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## Suicide Terrorism (Jul-Dec 2007)

A Review

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# SUICIDE TERRORISM (JUL-DEC 2007)

## A REVIEW

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### **An Overview**

Suicide terrorism is one of the deadliest but least understood threats to peace. From Uzbekistan to Lebanon to Turkey, not only has the number of attacks increased, but the number of countries that have come under attack has also risen.

As a tactic, suicide terrorism has seen tremendous success because not only is it an inexpensive strategy, it also does not require the attacker to have any escape plan in place. From the perspective of the suicide bomber, they believe that they are making the ultimate sacrifice in the name of religion or for their community.

For the purpose of analysis, the following study has been divided into two parts. The first looks at suicide attacks country-wise, and the second provides an overview of the target areas, modus operandi, and groups involved. Suicide attacks, in this analysis, refer to attacks undertaken by individuals using different methods, ranging from the bomber's vest, to the use of vehicles such as cars, trucks, motorcycles, and even bicycles.

### **Afghanistan**

As a country at war, Afghanistan has seen a lot of blood shed in recent years. But the rise of the suicide bomber, mostly the Talibs who have studied in madarsas in bordering Pakistan, has become a growing concern, both within and outside the country

A graph in the I-POST (Jan-Mar07) shows the rise in the number of suicide attacks from 2005 to march 2007 and the table below also points to the rise in the number of attacks in the region. As can be seen, the attacks have increased from single-digit to double-digit to triple-digit numbers and then reduced to double-digit. The major change can be seen from 2005, when the assembly elections took place. With the elections, and the coming to power of the Karzai government, 2006 saw a major increase in the number of attacks, probably as retaliation against the government. This figure, although relatively lower in 2007, was still higher than that in 2005.

**Table 1**  
**Suicide Attacks in Afghanistan**

| Year | No. of Attacks |
|------|----------------|
| 2001 | 1              |
| 2002 | 1              |
| 2003 | 2              |
| 2004 | 6              |
| 2005 | 21             |
| 2006 | 139            |
| 2007 | 58             |

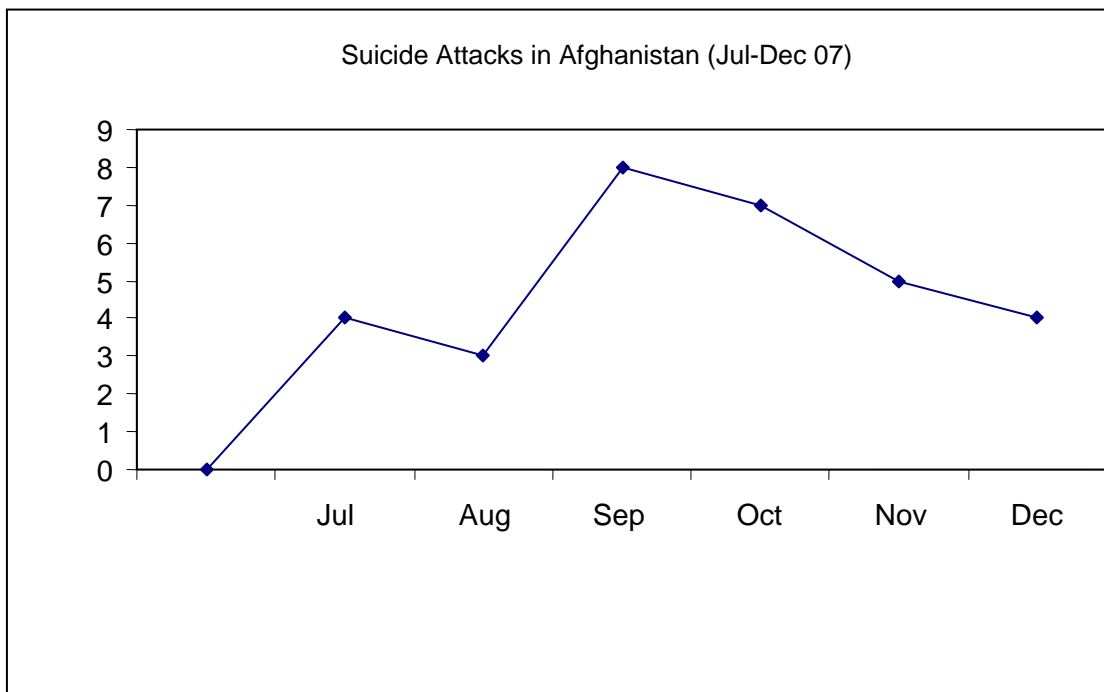
There could be numerous reasons for the decline in suicide attacks from 2006 to 2007. Perhaps the focus of the Talibs shifted from Afghanistan to Pakistan. It is also likely that they may have started facing recruitment difficulties due to the peoples' wariness of the war. Additionally, the people might have wanted to give the present government a chance to bring peace to the country. The

decrease in the number of attacks however, has been inconsistent as the number of attacks has risen from 2005 to 2007.

During the last six months of 2007, in overall, the number of attacks remained the same for the six-month period, with variations in between. While from January to June 2007, the total number of attacks was 27, over the next six months, the total stood at 31, which

citizens; the attacks in Southern Afghanistan could be a way to show the people that they should support the Taliban, who are still in control in the Pashtun-dominated Southern Afghan region.

The method of attack has remained more or less the same as during the previous six months and in the years preceding that period. The chief method employed, has been the use of bombers wearing



shows that there wasn't any drastic change between the first and the last six months of 2007, despite the decline in the overall number of attacks.

The targets of these attacks have primarily been Kabul and Southern Afghanistan, even though there were attacks in the northern areas of Herat and Mosul. While the attacks on Kabul seem to be the Taliban's way of garnering support for the insurgents, by showing the people that the government did not have the ability to protect its

vests and blowing themselves at checkpoints or by coming in front of military convoys. Of the 30 attacks in Afghanistan in the last six months of 2007, suicide bombing has been the most popular method.

Table 2 clearly shows that the insurgents, the al-Qaeda and the Taliban, unlike their counterparts in Iraq, prefer human bombs to suicide car bombers, a trend which has continued since suicide attacks became an important part of their strategy. The most gruesome attack in the

last six months (of 2007) was carried out by a suicide bomber on 6 November in Baghlan, when he detonated himself during the inauguration of a factory by a delegation of ministers who were being welcomed by school children. The ghastly attack took 72 lives and wounded more than a 100, including 6 ministers and at least 59 children.

**Table 2**  
**Mode of Attacks in Afghanistan**

| Mode of Attacks  | No of Attacks |
|------------------|---------------|
| Bomber on Foot   | 21            |
| Car bomber       | 7             |
| Motorbike bomber | 2             |

Another important fact that came to light was the use of roadside bombs by the Taliban, mostly against NATO forces and the newly-formed Afghan Army - their main targets. This is an inexpensive method used for strategic purposes by the Taliban, to demoralize the NATO forces and also shake the faith of the people in the present government.

**Iraq**

Iraq has witnessed maximum suicide attacks in Jul-Dec 2007, making it one of the most volatile and dangerous places. The country has seen the highest number of attacks compared to other countries, with the last three years having witnessed no less than 100 attacks each year. The number of civilians killed in Iraq was also the highest, as a lot of the attacks took place in public arenas such as markets, residential areas, and so on.

Also, most of these attacks took place in succession, resulting in a higher number of casualties. An analysis of the bombings clearly shows that the bombers rarely change their area of attack and also use the same method, that of driving an explosive-laden vehicle into a police checkpoint or any other vehicle carrying

NATO soldiers. Even though the bombers do not change their area of attacks, the number of incidents has risen since the past year, stating the strategic power that suicide attacks have. Though the number of attacks declined in 2006, they reached an all-time high in 2007, with 152 attacks.

Table 3 shows that the number of attacks has remained above 100 in the past 3 years, a cause of great concern. 2007 has had the maximum number of attacks in a year, which clearly shows that the use of suicide attacks as a tactic has been a success.

**Table 3**  
**Suicide Attacks in Iraq**

| Year of Attack | Number of Attack |
|----------------|------------------|
| 2005           | 150              |
| 2006           | 101              |
| 2007           | 152              |

The only area in Baghdad that is considered safe is the 'Green Zone' area, surrounding the US embassy. Nevertheless, the maximum number of attacks has been in the city of Baghdad, with 21 suicide attacks. The other popular target of suicide attacks was Diyala with 9 suicide attacks.

These attacks have become much more lethal and dangerous, with attacks on Ambassadors and ministers being attempted repeatedly. The insurgents, with different ideals and reasons for fighting, have all united to pursue a System Collapse Strategy, that is, using violence against the coalition forces, Shia and Kurdish parties, foreign contractors, and Sunnis who are sympathetic to the new government.

The table below shows that the city of Baghdad and the province of Diyala

account for more than 50% of the attacks, whereas the other attacks are spread over the whole of Iraq. Even though Baghdad has always had the maximum number of attacks since the beginning of the invasion in 2003, the allied forces have been unable to stop these attacks, which highlight the strategic significance of suicide attacks.

Baghdad is an obvious target for the insurgents, since the capital houses all the government offices, and more importantly has a heavy presence of not only American troops, but also of the other allied forces. Baghdad is composed of several ethnicities, notably Shias, Sunnis, and Kurds. The same composition exists in the Diyala province, which has seen a lot of sectarian violence.

A brief look at the profiles reveals that in the numerous attacks by insurgents, the maximum casualties have been Shia civilians, newly-recruited police officers, and armed forces. Also, the maximum number of attacks has taken place in either Shia or Kurdish neighborhoods. This could lead to a divide in society, which the former Ba'athists are against. However, a Shia government would not be acceptable to

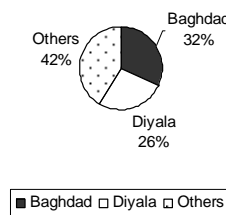
the majority Sunni population. Another aspect of these suicide attacks, specific to Iraq, is that they have always taken place in quick succession, that is, within a gap of 2-3 minutes.

A cursory glance at the chronology shows that in most cases, at least two attacks occurred in quick succession, whether in the same city or even in different cities. The attacks have also had an element of continuity, with the gap between them not exceeding five days, thus showing that the intensity of these attacks is unlikely to reduce.

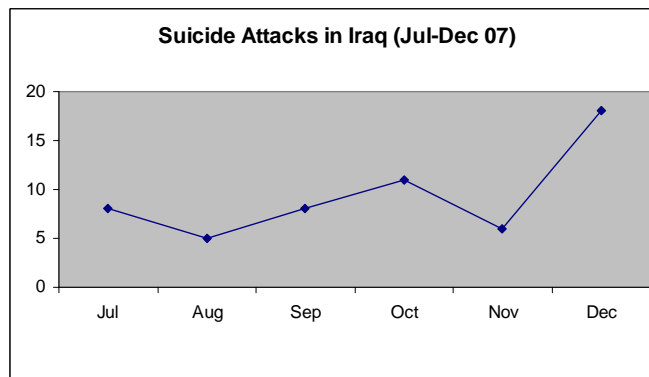
The graph below shows the number of attacks in each month for the last six months (of 2007). A closer look shows that attacks are on the rise, with December alone having seen 18 suicide attacks. Apart from these attacks, both sides have experienced high casualty rates during gun battle or combat. Suicide attacks alone have resulted in the death of nearly 1005 people and have left more than 2200 injured.

An important trend, particular to Iraq, has been successive suicide bomb attacks. A majority of the attacks during the given period took place within a gap of five minutes. The

Number of Attacks in Iraq (Jul-Dec 07)



Suicide Attacks in Iraq (Jul-Dec 07)



way it works is that after the first attacker has blown himself up and a crowd has gathered to help the wounded, the second attacker also blows himself up, causing severe damage and numerous deaths. This aspect of suicide attacks has not been witnessed in any part of the world outside Iraq.

With the highest number of casualties in 2007, Iraq is at crossroads. While Shia-Sunni clashes have increased with the Shia government being accused of having close ties with the Iranian Government, the problem of Kurdish autonomy is also extremely tense. The former Ba'athists have been trying to keep Iraq's secular culture alive, but with the number of attacks rising and economic and political clashes increasing, it is difficult to predict the future of a country, divided along religious lines.

**Pakistan**

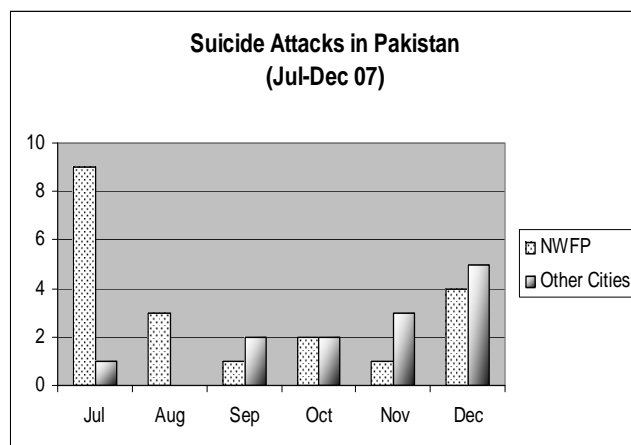
In 2007, besides Iraq, Pakistan also suffered in terms of suicide attacks. There were 56 instances of suicide terrorism in Pakistan during 2007. Four of these were committed during the first half of 2007, before the Army's commando raid on the Lal Masjid in Islamabad from 10 to 13 July 2007. The remaining 52 were committed between 13 July and 31 December 2007. This shows that the trend of suicide attacks has only just begun and that the Lal Masjid incident acted as a catalyst, breaking the barrier that had been held together since the 'war on terror'. The

month of December saw the gruesome death of the political leader Benazir Bhutto (who had returned to the country after an 8-year self-imposed exile) with a spate of suicide bombings that took the lives of 126 and injured another 248. Even though she escaped the first attempt on her life, she eventually succumbed on 27 December 2007. Also, with the elections just around the corner in Pakistan at that time, attacks became much more regular and successful.

An analysis of the trend of suicide attacks in Pakistan shows that there has been a clear shift in the type of violence the country has been swamped with. In 2006, while there was growing resentment against the government and the armed forces, due to their support for the "war on terror", there were still sectarian conflicts against the Ahmediyas and the Brelvis and so on. However, during the last year, there has been no suicide attack, and only some cases of violence against the minorities within Pakistan. This is because of the shift in the

nature of violence – from ethnic to ideological. It can also be observed that the maximum number of attacks that have occurred in the last six months (of 2007) have been in the Northwestern region of

Pakistan, with the number of attacks in the other regions such as Sindh rising considerably. This has spread out the attacks in Pakistan.



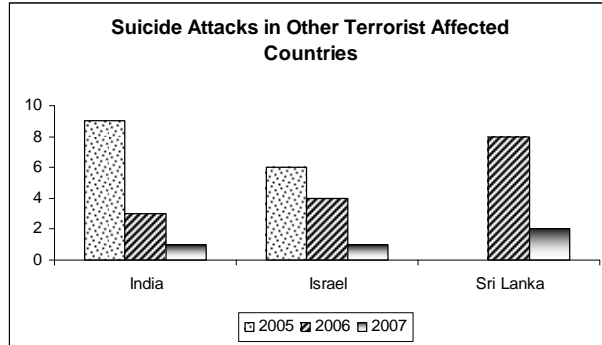
**The Maghreb and other States**

In the Maghreb states, there has been a steady rise in the number of attacks. Though the number of attacks has been only 4 in the last six months and 7 in all of 2007, the responsibility for all of these has been claimed by the al-Qaeda's North African wing, pointing to the growth of the organization in the African continent. The rise of the al-Qaeda can also be attributed to the leadership skills of the people heading these organizations as they manage to get the people's support for their ideology with the promise of a better future. These people are now turning to religion as a means of improving the quality of their lives. Before 2007, suicide attacks were not a part of these African countries, and now they are slowly seeping into the continent.

Conversely, there has been a decline in the number of attacks in countries like India and Israel, which have traditionally been the hot spots of terrorist activities. A reason for this could be that their respective neighbors, Pakistan and Iraq, have seen an increase in violence which has shifted their focus. Another plausible reason is that the peace processes in these countries are making progress. The table below illustrates the decline of suicide attacks in India and Israel, with Sri Lanka having a comparatively higher number of attacks in 2006 that plummeted in 2007.

Although there has been a decrease in the number of suicide attacks in the three

countries, the number of countries attacked by terrorist organizations has increased. Apart from the volatile states of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, the number of states attacked went up to 9 in 2007 from 6 in 2006. This points out to the rise of extremist violence in more and more countries such as Turkey, Somalia, Morocco, Algeria, Russia, and Lebanon. Incidentally, most of these states are predominantly Muslim.



**Target Areas**

The insurgents may operate in different countries but the areas of attack remain more or less the same. While some target areas are country-specific, checkpoints and convoys have been more commonly attacked. In Iraq, markets and residential areas have largely been the target areas, whereas in Afghanistan and Pakistan, checkpoints have seen the maximum number of attacks.

As the bar diagram below shows, the maximum numbers of attacks, which have been on checkpoints, have gone from 37 to 32 to 53 in the last three years. Although, there were no attacks in residential areas in 2006, their number went up from 2 in 2005 to 11 in 2007, and although the attacks on Government offices have decreased, the number of attacks on markets has gone up considerably from 6 in 2005 to 18 in 2007.

The diagram also represents the target areas in the three main countries of Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan during the given period. It shows that while the attacks in Afghanistan spread out across different areas, Pakistani insurgents, with a strong anti-government sentiment, mostly targeted Army and police checkpoints, and their headquarters. In Iraq, on the other hand, the targets of assault have ranged from residential areas and markets, to convoys and checkpoints. This is because of the divide between the Shia, Kurds, and the Sunnis. In Iraq, while the attacks on markets and residential areas have been used to cause maximum devastation, the purpose of the attacks against checkpoints seems to have been to break the morale of the forces. The maximum number of attacks in all the three countries has been against checkpoints, thereby revealing the anti-government policy of the insurgents.

**Modus Operandi**

The methods of conducting suicide attacks have varied from country to country. Nevertheless, the different types of attacks can be broadly classified as human bombs, car bombers, truck bombers, motorcycle bombers, and bicycle bombers. Of these five, human bombs are by far the most popular, especially in Afghanistan and the NWFP. Any mode of transport has now become a way of conducting suicide attacks against the ruling forces. Iraq, has

witnessed the use of a lot of car and truck bombs. In Iraq, suicide attackers rely heavily on car bombs or Suicide Vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIED).

The reason for a higher number of vehicle bombings in Iraq could be two-fold. One of the apparent reasons is that the amount of damage caused by these is immense, and the other is that Iraq, before the US invasion was much more advanced than other countries fighting the American and NATO forces.

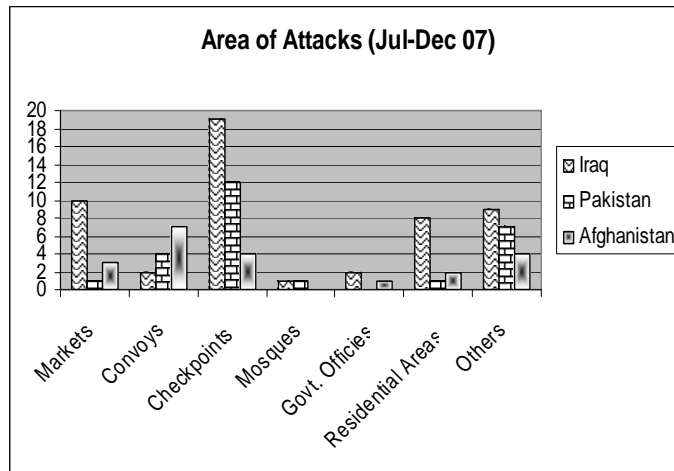
Motorbike and cycle bombers in Afghanistan have not yet become as popular as the car or truck bombings in Iraq, as there is still heavy reliance on the use of roadside

bombs.

It is in the interest of the al-Qaeda that they do not take responsibility for the attacks, as doing so would make them guilty of killing other Muslims - a crime in their eyes. Plausible deniability fits well with their political calculations.

**Groups Involved**

The al-Qaeda, as an umbrella organization, has been spreading its wings not only in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan but also over the Maghreb states of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. The North African wing of the al-Qaeda, has taken responsibility for each of the attacks that took place in these states. The rise of the al-Qaeda is a cause of





concern for the allied forces since it means that the former can re-group wherever they have dormant cells.

In Pakistan and Iraq, the al-Qaeda has not claimed any responsibility, although the forces sometimes claim that the attacks have an al-Qaeda imprint. But also of significance, are the local groups that are fighting as insurgents. In Iraq, for instance, with the new regime banning the Ba'athist party, and removing the soldiers of Saddam's army, there are a lot of unemployed soldiers and Ba'ath party loyalists or idealists. With no access to and no scope for acquiring political power, they feel alienated by the Kurds and the Shias, with whom all political power now seems to rest. Additionally, trained soldiers, with dependents to take care of, find themselves without any jobs. Thus, they benefit from the insurgency, as it provides them with their bread and butter. Apart from the nationalists, there are the Islamists, who are looking to unite the whole of the Muslim world (ummna) under one head and are an ideological part of the al-Qaeda group.

Pakistan also has its set of local insurgent groups, who call themselves the Pakistan Taliban. These groups, which have the same ideology as the Taliban, have been educated at the same Madarsas as the Talibs, that is, those bordering the Afghan-Pakistan border. In Afghanistan, while the Taliban have accepted responsibility for most of the roadside bomb attacks, they have not done so in the case of suicide attacks.

### **Conclusion**

With the coming of age of suicide terrorism as a modern tactic, and its spread over different regions of the world, suicide attacks today serve as an unequalled strategic tool for insurgents who are driven by a trans-national

political awakening. As a tactic, suicide attacks have seen unprecedented popularity, as the level of damage they can cause is colossal. Not only can hundreds die in a single attack, but the psychological damage it does to the wounded and the onlookers, is also huge. People are scarred for life, and the wounded also go through a lot of problems adjusting their life according to their disability. Suicide bombers, influenced by the various organizations and their propaganda, feel that they have the power to make a difference to the situation. The concept of taking lives gives them a sense of authority and power. Also, though the attackers never reveal their intentions, the family members are taken care of by the organizations. This works as an incentive for the unemployed youth, that after their death, regular compensation would run the family household.

From the broad trends of the given period, it is clear that checkpoints are one of the most-attacked places, but there is no way to make checkpoints more secure as the purpose of checkpoints is to keep the insurgents out. The other important targets have been army and police convoys and recruitment centers. The recruitment centers are attacked for the most strategic reason, being increase in the number of forces the insurgents would have to fight. The bar diagram clearly points out that the maximum number of attacks have been in Iraq, followed by Pakistan and then by Afghanistan. In analyzing the trends from July to December 2007, certain points come to light, whether they are differences in the methodology of attacks or similarities in the places of attacks. While Iraq uses more truck and car bombers, in Afghanistan, IEDs are used either by foot bombers or as roadside bombs. One reason for this could be that the impact created by a

car or a truck bomb is much more than the impact of a vest bomb and that Iraqi insurgents have had success with these attacks, whereas in Afghanistan, car bombing has not been that popular a choice. Also, due to the scarce availability of cars in Afghanistan, the insurgents perhaps find it easier to blow themselves up instead. Apart from the umbrella organization, the al-Qaeda, there is nothing that holds the insurgents together. But nevertheless, their ideologies are more or less the same. The Iraqi insurgents, as mentioned earlier, may have different end results, but they have the same goal, that of overthrowing the puppet governments in power.

Of the number of people killed in the attacks, in the given period, there were more civilians than army or police personnel. Though the number of attacks has been maximum in places with heavy military or police presence, the number of people killed has not been more than 30 in a given attack; whereas in a single attack in Iraq, more than 150 people died in a suicide attack by a truck bomber. Thus, the impact in a civilian area is much more than at checkpoints, since the number of people at the latter is never substantial.

On the other hand, India and Israel had a good year as insurgency-related suicide attacks declined substantially. Though the reason could perhaps be just that both the countries' neighbors are facing problems of insurgency, that is, Pakistan and Iraq; and the jihadi forces have their attention diverted for now. But it does raise the question of the increase in the number of attacks in predominantly Muslim countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, Somalia, Yemen, and so on. Does this mean that for the creation of a pan-Islamic umma, each country's democratic institutions would not be considered? And does this increase in predominantly

Muslim countries, in any way relate to the decrease in the attacks in the majority non-Muslim countries, as the organizations first want all the Muslims to unite? Also, in the Maghreb States, responsibility for all the attacks has been taken by the al-Qaeda's North-African wing, which could just be a local group that has sworn allegiance to the ideology of the al-Qaeda. This rise of organizations supporting the ideology of the al-Qaeda, or the rise of the al-Qaeda in the different continents, is a cause of great concern.

Though the attacks in Iraq have an ethnic aspect to them, most of the attacks in the rest of the countries have been religion-centric rather than ethnicity or nationality-based. The insurgents in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and to a large extent in Iraq too, are not fighting to rid the country of foreign rule so that they have a democratic government; these governments are very much existent (though not in full power). They are fighting as they believe in a different form of governance, one that is religion-based, and do not agree with the running of the government.