Three decades after its founding, where does Al Qaeda stand today?

Experts say that although the terrorist group is not as strong as it was in the past, developments in Afghanistan present new opportunities for the group.

All eyes are on Afghanistan as the Taliban rapidly takes control of several Afghan provincial capitals. The Taliban has taken dozens of districts and border crossings in the past few weeks as foreign troops withdraw.

Several experts have been expressing concern about a potential comeback for Al Qaeda due to the fallout from the conflict between the Taliban and the Afghan government, due to the power vacuum left by the withdrawing US troops.

While Daesh has dominated headlines in recent years, Al Qaeda has quietly pursued a strategy of restructuring and forging alliances with regional organizations. The US National Intelligence in 2019 warned that senior al Qaeda leaders were "strengthening the organization's global command structure, continuing to encourage attacks on Western and US targets."

A UN report that same year revealed that Al Qaeda appears to be even more revered, remains resilient and active in many regions and retains a desire to take on a more international appearance.

Most recently, Alex Younger, former head of British intelligence last month also warned that the Al Qaeda threat will grow saying that "it would be an 'enormous mistake" to neglect Afghanistan as happened back in 1989 after the mujahideen defeated the Soviet Union.

In light of recent developments, many believe that Al Qaeda and Daesh terrorist groups will take advantage of the departure of foreign forces.

August 11 marks 33 years since the founding of Al Qaeda.

Terror and security expert, Dr Elisabeth Kendall from Oxford University's Pembroke College plays down some of the more sensationalist warnings about Al Qaeda's resurgence.

"It has been degraded by drone strikes, infiltrated by spies, and fragmented by infighting. We should no longer think of Al Qaeda as a single integrated movement with central command and control," she told TRT World.

"But we must not be complacent. Its various splinter groups forge different alliances and this makes today's Al Qaeda both less predictable and more difficult to define and monitor."

According to security expert Abdullah Agar, Al Qaeda has 'completed' its work.

"When we look at such structures, they have all mutated, they have changed their strategies related to terrorism and politics, they come out very differently in this context. They completed their main task, which was for Islamophobia to prevail in the West," he added. "Al Qaeda still makes sense to some people, especially in certain segments, it still has the capacity to act, but its techniques and tactics have changed," Agar tells TRT World. On the other hand, Dr Kendall says Al Qaeda is still looking to attack the West and its allies.

"But its capacity to directly launch attacks inside the West is greatly reduced. Of course, the capacity for Al Qaeda's ideology and propaganda to inspire so-called lone wolf attacks remains. One other possibility is to launch 'international' attacks inside the Middle East, for example by focusing on soft targets or maritime shipping," she added. Security expert Agar also believes that Al Qaeda has been instrumental in building anti-Islamic discourse across the world. "They have performed their functions and will continue to perform their duties with the like. For Christians and Jews, Islam was also a hope, and these organisations became part of the perception operation against Islam". According to Dr Kendall, the developments in Afghanistan can also help Al Qaeda to find an opportunity. "Al Qaeda has a habit of bouncing back, particularly in conflict zones and failed states. So the unravelling of Afghanistan presents a golden opportunity for Al Qaeda to resurge. It has retained ties to the Taliban and may be able to re-group in the safe haven provided in the country," she told TRT World. **Monitoring Desk**

ANDSF capable to fight Taliban, Pentagon

Following surge in Taliban attacks and falling of districts and a number of provincial capitals to the group in recent days, Pentagon by expressing concern over deterioration of security condition in Afghanistan says Afghan National Defense and Security Forces have the capability to fight Taliban.

John Kirby, Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, told reporters in Washington that US was concerning over security situation in Afghanistan, stressing that the Afghan Defense and Security Forces had the capability to fight Taliban.

Pointing to falling a number of Afghan provincial capital to the Taliban, Kirby said the Afghan defense and security forces were responsible for defending the Afghan cities and their people and they should show strong determination to address the crisis.

According to US officials, Afghan special operations forces have been able to hold off the Taliban in key centers including Kandahar and Lashkar Gah, but in locations where the commandos have not been sent in, regular Army forces have been overrun.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan ministry of defense says Afghan National Defense and Security Forces particularly the special operations forces have overall capabilities to target terrorists at anywhere in the country, but it shows serious concern over presence of thousands of foreign terrorist fighters in the country.

A spokesperson to the ministry of defense Rohullah Ahmadzai said terrorists who have sent to Afghanistan have been unprecedented.

"Hundreds of religious madrasas and seminaries have been recently closed and thousands of Taliban have been sent to Afghanistan to fight against Afghan security forces and Afghan people in Afghanistan," Ahmadzai said, adding that Pakistan army officers and personnel have been active recently to fight shoulder to shoulder with Taliban against the Afghan people and security forces.

Afghan military experts say the country's ongoing fighting has its own depth as all efforts and sacrifices of the Afghan defense and security forces are sometimes ignored when something minor happens.

"Recruitment and training of the Afghan defense and security forces should be standardized as current trainings they are receiving are not constructive and effective for current fighting. It is good that all Afghan defense and security forces should be trained in accordance to present time," said Hadi Khalid, former deputy minister of interior.

He added that Afghan defense and security organs should have further coordination in fighting against the Taliban group as close coordination can be effective in battlefield and can prevent from further casualties, stressing that the country's political leaders should have consensus towards peace and war and be committed to fighting and defending the country. Atiqullah Amarkhil, another Afghan military expert, says Afghan National Defense and Security Forces have overall capabilities to independently fight the country's enemies as they have been trained and equipped during the past 20 years. "Maintaining security and fighting Taliban and Daesh causing bloodshed of innocent civilians is the responsibility of Afghan National Defense and Security Forces and this responsibility should be fulfilled with full precision," Amarkhil said.

He added if the country's defense and security forces were led in a better way, they could defend the country and people without any support from foreign countries.

Current security situation in Afghanistan have made a number of Afghans to convince the international community through social media to exert pressure on Pakistan to stop funding and providing safe havens for Taliban. The campaign 'Sanction on Pakistan' has been launched for the past three days during which Afghans are asking the international community particularly the United Nations to sanction on Pakistan as the country is supporting and interfering in internal affairs of Afghanistan.

This comes amid surge in Taliban attacks and falling a number of provincial capitals to the hand of Taliban. Afghan defense and security forces organs have said they will soon start large-scale offensive attacks on the Taliban to take the control of the fallen provincial capitals from the Taliban group.

Raiszada

Afghans women say Taliban crimes should be documented

By: Lailuma Noori

Afghan Women Voice Group in Peace-making Policy say Taliban's steps in connection with 'jihadul Nikah' (marriage) should be exposed internationally and their crimes against women are documented with close cooperation of human rights organizations.

Members of the group the other day in a news meeting declared that the voice of Afghan women should be shared with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). In a statement released by the group, it has been stressed that protective steps and facilities should be created for defenders of the women rights in support of the human rights defenders committee in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, Herat Times in a telegram canal writes that based on information from the Taliban group in Herat's Kurkh district, a number of women 'widowers' has been brought in a location in pretext that they would be helped.

"A number of married women have also attended the program to get assistance when they saw mullahs and fighters who wanted to forcefully marry women attending the program. Those having husbands by shouting that they have husbands have saved themselves from mullahs and fighters, while some others have been taken by mullahs," the Herat Times said.

The Herat Times further said that based on another report, Taliban fighters in Herat's west in Sayed Fakoor town have forcefully taken two young daughters after entering a house and beating other members of a family in the area.

There are reports that Taliban are promising the Afghan defense and security forces personnel that they will not harm them if surrendering to them, but those surrendering to the Taliban are taken out from their homes and are killed brutally during nighttime.

Halima Sadaf Karimi, a member of Afghanistan parliament says Taliban have enacted a law in the areas under their control, especially in the north, that every house should marry a girl to a mujahideen fighter, saying that it is their mujahideen's right. It is said that after marrying girls, they take them to Waziristan to receive Islamic studies.

Ms. Karimi added that the Taliban in Jawzjan province had beaten women who left their homes out in several valleys of the province. Meanwhile, the Afghan women group also asked meaningful presence of Afghan women in peace talks. According to members of the group, so far role of Afghan women has been symbolic as no meaningful role has been given to them in decision-making level of the peace talks.

Members of the group asked for documentation of Taliban's crimes after local officials said that Taliban started imposing limitations on women with capturing areas in the country's north. The Taliban are not equal in the standards of humanity, Islam and Afghanism. They had previously said that people would later introduce their 14-year-old daughters and widows to the Cultural and Religious Commission in order to marry them to the group's fighters.

Human rights watch groups have criticized the Taliban for numerous human rights abuses in the wake of their recent attacks on cities, calling many of the Taliban's actions as war crimes.

Conflicts displace 57,000 families in restive provinces, officials

By: Suraya Raiszada

The escalation of war and its spread into the provincial capitals has caused displacement of thousands of families from their homes in some restive northern and southern provinces of the country. Only, in the past five months, 57,000 families have been displaced as fighting and violence intensified by the Taliban militants, according to the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriates.

"The number of displaced people may be more than that and may have been deregistered due to the war," the ministry's deputy spokesman said.

Reza Baher, the ministry's deputy spokesman told The Kabul Times that after the Taliban attacks on districts and cities, families have fled their areas and sought refuge to the safer places under the government control.

According to him, the statistic has increased in recent months as the Taliban attacks intensified in the major cities and that in the last 15 days, up to 5,300 families have fled their main areas and relocated to the safer parts of the country.

In the past five months, 57,000 families have been displaced by war and violence, according to the spokesman.

The Taliban fighters attacked the city of Sheberghan, the capital of Jawzjan province, for several days now, and all offices in the province have been closed and the provincial Department of Refugees has not been able to register and survey the entire displaced people in recent weeks.

According to them from the Jawzjan Refugee Directorate, in the past week as Taliban attacks have intensified, residents fled their homes and taken refuge in safer areas under the government control.

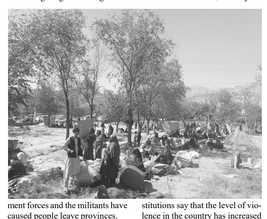
Akhtar Mohammad, a resident of Jawzjan province who fled to Kabul along with his family and lives in a rented house, said he had lost all his properties and fled war and violence and spend their live with difficulties. He called on the government to address their situation and pave the way for their return.

Most of Kunduz, Helmand, Takhar and Sar-e-Pul provinces are reportedly under Taliban control and the people will face severe problems if their provinces were not cleared of the militants.

The ministry's deputy spokesman said the ministry has assisted a number of families, but with the escalation of the war, the process has face challenges.

The Taliban militants have intensified their attacks on parts of the country as the new solar year begins and this after the withdrawal of foreign forces from the country.

Experts believe that with the deteriorating security situation, increase in suicide attacks, escalation of fighting between government forces and the militants have caused people leave provinces.



They asked the government to support them financially and pave the way for their return.

Organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Program (WFP) and others are currently assisting the internally displaced people (IDPs), with the Ministry of Refugees as a coordinator and overseer.

Earlier, the Independent Human Rights Commission (IHRC) reported that the number of people displaced by the war had risen this year and 62,480 families have been displaced in the last six months due to the ongoing war and violence by the Taliban.

It is to be noted that it is the harvest season of agricultural products in most provinces of the country and more families have reportedly left their homes and these products are feared now to be destroyed.

According to official statistics, from May 1 to July 15 this year, more than 2,900 security incidents occured across the country.

As a result of the security incidents, more than 17,600 Taliban fighters, security forces and civilians have been killed and the average death toll has increased over the past two and a half months.

President Ghani recently said that the Taliban have no will to make peace, so he has a plan on the table to change the security situation in the next three to six months.

At the same time, security institutions say that the level of violence in the country has increased after the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan.

The Ministry of Interior Ministry spokesman Mirwais Stanekzai told media that the Taliban militants have harmed civilians during their attacks on the districts and in many areas, they killed innocents. Fawad Aman, the deputy spokesman for the Ministry of National Defense, said that security forces were working day and night to prevent Taliban attacks and offensives, and that the group had suffered heavy casualties and would soon be defeated in the provinces they have now under control.