and watching the nation slowly but surely fail could potentially be even more costly to the United States. Seeing as the United States has been drawn into a war that will likely span at least two decades due to a terrorist organization's insurgency in a failed Afghanistan, allowing Al Qaeda to continue increasing its presence could very well lead to a similar response in Yemen if left unattended. Allowing Yemen to fail could also exacerbate a myriad of already substantial humanitarian issues that the nation is currently facing such as poverty, human and drug trafficking, and governmental corruption.

In a time of fiscal restraint, it would be interesting to see studies that are focused upon determining which option is more cost effective to the United States in the far term; supporting a failing state now, or a failed state later?

The United States is preconditioned against the acceptance of failure, and given that Yemen is experiencing an increase in terrorist activity, it is highly unlikely that the United States will not become increasingly involved in assisting Yemen through financial and military means. The United States' recent efforts to partner with the government of Yemen against al-Qaeda is a testament to this reality. Unfortunately, this effort has

materialized long after Yemen began showing symptoms of state weakness and a terrorist insurgency, and is largely in response to recent domestic terrorist activity that is directly linked to Yemen.

If the United States strives to enhance its policy of preemptively engaging terrorist organizations before they can become truly effective, it would be beneficial to place a more concerted effort on identifying failing states and scrutinizing symptoms of terrorism within their borders. Doing so will afford the United States an opportunity to take a more proactive approach to fighting the spread of terrorist influence, as opposed to reacting to the threat after it has allowed itself plenty of time to organize and gain an effective foothold within a failing state.

## **Operational Capabilities of Terrorist Organizations Within Failed States**

The focus of this thesis chapter will revolve around failed state theory and the degree to which “failed” or “failing” states are perceived as attractive areas of operation for transnational terror groups. Conventional wisdom suggests that poorly performing nations provide themselves as attractive areas of operation for terrorist groups because they have limited ability to effectively monitor their borders, monitor the inflow or outflows of persons, money or resources, and possess very little ability to quell internal conflict.<sup>75</sup> Following this train of thought, one might think that the more poorly a country is performing, the more attractive the state becomes as a terrorist foothold.

However, some theorists, such as Stewart Patrick, would argue that “failing” states are actually more attractive to transnational terrorist groups than states that have totally “failed.” His argument is that terrorist organizations seek out “weak but functioning states, where formal state structures and trappings of sovereignty exist in a rudimentary form but are fragile and susceptible to corruption.”<sup>76</sup> The idea here is that terrorist organizations need a basic and somewhat functioning societal infrastructure in order to be able to conduct operations effectively.

An example of this basic infrastructure would be Al Qaeda’s online influence. In order to maintain this operational capability, Al Qaeda must operate in environments that possess electricity, computers, internet, etc. In other words, Al Qaeda would have a

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<sup>75</sup> Stewart Patrick, “Weak Links: Fragile States, Global Threats, and International Security,” (New York: Oxford University, 2011), pp. 93.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

harder time extending global influence if they decided to run operations out of the world's most austere areas.

If Stewart Patrick's theory holds true and failing states are in fact more beneficial to terrorist organizations than states that have totally failed, would it not be more beneficial to accept or perhaps even facilitate state failure to the point where it no longer becomes beneficial to terrorist organizations?

While this notion resonates with individuals who prefer a more isolationist approach to international relations and may lend itself effective in making a nation more difficult to conduct terrorist operations out of, it does not account for the fact that in addition to areas that terrorist organizations need to operate out of, terrorist organizations seek lawless areas to simply lay low in. Failed states are poised to provide just that.

This paper will focus on Somalia as an unquestionably failed state (the most failed state according to many studies and indexes) in hopes of discovering if this status has hindered or helped the expansion of terrorist objectives within its borders. We will be analyzing the operational capabilities of al-Shabaab within Somalia, with an aim of correlating al-Shabaab's organizational capabilities to the territory it operates out of, in order to answer the question as to whether or not extremely "failed" states strengthen or weaken the operational capabilities of terrorist organizations that choose to operate within them.

My hypothesis heading into this paper is that extremely "failed" states weaken the operational capabilities of terrorist organizations that operate from within them due to the chaotic nature of their operational environment. This hypothesis assumes that an

extremely failed state would impose limitations on a terrorist group's organizational construct and thus limit that group's ability to plan and carry out terrorist operations effectively.

### **Research Methodology**

As stated in the introduction, the aim of this paper is to determine whether or not Somalia's status as an extremely failed state has imposed restrictions or limitations on al-Shabaab's ability to effectively operate as a terrorist organization. In order to succeed in doing this, there are many aspects of this discussion that must be addressed.

Because there is a lack of a formally agreed upon definition for what should or should not be considered a failed state, this paper will first focus on research performed by various scholars in an attempt to define the characteristics of a failed state for the purposes of this paper. A second question within the academic community that this paper seeks to address is how the international community should properly respond to failed states that harbor terrorist organizations. This paper will analyze differing viewpoints in an attempt to determine whether or not simply letting a nation completely fail is a valid alternative to nation building.

We will then analyze Somalia through the Fund For Peace's Failed State Index, which provides data that will clearly outline how Somalia performs as a nation-state relative to the rest of the world. As this paper will eventually demonstrate, Somalia is one of the worst performing countries in the world today, by almost every measurable account.

After establishing Somalia as an unquestionably failed state through both literature reviews and quantitative data sets, we will analyze al-Shabaab's operational capabilities as they are known to exist today. Where applicable, this paper will draw on comparisons to al-Qaeda, which is considered the world's most prominent terrorist organization by many scholars, in order to draw conclusions as to whether or not al-Shabaab demonstrates any lack of operational capability due to its decision to largely operate from within Somalia.

This paper will conclude with an ultimate determination as to whether or not it is valid to assume that extremely failed states will hinder a terrorist organization's operational capabilities. As a result of that determination, this paper will also seek to answer the secondary question of whether or not letting a state fail completely is a viable policy option when attempting to lessen a terrorist organization's operational capability within that country.

### **An International Focus on Failed States**

The international focus on failed states as a security concern is relatively new, and was largely due to the attacks which occurred on September 11, 2001. Stewart Patrick, in *"Failed" States and Global Security: Empirical Questions and Policy Dilemmas*, recalls how officials in Washington and other capitals tended to regard peripheral states with sovereignty deficits primarily as a humanitarian matter" and that "this strategic calculus

changed dramatically after al-Qaeda's attacks on the United States from Afghanistan, one of the poorest and most wretched countries in the world."<sup>77</sup>

In the United States' National Security Strategy of 2006, we find additional language that speaks clearly to the concern of failing states, as it reads:

“Weak and impoverished states and ungoverned areas are not only a threat to their people and a burden on regional economies, but are also susceptible to exploitation by terrorists, tyrants, and international criminals” and that the United States “will work to bolster threatened states, provide relief in times of crisis, and build capacity in developing states to increase their progress.”<sup>78</sup>

This concern over failed states is restated as one of the United States' current priorities in the National Security Strategy of 2010, albeit in a less forceful manner, as it proclaims:

“Failing states breed conflict and endanger regional and global security” and in response, “our diplomacy and development capabilities must help prevent conflict, spur economic growth, strengthen weak and failing

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<sup>77</sup> Stewart Patrick, “Failed’ States and Global Security: Empirical Questions and Policy Dilemmas,” Vol. 9 of *International Studies Review*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 644-662.  
[http://graduateinstitute.ch/files/live/sites/iheid/files/sites/developpement/shared/developpement/343/Stewart 2007ISR%20FragileStatesGlobalSec.pdf](http://graduateinstitute.ch/files/live/sites/iheid/files/sites/developpement/shared/developpement/343/Stewart%2007ISR%20FragileStatesGlobalSec.pdf)

<sup>78</sup> White House, “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” (Washington, DC: White House, 2006), accessed July 15, 2014.  
<http://www.comw.org/qdr/fulltext/nss2006.pdf>

states, lift people out of poverty, combat climate change and epidemic disease, and strengthen institutions of democratic governance.”<sup>79</sup>

Language found in the National Security Strategies of 2006 and 2010 highlight the prominence of failed state discussions as they relate to American national security interests today. Because scholars present varying views on how we should approach failed or failing states in a globalizing world, we must provide careful attention to all available options in order to ensure American security objectives are met while being careful not to unintentionally strengthen a terrorist organization’s operational capability due to uninformed policy decisions.

### **Is Failing an Option?**

According to Robert Rotberg, in *Failed States in a World of Terror*:

failed states have come to be feared as ‘breeding grounds of instability, mass migration, and murder,’ as well as reservoirs and exporters of terror. The existence of these kinds of countries, and the instability that they harbor, not only threatens the lives and livelihoods of their own peoples but endangers world peace.<sup>80</sup>

Furthermore, Rotberg highlights that Somalia and Afghanistan specifically:

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<sup>79</sup> White House, “National Security Strategy,” (Washington, DC: White House, 2010), accessed July 15, 2014.

[http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf)

<sup>80</sup> Robert Rotberg, “Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States: Cause and Indicators,” *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2003), pp. 5, accessed July 14, 2014. [http://www.brookings.edu/press/books/chapter\\_1/statefailureandstateweaknessinatimeofterror.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/press/books/chapter_1/statefailureandstateweaknessinatimeofterror.pdf)

are incapable of projecting power and asserting authority within their own borders, leaving their territories governmentally empty. This outcome is troubling to world order, especially to an international system that demands -- indeed, counts on -- a state's capacity to govern its space.<sup>81</sup>

As a result, it is a common belief within the international community that such countries require international intervention in order to help rebuild their capacity to govern effectively and legitimately, provide for economic reforms, and enable those countries to provide for their own internal security in order to ensure terrorist groups cannot establish footholds and operate from within them. Such intervention is commonly referred to as “state building” or “nation building.”

Current United States National Security Advisor to the President, Susan Rice, in a policy brief written for Brookings Institute, points out that “such [failed or failing] states can and often do serve as safe havens and staging grounds for terrorist organizations. Failed states create environments that spur wider regional conflicts with significant economic and security costs to neighboring states.”<sup>82</sup>

The spillover effects that failed states potentially play on a regional level is particularly relevant to security issues today, as we have recently observed a strengthening presence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a Syrian based

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<sup>81</sup> Robert Rotberg, “Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States: Cause and Indicators,” *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2003), pp. 5, accessed July 14, 2014. [http://www.brookings.edu/press/books/chapter\\_1/statefailureandstateweaknessinatimeofterror.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/press/books/chapter_1/statefailureandstateweaknessinatimeofterror.pdf)

<sup>82</sup> Susan Rice, “The New National Security Strategy: Focus on Failed States,” Brookings Institute, February 2013, accessed June 15, 2014. <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2003/02/terrorism-rice>

extremist group which gained control of Mosul, Iraq in June of 2014.<sup>83</sup> It might be of interest to note that Syria and Iraq were ranked the 15<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> most unstable nations in this year's Fragile State Index.<sup>84</sup> The growing influence of ISIS in Iraq is of great concern to other nations in the Middle East region, particularly Afghanistan and Yemen, as both of those nations are within relatively close proximity and possess very unstable environments.

In response to the threat of terrorist networks finding footholds within failed nations, Susan Rice believes that an effective response is to “combine improved intelligence collection with more aggressive efforts at conflict resolution and post-conflict ‘nation-building’ in global crisis zones, [which would] create pockets of improved development and security [which] would help limit the operating space of international outlaws.”<sup>85</sup> Rice continues by arguing that this can be accomplished by finding “innovative ways to assist failed and failing states through targeted development and counterterrorism assistance as well as improved trade access to the U.S. market.”<sup>86</sup>

Robert Rotberg would agree with Rice's sentiment, stating:

the new imperative of state building should supersede any lingering unilateralism. State building trumps terror. If state building is done on the cheap, or if the big powers walk away from the failed states too soon and

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<sup>83</sup> “Syria Iraq: The Islamic State Militant Group,” BBC News Middle East, August 2, 2014, accessed July, 15, 2014.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24179084>

<sup>84</sup> “The Fragile States Index,” The Fund for Peace, accessed June 15, 2014.  
<http://ffp.statesindex.org/>

<sup>85</sup> Susan Rice, “The New National Security Strategy: Focus on Failed States,” Brookings Institute, February 2013, Accessed June 15, 2014.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

decide that the long slog of reconstruction is for others, then the real war against terror will not have been won.<sup>87</sup>

In sharp contrast to the nation building policies of Rotberg and Rice, some scholars believe that it would be better to simply let failing states fail. Jeffrey Herbst, in *Let Them Fail: State Failure in Theory and Practice*, points out that state failure is merely a normal part of a historical cycle of state creation and destruction. His arguments center around frustrations with the international community, which according to his viewpoint has “in the face of clear evidence of resumption of the cycle of state creation and destruction, seem[ed] determined to do no more than resurrect what has not worked, although the lesson of history is that political orders evolve by changing form and scale.”<sup>88</sup> In other words, why continue to attempt to fix a system that has proven itself to be broken to begin with, rather than let a nation completely collapse and reform itself into one that will work?

Herbst believes that the international community can facilitate a smooth cycle of state destruction and recreation by adhering to three simple principles. First, to accept that there are alternative forms of state structure that might work better for a nation at play in order to encourage the development of “alternatives, be they ideas for new states, formulations for new divisions within states, or innovative ideas on how subnational units

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<sup>87</sup> Robert I. Rotberg, “Failed States in a World of Terror,” Council on Foreign Relations: Foreign Affairs, August 2002, Accessed June 15, 2014.

<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/58046/robert-i-rotberg/failed-states-in-a-world-of-terror>

<sup>88</sup> Jeffrey Herbst, “Let Them Fail: State Failure in Theory and Practice: Implications for Policy,” in *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg, (Princeton: Princeton, 2003), pp. 303-316. <http://glennschool.osu.edu/faculty/brown/Failed%20States%20Readings/Herbst.pdf>

can relate to the capital.”<sup>89</sup> Second, Herbst suggests that the international community begin practicing the decertification of old states which “are simply not exercising formal control over parts of their country and should no longer be considered sovereign” in order to provide “an avenue out of the current impasse, where there is no status to accord a country other than sovereignty, irrespective of domestic realities.”<sup>90</sup> Finally, Herbst suggests that the international community learn to become more supportive towards the creation and recognition of new nation-states. He claims that “by recognizing and legitimating new groups, the international community has the opportunity to ask that they respect international norms regarding human rights and has a chance to bring them into the international community.”<sup>91</sup>

Stewart Patrick is another scholar who feels that failed states should be less of a security concern to the international community than they are currently portrayed today. His basis for argument is that the threats failed states “pose are mainly to their own inhabitants. Sweeping claims to the contrary are not only inaccurate but distracting and unhelpful, providing little guidance to policymakers seeking to prioritize scarce attention and resources.”<sup>92</sup> The crux of Patrick’s argument is that failed states are not conducive to providing safety and security for terrorist organizations. Ironically, Patrick provides us with an account of how al-Qaeda discovered that Somalia was a less than favorable

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<sup>89</sup> Jeffrey Herbst, “Let Them Fail: State Failure in Theory and Practice: Implications for Policy,” in *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg, (Princeton: Princeton, 2003), pp. 303-316. <http://glennschool.osu.edu/faculty/brown/Failed%20States%20Readings/Herbst.pdf>

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Stewart Patrick, “Why Failed States shouldn’t be our Biggest National Security Fear,” *The Washington Post*, April 15, 2011, accessed June 15, 2014. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-failed-states-shouldnt-be-our-biggest-national-security-fear/2011/04/11/AFqWmjkD\\_story.html#](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-failed-states-shouldnt-be-our-biggest-national-security-fear/2011/04/11/AFqWmjkD_story.html#)

environment to operate out of in the 1990s. He proclaims how it was discovered through “intercepted cables, [al-Qaeda] operatives bemoaned the insuperable difficulties of working under chaos, given their need for security and for access to the global financial and communications infrastructure.”<sup>93</sup> He continues further by pointing out that “al-Qaeda has generally found it easier to maneuver in corrupt but functional states, such as Kenya, where sovereignty provides some protection from outside interdiction.”<sup>94</sup>

Contrary to the thoughts of most security officials, Patrick believes that “greater dangers emerge from stronger developing countries that may suffer from corruption and lack of government accountability but come nowhere near qualifying as failed states” and that by paying attention to those developing countries which lack accountability, we will be able to thwart transnational terrorist threats before they present themselves.<sup>95</sup>

The opposing viewpoints of Rotberg and Rice verses those of Herbst and Patrick are important in determining how we should address failing or failed states that are currently showing symptoms of transnational terror within their borders. With respect to the research purposes of this paper, if one were to determine that failed states do in fact hinder a terrorist organization’s operational capabilities, it might be advisable to simply allow those nations to continue to destroy themselves in hopes of discouraging future terrorist operations while allowing that nation to rebuild itself. On the other hand, if one were to determine that terrorist organizations are not operationally affected by the lawless

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<sup>93</sup> Stewart Patrick, “Why Failed States shouldn’t be our Biggest National Security Fear,” *The Washington Post*, April 15, 2011, accessed June 15, 2014.  
[http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-failed-states-shouldnt-be-our-biggest-national-security-fear/2011/04/11/AFqWmjkD\\_story.html#](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-failed-states-shouldnt-be-our-biggest-national-security-fear/2011/04/11/AFqWmjkD_story.html#)

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

environments provided by failed states, one would assume it would be in the international community's best interest to aid failed or failing states in the preventing terrorist organizations from operating within their borders.

### **Somalia and the Failed States Index**

When seeking a more quantitative and non-biased approach to the measurement of state performance, a structured and comprehensive database is found in the Fund For Peace's "Fragile States Index," (formerly known as the "Failed States Index"), which focuses on 12 indicators of risk (grouped within social, economic, political and military categories) and grades countries against those indicators through the use of Conflict Assessment System Tool (CAST) which scans all available electronic sources to determine a nation's ranking in each category.

As published by the Fund For Peace:

the strength of the Fragile States Index (FSI) is its ability to distill millions of pieces of information into a form that is relevant as well as easily digestible and informative. Daily, The Fund for Peace collects thousands of reports and information from around the world, detailing the existing social, economic and political pressures faced by each of the 178 countries that we analyze.<sup>96</sup>

Additionally, the FSI is currently on its tenth reporting cycle since it was created in 2005, providing it with some informational legitimacy within the international community.

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<sup>96</sup> "Methodology," The Fund for Peace, accessed June 15, 2014.  
<http://ffp.statesindex.org/methodology>

The Fund For Peace's Fragile States Index is not without its critics. Lionel Beehner and Joseph Young feel that the FSI is inadequate for numerous reasons. For one, they claim that the FSI is:

an index that is supposed to provide an underlying value for state stability but instead, is lost in tautology. For example, many of the subcomponents measure violence. Since one of the supposed uses of the index is to forecast violence, measuring violence to predict violence is true by definition.<sup>97</sup>

A second argument they present is that the FSI has failed to predict rather significant events, such as the Arab Spring.<sup>98</sup> Beehner and Young don't feel that that the FSI should be thrown out, but rather feel that analysts, particularly from a predictive analysis standpoint, could reform it for better use.

As argued by Beehner and Young:

we do not need an index to tell us that Greece is going through tough times or that Finland will not fail anytime soon. Nor do we need an index to remind us of Africa's post-colonial problems with state building. The index should instead be constructed to give us greater analytical leverage

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<sup>97</sup> Lionel Beehner and Joseph Young, "The Failure of the Failed States Index," World Policy Blog, July 12, 2012, accessed July 14, 2014.

<http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2012/07/17/failure-failed-states-index>

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

to anticipate events, whether they are acts of political violence, man made catastrophes, or regime changes.<sup>99</sup>

While all of these are valid arguments, the FSI still stands as a valid resource for the purposes of this paper because the intent of this paper is not geared towards forecasting future events, but rather to analyze how terrorist organizations are affected by the stability of the state they currently, or historically, operated within.

Somalia, the main country to be analyzed within this paper, has historically topped the FSI charts as one of the worst performing countries in the world, having been ranked the absolute worst performing country for six years before being displaced by South Sudan in the Fund For Peace's 2014 FSI rankings with a final score of 112.6 out of a worst possible score of 120. As shown in figure 1, of the 12 categories scored, Somalia performs particularly poorly in the "Refugees" and "Factionalized Elites" indicators, scoring 10 out of a maximum 10 points in each category. However, this is somewhat of a moot point as Somalia averaged a score of 9.4 across all indicators, with its best score being attained in the "Uneven Economic Development" indicator with a score of 8.7.<sup>100</sup>

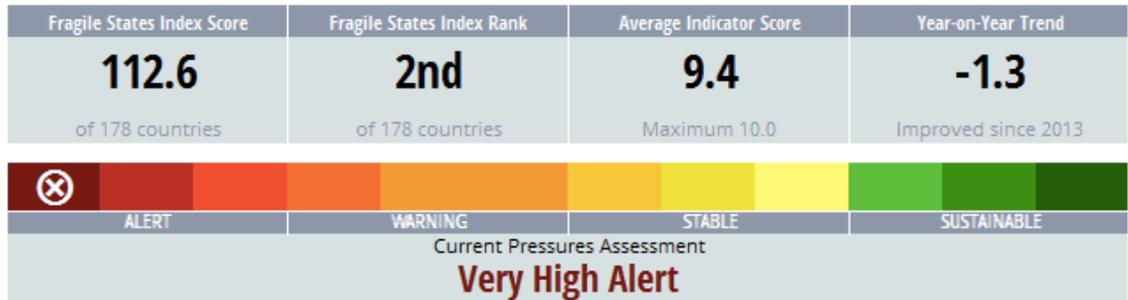
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<sup>99</sup> Lionel Beehner and Joseph Young, "The Failure of the Failed States Index," World Policy Blog, July 12, 2012, accessed July 14, 2014.

<http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2012/07/17/failure-failed-states-index>

<sup>100</sup> "Fund For Peace Country Data and Trends – Somalia," The Fund for Peace, Accessed June 15, 2014. <http://ffp.statesindex.org/2014-somalia>

**Figure 1. Somalia’s Fund For Peace FSI Rankings 2014**



**Indicator-by-Indicator in 2014**

DP	REF	GG	HF	UED	ECO	SL	PS	HR	SEC	FE	EXT
<b>9.5</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>8.9</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>9.6</b>	<b>9.8</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>9.2</b>
EXCELLENT	EXCELLENT	EXCELLENT	EXCELLENT	EXCELLENT	EXCELLENT	EXCELLENT	EXCELLENT	EXCELLENT	EXCELLENT	EXCELLENT	EXCELLENT
GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD
MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE
WEAK	WEAK	WEAK	WEAK	WEAK	WEAK	WEAK	WEAK	WEAK	WEAK	WEAK	WEAK
POOR	POOR	POOR	POOR	POOR	POOR	POOR	POOR	POOR	POOR	POOR	POOR

*Source: The Fund For Peace*

To place this information into context, the United States currently ranks 159<sup>th</sup> out of 178 countries with an overall score of 35.4 across all indicators. Finland ranks as the world’s most stable country with an overall score of 18.7. Somalia’s score places it in the bottom tier of FSI rankings, the “Very High Alert” tier, along with South Sudan, Central African Republic, Congo, and Sudan. A final country of note, and one to be analyzed a bit further in this chapter would be Afghanistan, which ranks 8<sup>th</sup> out of 178 countries in the FSI.<sup>101</sup> As shown in figure 2, of the 12 indicators scored, Afghanistan performs particularly poorly in the “Security” and “External Intervention” indicators earning scores of 10 and 9.9 respectively. Surprisingly, despite the recent years of conflict within

<sup>101</sup> “Fragile States Index 2014,” Fund For Peace, Accessed June 15, 2014. <http://ffp.statesindex.org/rankings-2014>

Afghanistan’s borders, one of Afghanistan’s best scores is found within the “Human Flight and Brain Drain” indicator, with a score of 8.7.<sup>102</sup>

**Figure 2. Afghanistan’s Fund For Peace FSI Rankings 2014**



**Indicator-by-Indicator in 2014**

DP	REF	GG	HF	UED	ECO	SL	PS	HR	SEC	FE	EXT
<b>8.8</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>9.9</b>
EXCELLENT	EXCELLENT	EXCELLENT									
GOOD	GOOD	GOOD									
MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE									
WEAK	WEAK	WEAK									
POOR	POOR	POOR									

*Source: The Fund For Peace*

Somalia’s poor performance across all indicators measured by the Fragile State Index, will serve as this paper’s justification for labeling her as a “failed state.” Given her current ranking, along with previously serving as the world’s worst performing country for six consecutive years, it is difficult to argue that if only a few states in the world truly deserved the “failed state” label, Somalia would not be one of them.

<sup>102</sup> “Afghanistan in 2014,” Fund For Peace, Accessed June 15, 2014. <http://ffp.statesindex.org/2014-afghanistan>

## **Al-Shabaab's Operational Capabilities in Somalia**

For the purposes of this paper, we will define operational capabilities as any means (regardless of whether or not that means is elementary or complex) through which a terrorist organization may recruit members, organize, communicate amongst members and the international community, travel, find safe haven, transfer supplies, plan terrorist events or other operations (such as participation in local government, providing local security services), and ultimately carry out successful terrorist attacks. This definition has purposely been drafted in a broad fashion in order to encompass the wide spectrum of functions one might consider operational when analyzing terrorist groups from various perspectives.

In order to place the operational capabilities of al-Shabaab into context, we must first consider the environment from which they largely operate within. A description of this environment is best put by Rotberg when he describes:

Truly collapsed states, a rare and extreme version of a failed state, are typified by an absence of authority. Indeed, a collapsed state is a shell of a polity. Somalia is the model of a collapsed state: a geographical expression only, with borders but with no effective way to exert authority within those borders. Substate actors have taken over. The central government has been divided up, replaced by a functioning, unrecognized state called Somaliland in the north and a less well-defined, putative state called Punt in the northeast. In the rump of the old Somalia, a transitional national government has emerged thanks to outside support. But it has so

far been unable to project its power even locally against the several warlords who control sections of Mogadishu and large swaths of the countryside. Private entrepreneurialism has displaced the central provision of political goods. Yet life somehow continues, even under conditions of unhealthy, dangerous chaos.<sup>103</sup>

Additionally, I'd like to propose three considerations we must acknowledge in order to effectively understand the manner in which al-Shabaab operates. First, we must consider that the operational aspects of an individual terrorist group are unique to that group. In other words, we cannot assume that all terrorist groups operate in the same manner given differences in ideology and preferred tactics. Second, we must acknowledge that the scope of a terrorist organization's operations is relative to its organizational size, and operational objectives. Finally, we must acknowledge that terrorist groups are adaptive in nature and will learn to successfully conduct operations through the means available to them, which are largely dictated by the resources, manpower, and societal construct of the environment that they choose to operate from within.

As stated by Daveed Gartenstein-Ross in *The Strategic Challenge of Somalia's al-Shabaab*, "al-Shabaab is a capable fighting force that implements a strict version of Shari'a in key areas of Somalia. Its range is enhanced by training camps from which

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<sup>103</sup> Robert I. Rotberg, "Failed States in a World of Terror," Council on Foreign Relations: Foreign Affairs, August 2002, Accessed June 15, 2014.  
<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/58046/robert-i-rotberg/failed-states-in-a-world-of-terror>

many Western Muslims have graduated.”<sup>104</sup> From a manpower perspective, it is estimated that there are currently between 6,000 and 7,000 members within al-Shabaab’s militia, which possess a great deal of experience in “asymmetrical warfare, small unit tactics, and a wide array of weaponry.”<sup>105</sup> Additionally, al-Shabaab is known to have carried out successful suicide bombings and the assassination of government officials.<sup>106</sup>

Augmenting its regular militia, al-Shabaab possesses a core clandestine network within its organization, called the Amniyat. According to Ken Menkhaus in *Al-Shabaab’s Capabilities Post-Westgate*, Amniyat “operatives pose as secularized Somalis and assume roles across the full spectrum of Somali society, including positions in the Somali Federal Government and foreign missions.”<sup>107</sup> Amniyat operatives are also known to be well versed in intelligence gathering operations, assassinations, explosives, and hit-and-run attacks.<sup>108</sup> Taking the operational capabilities and tactics of both the Amniyat network and al-Shabaab’s regular militia into consideration, it is easy to see that al-Shabaab possesses a wide range of methods by which it can project its organizational objectives within Somalia. Additionally, these tactics are similar in operational scope as those that are carried out by al-Qaeda on a routine basis.

They key to any terrorist organization’s survival is its ability to actively recruit and maintain a loyal membership base. As evidenced by al-Shabaab’s surprisingly large

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<sup>104</sup> Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, “The Strategic Challenge of Somalia’s Al-Shabaab: Dimensions of Jihad,” *Middle East Forum: The Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2009, accessed June 16, 2014, pp. 25-36.

[http://www.meforum.org/2486/somalia-al-shabaab-strategic-challenge#\\_ftn4](http://www.meforum.org/2486/somalia-al-shabaab-strategic-challenge#_ftn4)

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ken Menkhaus, “Al-Shabaab’s Capabilities Post-Westgate,” *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point: CTC Sentinel*, February 24, 2014, accessed June 15, 2014.

<https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/al-shababs-capabilities-post-westgate>

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

size, it can be concluded that it has no recruitment issues from a homegrown perspective. To put the organization's core membership into perspective, some analysts put Al Qaeda's "core membership at anywhere from 200 to 1,000" members, while Al Qaeda affiliated fighters are estimated to be made up of "thousands or tens of thousands."<sup>109</sup> Considering Al Qaeda's global prominence, al-Shabaab is a rather large organization given its rather concentrated geographical operating territory.

Currently, the greatest risk posed to the United States by al-Shabaab is its ability to recruit Somali men who reside in the United States to their cause. An "exodus of young Somali men from Minneapolis-St. Paul and elsewhere in the United States"<sup>110</sup> evidences al-Shabaab's successful recruitment efforts where larger populations of Somali immigrants reside. al-Shabaab's international recruitment does not stop with the US, as there are also "reports of young Somali men going missing from Canada, Europe, Australia, and Saudi Arabia."<sup>111</sup>

According to a recent investigative report produced by U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Homeland Security, 40 or more American's have already joined al-Shabaab, and of those 40 persons 15 have been killed while fighting for the organization, 4 have been prosecuted upon returning to the United States, and 21 or more

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<sup>109</sup> Carl Bialik, "Shadowy Figure: Al Qaeda's Size is Hard to Measure," The Wall Street Journal, September 10, 2011, accessed July 14, 2014.

<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424053111903285704576560593124523206>

<sup>110</sup> Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, "The Strategic Challenge of Somalia's Al-Shabaab: Dimensions of Jihad," Middle East Forum: The Middle East Quarterly, Fall 2009, accessed June 16, 2014, pp. 25-36.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

American's remain unaccounted for overseas.<sup>112</sup> The concern drawn from these successful recruitments is that those members could attempt to travel back into the United States and either spread al-Shabaab's influence or even conduct future attacks within our borders.

Finally, we must consider al-Shabaab's ideological ties to larger organizations such as al-Qaeda and its affiliate, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). According to the Committee on Homeland Security, al-Shabaab "has not only openly pledged loyalty and support to al-Qaeda and AQAP in Yemen, but has cemented alarming operational ties to both groups."<sup>113</sup> The ties being established al-Qaeda and AQAP are alarming because the relationships being built between these organizations are meant to enhance each organization's operational capabilities respectively.

While al-Qaeda may not have the organizational construct to operate effectively within Somalia and other parts of Africa, it can rely on its partnership with al-Shabaab to extend its ideological influence. al-Shabaab, on the other hand, can benefit from this relationship by gaining greater legitimacy in the eyes of its membership base and future recruits, while also adopting certain operational procedures and tactics that al-Qaeda has demonstrated as functional to a terrorist organization's survivability.

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<sup>112</sup> U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security, "Al Shabaab: Recruitment and Radicalization within the Muslim American Community and the Threat to the Homeland," (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2011), pp. 1-7.

<http://homeland.house.gov/sites/homeland.house.gov/files/Investigative%20report.pdf>

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusions

From the viewpoints provided by the scholars above, we can certainly conclude that Somalia should be considered a “failed state” regardless of which definition anyone chooses to use. Somalia is the storied example of a state that has reached the lowest of lows and remained there for much of recent history.

The Failed State Index provides us with an effective means of quantitatively measuring states along indicators in the economic, political, military and social welfare categories. Somalia’s position as the #2 worst performing country serves as more justification towards considering her as a failed state.

The operational capabilities of al-Shabaab, while often overshadowed by those of al-Qaeda are significant, particularly within Somalia, and will not be going away anytime soon. As Gartenstein-Ross noted, it is far more likely that the clan-based extremism will survive longer than al-Shabaab as a group, so while the name may disappear, the violence will still exist.<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, it is alarming to see al-Shabaab strengthening ties with al-Qaeda. By analyzing al-Shabaab’s capabilities in Somalia, it may be wise to conclude that different organizations operate effectively under different conditions, and while al-Qaeda may not be able to operate effectively within Somalia, they recognize that other groups such as al-Shabaab can, which is why a relationship is building between the two organizations.

Given these observations, we can conclude that while al-Shabaab is less capable of operating as a terrorist organization than al-Qaeda on a global scale, they are still very

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<sup>114</sup> Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, “The Strategic Challenge of Somalia’s Al-Shabaab: Dimensions of Jihad,” Middle East Forum: The Middle East Quarterly, Fall 2009, accessed June 16, 2014, pp. 25-36.

capable of conducting terrorist operations despite the environment they choose to operate within, and that the “failed state” environment has not limited their capability. A demonstration of this capability should be rather clear when one remembers al-Shabaab’s Nairobi mall attack, which lasted 80 hours and killed 67 people in September 2013.<sup>115</sup> Instead, Somalia’s environment has shaped the organizational goals and objectives of al-Shabaab, and those organizational goals are what make it a lesser (but still very valid) international threat than al-Qaeda.

Because we have demonstrated that failed states don’t hinder a terrorist organization’s operational capabilities, I propose that Patrick’s and Herbst’s “Let them fail” mentality, while very intriguing, is not as valid as Rotberg and Rice’s nation-building approach. al-Shabaab is used to operating within a clan-based environment, where they can use their societal influence to pave the way for their organizational objectives. Merely leaving Somalia alone would only provide al-Shabaab the continuance of the status quo. And, since Somalia has already proven itself to be one of the most failed states in the world, it is tough to believe that the conditions in that country could deteriorate much further.

In conclusion, this paper has proven my initial hypothesis to be false. Failed states do not hinder a terrorist organization’s ability to conduct operations, but instead, shapes the way in which terrorist organizations operate within them. Furthermore, the international community should continue nation-building efforts as opposed to letting a

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<sup>115</sup> Daniel Howden, “Terror in Westgate Mall: The Full Story of the Attacks That Devastated Kenya,” *The Guardian*, October 4, 2013, accessed July 1, 2014.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/interactive/2013/oct/04/westgate-mall-attacks-kenya-terror>

nation fail. As evidenced by al-Shabaab in Somalia, an extremely failed state is capable of providing a very optimal platform for a terrorist organization to operate within.

## **Confronting the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the Middle East**

Since the United States entered the Global War on Terror following the attacks that took place on September 11, 2001, we have taken on numerous terrorist organizations to include al-Qaeda in Iraq, the Taliban in Afghanistan, and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen. While we have no doubt seen successes in all of these fronts, terrorist networks are continually evolving into newer organizations with differing ideologies and ambitions, particularly as old leaders fall and new leaders rise to power. In more recent years, we have seen the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which would argue poses the greatest threat to the Middle East region to date. This chapter will serve as a study into how ISIS came to power, where they may go next, and how the United States might approach a war against this new and dangerous enemy.

The focus of the third chapter of this portfolio will be to cover the following objectives. First, to answer the question as to whether or not the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria's (ISIS) movements have taken advantage of weak states in the Middle East region due to their limited capacity to stop the spread of ISIS influence and subsequent territorial advancements. Second, using lessons learned from chapters one and two, attempt to predict which nations are at significant risk to the future expansion of ISIS due to their poorly performing statuses. And finally, to determine what strategic options and international partners the United States has within reach as they seek to build a

comprehensive strategy geared towards diminishing the presence of ISIS in the Middle East region.

### **The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)**

In order to understand how The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) rose to prominence, we must first cover a brief history of its roots in order to understand how the name came to existence, as there are many differing titles used by scholars, journalists, and politicians today, most of whom largely refer to the same group or variations of the group's previous forms of existence.

While some argue that ISIS's existence goes as far back as the early 1990's, most consider the first formal step in its development was when Abu Masab al-Zarqawi established al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in April of 2004.<sup>116</sup> Under Zarqawi, known as the "mastermind behind hundreds of bombings, kidnappings and beheadings in Iraq,"<sup>117</sup> AQI was largely known for its sectarian war against Shia community within the country. Zarqawi's rule over AQI lasted until June 7, 2006, when the United States Air Force dropped two 500-pound bombs on a house he inhabited, ending his life. Zarqawi's death represented the "most significant public triumph for the U.S.-led military coalition in Iraq since the 2003 capture of Saddam Hussein, although analysts warned that Zarqawi's death may not stem the tide of insurgency and violence any more than Hussein's capture

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<sup>116</sup> CNN. "ISIS Fast Facts." CNN Library. Last Modified November 6, 2014. Accessed November 8, 2014. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/08/world/isis-fast-facts/>

<sup>117</sup> Knickmeyer, Ellen and Jonathan Finer. "Insurgent Leader Al-Zarqawi Killed in Iraq." Washington Post Foreign Service. June 8, 2006. Accessed November 7, 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/08/AR2006060800114.html>

did.”<sup>118</sup> Before his death, Zarqawi was successful in mimicking Osama bin Laden’s leadership strategy by developing “numerous semi-autonomous terrorist cells across Iraq, many of which could continue operating after his death.”<sup>119</sup>

These terrorist cells would continue to grow under the inherited leadership of Abu Ayyub al-Masri, who would ultimately mastermind the creation of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in April of 2007, naming Abu Omar al-Baghdadi as its leader. Masri’s purpose in creating ISI was an “attempt to put an Iraqi face on al Qaeda's foreign-led movement and unite the disparate Sunni Islamist and insurgent groups.”<sup>120</sup> As one can assume, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi was a strong symbolic candidate for this position given the nature of his last name. Baghdadi and Masri would lead the Islamic State of Iraq until they were killed by U.S. and Iraqi security forces during a joint raid in the western province of Anbar in April of 2010.<sup>121</sup>

As a result of the deaths of Abu Ayyub al-Masri and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi the leadership of ISI was inherited by its current leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, an al-Qaeda operative who was formerly held captive in a U.S. facility known as Camp Bucca in southern Iraq.<sup>122</sup> Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is responsible for merging the ISI with the al-Nusra front in Syria, forming what today is known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

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<sup>118</sup> Knickmeyer, Ellen and Jonathan Finer. “Insurgent Leader Al-Zarqawi Killed in Iraq.” Washington Post Foreign Service. June 8, 2006. Accessed November 7, 2014.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/08/AR2006060800114.html>

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Roggio, Bill. “US and Iraqi Forces Kill Al Masri and Baghdadi, Al Qaeda in Iraq’s Top Two Leaders.” The Long War Journal. April 19, 2010. Accessed November 5, 2014.

[http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/04/al\\_qaeda\\_in\\_iraq\\_to.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/04/al_qaeda_in_iraq_to.php)

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> BBC. “Profile: Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi.” BBC News. Last Modified July 5, 2014. Accessed November 6, 2014.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27801676>

(ISIS) or what some may also proclaim as the “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” (ISIL), the “Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham,” or more simply put, the “Islamic State” (IS).<sup>123</sup> Interestingly, Baghdadi has not sworn allegiance to al-Qaeda’s current leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and forged the alliance with the al-Nusra front against his wishes, leading many to “believe he now holds higher prestige among many Islamist militants”<sup>124</sup> than the chief of al-Qaeda himself.

For the purposes of this paper, we will refer to Baghdadi’s militants as ISIS to alleviate confusion to the reader. While some references used in this chapter may allude to ISIL or IS, it is assumed for the basis of this discussion that those politicians, scholars, and journalists are referring to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, as it stands under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s leadership at this time.

In an effort to better predict the direction ISIS may be headed in the future, both geographically and ideologically, we must understand their motivations and capabilities as they stand today. Ideologically, ISIS is a Sunni-led radical jihadist group, which seeks to build a regional (and eventually global) caliphate of loyal Muslims who reject Shia Islam.<sup>125</sup> As explained further by Dr. Akl Kairouz, a political science instructor at Notre Dame University when he states:

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<sup>123</sup> BBC. “Profile: Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi.” BBC News. Last Modified July 5, 2014. Accessed November 6, 2014.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27801676>

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Shakdam, Catherine. “Analysis: The Fifth Caliph And ISIS: Looking To History To Understand The Present.”MintPress News. October 17, 2014. Accessed November 5, 2014.

<http://www.mintpressnews.com/analysis-fifth-caliph-isis-looking-history-understand-present/197829/>

There is an important aspect of ISIS which we too often bypass as inherent to the group's radical nature - its hatred of Shia Islam. This hatred is actually core to ISIS' paradigm, its entire philosophy revolves around the idea that it is the true keeper of Islamic tradition and that the sword is the only mean to promote its faith.<sup>126</sup>

Because of their deep-rooted hatred of Shia Islamists, we can observe ISIS's movements within a Shia governed Iraq as a somewhat logical step towards their ultimate end state objectives. According to ABC News and Pew Research surveys, an estimated 45-55% of the Muslim population in Iraq identifies themselves as Shia.<sup>127</sup>

ISIS's sweeping territorial gains throughout Iraq in 2014 have been nothing short of astonishing. Utilizing an interactive article updated daily by the New York Times which draws from numerous credible agencies for data, we can get a feel for the scope of ISIS's recent territorial gains and their impact on Iraqi citizens. Between January and May of 2014, ISIS was known to have gained control of much of the Anbar province in western Iraq, displacing an estimated 500,000 Iraqis. This was followed up by a strong move to gain control over the areas of Mosul and Tikrit in the months of June and July, displacing another half-million Iraqis. More recently, ISIS has captured Sinjar, a Kurdish town in northern Iraq, which is largely populated by minority religious groups such as

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<sup>126</sup> Shakdam, Catherine. "Analysis: The Fifth Caliph And ISIS: Looking To History To Understand The Present." MintPress News. October 17, 2014. Accessed November 5, 2014.

<http://www.mintpressnews.com/analysis-fifth-caliph-isis-looking-history-understand-present/197829/>

<sup>127</sup> Lipka, Michael. "The Sunni-Shia Divide: Where They Live, What They Believe and How They View Each Other." Pew Research. June 18, 2014. Accessed November 8, 2014.

<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/06/18/the-sunni-shia-divide-where-they-live-what-they-believe-and-how-they-view-each-other/>

Christians and the Yazidis.<sup>128</sup> While these territorial gains represent the larger cities and provinces taken by ISIS, there are numerous towns and cities throughout Iraq that are currently under ISIS control that will remain unmentioned.

ISIS movements in Syria are driven by similar motivations. Although only 15-20% of Syria's population identifies themselves as Shia Islamists, ISIS's main rub is with Bashar al-Assad's regime, which is "dominated by Alawites (an offshoot of Shia Islam)."<sup>129</sup> Ironically, it is believed by many that al-Assad initially welcomed the presence of ISIS fighters within Syrian borders during what is commonly referred to as the "Arab Spring" in March of 2011, in hopes that their presence would ultimately disrupt the organization of Syrian rebels which were seeking to overthrow his dictatorship.<sup>130</sup> As a result, ISIS now controls large swaths of land in eastern Syria, the most notable cities being the cities of Aleppo, Hasaka, Raqqa, Dier al-Zour, and Abu Kamal.<sup>131</sup>

Organizationally speaking, ISIS is far from being considered a small transnational terror group. It is estimated that ISIS is comprised of as many as 30,000 -50,000 militants, and possesses a steady stream of volunteers eager to join its ranks from Syria,

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<sup>128</sup> New York Times. "Areas Under ISIS Control." New York Times. Last Modified November 7, 2014. Last accessed November 8, 2014.

[http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/06/12/world/middleeast/the-iraq-isis-conflict-in-maps-photos-and-video.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/06/12/world/middleeast/the-iraq-isis-conflict-in-maps-photos-and-video.html?_r=0)

<sup>129</sup> Lipka, Michael. "The Sunni-Shia Divide: Where They Live, What They Believe and How They View Each Other." Pew Research. June 18, 2014. Accessed November 8, 2014.

<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/06/18/the-sunni-shia-divide-where-they-live-what-they-believe-and-how-they-view-each-other/>

<sup>130</sup> Kaphle, Anup. "Timeline: Unrest in Syria." The Washington Post. January 20, 2014. Accessed November 6, 2014. <http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/page/world/timeline-unrest-in-syria/207/>

<sup>131</sup> Baker, Peter. "In Airstrikes, US Targets Militant Cell Said to Plot an Attack Against the West." New York Times. September 23, 2014. Accessed November 9, 2014.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/24/world/middleeast/us-isis-syria.html>

Europe, and even the United States.<sup>132</sup> The organization draws funding from “large extortion networks in Mosul that predate the US withdrawal” and by recently seizing the “financially valuable Conoco gas field, said to be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars a week, in Deir Ezzor, Syria.”<sup>133</sup> In total, ISIS is estimated to be bringing in \$3,000,000 daily from its oil and gas resources from field it controls across northern Iraq and Syria and has an estimated \$2,000,000,000 in cash and assets on hand.<sup>134</sup>

As far as the manner in which they operate, ISIS is nothing short of barbaric. According to a United Nations report released in October, ISIS is responsible for an estimated 5,500 civilian deaths in Iraq alone since June of 2014. Continuing further, the report grimly highlights the “extremists’ campaign of physical and sexual violence against women and children, with accounts of women being captured and sold as sex slaves to Islamic State recruits, and children being used as soldiers.”<sup>135</sup> The full brutality of ISIS didn’t become gruesomely apparent to the U.S. population until the beheadings of Americans James Foley and Steven Sotloff were posted to social media accounts in August and September of 2014, inciting a call to action from the American people and US Congress.

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<sup>132</sup> Wing, Nick and Carina Kolodny. “15 Shocking Numbers That Will Make You Pay Attention To What ISIS Is Doing In Iraq. The Huffington Post. August 11, 2014. Accessed November 8, 2014. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/11/isis-iraq-numbers\\_n\\_5659239.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/11/isis-iraq-numbers_n_5659239.html)

<sup>133</sup> Tran, Mark. “Who are ISIS? A Terror Group Too Extreme – Even for Al-Qaeda.” The Guardian. June 11, 2014. Accessed November 5, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/11/isis-too-extreme-al-qaida-terror-jihadi>

<sup>134</sup> Wing, Nick and Carina Kolodny. “15 Shocking Numbers That Will Make You Pay Attention To What ISIS Is Doing In Iraq.”

<sup>135</sup> Cumming-Bruce, Nick. “5,500 Iraqis Killed Since Islamic State Began Its Military Drive, U.N. Says.” New York Times Middle East. October 2, 2014. Accessed November 6, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/03/world/middleeast/un-reports-at-least-26000-civilian-casualties-in-iraq-conflict-this-year.html>

The bottom line is that ISIS is continuing to grow in influence, and has the motivation and capabilities (both militarily and financially) to extend its reach beyond its current position. As summarized best by Charles Lister, a fellow at the Brookings Institution in Doha, "ISIS now presents itself as an ideologically superior alternative to al-Qaida within the jihadi community and it has publicly challenged the legitimacy of al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. " Furthermore, "it has increasingly become a transnational movement with immediate objectives far beyond Iraq and Syria."<sup>136</sup>

### **ISIS Movements: Areas of Opportunity?**

In the first chapter of this portfolio, we were able to draw a nexus between transnational terrorist organization movements and their proclivity to attempt to seize operational control of territories in failed or failing states, as exemplified by the relatively recent emergence of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen. Terrorist organizations gravitate towards these nations because poorly performing states have little to no border control, weak or corrupt governments which do not effectively govern the population, and the citizens of those populations are generally swayable due to the lack of social welfare they are being provided and the lack of economic opportunities available to them.

Because ISIS has outwardly expressed its desire to establish a regional, and ultimately a global caliphate, it would be wise for us to assume that their expansion will

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<sup>136</sup> Lister, Charles. "Dynamic Landscape: Surveying Syria's Military Landscape." Brookings Doha Center. May 2014. Accessed November 5, 2014.  
<http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2014/05/19%20syria%20military%20landscape%20lister/syria%20military%20landscape%20english.pdf>

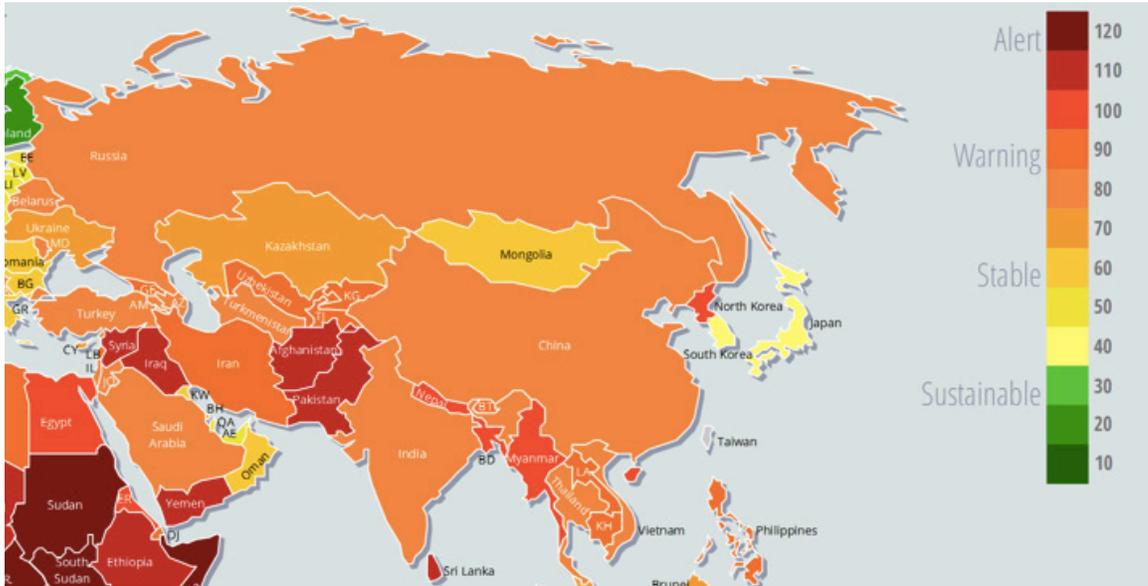
not limit itself to territories within Iraq and Syria. A second assumption being made at this point in this chapter is that while ISIS wants to expand its reach globally, it will first seek to maximize its presence within the Middle East region. Therefore we should attempt to look at nations within close geographical proximity to current ISIS areas of influence, in an attempt to identify nations that are poorly performing and thus may be considered at particular risk to the manifestation of ISIS operatives within their borders.

For the initial analysis in determining which states pose as potentially attractive targets for future ISIS endeavors, we will again turn to the Fund For Peace's Fragile State Index of 2014. We will utilize the Fund For Peace's index because it serves as a non-subjective set of quantitative measurements that provide a great basis for the analyzation of state stability across twelve primary social, economic and political indicators, which were highlighted in chapters one and two.<sup>137</sup> The methodology behind this is to broadly identify the poorest performing states in the region, as analyzing every nation in the region would be beyond the practical scope of this paper. By identifying those states which stand out as significantly less stable than others in the region, we provide ourselves a starting point from which we can take a more in-depth look into each country and identify specific reasons why it may be a potential territory of opportunity for future ISIS operations.

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<sup>137</sup> FFP. "Indicators." Fund For Peace. Accessed November 8, 2014.  
<http://ffp.statesindex.org/indicators>

**Figure 3: Fund For Peace Fragile States Index 2014.**



*Source: The Fund For Peace*

From figure 3, we can make a few observations. First, we can see that the Middle East region is performing relatively as a whole. While when compared to the North East portion of Africa and most of Asia the region looks relatively stable, it must be noted that all countries with the exception of Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar (who are considered to be at a stable threshold) are labeled as “Warning” or “Alert” states according to the key provided.

Of the states showing a color that would indicate “Warning” or “Alert” performance grades, we find that Five nations stand out as extremely poor performers, warranting a color that indicates they are “Alert” states. Those nations include Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Iran, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Lebanon garner colors that indicate them being “Warning” states, but their stability figures are considerably better than the Five Alert states. In order to limit the scope of this paper, we

will take Yemen, Afghanistan, and Pakistan as states to scrutinize further in order to determine to what degree they are at risk of a possible ISIS presence in the relatively near future. We will exclude analysis on Syria and Iraq because ISIS is already actively conducting operations out of the two territories, and their desire to become increasingly more influential within those territories is evidenced by newsworthy advances by ISIS militants being made daily.

When looking at figure 3 a bit more closely, one might be inclined to ask why Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran are not being considered for analysis, given their geographic proximity to Iraq and Syria. While their geographic proximity imposes inherent risks, all three of the nations have outwardly expressed dissatisfaction with ISIS in the region and are taking active steps towards reducing their influence. Because of this, we will exclude them from risk analysis, but will analyze their capacities to contribute to a comprehensive U.S. strategy against ISIS in a later portion of this chapter.

### *Afghanistan*

According to Fund For Peace data and trends analysis, Afghanistan ranks a miserable 6<sup>th</sup> out of 178 countries ranked. Moreover, Afghanistan has historically ranked among the world's most poorly performing countries since the creation of the index 10 years ago, where she held a marginally better 11<sup>th</sup> of 76 position on the global scale in 2005.<sup>138</sup> Fund For Peace analysis states that “corruption, drugs and extremism continue to

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<sup>138</sup> FFP. “The Failed States Index 2005.” Accessed November 1, 2014.  
<http://ffp.statesindex.org/rankings-2005-sortable>

run rampant across the country” and are a large factor in Afghanistan’s poor performance to date.<sup>139</sup>

Afghanistan could serve as an attractive target to ISIS as it possesses a storied history of harboring terrorist networks, most notably the Taliban – a Pushtun Islamic fundamentalist group that reigned from 1996 to 2001, which is believed to have harbored Osama bin Laden during the United States’ Global War on Terror.<sup>140</sup> While the Taliban has been largely on its heels since the U.S. counter-insurgency began in 2001, President Obama has recently reduced the United States’ military presence in Afghanistan to 32,000 troops from a height of 101,000 troops in 2011. Furthermore, The President announced a plan in May of 2014 to continue reducing troops to a level of 9,800 by the end of 2014, and ultimately leaving behind only an embassy protection force by year 2016.<sup>141</sup> These announcements introduce the possibility of a security vacuum in Afghanistan post U.S. security force withdrawal, which could leave Afghanistan with a fate similar to what Iraq experienced when U.S. troops withdrew in December of 2011 as radicalist groups seek to re-establish themselves in the area.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> FFP. “Failed State Index: The Troubled Ten.” Accessed November 1, 2014.  
<http://library.fundforpeace.org/fsi14-fragile10-2>

<sup>140</sup> Laub, Zachary. “The Taliban in Afghanistan.” Council on Foreign Relations. July 4, 2014. Accessed November 3, 2014.  
<http://www.cfr.org/afghanistan/taliban-afghanistan/p10551>

<sup>141</sup> Landler, Mark. “U.S. Troops to Leave Afghanistan by End of 2016.” The New York Times. May 27, 2014. Accessed November 9, 2014.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/28/world/asia/us-to-complete-afghan-pullout-by-end-of-2016-obama-to-say.html>

<sup>142</sup> Salam, Reihan. “We Never Should Have Left Iraq.” Slate. June 12, 2014. Accessed November 9, 2014.  
[http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/politics/2014/06/iraq\\_sunnis\\_and\\_shiites\\_the\\_u\\_s\\_should\\_never\\_have\\_withdrawn\\_its\\_troops\\_in.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2014/06/iraq_sunnis_and_shiites_the_u_s_should_never_have_withdrawn_its_troops_in.html)

There are serious questions being raised as to the Afghani government's ability to defend itself post troop withdrawals. As Max Boot, of the Council on Foreign Relations notes, as foreign military forces move out, "with them will go the bulk of foreign financing that has accounted for almost all of the state's budget."<sup>143</sup> In addition, Afghanistan has recently elected a new president, Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, which will present challenges in itself as the nation and its new appointed president adjust to a less seasoned government at the same time it experiences a massive withdraw of security forces. Furthering this concern are reports that Afghani Taliban are considering an alliance with ISIS in order to produce a renewed insurgency. According to Rishi Iyengar of Time Magazine, Commander Mirwais, the leader of Hezb-e-Islami, has stated, "We pray for them (ISIS)" and "if we don't see a problem in the way they operate, we will join them."<sup>144</sup> Hezb-e-Islami is an Afghanistan-based militant group with links to the Taliban, known for its higher levels of brutality.

Recognizing that Afghanistan possesses an even more fragile government and security force than Iraq did at the point of U.S. withdrawals, should leave no one with a comfortable feeling that they will be able to sufficiently defend themselves from ISIS movements should that organization seek to operate within their borders.

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<sup>143</sup> Boot, Max. "What it Will Take to Secure Afghanistan." Council on Foreign Relations. June 2012. Accessed November 8, 2014.

<http://www.cfr.org/afghanistan/take-secure-afghanistan/p28587>

<sup>144</sup> Iyengar, Rishi. "Afghan Militants May Join ISIS, Says Their Commander." Times Magazine. September 3, 2013. Accessed November 8, 2014. <http://time.com/3260322/taliban-afghanistan-isis-islamic-state-hezb-e-islami/>

## *Pakistan*

Pakistan ranks 10<sup>th</sup> of 178 countries in this year's fragile state index rankings.<sup>145</sup>

As outlined in Fund For Peace analysis, Pakistan's deterioration in rankings is largely due to extreme grievances in the country with regards to her former Prime Minister, Raja Pervez Ashraf, who was arrested and charged with corruption in January for actions dating to 2010, while serving as Prime Minister. Additionally, low rankings were a result of, "a large number of bomb attacks over the year including the deadliest attack on Christians in Pakistan's history. In September, more than 80 people were killed in a double suicide bombing set off at a church in Peshawar."<sup>146</sup> These attacks were claimed by the Taliban.

As if the existence of the Taliban in Pakistan wasn't troubling enough, there are now reports that the Pakistani Taliban is vowing support of ISIS. In a statement released by Taliban spokesman Shahidullah Shahid, he proclaims, "All Muslims in the world have great expectations of you [ISIS] ... We are with you, we will provide you with Mujahideen (fighters) and with every possible support."<sup>147</sup> The Al Arabiya press release goes on to mention that ISIS activists have even been spotted in the city of Peshawar distributing informational pamphlets.<sup>148</sup> The fact that the Taliban in Pakistan is making such proclamations serves to show that ISIS has already garnered favor among extremists

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<sup>145</sup> FFP. "Failed State Index: The Troubled Ten." Accessed November 1, 2014. <http://library.fundforpeace.org/fsi14-fragile10-2>

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Al Arabiya. "Pakistani Taliban Vow Support for ISIS Fighters." Al Arabiya News. October 5, 2014. Accessed November 6, 2014. <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/10/05/Pakistan-Taliban-pledges-support-to-ISIS-.html>

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

within the state and would suggest that a desire to carry out operations within Pakistan would be met with open arms.

The Pakistani government recognizes that they are at risk, recently releasing a secret memo, which captures some of the known intentions of ISIS within Pakistani borders. According to Mujeeb Ahmed of NBC, the memo details how “ISIS has created a 10-man ‘strategic planning wing’ with a master plan on how to wage war against the Pakistani military, and is trying to join forces with local militants” with an intent to “inflict casualties to Pakistan Army outfits who are taking part in operation Zarb-e-Azb.”<sup>149</sup> The apparent plan of ISIS is to leverage the existence of jihadist groups within Pakistan to wage war against a government which is already being worn thin by operations against the Taliban and al-Qaeda linked terror groups.

### *Yemen*

According to Fund For Peace analysis, Yemen ranks 8<sup>th</sup> of 178 countries in the fragile states index for 2014.<sup>150</sup> As outlined in chapter one of this portfolio, Yemen is currently struggling with the existence of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and has seen continued U.S. led airstrikes within its borders against al-Qaeda since 2002. In total, an estimated 106 covert airstrikes have killed 525 militants over the past 12

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<sup>149</sup> Ahmed, Mujeeb. “ISIS has Master Plan for Pakistan, Secret Memo Warns.” NBC News. Last modified November 10, 2014. Accessed November 11, 2014.

<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/isis-has-master-plan-pakistan-secret-memo-warns-n244961>

<sup>150</sup> FFP. “Failed State Index: The Troubled Ten.” Accessed November 1, 2014.

<http://library.fundforpeace.org/fsi14-fragile10-2>

years<sup>151</sup>, including Anwar al-Awlaki, a prominent al-Qaeda militant of American descent.<sup>152</sup>

As noted by Almosawa Shuaib, a journalist for the Daily Beast, “Al Qaeda exploits the continued separatist sentiment [within Yemen], which has been aggravated by the security crackdown and political marginalization.”<sup>153</sup> Shuaib raises questions about the Yemeni government’s capacity to successfully defend against a long-term insurgency, stating that while U.S. aid to Yemen has “totaled over \$600 million” the “government’s commitment to fight the militants is questionable.”<sup>154</sup> He continues further to note that the Yemeni “government’s failure to address longstanding issues, has brought the Islamist-led government and the Hadi presidency to the brink of collapse.”<sup>155</sup>

While Yemen struggles to identify a sound form of self-government, ISIS is garnering support from AQAP. As pulled from a recent AQAP statement provided by the Yemen Times, AQAP “announce[s] solidarity with our Muslim brothers in Iraq against

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<sup>151</sup> Roggio, Bill and Bob Barry. “Charting Data for US Air Strikes in Yemen, 2002-2014.” The Long War Journal. Last Modified November 4, 2014. Accessed November 8, 2014. <http://www.longwarjournal.org/multimedia/Yemen/code/Yemen-strike.php>

<sup>152</sup> Griffin, Jennifer. “Two U.S.-Born Terrorists Killed in CIA-Led Drone Strike.” Fox News. September 30, 2011. Accessed November 7, 2011. <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2011/09/30/us-born-terror-boss-anwar-al-awlaki-killed/>

<sup>153</sup> Almosawa, Shuaib. “Obama’s ‘Yemen Model’ for the War on ISIS Is a Wreck.” The Daily Beast. September 12, 2014. Accessed November 5, 2014. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/09/12/obama-s-yemen-model-for-the-war-on-isis-in-yemen-it-s-a-wreck.html>

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

the crusade. Their blood and injuries are ours and we will surely support them.”<sup>156</sup> The statement released by AQAP goes so far as to even provide ISIS advice, stating:

Be cautious about dealing with cell phones and internet networks; do not gather in large numbers or move in large convoys; spread in farms or hide under trees in the case of loud humming of warplanes; and dig sophisticated trenches because they reduce the impact of shelling.<sup>157</sup>

All three of the countries outlined above have three things in common. First, they are all suffering from governments that possess a real lack of control over their populations, along with no solid ability to provide proper security against outside threats. Second, comparatively speaking, all three rank among the world’s most unstable nations according to the Fund For Peace’s fragile state index. Finally, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen are all currently struggling with the existence of extremist groups aimed at overthrowing the government, all of which have recently pledged allegiance to ISIS. Because of these observations, it can be justified that all three nations are at a relatively high risk of seeing ISIS establish footholds within their borders.

### **U.S. Approach and Potential Partners**

The United States’ current military approach to the destruction of ISIS is highlighted by continued airstrikes (along with the support of coalition air forces) within

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<sup>156</sup> Wong, Kristina. “Al Qaeda in Yemen Declares Support for ISIS.” The Hill. August, 19, 2014. Accessed November 8, 2014.

<http://thehill.com/business-a-lobbying/215480-al-qaeda-in-yemen-declares-support-for-isis>

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

Syria and Iraq on known ISIS militant locations and operational infrastructure to include vehicles, ammunition stockpiles, and command and control structures. The overarching result of these efforts is to remain unseen at this point, however, there are indications that the leader of ISIS, Bakr al-Baghdadi was among those wounded, if not killed, in the airstrikes of al-Qaim on November 8, 2014.<sup>158</sup> This is a great advancement for coalition forces, however, we've seen through the historical analysis of AQAP and ISIS, this does not mean the terrorist group will be deterred from continuing their cause. Because the United States government has expressed a non-negotiable desire to remove troops from the theatre by 2016, they may be placed in a position where they have no choice but to continue air strikes until the threat ISIS poses is deemed at a level which no longer alarms the international community.

Many believe that the withdrawal of troops from Iraq created a security vacuum which provided ISIS the opportunity to sweep through the nation relatively unchallenged. Taking this into consideration, the U.S. should revisit its plan to completely remove troops from Afghanistan by 2016. Should they continue plans to do so, it is highly likely that ISIS, along with their newfound partners in the Afghani Taliban, will seek to take advantage of a security vacuum similar to that which was found in Iraq. An alternative to this approach would be to leave the current troop levels as they are today, so as to maintain the status quo, at the very minimum. Doing so would allow the United States

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<sup>158</sup> Corcoran, Kieran. "U.S. Airstrikes 'Hit ISIS Leader': Terror Group Chief 'Critically Wounded' in Iraq After Coalition Forces Bomb Jihadi Leaders." The Daily Mail Online. Last modified November 8, 2014. Accessed November 10, 2014. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2826488/U-S-air-strikes-hit-ISIS-leader-Abu-Bakr-al-Baghdadi.html>

more time to accurately assess ISIS' intentions and Afghanistan's capacity to defend itself against that threat, should ISIS move in Afghanistan's direction.

Aside from continued airstrikes, the U.S. has an opportunity to utilize other nations in the region to assist in their cause. While not a typical partner of the U.S., Iran has expressed an intense interest in aiding of the dismantling of ISIS. Because Iran is a majority Shia country, her government feels extremely threatened by ISIS advancements, and given current discussions with the U.S. over the future of Iran's nuclear program, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has indicated that he'd be willing to aid in the destruction of ISIS if the U.S. will show some concessions during nuclear discussions. In a recent before the United Nations General Council, Rouhani stated, "We are determined to continue our confidence-building approach and our transparency in the nuclear negotiations" and "If our interlocutors are equally motivated and flexible," Iran and the U.S. could tackle "very important regional issues, such as combating violence and extremism."<sup>159</sup>

While the thought of cooperating with Iran brings shudders to much of the international community, the United States might not have a more capable partner in the region, particularly one with a real motivation to ensure ISIS' Sunni-led "caliphate" does not come to fruition. Not only does Iran possess a cause, but she possesses a military capable of carrying out her wishes. Her military is comprised of an estimated 545,000 active frontline personnel with another 1,800,000 personnel in active reserve status. She

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<sup>159</sup> Avni, Benny. "Iran Says It's Willing to Fight ISIS, For a Price." News Week. September 29, 2014. Accessed November 8, 2014. <http://www.newsweek.com/iran-says-its-willing-fight-isis-price-273939>

has an estimated 2,400 tanks, 480 aircraft, and 395 naval vessels that are operational and ready for tasking.<sup>160</sup> By ignoring her ability to provide a valid military presence in the region the United States would be shunning a considerable amount of manpower and firepower that could be thrown at ISIS.

A second potential partner can be found in the state of Turkey. Until recently, “Turkey has refused to allow its Kurdish fighters to cross into Syria because of links between Syrian Kurds and Turkey’s own separatist rebels” however, she “has come under pressure to increase its support for the international coalition fighting ISIS,”<sup>161</sup> which is a significant step in the right direction.

While the U.S. and Turkey are natural allies by nature of their co-existence in NATO, the United States would surely benefit from an increased level of involvement from a nation that boast one of Europe’s largest armies. Additionally, Turkey is of strategic importance geographically, as she borders Syria to the North and can serve as a geographic buffer that contains ISIS militants within regions to the South. As far as military capabilities are concerned, Turkey is a very capable partner. She boasts of an estimated 410,000 active military personnel, 3,650 tanks, 980 aircraft, and 115 naval vessels.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> GFP. “Iran Military Strength.” Global Fire Power. March 27, 2014. Accessed November 6, 2014. [http://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country\\_id=iran](http://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=iran)

<sup>161</sup> Bajekal, Naina. “Turkey Will Help Iraqi Kurds Join Fight Against ISIS in Syria.” Time Magazine Online. October 20, 2014. Accessed November 5, 2014. <http://time.com/3524194/isil-isis-turkey-kurdish-iraq-syria-kobani/>

<sup>162</sup> GFP. “Turkey Military Strength.” Global Fire Power. March 27, 2014. Accessed November 6, 2014. [http://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country\\_id=turkey](http://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=turkey)

A final partner to consider would be that of Saudi Arabia. While a Sunni nation as a whole, Saudi Arabia does not agree with the extreme brutality that ISIS has shown, and because of this, is currently aiding in coalition airstrikes. Saudi Prince al-Faisal's reasoning for joining coalition forces was best shown when he said, "we don't consider ISIS as being a Muslim group, because of what they do to Islam."<sup>163</sup> He continues further, explaining that, "you don't simply create an Islamic state by chopping people's heads off and enforcing your opinion on them."<sup>164</sup> Saudi Arabia's military might is comprised of an estimated 233,000 active duty personnel, 1,000 tanks, 650 aircraft, and 50 naval vessels.<sup>165</sup>

As the United States seeks to build a comprehensive strategy geared towards addressing the growing power and influence of ISIS in the Middle East region, we must look at strategic nations in the region that could serve as much needed allies as against this threat. Additionally, we should look at our own internal strategies and question whether not they suitably address ISIS's long-term ambitions within the Region. We must be careful to not only look at where ISIS operates now, but also to make realistic assumptions about territories they will likely operate from in the future, and plan accordingly.

By recognizing that there is value added in increasing our relationships with Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, the United States can bring a considerable amount of

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<sup>163</sup> CBS. "Saudi Prince on Helping US Fight ISIS." CBS News. September 25, 2014. Accessed November 7, 2014.

<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/saudi-arabia-prince-turki-al-faisal-on-syria-airstrikes/>

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

military fight to ISIS without increasing the United States' own military footprint. Furthermore, by engaging these three nations directly, the United States can ensure that there are geographical allies that are physically between ISIS' current locations, and those nations we have identified earlier in this chapter as "at risk" for future ISIS operations.

### **Conclusions**

As evidenced by the research presented above, one can see that ISIS has taken advantage of the security vacuum in Iraq created by U.S. troop withdrawals, and political instability in Syria over the existence of Bashir al-Assad's regime, in order to advance their brutal objectives. ISIS has garnered the attention and admiration of extremist organizations throughout the Middle East, and their rise to prominence has placed them in a position where they can argue themselves as a more relevant transnational terrorist organization than al-Qaeda. As noted earlier in this chapter, ISIS is interested in creating a Sunni-led Islamist Caliphate that would blanket the entire Middle East region, and eventually the world. Taking this motivation into consideration, we must look beyond Iraq and Syria and identify nations that would be likely targets of opportunity for ISIS to conduct operations out of in the future.

Through the analysis presented by the Fund For Peace, one is able to draft predictions as to where ISIS may move next. In my analysis, I identified Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen as states that at considerable risk of allowing ISIS to gain footholds within their borders. Afghanistan is particularly at risk by nature of her struggles with a

new presidency, an ongoing battle with Taliban insurgents, and serious questions surrounding her ability to provide internal security once U.S. troops withdraw fully by the end of 2016. Pakistan is facing similar turmoil, struggling with a government wrought with corruption while battling Pakistani Taliban militants that are eager to join ISIS forces. Yemen has already proven herself incapable of ridding AQAP from within her borders despite ongoing U.S. financial aid and airstrikes. AQAP has become emboldened with ISIS' recent successes and allowing the two organizations to strengthen ties will only bring more instability to Yemen.

When analyzing the United States' strategy towards the engagement of ISIS, one realizes that continued airstrikes are perhaps her only option from militaristic standpoint, unless the current administration changes direction and decides to maintain our current ground footprint or even expand it. Given our intent to minimize our ground footprint, the U.S. must look at other nations in the region that are capable of filling that capability gap. In doing so, we identify Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia as nations of strategic interest which have all expressed a willingness to take the fight to ISIS.

Despite possessing different motivations for wanting to aid in coalition efforts, all three nations are geographically significant because they contain ISIS movements in certain ways. Turkey contains ISIS from spreading its influence to the North, Saudi Arabia acts as a geographical barrier between ISIS in Syria and AQAP in Yemen, and Iran acts a geographical barrier between ISIS in Iraq and the Taliban militants in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Furthermore, aside from the United States, these three nations

possess the three largest militaries in the immediate region surrounding ISIS' current operating grounds.

In conclusion, if the United States wants to eliminate ISIS from the Middle East, it must become more proactive by predicting where ISIS is turning to next, and thwarting symptoms of extremism before they become unmanageable. A great starting point is found through the identification of the most failed states in the region, and determining whether or not there are significant enough motivations for ISIS to gravitate towards them. Additionally, the United States will need to seek partners in the region that are willing to support with military might in absence of U.S. troops on the ground. While the partners identified above may not be ones the U.S. generally works with, it is imperative we maximize regional buy-in to ensure ISIS' momentum is slowed and eventually reversed.

## **Thesis Conclusion**

In chapter one of this portfolio, I established that there is much work to be accomplished with regards to developing standard terminologies when discussing failed or failing states. Possessing a myriad of terms that refer to a generally similar condition of state performance only creates confusion. Likewise, it would be beneficial for scholars, and the international community as a whole, to come to a consensus on criteria for which we can measure state performance. Doing so will allow the international community to determine thresholds by which certain terms can be used to label certain levels of state performance. Additionally, by standardizing thresholds through which states can be measured as failed or failing, we can then develop a framework for standard responses by the international community, or at the very least, develop a means to bring attention to that state and begin a dialogue regarding how that state is impacting its neighbors and the international community as a whole, particularly with respect to security issues.

I also establish that there is in fact a nexus between transnational terrorist organizations and failed or failing states. I demonstrate this through the existence of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's (AQAP) growing influence within Yemen. I highlight how the symptoms of their presence in Yemen were there long before the United States took action to attempt to rid Yemen of AQAP's presence. As a result of this failure to act in a proactive manner, I find that the United States has now been placed in a position where it is forced to conduct air-strikes on militants as their whereabouts become known,

and with a Yemeni government that is half-heartedly attempting to address this issue internally, the United States will be supporting in this fashion for the foreseeable future.

In chapter two, I test Stewart Patrick's argument that failed states may actually be less attractive to transnational terrorist organizations than states that are considered to be failing. I do this by performing a case study on al-Shabaab in Somalia. The aim of this study is to determine to what extent a truly failed state hinders or helps a terrorist organization's operational capability. Through research, I find that there is no real capability loss experienced by al-Shabaab's existence in Somalia. While their ambitions are different, per say, than those of al-Qaeda or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, their actual operational capabilities are not hindered.

While we note that transnational terrorist organizations have admitted it being difficult to conduct operations out of Somalia due to its chaotic state, I observe that this does not prevent terrorist organizations from growing within that nation. Al-Shabaab serves as an example of a terrorist organization that has adapted to its environment in a manner which allows it to conduct operations effectively from within an extremely failed state. Lessons learned from these observations are particularly pertinent to policy makers within the international community as they seek options on how to deal with terrorist organizations that reside in states that are trending in a negative manner. While tempting from a fiscal responsibility standpoint, allowing a state to collapse further does not prove to prevent terrorist organizations from operating within its borders.

In chapter three, I build upon research conducted in chapters one and two, and develop a framework for the identification of states that are at significant risk to

transnational terror organization insurgencies due to their status as a failing or failed state. Using the Fund For Peace's CAST model for metrics and corresponding analysis, I was able to identify Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen as states that are performing significantly more poorly than other nations in the region, and subsequently are at significant risk to the future ambitions of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as it seeks to build a regional, and eventually a global "Islamic Caliphate." After those states were identified, I conducted research further to analyze their capacity to defend against ISIS intentions, highlighting that all three are ill-equipped to do so, and all three have extremist groups within them that openly support ISIS objectives.

After establishing that Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen are at risk to the future ambitions of ISIS, we take a broad look at the Middle East region to find particular nations that are placed in a good position to assist the United States in developing a comprehensive strategy geared towards the destruction of ISIS as a transnational terrorist organization. Through this analysis, I identify Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia as nations with particular stake in the destruction of ISIS, along with a considerable amount of firepower that could be used to offset the planned removal of U.S. troops in theater beyond 2016. Additionally, all three countries are strategic from a geographic perspective, as Turkey contains ISIS to the North, Saudi Arabia presents a geographic barrier between ISIS operatives in Syria and AQAP operatives in Yemen, while Iran provides a geographic barrier between ISIS operatives in Iraq and the Taliban militants in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Ultimately, this thesis portfolio accomplishes three main objectives. First, it acknowledges that failed or failing states pose as attractive environments to transnational terrorist organizations, and while poor state performance does not guarantee the presence of terrorist networks, it does enhance the probability of their existence, particularly if terrorist groups are already operating within other areas in the region. Second, through the analysis of al-Shabaab in Somalia, this research proves that allowing a state to completely fail is not a valid approach to deterring terrorist networks from operating within that state. Finally, this portfolio provides framework for the future prediction of states which may become vulnerable to transnational terrorist movements due to declinations in state performance.

This research is significant in that it brings forth a more forward leaning approach to current academic discussions surrounding failed states and the security impacts they present to neighboring nations and the international community as a whole. Much of the conversation today revolves around how poorly performing states are currently struggling to address extremist groups within their borders. This portfolio separates itself from those discussions by looking towards nations that are performing poorly, and predicting their susceptibility to future transnational terror organization movements.

If we as an international community can begin to predict where terrorist organizations are seeking their next operating base, we can work with those nations at risk to ensure this does not happen. By supporting at risk nations on the front end, we can avoid forcing ourselves into decade-long counter-insurgencies as a result of our failure to

prevent transnational terrorist groups from establishing firm roots in their desired areas of operation from the start.

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## Curriculum Vitae

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### Professional Summary

Andrew currently serves as the LPD-17 Class East Coast Ship Manager for NAVSEA, SEA 21, PMS 470 at the Washington Navy Yard, Washington D.C. In his professional position, he is responsible for the planning and execution of multi-million dollar modernization packages for Four San Antonio Class warships in Norfolk, VA and Mayport, FL as they go into shipyards for periodic maintenance periods.

Previous to this position, Andrew was employed as a Senior Consultant at Booz Allen Hamilton, where he supported the Department of Navy through the development of metrics based improvement models to enhance fleet readiness. Andrew's initial career was as a qualified Surface Warfare Officer for the United States Navy, where he deployed twice to the Middle East Region. His proudest accomplishment during this time, was as Lead Boarding Officer for the USS ANZIO (CG-68), where he recruited, trained, and led a team of 24 Sailors through 30 plus Counter-Piracy boardings in support of Coalition Task Force 151 operational tasking in the Gulf of Aden. The highlight of these efforts was the flawless execution of a counter narcotics boarding which resulted in the seizure of more than Four tons of Hashish, with an estimated street value of more than \$28 Million dollars.

Andrew reached the rank of Lieutenant while holding positions of Repair Division Officer, Force Protection Officer, Lead Boarding Officer, and Assistant Training Officer. He possesses extensive experience in briefing Flag level Naval leadership and has published Naval intelligence messages that have been reviewed at the Chief of Naval Operations level.

### Academic Experience

Johns Hopkins University, Washington DC	M.A. Global Security Studies	2014
United States Naval Academy, Annapolis MD	B.S. Naval Architecture	2006
Patuxent High School, Lusby MD	H.S. Diploma	2001

### Clubs and Associations

United States Naval Academy Alumni Association  
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### Awards

Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal (2), Global War on Terror Expeditionary Medal, Global War on Terror Service Medal, Navy "E" Ribbon, National Defense Service Medal, Humanitarian Service Medal, Sea Service Deployment Ribbon (2).

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