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# The Franchising Effect on the Al-Qaeda Enterprise and Related Transnational Terror Groups: Patterns of Evolution of Al-Qaeda Affiliates in the 21st Century

Nicholas Benjamin Law

*Old Dominion University*, [nxlaw001@odu.edu](mailto:nxlaw001@odu.edu)

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**THE FRANCHISING EFFECT ON THE AL-QAEDA ENTERPRISE AND RELATED  
TRANSNATIONAL TERROR GROUPS: PATTERNS OF EVOLUTION OF  
AL-QAEDA AFFILIATES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

by

Nicholas Benjamin Law  
B.A. December 2002, The University of Georgia  
M.A. March 2011, Naval Postgraduate School  
M.M.S. June 2016, United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College

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Approved by:

Steve A. Yetiv (Director)

Peter Schulman (Member)

Fran Hassencahl (Member)

## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE FRANCHISING EFFECT ON THE AL-QAEDA ENTERPRISE AND RELATED TRANSNATIONAL TERROR GROUPS: PATTERNS OF EVOLUTION OF AL-QAEDA AFFILIATES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

Nicholas Benjamin Law  
Old Dominion University, 2016  
Director: Dr. Steve A. Yetiv

The attacks of September 11, 2001 by Al-Qaeda-sponsored militants represented a high-water mark for the terrorist organization in its self-styled journey to become the inspirational Islamic vanguard for disenchanted Muslims across the globe. In the years that followed these attacks, the Al-Qaeda enterprise underwent a constant rate of evolution and mutation, resulting in a phenomenon of parallel and like-minded Islamist groups pledging allegiance to Usama bin Laden and his ideological vision of a global jihad. Instead of strengthening the overall organization, this expansion diluted the command and control of Al-Qaeda senior leaders in their ability to shape the overall movement it once led, as well as displaced the locus of power for the larger movement among various powerbrokers with unpredictable agendas and worldviews. Instead, the affiliation and franchising of parallel groups proved to result in only temporary changes in organizational behavior of these affiliates, as the domestic social, political, and economic forces present in these regions and nation-states had much more effect on Al-Qaeda affiliates and their members than the traditional Al-Qaeda agenda

This dissertation is innovative in comparing Al-Qaeda Central in 2001 to its corollary manifestations as Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) across four variables of study and across time. The findings of this study help to explain the evolution of Al-Qaeda as the most capable and feared

terrorist organization that it occupied at the beginning of the decade into a vague conglomerate of affiliates and sub-groups fifteen years later. The short term gains offered by affiliation for parallel movements under the AQ brand were exploited by these affiliates for their own particular interests, but ultimately discarded for domestic welfare of the affiliates themselves, even running counter to the transnational agenda of Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda.

Breaking new ground, this research attempts to understand the evolution of the organization through the affiliation of parallel movements, what effect this affiliation has, and to identify signposts and patterns that can be overlaid on future manifestations of the global Islamic jihadist movement, either under Al-Qaeda leadership or some other organization.

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This dissertation is dedicated to those brave, young patriots who answered their nation's call at a critical point in our shared history, and in order to preserve our collective American way of life.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

On September 11, 2001, Al-Qaeda-sponsored militants struck a devastating blow to the United States. These attacks served as the impetus for the United States to begin a comprehensive campaign to destroy this organization, which led a nation to conduct armed conflict in a variety of geographically distributed theaters, and which constitutes the longest period of war in American history. At present day, the campaign against transnational Islamic terror networks and organizations by the United States endures. Throughout the decade that followed the 9/11 attacks, terrorism experts, policy makers, and military commanders have struggled with defining the global jihadist movement, how it is organized, what it seeks to accomplish, and Al-Qaeda's role in that movement. At present day, the global jihadist movement, one formerly led by Usama Bin Laden (UBL) and his Al-Qaeda organization, has now fallen under the leadership of the Islamic State headquartered in Syria and Iraq. This change in ideological leadership and the emergence of the latest manifestation of global Islamic jihadism is simply the newest chapter in an on-going mutation and evolution of a larger, less tangible movement. Just as the United States' campaign against this most recent embodiment of transnational terror continues, so does the unending quest in the attempt to understand how this coalescence of ideology, violence, and terror comes to pass.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the military operations that targeted Al-Qaeda training camps and strongholds throughout Afghanistan, the diffusion and expansion of the Al-Qaeda narrative--accompanied with tangible military capabilities, personnel, and money--made the mission of finding, fixing, and locating Al-Qaeda elements much more difficult. In a media briefing in January 2001, nine months before the 9/11 attacks, General Tommy Franks, then

Commanding General of U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) whose operational area of responsibility (AOR) included Al-Qaeda Central strongholds, stated that Al-Qaeda maintained a presence in seventy countries. Although this represented an official estimate on the disposition of Al-Qaeda at the time, many scholars and policy experts simply did not know where this number came from or if it was even an accurate depiction of Al-Qaeda's organizational strength.<sup>1</sup>

Following the attacks, these assessments by the United States Government were used as an attempt to build overall situational awareness after-the-fact on the person(s) who carried out these attacks.<sup>2</sup> Although few people were thinking about Al-Qaeda prior to 9/11, those tragic events spurred an enormous amount of research and analysis on the organization, specifically, and terrorism, in general, both from a historical perspective to modern capabilities and motives, all of which were part of the cumulative effort to understand this new enemy.

Much of the existing scholarship on Al-Qaeda (AQ) has focused on the deep study of the formation of the organization, specifically the matriculation and radicalization of UBL and Ayman al-Zawahiri, both of whom have had the most impactful and lasting influence on Al-Qaeda, coupled with the effects of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the perceived encroachment of the West on Islamic lands. These previous studies focused heavily on the development and explanation of radical Islamic thought and its link to transnational terrorism, as well as introducing scholars to the inspirational figures that contributed to its ideological foundations and worldviews. These previous studies provided the necessary foundational knowledge that informed the international community about who this group was and what its leadership espoused at a critical time in world history. These studies were vital to gathering that required information, which would serve to shape operations targeting Al-Qaeda and its affiliates

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Bialik, "Shadowy Figures: Al Qaeda's Ranks are Hard to Measure," *The Wall Street Journal* (September 9, 2011): <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111903285704576560593124523206.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Bialik, "Shadowy Figures: Al Qaeda's Ranks are Hard to Measure".

in the post-9/11 operational environment. However, these deep studies tell little about the nature of the organization post-9/11, if it is still in fact an organization, and how it has adapted to pressures exerted upon it through a changing global order and a transformative, post-Arab Spring Middle East.

What remains is an understanding of Al-Qaeda that is too rooted in previous conflicts, expired notions, ideas, and perceptions that have become outdated and ill placed. For political reasons, it remains expeditious to call upon the public's constructed ideas about what Al-Qaeda really is, who belongs to it, and what its ends, ways, and means truly are. Some have gone so far as to say that the notion of Al-Qaeda as an organization that poses grave risk to the United States is a myth continually perpetuated by Western media, and policy makers have institutionalized terrorism into the American psyche for various, unrelated ends.<sup>3</sup> Although there is an argument that Al-Qaeda no longer exists except in these constructed terms, the religious edicts espoused by those claiming allegiance to Al-Qaeda and its leadership--however detached and weakened they may be--are enduring.

Competing conventional wisdoms and public opinion indicate that Al-Qaeda represents a monolithic, transnational, and coordinated movement; many view the history of Al-Qaeda as belonging to two separate historical chapters. The first narrative describes a group borne out of the mountains of Afghanistan during the waning days of conflict against the Soviet Union, which would go on to perpetrate attacks on American targets in Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Kenya, and Tanzania, as well as the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001. The second narrative seeks to know the organization that emerged following the 9/11 attacks, proliferated its ideology, and sought to serve as the spiritual vanguard for transnational Islamic terrorism with its disciples far flung across the wider region and the globe.

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<sup>3</sup> Fawaz Gerges, *The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7.

As experts labored to develop the understanding necessary to counter Al-Qaeda, the terrorist organization began to expand and mutate. As either part of some overarching strategy, or simply the exploitation of the socio-political forces across the wider Middle East and beyond, Al-Qaeda affiliates began to spring up across the region. Between 2001-2009, primary AQ affiliates were established in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Algeria, with additional secondary affiliates in places like Somalia and South Asia loosely organized and abstractly allied with AQ. Initially seen as an expansion of capability and an increased threat to regional governments and the West, Al-Qaeda Central became less able to exercise command and control over its affiliates, despite legitimate efforts to do so. Although scholars considered Al-Qaeda as the most dangerous threat to the United States and its interests following 9/11, they determined that AQ as it was organized at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was a shell of its former self by the decade's end. Even if the organization did retain some sort of capability to plan, launch, or support attacks, the killing of Usama bin Laden (UBL) by U.S. commandos in May 2011 proved to be the final blow to an organization that had become increasingly marginalized and irrelevant to a global phenomenon that it once led.

As explained by Peter Mandaville, at the height of its abilities to plan and facilitate operations, Al-Qaeda would best be characterized “as a holding company, which-in addition to its own cells-could tap directly into a wide range of otherwise autonomous organizations to leverage their particular skills and capabilities for a given operation.”<sup>4</sup> When this assessment is taken into context, it would suggest that Al-Qaeda's strength would be increased relative to the numbers of groups or sub-organizations that coalesced under the banner of Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda Central. As these affiliates came on-line, a cursory analysis of this phenomenon would reinforce such a perspective; that is-increased numbers of affiliates equate to increased influence,

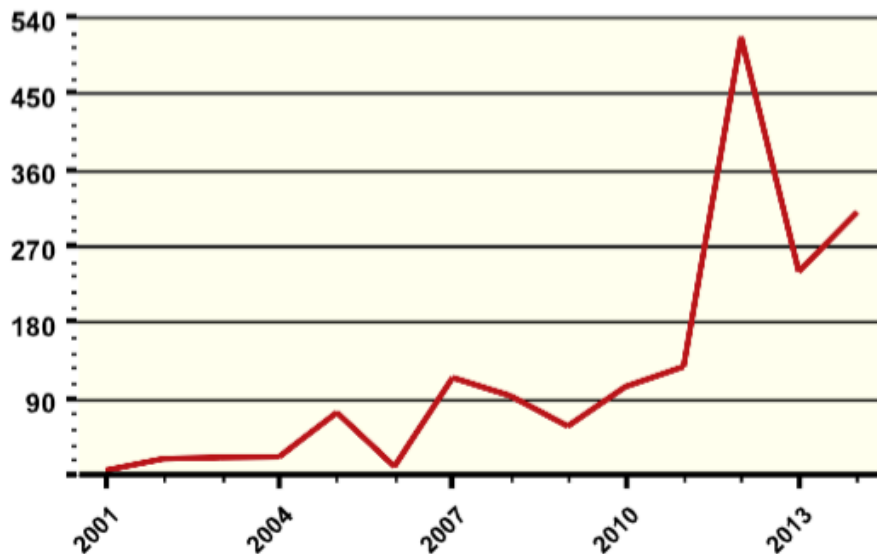
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<sup>4</sup> Peter Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Routledge, 2014, 345.

synchronized capabilities, and a general strengthening of the movement as a whole. This supposed wisdom is supported by existing research.

According to data gathered showing the numbers of attacks carried out by either Al-Qaeda Central (AQC) and its main affiliates in either Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula, or Algeria, the death of Bin Laden and the so-called “rise and fall” of Al-Qaeda has not translated into diminished attacks in the name of Al-Qaeda. As shown in Figure 1.1, the numbers of attacks has in fact steadily increased, remarkably reaching a high-water mark a year after the death of Bin Laden in 2011.

**Figure 1.1: Al-Qaeda Enterprise Attacks (2001-2014)<sup>5</sup>**



*Data Source:* National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, *Global Terrorism Database* [data file], 2016, accessed August 14, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

<sup>5</sup> Data includes cumulative attacks that were attributed to Al-Qaeda, Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).



When juxtaposed to the analysis by Gerges and many other scholars and national security professionals that claim that Al-Qaeda is in fact on the decline, if not totally obliterated, this notion simply leaves us no closer to understanding this phenomenon that we were on September 11, 2001. Did the expansion of the Al-Qaeda brand to other parallel movements strengthen Al-Qaeda or contribute to its decline?

Instead of strengthening the overall organization, the fragmentation and expansion of the Al-Qaeda brand to other parallel movements contributed to its erosion as the most capable transnational jihadist terrorist organization. In its place emerged the Islamic State (IS), an organization borne from the ashes of Al-Qaeda's affiliate in Iraq whose goal was to carry out the unification of the Islamic revivalist movement, which the traditional Al-Qaeda Enterprise (AQE) could not accomplish despite its desire to do so. As the latest incarnation of the self-styled global jihadist vanguard, the Islamic State is perpetuating an on-going narrative that has undergone constant mutation and evolution, of which Al-Qaeda merely served as custodian of for a short period.

As policy experts and military leaders refine various approaches to confront the latest incarnations of radical Islamic terrorism and the new, great threat posed by the Islamic State, it would be politically convenient to overlook the importance of understanding the failures of Al-Qaeda in developing such approaches. Through quantitative and qualitative study of Al-Qaeda's evolution during the first fifteen years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, patterns and insights of this evolution are useful in building a greater understanding of the lifecycle of similar groups or brands which may experience lateral expansion to other regions containing like-minded groups or affiliates in order to strengthen and cultivate the larger movement.

## PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The primary purpose of this study is to analyze the degradation of Al-Qaeda through the fragmentation of its brand among regional affiliates, resulting in AQ's failure to achieve its broader strategic goals. This fragmentation or affiliation of parallel Islamist groups to a central authority, the notion of ideological proliferation of transnational jihadism from a central authority to associated groups, is important in forming a more thorough understanding of similar organizations such as the Islamic State or other groups that could emerge in the future. In a 2010 study on the organizational structure of Al-Qaeda, Rohan Gunaratna and Aviv Oreg indicate a gap in existing literature, which if filled, could better explain the proliferation of the Al-Qaeda brand across the globe-- which parallel movements have adopted--and how these new brands have evolved over time.<sup>6</sup> This study seeks to answer their call. This study also seeks to more fully understand the nature of affiliation between an affiliate or franchised-group of a recognized authority (Al-Qaeda) and its parallel movements.

The driving question of this study is about change and related patterns of evolution. It aims to illuminate how Al-Qaeda and its affiliates changed over time, and it does so by studying, systematically, how the greater Al-Qaeda Enterprise (AQE) has evolved in terms of its ideological model, financing methods, targeting preferences, and the characterization of its ranks. By studying the evolution of the enterprise in this way, it is possible that patterns of this evolution can be generated and applied to similar transnational jihadist organizations, which will more fully inform a broader understanding of the character of similar or related groups that will emerge in coming decades. This study does not attempt to dismiss existing scholarship on Al-Qaeda as wrong or ill informed. Rather, it seeks to sharpen the existing body of knowledge with

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<sup>6</sup> Rohan Gunaratna and Aviv Oreg, "Al-Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (2010): 1051.

new comparisons and analyses of data and case studies that will enrich the overall understanding of Al-Qaeda's global infrastructure and focus on its change over time.

The true nature of the proliferation, or franchising, of the Al-Qaeda brand to various parallel movements is unclear. A comprehensive study of these affiliates, their motives and tactics, as well as their financing models, can include a series of lost scents and a labyrinthine maze of unverified information sources, some true, many merely legend. Since 9/11 and the enduring conflict between the West and radical Islamic terror groups, various off-shoots have sprang up across the wider Middle East, each professing an allegiance to Bin Laden (known as *bayat*) and Al-Qaeda as the chief architect of the global jihad, suggesting that these affiliates are part of a larger, tangible network, which has increased the capacity of the overall AQ organization. An existing assumption is that Al-Qaeda Central (AQC), the small headquarters element and staff of Usama bin Laden (UBL) and his top aides, based along the Afghanistan/Pakistan border, consciously and strategically built a global network upon which it executed command and control over regional affiliates in order to carry out some sort of integrated, global operational plan. Despite the fact that both the central authority and associated groups have overtly stated these goals in AQ correspondence, a study on the evolution of Al-Qaeda cannot accept this assumption without testing it.

How can this fragmentation or proliferation of Al-Qaeda be characterized? Did Bin Laden, his primary deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri, and other senior AQ leaders plan the creation of AQ-inspired affiliates as part of the overall operational design to unite the global jihadi movement, or can this evolution be explained in some other way? If it can be determined that the evolution of Al-Qaeda and its affiliates has occurred due to some other factors, how does this change the way in which opponents construct their aims against this organization? Is there

evidence of cooperation among affiliate groups in support of an overall agenda? By uncovering potential patterns through this evolutionary study of Al-Qaeda, policy makers and military leaders will have a better understanding of how to counter similar movements in the future. It is also possible that calculations can be made based on the evolutionary growth of the overall Al-Qaeda network that could assist national security professionals in predicting future iterations or components of the AQ network.

A study such as this one faces many challenges. In most cases, the narrative of Al-Qaeda and the associated data that can definitively prove operational patterns and useful linkages simply does not exist or is so highly restricted that open scholarship cannot be conducted. As the United States and her allies continue to prosecute a global campaign against Al-Qaeda and other like-minded groups such as the Islamic State, it is difficult to say what can be achieved through accessing publically available records and resources. Instead, it is necessary to weave what data can be acquired through unrestricted investigation into a general understanding that can be supported by both existing research and factual-based events. This study is based on that approach.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This study will focus on what I refer to as the Al-Qaeda Enterprise (AQE) of the 21st century and will attempt to understand its evolution from the attacks of 9/11 through the franchising of its brand to related movements (intentional or otherwise). Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis, this study will present a “state of the organization” as it existed prior to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which will establish a baseline from which to measure change over time and will allow for the study of evolutionary changes that have been observed across the AQ spectrum. For the purposes of this study, I will analyze a period of thirteen years

(2001-2014), which encompasses the period of evolution of the AQE from its zenith of 9/11 to approximately two years following Bin Laden's death.

This dissertation will use four variables of analysis to map the evolution of Al-Qaeda Central (AQC) and its mainline affiliates, Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). For this study, I define AQC as the *Central Authority* and the affiliates of this study as the *Subordinate Movements*. I will utilize existing research that has attempted to explore and more fully understand Al-Qaeda and its affiliates, while also relying on original sources, such as newspaper articles, published personal writings, and speeches. I will also utilize letters and the personal communications of Al-Qaeda leadership at all levels. I will draw on existing data to show the development of AQ affiliates and the effects that this affiliation had on parallel groups that adopted the AQ brand. This methodology will be applied to each variable of this study, which is detailed below.

The choice of this study to focus on the particular main affiliates (AQI, AQAP, AQIM) is not necessarily related to the rebranding of existing movements with the "Al-Qaeda" moniker. Rather, existing quantitative studies that have measured the strength of each relationship between AQC as the Central Authority and parallel jihadi groups as Subordinate Movements, which confirm the assumption of this study that the chosen affiliates do represent the best examples to measure Al-Qaeda's change over time. A study conducted by the RAND Corporation in 2006 measured the strength of the Al-Qaeda "nebula", which characterized eighteen AQ affiliates and related movements. Of those eighteen, the movements in Iraq, Algeria, and the Arabian Peninsula displayed some of the highest scores in twelve various categories, such as

“Coordinated or Joint Operations with AQ or AQ operatives” and “Shared combat or training experience with AQ”.<sup>7</sup>

The four variables of analysis that will be examined across time are as follows: 1) *Ideology and goals as they relate to specific worldviews and interpretations*; 2) *Targeting and operationalization associated with ideology*; 3) *Ways and means of institutional financing for recruitment, sustainment, and operational employment*; and the 4) *presence and diversity of combatants or foreign fighters employed where Al-Qaeda has a presence*. A systematic analysis across time offers an original approach to this critical subject. These variables and their respective significance are explained below.

1) *Ideology and goals as they relate to specific worldviews and interpretations*.

In order to understand the ideological construct of Al-Qaeda and its affiliates, it is important to frame this perspective in terms of what Fawaz Gerges refers to as the near/far enemy.<sup>8</sup> Historically, the radical Egyptian Islamic movement, which heavily influenced Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, was transfixed on the notion of resistance of the Egyptian government, which radical groups believed was an apostate regime that purposefully ingrained and implemented secular forms of government, subsequently marginalizing devout Muslims, and cracking down on those that were viewed as enemies of the state. The characterization of the Egyptian regime was highly influenced by the inspirational writings of Sayyid Qutb, the imprisoned and later-executed Muslim philosopher and radical who was and remains an influential figure in global jihadi circles. Qutb himself, as well as other radical Islamic thinkers, derived their interpretations from the writings of Ibn Taymiyya, the 14<sup>th</sup> century Islamic scholar

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<sup>7</sup> Angel Rabasa, *Beyond Al Qaeda: Part 1 The Global Jihadist Movement* (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation, 2006), 79.

<sup>8</sup> Fawaz Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

who attempted to reconcile the requirements of the Muslim faith and the apostate Mongol rule that swept across the greater Near East during this period.<sup>9</sup>

Although Qutb expressed strong views on the plight of Muslims across the globe and at the hands of the secular dictatorships (Gerges' *near enemy*) prevalent within the region, he also maintained radical views with regard to the West, namely the United States (far enemy). As a supporter of many of these secular regimes, Islamic radicals that were indoctrinated by the writings of Qutb would later begin to believe that the true enemy and the real power behind these dictatorships was the United States. It was this belief that framed much of what UBL set out to do in his attempts to confront the Western power.

Although important, the United States was not the only power that drew such focus. The perceived success of the Arab Afghans during the Soviet campaign of the 1980s, many of whom would go on to form the foundation of Al-Qaeda, called upon their perceived religious duty to defend Muslim lands from godless invaders. It was this success against a mighty world power that generated the momentum and confidence in grandiose aims that eventually led to the 9/11 attacks against the United States.

This radical groups' focus on affecting the *far enemy* was strengthened due to U.S. involvement during the First Gulf War, which would result in Bin Laden's subsequent loss of face with the Saudi monarchy. The perceived encroachment and subjugation of Muslims by the West led to the United States being elevated as the focus of a far-enemy orientation. Despite the adoption of this *far enemy* orientation by core Al-Qaeda, affiliated or franchised AQ groups have not necessarily adopted such a focus, often adopting an ideology that seeks to confront those regional domestic regimes, which is much more in line with the earlier Egyptian movements that

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<sup>9</sup> "Ibn Taymiyyah, Taqi al-Din Ahmad," *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, accessed May 11, 2016, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e959>.

preceded Al-Qaeda. In some cases, groups or affiliates have developed a hybrid ideological view, incorporating some form of near and far enemy orientation.

In order to analyze this variable across AQC and its main/sub-affiliates, I will use historical records and case studies to examine indicators, like political or religious remarks made by leaders within these respective groups, in order to determine the nature of focus on either the *near/far* enemy, or a combination of both. This variable will be closely tied to targeting in order to assess whether the espoused ideology matches the respective objectives. I will also provide explanations as to what may have caused a shift in *near/far* ideology, such as increased military operations against such groups by either external or internal agencies, and the resulting shifts in ideologies.

## 2) *Targeting and operationalization associated with ideology.*

Studying how Al-Qaeda and its affiliates have operationalized their ideology through an analysis of targeting data is a very telling variable to characterize the evolution of the larger organization. As the self-styled vanguard of the global Muslim cause, Al-Qaeda traditionally held the view that regional apostate regimes could be toppled only after those that had the real power were significantly weakened or destroyed.

This belief led to the adoption of a targeting program that sought to focus resources on the planning and execution of large-scale, high profile attacks that would embarrass the United States or other western powers and draw these countries into a war in the heart of the Muslim world. This encroachment would justify Al-Qaeda's aims as the defender of Muslim lands, while simultaneously causing these external powers to commit significant resources that could have lasting effects. Although Al-Qaeda could have executed attacks against its more convenient enemies, especially those regional governments that were actively pursuing its



operatives prior to 9/11, it demonstrated a high level of tactical and operational patience, and remained devoted to striking the West in a high-profile attack. AQC also focused the majority of its targeting efforts toward targets of economic impact, vice targets of a religious or cultural significance. Additionally, AQC initially refrained from openly targeting one of the largest interests of the West throughout the Middle East, the oil infrastructure of various states. As will be shown, this philosophy quickly eroded, as open targeting of oil refineries, pipelines, and other related infrastructure was sanctioned by Bin Laden and AQC.

For AQ affiliates, their targeting program may not necessarily match AQC as the Central Authority. In many instances, AQ affiliates focused on targets that were directly tied or linked to regional state governments and infrastructure, minority groups, religious sites, and various third parties, as well as a variety of other unrelated targets, despite explicit guidance from AQC that dissuaded such attacks. Furthermore, the philosophy to use suicide as a targeting medium became an important component for each of the affiliates studied. By looking at the rate of suicide attacks during the periods of study for each affiliate could provide important insights into various mechanisms of each affiliate, to include the attraction of foreign fighters and general recruitment.

I will utilize targeting data attributed to AQC and its affiliates, from historical accounts and from the Global Terrorism Database, which will facilitate the linkage of activities of specific AQ groups and subgroups and to *near/far* orientation and ideology. Not only will comparing targeting data of AQ affiliates to AQC provide a clear indicator of command and control relationships—as well as the ability, or inability, of AQC to exert control over affiliates—but it will also provide much clearer insight into these regional affiliates and their impact on the larger organization.

3) *Ways and means of institutional financing for recruitment, sustainment, and operational employment.*

Traditionally, Al-Qaeda was able to draw resources from the extensive global Islamic charity networks that acted as front organizations with the intent of covertly funding AQ and other terror groups. Prior to 9/11, these charities, with AQ sympathizers and operatives working within those charitable organizations, successfully acquired and funneled funds to Al-Qaeda. However, a key tactic in the U.S.-led war against Al-Qaeda has been to target these charity networks and prevent their activities, which has affected Al-Qaeda and its affiliates dramatically. As Steve Lewis identifies, “Long gone are the days of terrorist outfits relying on donations from supporters in foreign countries. The modern terrorist group – and Islamic State is perhaps the embodiment of this – uses a sophisticated network to earn revenue to maintain operations.”<sup>10</sup>

The sources and mechanisms of financing employed by AQC and affiliated movements will be analyzed through case studies, historical analyses, and reports that focus on sources of financing for AQ-related activities. Case studies of both AQC and its affiliates have shown that the autonomy of financing operations has been vital to the proliferation of the AQ ideology and its operationalization worldwide. AQC, and Bin Laden in particular, traditionally provided the necessary funding for affiliates or small groups to establish themselves, with the understanding that these groups would quickly become financially self-sufficient. The manner in which these groups sustained themselves is a key variable of study, as it can offer evolutionary insights into group motivations and potential avenues of exploitation by the West. I will study the established and documented ways in which AQC and subgroups have financed their activities, and analyze how this has evolved since 2001 and across various groups, depending on the nature of their specific geographic locations.

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<sup>10</sup> Lewis, "Financing terrorism," 20-26.

4) *Presence and diversity of combatants or foreign fighters within AQ affiliates and their roles within the organization.*

The foreign fighter phenomenon has been a dynamic and often-studied component of the transnational Islamic revival. Foreign fighters are driven by dual factors that drive participation: the first being understood as an Islamic duty to defend Muslim lands from occupiers (i.e., Afghanistan and Iraq), and the second being understood as a form of political transnationalism through fighting (violence) to gain political clout and influence in either an active conflict zone or in their country of origin upon return from a given conflict. For those fighters that survive religiously inspired expeditions as part of some larger campaign, the benefits that await them upon their return, especially among jihadi organizations, are unmatched. These veterans who have demonstrated this commitment across the battlefields of the jihadi renaissance gained serious credibility among a growing global movement with varying levels of participants and devotees.

Throughout the formative years of Al-Qaeda during the Soviet campaign, thousands of Arab volunteers flocked to the region to receive some level of training in the *mujahedeen* camps ran by Bin Laden's Arab Afghan enterprise. Some of those veterans would go on to form the core leadership and middle management of Al-Qaeda Central, whereas others who survived simply returned home, where they became drawn to radical organizations and ideologues within their home countries, to include emerging AQ affiliates.

Historically, early Al-Qaeda operated in a much more centralized way, deploying and directing fighters across various theaters, to include Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, East Africa, and Somalia, as well as the Caucuses. Training camps established by Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan were organizationally based on the nationality of foreign volunteers. Egyptians lived and trained with

other Egyptians. Algerians lived and trained with Algerians. This pattern was standard practice. It is possible that AQ derivatives and affiliates would be expected to have a much more homogeneous composite of fighters, as these fighters would be less able to traverse state borders, as well as less incentivized to do so because of perceived political or social benefits of remaining in a struggle close to home. The presence of a diversified foreign fighter cadre would indicate some level of coordination among the larger organization, even loosely, which would allow some sort of determination to be made about the nature of Al-Qaeda and how it has evolved with regard to its ability to disperse its fighters across the region to aid and support other parallel movements. On the other hand, it also remains possible that the homogeneity of regional affiliates and their specific grievances do not lend themselves well to the addition of non-indigenous ethnicities and nationalities into the movement.

If true, the evolving homogeneity of the foreign fighter contingent operating in regional AQ affiliates is important, as it potentially points to a trend of abandonment by those foreign fighters that seek to gain, either socially or politically, much less than those fighters who are traditionally from a given conflict zone, especially once the romanticism of joining such a movement has dissipated.

In general, data on the origins of foreign fighters as members of the Al-Qaeda network is either very hard to acquire through unclassified means, or has been highly manipulated by foreign governments to achieve some political end. Furthermore, it is difficult to determine if foreign volunteers can be considered to be operating as members of a regional Al-Qaeda affiliate, with a separate and distinct group or organization, or the highly unlikely, yet possible, notion that these fighters are operating independently. This dilemma will be addressed with the assumption that foreign fighters present in the case studies that will follow either traversed into a

regional theater of conflict through AQ-sponsored means or networks, or once in theater, also operated within an AQ-backed cell or organization.

In order to establish a baseline from which to track the foreign fighter contingent belonging to Al-Qaeda, I will utilize a comprehensive 2004 study that collated the data of 172 *mujahedeen* who were believed to be part of the larger Al-Qaeda organization in its earliest days. This study provides names, dates, and places of birth for those fighters listed, which constitutes membership within the Central Staff and three sub-regions.<sup>11</sup> For the purposes of this study, this data will provide a diversification baseline as a comparative study among the three main affiliate groups. Additionally, I will provide a basic organizational analysis of the hierarchical structure of AQC and each affiliate, and show the roles of influential nationalities within each respective group over time.

## REVIEWING THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

This section provides a background on the foundational debates that have contributed to the construction of the ideas, notions, and beliefs that have emerged with regard to radical Islamic thought and its influence on Al-Qaeda. It is important to understand conventional wisdom and popular ideas about Al-Qaeda, how it's organized, and the political, social, and economic conditions that sustain it before exploring how this study will contribute to the existing literature.

Within the existing body of knowledge on the evolution of Al-Qaeda in the post-9/11 era, three central debates have emerged that represent the overall nature of the scholarship on the topic: (1) *Why do people continue to join radical Islamist organizations like Al-Qaeda?* Additionally, at the point of synergy between manpower and ideology, (2) *How do groups like*

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<sup>11</sup> Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 71.

*Al-Qaeda organize and function in order to achieve their desired end-state? Finally, (3) What can be said about the overall strategy, or lack thereof, of Al-Qaeda in the post-9/11 years?*

By identifying the ongoing and evolving debate surrounding these questions, we can hone the focus of this study to those areas that are critical to our evolving understanding of how this organization is structured, how it operates in the modern era, how it funds its activities, and other dynamics that can help to paint a more complete picture of Al-Qaeda and identify patterns. By understanding the first debate, one can begin to understand the conditions that help in the proliferation of an AQ-inspired ideology. The second debate centers on how, if at all, AQC attempts to shape its own evolutionary trajectory as part of some grand, overall design through conscious planning. Thirdly, the debate on the nexus between strategic aims and evolution/devolution informs the overall body of knowledge on the AQE.

Prior to 9/11, Western understanding of the motives, catalysts, and religious legitimization of AQ-related activities was less than comprehensive. Scholars, policy makers, and leaders found it difficult to understand the identities of those agents who carried out the 9/11 attacks and what drove them to commit such acts. The conventional wisdom on transnational terrorism, specifically, was widely regarded as merely a tactic in a religiously motivated, radicalized clash of civilizations between Muslims and non-Muslims, underscored by writings such as Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*.<sup>12</sup> In order to challenge this conventional wisdom and form various alternative approaches to explain this phenomenon, scholars sought to present cultural, societal, and economic indicators that could explain motivations and explanations surrounding AQ-related movements and their broader appeal.

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<sup>12</sup> Samuel Huntington, "A Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993). <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/1993-06-01/clash-civilizations>.

An early position on the motivations of terror activities pointed toward economic forces that created the conditions for radicalization among emerging countries. Michael Mousseau theorized that the clashes between the client-based economies of the developing world (Middle East) with the capitalist market economies of the West were driving those in the developing world to join groups such as Al-Qaeda, and were essentially a by-product of the economic liberal order championed by the West. Mousseau suggests that “the social origins of terror are rooted less in poverty-or in growing discontent with U.S. foreign policy-and more in the values and beliefs associated with the mixed economies of developing countries in a globalizing world.”<sup>13</sup> He goes on to explain that “as a result of globalization, these values (liberal-democratic values) and beliefs are increasingly clashing in the mixed market-clientalist economies of the developing world, triggering intense antimarket resentment directed primarily against the epitome of market civilization: the United States.”<sup>14</sup>

In March 2004, in the wake of the Madrid train bombings by an AQ-sponsored cell, Fidel Sendagorta, an official within the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, published an article in which he argued that failed integration policies of immigrants, both in Spain and across Europe, led them to resort to violence to achieve some political end. In particular, he explains, “dysfunctions in the system have led to the creation of closed ghettos which become breeding grounds for antisocial behavior and Islamic radicalism.”<sup>15</sup> Sendagorta adds, “In European cities the salafists (jihadists) seek to isolate themselves from their surroundings by ‘Islamizing’ an entire district or the community around a mosque. Moreover, the combination of unemployed youth, cities with overstretched urban services, and unhealthy slum districts becomes particularly

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Mousseau, “Market Civilization and Its Clash with Terror,” *International Security* 27, no. 3 (Winter 2002/2003): 6.

<sup>14</sup> Mousseau, “Market Civilization and Its Clash with Terror,” 6.

<sup>15</sup> Fidel Sendagorta, “Jihad in Europe: The wider context,” *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 47, no. 3 (2005): 66, doi:10.1080/00396330500248029.

dangerous when mixed with jihadist ideology.”<sup>16</sup> In comparison to Mousseau’s position, Sendagorta’s thesis indicates that the extant forces driving such radicalization are not necessarily a result of systemic forces alone, but perhaps more linked to state reactions to domestic tension.

The basis of his argument surmises that the chemistry of some Muslims’ encounters with Europe facilitates their recruitment by terrorist networks. He goes on to explain, in reference to the attackers, “These groups do not have the capacity to seize power or seriously challenge the political system in any European country. Today we face not a string of isolated small groups but a transnational community of activists indoctrinated via the Internet, whose leaders are intent on Islam’s ideological hegemony worldwide-in other words-a global-scale insurgency that uses religious resources to serve a political strategy based on confrontation with the West.”<sup>17</sup>

Henrik Urdal argues that a link exists between “youth bulges-defined as large cohorts in the ages of 15-24 relative to the total adult population” and the increase in likelihood of political violence and/or terrorism.<sup>18</sup> Urdal suggested several different hypotheses, which sought to analyze youth bulges across the Muslim world. After empirical analysis, Urdal concludes, “Relatively large youth cohorts are associated with a significantly increased risk of domestic armed conflict, terrorism and riots/violent demonstrations.”<sup>19</sup>

Although the results of Urdal’s empirical analysis did not show strong direct connections between youth bulges and terrorism, he did conclude that at the state level, correlations surrounding immigration and emigration are relevant, supporting Sendagorta’s analysis. Urdal states, “If migration opportunities are substantially restricted, developing countries that

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<sup>16</sup> Sendagorta, “Jihad in Europe: The wider context,” 67, 70.

<sup>17</sup> Sendagorta, “Jihad in Europe: The wider context,” 65.

<sup>18</sup> Henrik Urdal, “A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence,” *International Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (September 2006): 608, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2478.2006.00416.x.

<sup>19</sup>Urdal, “A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence,” 623.



previously relied on exporting surplus youth may experience increased pressures from youth bulges accompanied by a higher risk of political violence.”<sup>20</sup>

Urdal’s contribution informs this study by applying his paradigmatic approach on the analysis of the Arab Afghan volunteer networks that grew and strengthened throughout the 1980s, which offered Arab youth an opportunity to go to Afghanistan to fight against the Soviet Union. In some ways, the nation that sent these youth off to a faraway land to fight in the name of Islam received the compound dividends of siphoning off its excess youth, while also receiving the increased legitimacy of countering Soviet aggression. Urdal’s findings are also relevant for this study, in that those fighters who did not die in the mountains of Afghanistan eventually returned home. Trained and indoctrinated, these fighters would form the base for Al-Qaeda affiliates across the wider Middle East in the years that followed and are an extremely important aspect of the foreign fighter phenomenon.

Other scholars have developed various theories on the causes of terrorism and popular support for groups like Al-Qaeda. Max Abrahms states that drivers of terrorism are more about the social benefits of joining terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda and its affiliates, and the incentives that group inclusion provides to those prospective members. Additionally, Abrahms argues that terrorists attach more importance to these social benefits of terrorism than political benefits, which undermines the notion that the strategic model alone can explain terrorism. He explains, “Members of a wide variety of terrorists groups say that they joined these armed struggles not because of their personal attachment to their political or ideological agendas, but to maintain or develop social relations with other terrorist members.”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, “case studies of Al-Qaeda, Aum Shinrikyo, Hezbollah, the IRA, the RAF, the Weather Underground, and Chechen

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<sup>20</sup> Urdal, “A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence,” 625.

<sup>21</sup> Max Abrahms, “What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy,” *International Security* 32, no. 4 (Spring 2008): 97.

and Palestinian terrorist groups have concluded that most of the terrorists in these groups participated in the armed struggle to improve their relationships with other terrorists or to reduce their sense of alienation from society, usually both.”<sup>22</sup> In the same vein, the social impacts on joining groups like Al-Qaeda or its affiliates is also reinforced by Randy Borum and Michael Gelles, who conclude that Al-Qaeda as a social movement has the ability to harness the power of collectivist societies, like those in Asian and Middle Eastern cultures, where “being part of a larger cause is a natural predisposition.”<sup>23</sup>

Comparatively, James Piazza suggests that failed or failing states played a significant role in the likelihood of political violence or terrorism resulting from that environment. Piazza drew a link between the failure of states and the likelihood of transnational terrorist organizations operating from these states, which would explain early Al-Qaeda and its incubation in the safe havens of Afghanistan and Pakistan throughout the 1990s.

In his article, Piazza states that due to the ease in penetration, recruitment, and conducting operations, “failed or failing states are theoretically more likely to contain terrorist groups, experience terrorist attacks, have their citizens join terrorist groups, and see their territory used as bases from which to launch attacks abroad. This is because they lack the ability to police for and deter terrorist activity, and because they provide important opportunities for terrorist movements.”<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, Piazza suggests that “because they lack the ability to project power internally and have incompetent and corrupt law enforcement capacities, failed or failing states provide opportunities, and lower costs, for terrorist groups to organize, train, and generate

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<sup>22</sup> Max Abrahms, “What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy,” 98.

<sup>23</sup> Borum, Randy, and Michael Gelles. 2005. "Al-Qaeda's Operational Evolution: Behavioral And Organizational Perspectives," *Behavioral Sciences & The Law* 23, no. 4: 467-483, 473.

<sup>24</sup> James A. Piazza, “Incubators of Terror: Do Failed and Failing States Promote Transnational Terrorism?,” *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (September 2008), 471, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2478.2008.00511.x.

revenue, and set up logistics and communications beyond those afforded by the network of safe houses in non-failed states.”<sup>25</sup> Additionally, “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>26</sup> When comparing the proliferation of Al-Qaeda from safe havens in Afghanistan and Pakistan to other areas of the Muslim world, Piazza’s argument remains strong.

Daniel Byman takes Piazza’s thesis one step further, suggesting that although Al-Qaeda is often characterized as not being supported by a state, it would not have enjoyed its early success were it not for the support and patronage of host nation-states, namely Sudan in the early 1990s, and later Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>27</sup> Byman concludes that the mutually supporting relationship developed between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda leadership marked a unique status of reciprocity.<sup>28</sup> As later chapters will show, other relationships between Al-Qaeda affiliates and host states developed along these same lines.

Both Mousseau and Sendagorta suggest that system-level causes are at the root of the proliferation of jihadism. Although global economic trends will not formally be addressed in this study, system-level approaches will be utilized in the analysis of ideology and goals across AQC and three of its main sub-groups. As will be shown, perceived grievances between Muslims vis-à-vis the West have a profound effect in the construction of grievances that AQ-linked groups have utilized to justify their activities. Sendagorta’s perspective serves this study

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<sup>25</sup> James A. Piazza, “Incubators of Terror: Do Failed and Failing States Promote Transnational Terrorism?,” 471.

<sup>26</sup> James A. Piazza, “Incubators of Terror: Do Failed and Failing States Promote Transnational Terrorism?,” 471-472.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States That Sponsor Terrorism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States That Sponsor Terrorism*, 209.

in terms of framing how and why foreign fighters choose to self-export to conflict zones and what their presence means to the state of a larger, transnational organization like Al-Qaeda.

Urdal, Piazza, and Byman place a large emphasis on the role of the nation-state in creating the conditions that possibly support the proliferation of Al-Qaeda as a brand and as an ideology. Both the Urdal and Piazza arguments inform this study as it relates to Al-Qaeda and its perceived conscious decision to focus its recruitment and franchising efforts. As this study will show, the linkage between Urdal and Piazza's perspectives and the states in which Al-Qaeda has chosen to operate is quite strong. This assumption is based on the investigation conducted by Arie Perliger, in which her research on what makes some terrorist organizations succeed and some fail can be attributed to several tangentially related factors, to include structural and environmental drivers. Most importantly, Perliger concludes that although most groups that she studied did not last more than two years, the groups that did survive and that were also operationally effective operated within supportive and homogenous communities. Successful groups also find the right balance between centrality and flexibility.<sup>29</sup>

Additionally, the appeal of Al-Qaeda can be traced to both its clear and relatively constant themes, coupled with varying degrees of ambiguity and vagueness that underscores its flexibility. This duality, described as "Al-Qaedaism" by Edwin Bakker and Leen Boer as being both clear and vague at the same time, is what has maintained the appeal of Al-Qaeda as both a movement and an idea.<sup>30</sup>

Despite attempts to understand the motivation behind those that seek to join the ranks of Al-Qaeda by applying other, more scientific approaches to understanding this phenomena, other

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<sup>29</sup> Arie Perliger, "Terrorist Networks' Productivity and Durability: A Comparative Multi-level Analysis," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol 8, No 4 (2014), <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/359/712>.

<sup>30</sup> Edwin Bakker and Leen Boer, *The Evolution Of Al-Qaedaism: Ideology, Terrorists, And Appeal*, Netherlands Institute Of International Relations, *Clingendael*, December 2007, 52.

scholars argue that the religious component is still quite strong. According to Mary Habeck, the Islamic belief system that drove, for instance, the 19 attackers that conducted to 9/11 attacks, was a “multifaceted Islamist belief system...which has very specific views about how to revive Islam, how to return Muslims to political power, and what needs to be done about its enemies, including the United States.”<sup>31</sup>

Within the context of the debate outlined above, Al-Qaeda, as both an organization and an ideology, looks different dependent upon the snapshot in time of the analysis being conducted. Utilizing a paradigm for what Al-Qaeda looked like at its founding in 1988 would be inadequate for understanding the organization in 2001. This also holds true between an analysis in 2001 and one conducted in 2013. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, a second academic and policy debate centers on the nature of the organization of Al-Qaeda and the importance of characterizing it properly.

In a closely related study that attempted to analyze the evolution of the Al-Qaeda network since its infancy to the modern era, Victoria Barber applied a network-based analysis to understand the growth of the Al-Qaeda brand from 1996 to 2015. Barber highlights the adaptation of the larger AQ network and its relationships with other parallel groups.

Barber states that during the development of the AQ network between 1996 and 2000, the organization adopted hub-and-spoke structure. As Barber shows, AQC found itself at the center of this hub-and-spoke network, with solid relationships developed with other members of the global jihadi network writ large. During the period, much of Al-Qaeda work was focused on building these relationships. Between 2001-2005, the AQ network expanded tremendously, as groups were looking to gain credibility by adopting the AQ brand, most notably the establishment of the affiliate in Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Between 2006-2010, the AQ network

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<sup>31</sup> Mary Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror*, Yale University Press, 2006.

added many more actors, but also the structure of the network changed significantly. This restructuring led to AQC losing its monopoly on the global terror network structure, as new strong actors emerged that had differing perspectives. Between 2011-2013, AQ displayed a lack of preference from working with its established affiliates. Of most significance to this study is Barber's findings that these networked groups tended to have strong affiliation other groups which were aligned regionally, and less to do with worldview or ideology.<sup>32</sup>

Marc Sageman, a former U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officer, suggests that the Al-Qaeda that existed prior to the 9/11 attacks no longer exists. Instead, Sageman suggests that Al-Qaeda has since evolved into a grass-roots movement, which is driven by a bottom-up structure that finds its strength in the diversity and allure to its call to action. Sageman also claims that rhetoric suggesting that Al-Qaeda has an established and controllable network of sleeper cells across the globe, which at times has been an accepted view of many in the West, is inaccurate.<sup>33</sup>

Sageman argues that the Al-Qaeda that existed prior to 9/11 was reduced to a select few individuals who were forced into isolation somewhere within the Afghanistan/Pakistan border regions after the U.S-led campaign against High Value Targets (HVTs) believed to be either a member of or supporting UBL's Al-Qaeda. Sageman suggests that the middle-class, educated cadre that perpetrated the 9/11 attacks no longer defines the organization. Rather, core AQ remains essentially marginalized in Afghanistan and Pakistan, while grass-roots organizations

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<sup>32</sup> Victoria Barber, "The Evolution of Al Qaeda's Global Network and Al Qaeda Core's Position Within it: A Network Analysis," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol 9, No 6.  
<http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/469/html>.

<sup>33</sup> Marc Sageman, *Leaderless jihad: terror networks in the twenty-first century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

and long-standing Islamist movements aimed at domestic issues, like AQ-inspired affiliates, pose the larger risk to Western interests.<sup>34</sup>

Sageman is critical of Western efforts to continue the pursuit of the traditional organization, instead urging leaders to focus on movements that share the global jihadist ideology of AQC, but who do not have the capability to link up with AQC leadership, which he defines as the next generation of membership. Essentially, Sageman paints a distinct difference between the old Al-Qaeda cohort and the new, suggesting that the traditional ideas about who Al-Qaeda is may no longer be relevant.<sup>35</sup>

Bruce Hoffman, the long-time terrorism scholar, argues that Sageman's view of Al-Qaeda is incomplete and misplaced. Hoffman refutes Sageman's conclusions, instead suggesting that Al-Qaeda is a much more complex organization than Sageman describes, stating, "The unmistakable message is that Al-Qaeda is a remarkably agile and flexible organization that exercises both top-down and bottom-up planning and operational capabilities."<sup>36</sup> Hoffman concludes that intelligence estimates, documents, and information gathered throughout this first decade after 9/11 have shown that AQC leadership still play an important role in the development and stewardship of the organization. Hoffman states that traditional AQ-backed operations are still the most viable threat against the US homeland and should not be ignored.<sup>37</sup>

According to Hoffman, many in the media, as well as the American political establishment, have prematurely and inaccurately predicted the demise of the organization as

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<sup>34</sup> Marc Sageman, *Leaderless jihad: terror networks in the twenty-first century*.

<sup>35</sup> Marc Sageman, "A Different Kind Of Terrorist; Old Al-Qaida Has Faded, But A New Breed Has Become A Threat To The West," *Waterloo Region Record* (Kitchener/Cambridge/Waterloo, ON), June 17, 2008, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/1215EE8A7395BBF8?p=AWNB>.

<sup>36</sup> Bruce Hoffman, "The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism: Why Osama Bin Laden Still Matters," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 3 (2008): 134, accessed December 29, 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/review-essay/2008-05-03/myth-grass-roots-terrorism>.

<sup>37</sup> Bruce Hoffman, "The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism: Why Osama Bin Laden Still Matters," 134.

seemingly new counterterrorism victories were achieved within the global battle space.<sup>38</sup>

However, these so-called victories did not necessarily erode the centers of gravity that make Al-Qaeda so resilient. Hoffman writes, “The al-Qaeda of today combines, as it always has, both a ‘bottom up’ approach —encouraging independent thought and action from low- (or lower-) level operatives — and a ‘top down’ one — issuing orders and still coordinating a far-flung terrorist enterprise with both highly synchronized and autonomous moving parts.”<sup>39</sup>

The notion that the larger AQ network has not only reinforced, but also encouraged a “leaderless jihad” may not be completely accurate. What Scott Helfstein suggests is that groups often mimic the bureaucratic structure of other successful groups in order to reduce transaction costs and redundancies, which Helfstein explains as a form of *institutional isomorphism*.<sup>40</sup> If Helfstein’s analysis proves correct, it is possible that an additional analysis of the internal bureaucracy of AQC would possibly be matched by its first major affiliate, AQI. As AQC’s influence decreased with the introduction of more players within the overall global terrorist movement, as shown by Barber, Helfstein’s thesis would indicate a change in the manner in which latter versions of AQ affiliates would organize themselves. In this regard, one could hypothesize that similarities of governance structure could be directly linked to the strength of linkage between Al-Qaeda Central and the affiliates of this study.

The 2010 study conducted by Gunaratna and Oreg supports Hoffman’s view and suggests that Al-Qaeda remains a legitimate and structured organization, which has adapted to the ever-increasing pressures exerted upon it by the West, but they also offer additional evidence that supports the idea that Al-Qaeda’s formalized structure is what has enabled it to maintain its

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<sup>38</sup> Bruce Hoffman, “The Global Terrorist Threat: Is Al-Qaeda on the Run or on the March?,” *Middle East Policy* 14, no. 2 (June 2007): 45, accessed January 15, 2015, doi:10.1111/j.1475-4967.2007.00296.x.

<sup>39</sup> Bruce Hoffman, “The Global Terrorist Threat: Is Al-Qaeda on the Run or on the March?,” 45.

<sup>40</sup> Helfstein, Scott. 2009. "Governance of Terror: New Institutionalism and the Evolution of Terrorist Organizations." *Public Administration Review* 69, no. 4: 727-739, 735.



flexibility. Gunaratna and Oreg state that Al-Qaeda's "ability to regroup and 'replenish' the loss of its physical infrastructure and its leadership is what is allowing it to survive and maintain the resilience of the ideology that the group continues to recreate and disseminate."<sup>41</sup>

As defined by what Gunaratna and Oreg describe as a diffuse global network, their analysis of the various dynamics of network-based organizations devoid of a hierarchical leadership structure as compared to what they call a command-cadre is of importance when determining the evolutionary growth of Al-Qaeda. They explain that command-cadre organizations, similar to Al-Qaeda's organizational structure prior to 9/11, are much more capable of conducting large-scale, complex attacks that require significant levels of funding, specialized training, and communication. They also conclude that the formal infrastructure of AQC is what has allowed it to survive under the increased pressure that was placed upon it by military and intelligence operations in the years following 9/11. On the other hand, network-based organizations, similar to those described by Sageman, lack the capability to coordinate these larger-style attacks due to the limitations placed on communication mediums and the inherent dangers placed upon these organizations that use them. Therefore, Gunaratna and Oreg conclude that the command-cadre structure is more likely to reflect how Al-Qaeda will organize itself for future operations, as it maintains an affinity for conducting these large-scale and prolific attacks.<sup>42</sup> However, doubts and questions linger as to the likelihood or capability of Al-Qaeda being able to launch such attacks, especially as other groups like the Islamic State rise to fill the leadership role of the global movement and Al-Qaeda continues its transition from tangible terrorist organization into an ideological and inspirational figurehead.

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<sup>41</sup> Rohan Gunaratna and Aviv Oreg, "Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no. 12 (2010): 1044, accessed December 29, 2014, doi: 10.1080/1057610X.2010.523860.

<sup>42</sup> Rohan Gunaratna and Aviv Oreg, "Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution," 1045-1046.

As explained by Anthony Celso, the evidence of external attacks supposedly plotted by Al-Qaeda and its affiliates, like the train bombings in Madrid in 2004 and in London in 2005, were neither indicative of a network-based/leaderless organization as posited by Sageman, nor were they completely reflective of Hoffman's position describing a resilient and viable hierarchical organization capable of conducting complex and far-flung attacks. Celso explains that the adaptation of Al-Qaeda as an organization and the rise of the regional affiliates, such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), are not exclusively indicative of a strong, hierarchical organization or simply a catchall categorization for low-level Islamist movements across the wider Middle East. Rather, Celso states, "Al Qaeda's post - 9/11 mutation is more complex than the Sageman-Hoffman dispute suggests. This is dramatically illustrated by the diverse range of attacks connected to and inspired by al Qaeda that vary in the extent of their centralized control."<sup>43</sup>

Yet another paradigm that has been presented for attempting to understand the way that Al-Qaeda structured itself is proposed by David Ronfeldt, who suggest that the structure of the larger Al-Qaeda network and the roles and interactions displayed within this network among the different affiliates is much more like a tribal structure than a corporation, the later of which became the accepted understanding of how the organization was structured. Ronfeldt states, "Before and after the 11 September 2001 attacks in New York and Washington – analysts wondered whether this mysterious organization was structured like a corporation, a venture capital firm, a franchise operation, a foundation, a social or organizational network – or all of these. Today, now that al-Qaeda has more affiliates, the network and franchise concepts remain in play, but the emphasis is on al-Qaeda's evolution into a decentralized, amorphous ideological

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<sup>43</sup> Anthony N. Celso, "Al Qaeda's Post - 9/11 Organizational Structure and Strategy: The Role of Islamist Regional Affiliates," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (2012): 33, accessed January 15, 2015, doi:10.1215/10474552-1587847.

movement for global jihad.”<sup>44</sup> Instead of this accepted corporate structure, Ronfeldt suggests that Al-Qaeda has developed and adopted another layer of hybridity, this one revolving around what he calls a “tribalized network”-one that has incorporated some degree of hierarchy within the organization, but also attempted to translate tribal characteristics to a global, transnational movement.<sup>45</sup>

Somewhere between characterizing Al-Qaeda as a totally decentralized, grass-roots organization, an adaptable and enduring hierarchical organization, or a hybrid model solidifies the true nature of Al-Qaeda as both a global brand and a tangible organization with physical assets. As shown, the lines are not clear. Furthermore, this ambiguity both perpetuates common misunderstandings of Al-Qaeda and is also a source of its strength. In terms of this second debate, this study will seek to provide a clearer and more precise characterization of these dynamics between Al-Qaeda and parallel movements.

The Hoffman-Sageman debate forms the basis for the notion that Al-Qaeda as an organization has failed. Although its ideological spirit has been imbued on numerous jihadist movements across the Muslim world and beyond, AQC’s ability to manage a global vanguard in support of its tailored grand strategy simply has not worked. Rather, the fragmentation of Al-Qaeda and the empowerment of affiliates to carry out an AQ-inspired strategy is not a sign of strength or growth, but instead a mark of devolution. This fragmentation, therefore, would suggest that the affiliation of AQ groups should be viewed not as an increased threat, but as a signal of dissolving authority and reduced capability.

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<sup>44</sup> David Ronfeldt, “Al Qaeda and Its Affiliates: A Global Tribe Waging Segmental Warfare,” RAND Corporation, 2007, 34.

<sup>45</sup> David Ronfeldt, “Al Qaeda and Its Affiliates: A Global Tribe Waging Segmental Warfare,” RAND Corporation, 2007, 34.

To be sure, Al-Qaeda's ability to launch large-scale attacks on the West has been affected by the U.S.-led campaign against it. Since the 9/11 attacks, no major follow-on attacks have transpired on the U.S. homeland or against major U.S. interests overseas. The attacks that have occurred, or planned to occur in recent years, have been the work of AQ affiliates and groups such as the Islamic State, the reimagined group that grew out of the remnant of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). This diffusion of power from the Central Authority to Subordinate Movements, and the related loss of power by Al-Qaeda, can be explained in the ideological approach of its global campaign.

This shift is most comprehensively explained in the choice of traditional AQ leadership to pursue a *focoist* strategy of ideological proliferation, as demonstrated by Ernesto "Che" Guevara during the 1960s, in order to expand the footprint of Al-Qaeda and to grow the movement. Kenneth Payne explains that this *focoist* strategy by Guevara attempted to recreate and generalize his and Castro's experiences in overthrowing the Batista regime in 1958 to other small groups that would use Guevara's legacy as inspiration. According to Payne, the global campaign of Al-Qaeda and other jihadists is similar to *focoist* guerillas that sought to use violence, carried out by a small band or group, to radicalize a wider population.<sup>46</sup> Payne suggests that Al-Qaeda's manipulation of this violence to gain territory and funnel fighters to these enclaves was part of a conscious strategic design. Payne highlights the remarkable similarities between the Guevarean insurgency and Al-Qaeda's strategy and ideology prior to the Arab Spring in 2011.<sup>47</sup>

In contrast, Ryan Evans concludes that an ideological shift occurred sometime after the Arab Spring, in which selected AQ affiliates abandoned the idea of a *focoist* approach and began

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<sup>46</sup> Kenneth Payne, "Building the Base: Al Qaeda's Focoist Strategy," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34, no. 2 (2011): 124.

<sup>47</sup> Payne, "Building the Base: Al Qaeda's Focoist Strategy," 127.

a more populist methodology, which Evans explains is more in keeping with Mao Tse-tung's campaign in China during the 1920s. Utilizing a reimagined Maoist approach, AQ affiliates such as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) embodied the popular anger and frustrations felt by rural Yemenis toward their government.<sup>48</sup> In this regard, modern Al-Qaeda is seen less as a cadre of radicals whose aims are less connected with the people amongst whom they operate and more of a movement that gives a voice to a marginalized population. This has resulted in the perceived decline of Al-Qaeda, as previously illustrated by Fawaz Gerges, and the rise of challengers to the throne of global jihadism, as witnessed by the ascendance of the Islamic State and the loss of Al-Qaeda Central's monopoly on the global terrorist network.

As explained by Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and his colleagues, this ideological shift about how to conduct a global insurgency explains the decline of the traditional Al-Qaeda model and the rise of the Islamic State, which appeals to former and current Al-Qaeda affiliates for two reasons: "First, the group sought to portray al-Qaeda's slower and more deliberate strategy as weakness and indecisiveness. Second, the Islamic State appealed to al-Qaeda's affiliates by emphasizing its momentum and expansion with the aim of poaching groups, members, and potential recruits."<sup>49</sup>

In total, the debates detailed here reinforce the need for research on the nature of Al-Qaeda's evolution in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in order to continue the related development of the academic body of knowledge on terrorism, jihadism, and the lifecycles of like-organizations. Furthermore, the evolution of these various academic ideas occurred over several years, each

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<sup>48</sup> Ryan Evans, "From Iraq To Yemen: Al-Qa'ida's Shifting Strategies," *CTC Sentinel: Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* 3, no. 10 (October 2010): page number goes here, accessed May 11, 2016, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/from-iraq-to-yemen-al-qaida's-shifting-strategies>.

<sup>49</sup> Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Nathaniel Barr, and Bridget Moreng, "The Islamic State vs. Al-Qaeda: The War Within the Jihadist Movement," *War on the Rocks* (January 13, 2016), accessed May 11, 2016, <http://warontherocks.com/2016/01/the-islamic-state-vs-al-qaeda-the-war-within-the-jihadist-movement/>.

influenced by new insights developed across various academic disciplines. What must be said is that academic approaches were not only fueled by the changing nature of the Al-Qaeda organization, but also hampered by this change. In light of this reality, developing a parsimonious approach will remain difficult, yet necessary to gain additional clarity on the evolution of Al-Qaeda and its affiliates.

#### CONTRIBUTING TO EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

As deduced from the existing research on the evolution of Al-Qaeda and its affiliated movements, studying Al-Qaeda and its evolution from a relatively small organization to the realities and complexities of a diffuse, modern, transnational, and somewhat vague terror movement is extremely difficult. However, this study proposes to contribute to the existing knowledge in four ways.

First, this dissertation offers a longitudinal analysis across AQ and its mainline affiliates, as measured by the aforementioned variables, will provide insight into the organization's evolution and to the extent in which it can actually be considered an organization. This is an important aspect, as it shapes the policies implemented to counter this organization or like groups that will emerge in the future utilizing an AQ-branded strategy or ideology.

Thus far, existing research has been plagued by either being overwhelmed with the vast social, cultural, and religious minutiae that can complicate a comprehensive study on the evolution of Al-Qaeda, or by focusing too hard on one or two specific components of the organization, which does not paint a complete picture. Granted, a detailed and intense study of all contributing components to help define and understand Al-Qaeda is important, but the reality is that a more nuanced approach is needed if a modern understanding is to be gained in a digestible and relevant form. Furthermore, this study will adopt a high level of what Steve Yetiv

refers to as “interdisciplinarity” as part of a greater integrated approach that seeks to utilize historical case studies with some level of data analysis.<sup>50</sup> As the existing literature shows in the previous section, many academic fields can offer unique insights into the phenomenon of the evolution of terrorist organizations. It is this approach that will undergird this study.

Secondly, this study will observe the intersection of ideology and the execution of attacks by member-groups across the wider Middle East and the West through applying data from the Global Terrorism Database. Whereas existing studies have followed the traditional design of case studies of Al-Qaeda and its leaders, this study will apply both case study and data analysis approaches in order to identify potential patterns, backed up by measurable data. Undergirding this approach is the comparative analysis of targeting data over time, the role of suicide and the rate of its use throughout the enterprise, the diversity of targets, and the effects of affiliation on the types of targets chosen by subordinate groups.

Third, by exploring the evolution of financing sources for operations of AQ and its affiliates over time, more evidence is made available that explains a shift not just of ideology of affiliate groups, but also the means by which these groups fund their operations. Shifting sources of revenue, as well as the means by which these groups receive legitimacy from the population through financial support, could lend greater insight into the evolution of AQ affiliates, thus supporting the further fragmentation of the traditional Al-Qaeda model.

Related to the existing literature on sources of motivation for joining radical groups such as Al-Qaeda and the diverse sets of system-level causes and motivations, scholarly analysis on the diversity of members, where they came from, where and with whom they decide to fight, and where they have returned perhaps can provide the greatest pieces of information on the flow of

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<sup>50</sup> Yetiv, Steve. (2011), History, International Relations, and Integrated Approaches: Thinking about Greater Interdisciplinarity, *International Studies Perspectives*, 12: 94–118.

fighters across the global battlefield. Although information related to AQ membership and allegiance is extremely hard to acquire, existing documents can be analyzed, which when combined with the other variables of this study, can perhaps bridge that access-to-information gap.

It is important to note here that a vast amount of data that has been compiled on Al-Qaeda and its affiliates remains in the realm of classified information under the auspices of U.S. Government agencies. There is no question that access to that information, as well as the ability to synthesize and produce a study that could be publically shared, would likely produce a much better product in determining the evolutionary trajectory of Al-Qaeda. Therefore, it must be stated that the information utilized for this study will only be drawn from materials, sources, and databases that can be accessed by anyone with an interest to explore and desire to understand. In some cases, it is necessary to utilize translated versions of materials that have been vetted and authorized for release by competent authorities or government agencies. Based on this methodology, it must be stated that comparable troves of data may not be available for all of the affiliates addressed in this study. Some affiliates, such as Al-Qaeda in Iraq, has produced much more professional analysis than others. Therefore, this reality must be considered when analyzing other affiliates and their contribution to the evolution of the larger movement.

This study will also rely upon battlefield accounts and memoirs by military and national security professionals, as these references can provide data that would be unable to be accessed through open-source means. Although difficult to verify, the high-profile nature of these professionals would reduce the likelihood of misrepresentation of facts and details, as a wider academic community or those with conflicting knowledge could challenge these assertions.



As a disclaimer, this dissertation will offer little in terms of attempting to justify or understand the ideological leanings of Al-Qaeda and those that fill its ranks or have a shared or similar worldview. Although I will establish the necessary historical context, this study will begin years after the events that led to its founding, and after the events which led UBL to Afghanistan to consolidate his position and influence. It will begin after UBL and Al-Qaeda began to turn their focus toward the United States and western targets in the wider Middle East, as well as after the issuance of UBL's *fatwas* of the late-1990s calling for armed aggression against the United States. Although some attention will be paid to the historical foundations of the organization as described, I will avoid the unnecessary explanation of the early intricacies that can plague a similar study. Furthermore, this dissertation will provide little in terms of understanding the Islamist worldview as it pertains to the establishment of an Islamic caliphate, or the ideas regarding the religious sanction of its activities. Put simply, I will analyze the organization as it has existed and does exist, and based upon its actions, regardless of opinions regarding their just execution.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF AL-QAEDA PRIOR TO 2001

#### INTRODUCTION

By 2001, public knowledge in the West concerning Bin Laden and the presence of an organization known as Al-Qaeda remained limited. During the years leading up to the 9/11 attacks, various media reports detailed Al-Qaeda and the aims of its founder, but most reports and analyses simply remained lost in the myriad news stories of the day. To be sure, UBL had gained particular attention of Western intelligence agencies, as well as various security services throughout the Middle East and beyond prior to September 11, 2001. However, the focus of the international community on the organization prior to 9/11 paled in comparison to what would emerge in subsequent years following those attacks.

From its inception, Al-Qaeda found relatively successive justifications for its perceived role as a unified Muslim vanguard that sought to deploy its forces wherever Islam was threatened, most notably by Western interference or occupation. What made Al-Qaeda unique was its ability to both conceive and carry out large-scale, prolific attacks against both western targets and interests throughout the wider Middle East, as well as against regimes and governments that were deemed to be allied with the West.

The next two chapters will detail the development of Al-Qaeda in the decade that followed its founding and its evolution into the organization that existed prior to the events of September 11, 2001. This chapter will provide an analysis on the development of the foundational tenets of Al-Qaeda, uncovering themes and ideas about what form an AQ-branded global jihad would take in succeeding years. I will begin by establishing the foundational components of global Salafi jihadism through an analysis of the writing of Sayid Qutb,

considered to be the founding contemporary ideologue, who developed the ideas of jihad against the West, the United States, and the apostate regimes of the Middle East during the 1960s in Egypt. Qutb's writings and beliefs would go on to influence the next generation of global jihadists, which would include the founders of Al-Qaeda, and create the theoretical bedrock which has inspired an enduring global struggle.<sup>1</sup>

Next, I will demonstrate the evolutionary development of Qutb's ideology and its inspiration on the two primary influencers of UBL who had the foremost impact on Bin Laden's development of Al-Qaeda and its purpose in the prosecution of a wider global struggle: Abdullah Azzam and Ayman al-Zawahiri. Once the nuance of this ideology has been explained, I will show how Khalid Sheikh Mohammad (KSM), considered to be the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks, presented Bin Laden with a plan that would have the most significant impact on AQ in terms of marrying the established ideology with operational design. In totality, this analysis will demonstrate the multitude of influencers and competing views, which shaped the development of Al-Qaeda and its long-term mission.

## INFLUENCING THE IDEOLOGY OF EARLY AL-QAEDA

Determining the ideological sources and foundations of Al-Qaeda can be a lengthy and detailed process. Since the time of the Prophet Mohammad, successive religious scholars and political figures have debated over the interpretations of both the Koran and the hadith, the latter being a collection of sayings, deeds, and accounts of Mohammad's life as the spiritual leader of early Muslims, second in importance to the Koran, and a supplementary guide for all Muslims in the conduct of their daily lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Egypt: Islamic Book Service, 1964).

Ultimately, the foundations of modern radical Islamic thought, the ideology that drives Al-Qaeda in its aims, are interpreted and believed to be drawn from the earliest Islamic texts and upon the jurisprudence of Islam's most established scholars. This notion of interpretation is important to this study, and any study that draws upon religious ideology as a basis of its methodology, for the apparent interpretive license that permeates modern Islam has contributed significantly to forming Al-Qaeda's ideas about what its role should be as a vanguard of Islamic society.

However, it would be extremely tedious, difficult, and beyond the scope of this study to attempt to trace the ideological roots and beginnings of the brand of radical Islamic thought that UBL and Al-Qaeda represent, which would involve a rather exhaustive journey deep into the past, tracing the evolution of religious philosophical thought over 1400 years to the beginning of Islam as an established religion. Despite this difficulty, existing scholarship has attempted to do just that, although the relevance to how this pertains to the modern-day Al-Qaeda and its evolution is minimal.

Rather, it is more important to look at the immediate ideological influences of Al-Qaeda, those ideologues who both established modern jihadist ideology or those who had direct contact with UBL prior to, during, and immediately after the founding of the group and can be considered as most responsible for shaping AQ-inspired thinking. For the purposes of this study, I will examine the influences of Sayyid Qutb, Dr. Abdullah Azzam, Dr. Ayman Al-Zawahiri, and Khalid Sheikh Muhammad.

#### SAYYID QUTB (1906-1966)

Considered to be a foundational ideologue that radical Islamists still reference today, Qutb's beliefs challenged what he viewed as the apostate regimes throughout the Middle East,

calling for a resistance against those leaders and regimes that he believed were subservient to the West, thus undermining the role of Islam in governing Muslim societies. In his seminal work, *Milestones*, Qutb passionately explains his view on the concepts regarding the sovereignty of God and opposition to influence by crusading powers of the West. Qutb wrote *Milestones* in prison prior to his state execution in 1966, and the work remains central to radical Islamist thought, with current Islamist organizations referring to Qutb and *Milestones* as a call to arms for modern jihadist ideas. According to John Turner's estimation, Qutb is the most "essential contributor to what is the Al Qaeda ideology."<sup>2</sup>

Qutb, an Egyptian who lived for a brief time in the United States on a teaching scholarship, held radical views on the legitimacy of the Egyptian regime and subservience of a society to the rule of those who had obtained their positions of power outside of accepted Islamic norms. A member of the Muslim Brotherhood, Qutb felt that it was the duty of all true Muslims to rebel against apostate regimes in the name of Islam. *Milestones* urges Muslims to resist these man-made laws and those regimes that seek to place themselves in domination over other men, implying that their rule did not supersede that of God's law. Qutb claimed that it was the religious duty and obligation of all true Muslims to liberate people from the repressive bonds of these regimes in order for these freed people to be in a position to receive Islam.<sup>3</sup>

Qutb's main theme in *Milestones* revolves around the concepts of *jahiliyya* (ignorance) and *tawhid* (unity), or in the Islamic context, the notion of God's sovereignty over all aspects of life. In Islamic terms, *jahiliyya* refers to the period of mankind before the revelation of the Quran to the Prophet Mohammad and spread of Islam as God's last and final issuance of His will

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<sup>2</sup> Turner, J. 2010. "From Cottage Industry to International Organisation: The Evolution of Salafi-Jihadism and the Emergence of the Al Qaeda Ideology." *Terrorism And Political Violence* 22, no. 4: 541-558.

<sup>3</sup> Qutb, *Milestones*.

to mankind. Prior to this revelation, the people of Mecca were polytheists and practiced various forms of paganism. As Islam teaches, when Muhammad received God's word and began to spread this new religion, mankind was ushered out of this age of ignorance and into a new age of enlightenment. Qutb took this concept and argued that this age of ignorance had returned to the wider Muslim community because Muslims had veered away from the original teachings of Islam. Theorists such as Qutb cite this seeming abandonment by the global Muslim community of a strict adherence to Islam as a means of governing society, which was believed to be the primary reason for general decline of the Muslim world.

Qutb also wrote a good deal about *jihad*, both the lesser and greater *jihad*. In Qutb's terms, *jihad* (holy war) was made acceptable by God because Muhammad used war in defense of his people and in spreading the message of Islam, the latter of which has been utilized as a justification to shift from a defensive form of jihad to an offensive form, and which Al-Qaeda has used to justify its actions.

Qutb believed that those who follow God's laws and are true believers of Islam will always be under attack from those who seek to implement man-made laws and place themselves above the sovereignty of God, which remains a primary critique of the West and its allied regimes in the Middle East. He declared that Muslims will be tempted to sway from the righteous path by Christians and the West, but Muslims must instead fight, resist, and march as one under the banner of Islam.

Although Qutb focused much of his attention toward domestic struggles, he ultimately saw the West as an encroaching monolith that would threaten Islam and corrupt its intrinsic values. Put simply, Qutb saw the Quranic revelation period of 7<sup>th</sup> century AD as the pinnacle of human existence, and advocated for devolution of humanity, of sorts. According to Fawaz

Gerges, “Qutb’s anti-American narrative with his revolutionary idea of *al-Islam al-haraki* (dynamic and operational Islam), facilitated al-Qaeda’s efforts and allowed it to reclaim him (Qutb) as the spiritual force behind its ‘blessed’ transnational jihad.”<sup>4</sup> Additionally, and most importantly for the discussion here, Qutb stressed the need for Muslims all over the world to return (spiritually and ideologically) to the age of The Prophet, in that the Prophet Muhammad and his immediate successors were led by and followed God’s law alone. Existential forces and laws of man would not corrupt them.

#### ABDULLAH AZZAM (1941-1989)

The influence of Abdullah Azzam on the foundations of Al-Qaeda and Bin Laden cannot be understated. A Jordanian Palestinian, leading figure within the Muslim Brotherhood, and an Islamic scholar and theoretician, Azzam was considered a founding father of the modern jihadist movement. He was an instrumental figure in popularizing the call to jihad across the Arab world and the West against the Soviets in Afghanistan. He was an adept fundraiser and facilitator who found himself at the intersection between the Afghans, the Pakistanis, and the Saudi Arabia/United States funding apparatus.

Azzam was a unique and intriguing figure, which is certainly what drew UBL to him during the earliest days in Peshawar. Whereas Bin Laden was shy and soft-spoken, Azzam was considered a much more charismatic and obvious leader of the Arab cause in Afghanistan. While living in Amman, during the late-1960s, he had allegedly participated in the Palestinian resistance against Israel. He had extensive religious scholarly training, receiving a doctorate from Al-Azhar University in Cairo in the early 1970s. Following his return to Jordan in 1973, Azzam gained notoriety as a professor of Islamic religious philosophy teaching classes on the

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<sup>4</sup> Fawaz Gerges, *The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 33.

*shari'a*.<sup>5</sup> In 1980, Azzam left Amman for Jeddah, as his teaching and perceived radical views had drawn the negative attention of Jordanian security services. Under this pressure, Azzam accepted a teaching position at King Abdul Ibn Saud University, where it is possible that he could have first met Bin Laden while the eventual founding father of Al-Qaeda was studying at King Saud University.<sup>6</sup>

Azzam felt drawn to the jihad in Afghanistan, eventually accepting a university position in Pakistan in 1981 to be close to the action and to help any way he could in the efforts of the *mujahedeen*, especially Arab volunteers who were flocking to the region to participate. In 1984, Azzam founded the Maktab al-Khidmat (MAK), or Services Office, which was established to organize the support necessary for the influx of these Arab volunteers from all across the region. During this period, Azzam and Bin Laden jointly managed the MAK and were considered to be the two most influential Arab leaders in Afghan jihad.

That same year, Azzam wrote a book entitled *The Defense of Muslim Territories*, which called upon all Muslims who were fit and able to travel to Afghanistan to participate in this war as a religious obligation. In the book, Azzam also laid out the justification for the establishment of a global defense force to protect Muslim lands, a precursor to Al-Qaeda.

From its founding, MAK was considered a Muslim Brotherhood operation, due in part to Azzam's history and legacy with that organization. However, Azzam began to develop and implement a different ideological paradigm through which to view the global jihad. Mainly, Azzam's ideology shifted the focus from resistance against an internal enemy, those regimes that sought to crack down on Islamists, to the external enemy, which sought the occupation of Muslim territories. This philosophy represented a shift away from the existing notions that the

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<sup>5</sup> Gilles Kepel and Jean-Pierre Milelli, eds., *Al Qaeda in its Own Words*, (Place of Publication: Harvard University Press, 2008), 88.

<sup>6</sup> Kepel and Milelli, eds., *Al Qaeda in its Own Words*, 88.



struggle should be focused on the authoritarian regimes of the Middle East in which Muslims were subjugated, and instead focused on the West.<sup>7</sup>

Azzam also focused more on the concept of territorial integrity of Muslim lands vice the regimes that governed them. This placed an increased importance of the concept of Muslims' lands as a whole, vice the concept of individual Islamist movements being defined by the nation-state in which they operated. For Azzam, the meaning of a wider Islamist movement would transcend state boundaries. This new concept also changed the lens through which the Palestinian struggle was viewed, making it more about the repelling of an occupying force trying to seize traditional Muslim lands vice a focus on establishing a Palestinian state through negotiation and dialogue.<sup>8</sup> The Palestinian issue remained an important part of Azzam's worldview.

Azzam was also adamant that a vital part of the global Islamist struggle and resurgence was the need to maintain control of an area or lands from which to cultivate Muslim forces—a community to train, teach, and educate a force—which would then be able to launch operations to retake Muslim lands.<sup>9</sup> Azzam and Bin Laden were convinced that this would be the soon-to-be liberated Afghanistan.

Although Bin Laden shared Azzam's zeal and ideology, he ultimately decided to create his own organization separate from Azzam, which would be an alternative to the Muslim Brotherhood status quo. Although Azzam and UBL would remain close, this split was indicative of new influencers of UBL's worldview and how this new fundamentalist movement should bring about the desired change. In Al-Qaeda, UBL wanted to break away, creating an organization that would give Arabs a leading role in the Afghan jihad, whereas Azzam seemed

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<sup>7</sup> Kepel and Milelli, eds., *Al Qaeda in its Own Words*, 99.

<sup>8</sup> Kepel and Milelli, eds., *Al Qaeda in its Own Words*, 99.

<sup>9</sup> Kepel and Milelli, eds., *Al Qaeda in its Own Words*, 100.

content with Arabs playing a supporting role to the Afghans. UBL's training camps, like the all-Arab camp at Jaji in which Arab volunteers were trained, would later be the site of a fierce and legendary battle with the Soviets. The exploits and legends that grew from the Arabs at Jaji, under the supposed command of Bin Laden, would not only begin the myth of Bin Laden but would also form the infrastructural bedrock of the Al-Qaeda organization.

#### AYMAN AL-ZAWAHIRI (1951-PRESENT)

In October 2001, the Saudi newspaper *Ash-Sharq al Awsat* first published Dr. Ayman Al-Zawahiri's manifesto, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, which detailed and justified the creation of a global and uniting force, which would campaign for all Islamic jihadi movements, which was active in dozens of countries, and which would harness their collective power under one organization. In his writing, Zawahiri details the failure of movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, to bring about the desired changes within Muslim society. He accused these organizations of not going far enough in their resistance to Western influence and their proxies within the Middle East. Instead, Zawahiri called upon the youth of the Muslim world for a renewal and rededication to the global jihadist movement, one that would utilize existing strongholds, to train its armies and prepare for an unending war against the West, namely the United States and Israel. He writes of the renewed struggle against United States:

Cause the greatest damage and inflict the maximum casualties on the opponent, no matter how much time and effort these operations take, because this is the language understood by the west. The struggle for the establishment of the Muslim state cannot be considered a regional struggle, certainly not after it had been ascertained that the Crusader alliance led by the United States will not allow any Muslim force to reach power in the Arab countries.<sup>10</sup> It is a long road of jihad and sacrifice. If our goal is comprehensive change and if our path, as the Koran and our history have shown us, is a long road of jihad and sacrifices, we must not despair of repeated strikes and recurring calamities. We must

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<sup>10</sup> Laura Mansfield, trans. *His Own Words: The Writings of Dr. Ayman Zawahiri* (United States: TLG Publishers, 2006), 200-201.

never lay down our arms, regardless of the casualties or sacrifices. We must realize that countries do not fall all of a sudden. They fall by pushing and overcoming.<sup>11</sup>

Zawahiri had the ability to translate the local and regional issues that had defined the Islamic movements that came before into a more transnational focus. He was able to draw the localized and regional attention of other Muslim issues into a more transnational focus that could be used in the greater global jihadi campaign, much like he framed the Palestinian struggle as playing a role in this larger global movement.<sup>12</sup>

Zawahiri, who had fled his native Egypt in 1985, following his acquittal in the assassination death of President Anwar Sadat in 1981, knew of UBL and his exploits against the Soviets. Zawahiri, a trained physician, had first arrived in Peshawar in 1980 to work as a doctor for a time, treating wounded fighters coming across the border from the battlefield in Afghanistan. He returned a second time in 1981. It was during this period that he became acquainted with UBL and the Arab Afghan legion.

Following the death of Abdullah Azzam, Zawahiri found himself as de facto spiritual and operational advisor to UBL and Al-Qaeda. Whereas Azzam stridently argued that a global jihad must be rooted in and informed by religious edict and sanction, Zawahiri felt much more strongly that terrorist operations, much like the attacks and hijackings that had defined the 1970s and early 1980s, like those of Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), should be incorporated into UBL's program. Prior to his death, Azzam was still very much a member of the Muslim Brotherhood enterprise, of which Zawahiri had become so critical. Although Azzam had impressed UBL with his "practice what you preach" mentality, Zawahiri had grown disillusioned with the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as other Islamic revival groups, in successfully bringing about change

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<sup>11</sup>Mansfield, trans., *His Own Words: The Writings of Dr. Ayman Zawahiri*, 218-219.

<sup>12</sup> Turner, J. 2010. "From Cottage Industry to International Organisation: The Evolution of Salafi-Jihadism and the Emergence of the Al Qaeda Ideology." *Terrorism And Political Violence* 22, no. 4: 541-558, 552.

within Muslim society and under the existing regimes of the Middle East. As Azzam became further marginalized from UBL's inner group, Zawahiri's ideas about how to prosecute a global jihad were implemented by Bin Laden and his lieutenants. It appeared as though Bin Laden was falling more under the guise of the traditional Egyptian jihadi framework, while Azzam wanted to distance his movement from it. Both Azzam and Zawahiri clearly wanted to remain outside of Muslim Brotherhood oversight and influence.

In many ways, UBL needed a figure like Azzam or Zawahiri, someone who had the credentials of a religious scholar, to bring a level of religious authority to what he was attempting to do. This is reflective of the earliest days of the Soviet jihad, where UBL saw himself as merely a facilitator of the movement by providing organizational capabilities and financing. He would have to defer to this higher religious authority.

However, by the late 1990s, UBL had perhaps casually overlooked the supposed requirement that only religious scholars may issue a religious ruling, or *fatwa*, in which the author can claim such legitimacy. UBL's issuance of his fatwa in 1996, calling on Muslims to take up arms against the United States and Israel, showed not only his desire to falsely legitimize himself with the title of Imam but also an acknowledgment that his organization would maintain religious sanction of its activities.

#### KHALID SHEIKH MUHAMMAD (1964-PRESENT)

The influence of Khalid Sheikh Muhammad (KSM) on Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda rested solely on the operational design of future attacks and how these attacks would provide the *ways* in order to achieve Al-Qaeda's *ends* of their global campaign. Whereas Azzam and Zawahiri had the religious credentials to influence both ideology and operations, KSM was merely an idea man that would eventually earn favor with UBL for his ability to plan and carry out high-profile

attacks. In fact, KSM was not an original founding member of Al-Qaeda in the late 1980s. He did participate in the Soviet jihad and had made acquaintance with Bin Laden sometime during that period, but was never really a close associate to either UBL or Azzam. He did, however, briefly serve as a secretary to the latter, which is assuredly how he came to know Bin Laden.<sup>13</sup>

Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, an ethnic Baluch and Pakistani citizen, was born in Kuwait and attended college in the United States.<sup>14</sup> Having lived in the U.S. and attended college in North Carolina, KSM had a unique perspective and insight into the West that UBL and his other associates did not have. Enamored with the ongoing jihad against the Soviets, KSM traveled for the first time to Pakistan in 1987, where he received some military training, and then fought against the Soviets for a period of roughly three months.<sup>15</sup> After the Soviet withdrawal, KSM spent time running a nongovernmental organization (NGO) until 1992, which sought to provide some level of support to the Afghan mujahedeen. Following this period, KSM spent time fighting in Bosnia with remnants of the Afghan movement.<sup>16</sup>

Shortly after Bin Laden had been asked to leave Sudan and set up permanent operations in Tora Bora, KSM visited Bin Laden to detail what he had been up to since the Afghan days and to pitch the idea that he and his nephew, Ramzi Youssef, had developed. This idea called for the hijacking of several planes, which could be used as missiles to crash into important landmarks in the United States or be exploded over the ocean. Contrary to popular belief, the first World Trade Center attacks in New York in 1993 were not a plot developed and carried out by an Al-Qaeda operative. Rather, the plot was the conception of Youssef, independent of official Al-

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<sup>13</sup> Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 266.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Randal, *Osama: The Making of a Terrorist* (New York: Knopf Publishing, 2004), 219.

<sup>15</sup> National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, by Philip Zelikow, Executive Director; Bonnie D. Jenkins, Counsel; and Ernest R. May, Senior Advisor (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 146.

<sup>16</sup> National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 147.

Qaeda sponsorship. KSM's role in that operation involved wiring \$600 from a bank in Qatar, where KSM was serving in the Ministry of Electricity and Water, to Youssef's planning partner for the operation.<sup>17</sup>

Following this attack, KSM joined his nephew in the Philippines in 1994, where they originally conceived of the hijacking plot, which they labeled as *Operation Bojinka*. It was also during this period that UBL decided to call upon Youssef, asking him to put together a plan to assassinate President Clinton while during his visit to Manila in 1996.<sup>18</sup> The plot, which was centered on the placement of high-explosive charges beneath a bridge in which the Presidential motorcade would travel across, was foiled when U.S. Secret Service intercepted radio transmissions that indicated an impending attack on the president. Subsequently, Clinton and his entourage were re-routed, avoiding the bridge laced with explosives, and avoiding this potentially catastrophic attack. By the spring of 1999, Bin Laden was ready to address KSM's initial pitch to plan and launch the *planes* operation, which would result in the 9/11 attacks. In Kandahar, Bin Laden, Abu Hafs, and KSM exclusively decided upon the targets that they would hit on 9/11.<sup>19</sup>

## TRANSLATING IDEAS INTO ACTION

When Azzam was killed in 1989, Zawahiri emerged as the spiritual advisor for Al-Qaeda. In his writings, Zawahiri was always more interested in carrying out his version of global jihad through the use of terrorist tactics. Conversely, Azzam wanted to focus on developing a large force, which could deploy from its base of operations, which had become Afghanistan, to engage in more of a formal battle with its adversaries. With Azzam out of the picture, UBL had both

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<sup>17</sup> National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 147.

<sup>18</sup> Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, 267.

<sup>19</sup> Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, 308.

Zawahiri and KSM to influence him and determine the types of attacks that would be carried out and the manner in which they would be prosecuted.

In the earliest days, UBL focused on two ideological tenants. The first centered on the unification of Muslims in the pursuit of re-establishing the Islamic Caliphate, the embodiment of rightly guided Islamic rule, which was formally dissolved with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire following the end of World War I. This can be directly related to the influence of Azzam. In fact, UBL made specific reference to the dissolution of the Islamic Caliphate as a disgraceful and intended act set about by the United States, which was referenced in his videotaped message to the American people shortly following the 9/11 attacks.<sup>20</sup>

Secondly, UBL inherited Azzam's formulation that sought to establish "an organization that would channel the energies of the mujahedeen into fighting on behalf of oppressed Muslims worldwide, an Islamic rapid reaction force, ready to spring to the defense of their fellow believers at short notice."<sup>21</sup> However, the ideological split that occurred between Azzam and UBL over how this organization was to be operationalized created the foundations that would set sights on the United States and the West. Influenced by Zawahiri and KSM, Al-Qaeda became the organization that would take the fight to the far enemy, insisting on a top-down approach, as it were, vice domestic Islamist movements that had resulted in little successes.

Both tenets sought to undue the perceived wrongs that had befallen Muslims in the Middle East. In his first published *fatwa* in 1996, which was the first formal declaration of war against the United States, UBL states:

It should not be hidden from you that the people of Islam had suffered from aggression, iniquity and injustice imposed on them by the Zionist-Crusaders alliance and their collaborators; to the extent that the Muslims blood became the cheapest and their wealth

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<sup>20</sup> Statement by Osama Bin Laden in Videotaped Address to the People of the United States, October 7, 2001, The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/oct/07/afghanistan.terrorism15>. Accessed 6 January 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Kepel and Milelli, eds., *Al Qaeda in its Own Words*, 22.

as loot in the hands of the enemies. Their blood was spilled in Palestine and Iraq. The horrifying pictures of the massacre of Qana, in Lebanon are still fresh in our memory. Massacres in Tajikistan, Burma, Kashmir, Assam, Philippines, Fatah, Ogadin, Somalia, Eritrea, Chechnya and in Bosnia-Herzegovina took place, massacres that send shivers in the body and shake the conscience. All of this and the world watch and hear, and not only didn't respond to these atrocities, but also with a clear conspiracy between the USA and its' allies and under the cover of the iniquitous United Nations, the dispossessed people were even prevented from obtaining arms to defend themselves.<sup>22</sup>

In analyzing this statement, Michael Scheuer indicates that Bin Laden believed that the ills that had befallen the Muslim world were being driven by American policies around the globe, especially in terms of its perceived anti-Muslim campaign. The former head of the CIA's Bin Laden Task Force, ALEC STATION, Scheuer states, "Bin Laden portrays Americans and their allies as inhuman creatures that thirst for Muslim blood, delight in gore, and aim to annihilate the Islamic world."<sup>23</sup>

Whereas Azzam had exclusively focused on assisting the Afghans against the Soviets in a localized, yet worthy jihad, UBL was more transfixed on the wider Muslim community and its liberation from oppressive regimes and unwanted Western influence.<sup>24</sup> This focus on a wider agenda would become a defining feature of Al-Qaeda, as previous groups such as Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) were much more concerned with localized grievances and a more nationalist approach. Interestingly, Azzam had argued for a renewed focus on the Palestinian issue, a point with which Bin Laden simply did not agree.<sup>25</sup>

Bin Laden viewed the conflict in terms of a Judean-Christian conspiracy that sought to undermine Islam, occupy its Holy Lands, and subsequently vanquish Muslims everywhere, similar to the period of the Crusades centuries earlier. UBL's usage of the Crusader imagery, as

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<sup>22</sup> "Bin Laden's Fatwa," PBS NewsHour, August 23, 1996, accessed February 4, 2015, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/military-july-dec96-fatwa\\_1996/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/military-july-dec96-fatwa_1996/).

<sup>23</sup> Michael Scheuer, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2006), 47.

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Randel, *Osama: The Making of a Terrorist* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 92.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Benjamin and Simon Steve, *The Age of Sacred Terror* (New York: Random House, 2002), 103.



Scheuer explains, serves three main purposes: The first is utilizing language that is meant to paint Christians in the worst possible light, to make them appear to be inhuman. Secondly, the Crusader imagery is meant to revive the barbarism of Crusaders against Muslims. Third, and most importantly, it creates the sense that the West is the main enemy of Islam, not the Arab regimes that have fallen under its control.<sup>26</sup>

Following the withdrawal of the Soviets in 1989, UBL returned to his native Saudi Arabia, where he was lauded for his successes in Afghanistan. While there, UBL worked very closely with Saudi intelligence in the establishment of a mujahedeen force that could be utilized by the Saudi monarchy and its allied Yemeni partners in communist-controlled South Yemen.

When Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait in 1990 and threatened to continue further south into Saudi Arabia, UBL famously pleaded with the Saudi royal family to allow his fighters to come to their aid and oust Saddam's army. When the Saudis rejected UBL's offer and decided to partner with the U.S.-led coalition, UBL experienced a serious loss of face, leading to the eventual revocation of his Saudi passport and expulsion from his native country.

Changing the course from a focus on regional governments to those of the West, especially the United States, would not happen overnight. One of the first interviews with Bin Laden published in a Western newspaper was Robert Fisk's 1993 interview, as UBL was in the process of completing various road and infrastructure projects in his newfound home in Sudan following his initial return from Afghanistan. Fisk's article paints a picture of a man who had valiantly used the tools of his trade, heavy earth moving equipment acquired through his family's construction business and his personal wealth, to aid in the defeat of the Soviets, and who now had moved on to create a sort of work program for his Arab legion that had followed him to Khartoum after the Soviets had withdrawn and Afghanistan devolved further into tribal war and

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<sup>26</sup> Schueuer, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes*, 49.

chaos. During that 1993 interview, there was no mention of a wider aim to target the United States or its interests in the Middle East.<sup>27</sup>

However, three years later in 1996, Fisk ventured into the mountains of Afghanistan to meet with UBL once again. Fisk's visit corresponded to the attacks on the military barracks in Khobar, Saudi Arabia, which had occurred mere weeks before, in which 19 U.S. service members were killed.<sup>28</sup> In the interview, UBL states that, "The explosion in Khobar did not come as a direct reaction to the American occupation but as a result of American [behavior] against Muslims, its support of Jews in Palestine [sic] and the massacre of Muslims in Palestine and Lebanon - of Sabra and Chatila and Qana - and of the Sharm el-Sheikh [anti-terrorist] conference."<sup>29</sup>

Although speculation remains as to the involvement of UBL and Al-Qaeda in planning and carrying this operation out, as some point to a joint Iranian-Hezbollah plot, many nonetheless viewed this incident as one of the first successful, large-scale operations conducted by Bin Laden and his organization of Afghan jihad veterans, and reflective of the type of attack which would become their hallmark.

By 1996, Bin Laden had grown tired of his time in Sudan, despite the fact that he once considered his time there as the happiest of his life up to that point.<sup>30</sup> When the Sudanese government offered to turn him over to U.S. authorities, backed by increasing Saudi pressure,

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Fisk, "Anti-Soviet warrior puts his army on the road to peace," *The Independent* (December 6, 1993), accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/antisoviet-warrior-puts-his-army-on-the-road-to-peace-the-saudi-businessman-who-recruited-mujahedin-now-uses-them-for-largescale-building-projects-in-sudan-robert-fisk-met-him-in-almatig-1465715.html>.

<sup>28</sup> "Al Qaeda Is Now Suspected in 1996 Bombing of Barracks," *The New York Times* (May 14, 2003), accessed January 6, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/14/world/al-qaeda-is-now-suspected-in-1996-bombing-of-barracks.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Fisk, "Arab rebel leader warns the British: 'Get out of the Gulf,'" *The Independent* (July 10, 1996), accessed February 11, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/arab-rebel-leader-warns-the-british-get-out-of-the-gulf-1328034.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, 188.

UBL was asked to depart for a country of his choice. He chose his former proving grounds in Afghanistan. It was during this period that Al-Qaeda's operational development escalated in intensity and urgency.

#### AL-QAEDA AND THE SAFE HAVEN OF AFGHANISTAN

Bin Laden based his decision to return to Afghanistan on several factors. Primarily, his relationship with the Saudi monarchy and the United States left him under increased scrutiny. He was quickly running out of places to go. Afghanistan offered Bin Laden both a safe haven and a base of operations once he decided to increase the intensity of AQ operations.

As the previous chapter stated, terrorist organizations are drawn to failed or failing states.<sup>31</sup> By the late 1990s, Afghanistan was certainly that. Earlier in the decade, the Taliban gained power in the political vacuum of post-war Afghanistan. Taliban forces, led by Mullah Omar, would eventually unseat the government in Kabul and take Kandahar from rival mujahedeen factions, establishing the city as the new capital in 1996.<sup>32</sup> Under Taliban rule, a strict Islamic reformation approach was implemented throughout all levels of society. However, the Taliban during this period can neither be described as Islamists in the Muslim Brotherhood tradition nor the traditionalism embodied by the Wahhabi Islam movement popular in Saudi Arabia. Rather, the Taliban sought an alternative approach based on its own unique interpretation of Islam rooted in the Deobandi Islamic tradition prevalent in the border regions along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, which had extremist views on women, education, and

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<sup>31</sup> Piazza, "Incubators of Terror: Do Failed and Failing States Promote Transnational Terrorism?," 471.

<sup>32</sup> M.J. Gohari, *The Taliban: Ascent to Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9.

adherence to sharia law. The Taliban was also concerned only with its own successes and international recognition, and much less focused on a wider, global Islamist movement.<sup>33</sup>

The Taliban's approach and philosophy placed it in opposition to that ideology espoused by Bin Laden and his inner circle. Bin Laden's return to Afghanistan in May 1996 occurred only months before the Taliban consolidated power and seizure of Kabul. In fact, it has been reported that Mullah Omar sent a delegation to Tora Bora to receive him upon his arrival.<sup>34</sup> Despite this apparent camaraderie, Bin Laden's group and the Taliban were both very distinct organizations, both having contacts within the Pakistani ISI and both leveraged for Pakistan's benefit. The Taliban were encouraged that Bin Laden would bring significant financial resources and help with various civil projects, much like he had done in Sudan a few years earlier. However, Bin Laden's funds were now frozen, leaving him unable to deliver on such promises.<sup>35</sup> Although the Taliban and Bin Laden were inextricably linked by 1997, the nature of Bin Laden's involvement or support from Pakistani ISI remains vague.<sup>36</sup>

Although Bin Laden was unable to deliver on such projects, he did earn favor with his Taliban hosts by sending a few hundred Arab-Afghan fighters to assist Taliban forces in the north in 1997 and 1998. Bin Laden's ideas about global jihad became increasingly more welcome by top Taliban leaders who, prior to this period, did not maintain hatred for the West or the United States. With the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, pressure from the United States began to build on the Taliban to expel Bin Laden from Afghanistan, but Mullah Omar refused, citing Afghan traditions against the expulsion of guests.

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<sup>33</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (United States: Yale University Press, 2000), 87-88.

<sup>34</sup> Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, 245.

<sup>35</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, 139.

<sup>36</sup> Jonathan Randal, *Osama: The Making of a Terrorist*, 241.

Despite the Taliban's position, Mullah Omar and other Taliban leaders realized that Bin Laden had become more of a liability than an asset, but dealing with this issue would be complicated. Bin Laden continued to cause friction with his Taliban hosts for refusing to maintain a low profile and for his activities, especially in relation to his publicized calls for global jihad and war against the West.<sup>37</sup> By this time, Al-Qaeda had gained a firm foothold in the ungoverned expanses of the Hindu Kush, positioning itself for the next decade to come.<sup>38</sup> By 1998, Al-Qaeda "had come of age."<sup>39</sup>

As Daniel Byman emphasizes, early Al-Qaeda depended heavily on the safe havens provided by Sudan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. In the case of Afghanistan under Taliban rule, Al-Qaeda enjoyed unprecedented levels of freedom to develop its organization in the manner that Bin Laden determined. Al-Qaeda fighters flowed freely into Afghanistan during this period, recruiting and training its forces, and plotting some of its most fantastic attacks.<sup>40</sup>

As the 9/11 plot came closer to execution, some leaders within Al-Qaeda urged Bin Laden to reconsider, stating that his belief that the U.S. would not have a will to fight was incorrect. These dissenting members argued that the subsequent U.S. response would jeopardize the Taliban government and harm the efforts made in Afghanistan to establish the new Islamic caliphate.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Anne Stenersen, "Arab and non-Arab jihadis," *Faultlines in Global Jihad: Organizational, strategic, and ideological fissures*, ed. Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2011), 124.

<sup>38</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, 139-140.

<sup>39</sup> Deepak Tripathi, *Breeding Ground: Afghanistan and the Origins of Islamist Terrorism* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, Inc., 2011), 130.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States That Sponsor Terrorism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 205.

<sup>41</sup> Fawaz Gerges, *The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 90.

## CHAPTER 3

### OPERATIONALIZATION AND PROLIFERATION

#### INTRODUCTION

As the last chapter detailed, the desire to expand the global jihad movement can be found embedded in the post-Afghan scene of the 1980s and the ideological influences on Bin Laden in the form of Azzam and Zawahiri. Developing a tiered plan for growth for Al-Qaeda was not exclusively a product of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) launched by the United States following the 9/11 attacks. Prior to 2001, Bin Laden had been very active in developing other regional strongholds for Al-Qaeda operations. Most of these were based upon the Arab Afghan networks established in the 1980s, but others became opportunities of convenience. To be sure, Bin Laden's plan of luring the United States into a wider war in the Middle East was a central goal. Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda had attempted this tactic with the *USS Cole* bombing, but U.S. reaction remained limited and restrained. However, the moment of divergence between strengthening the core organization and empowering cells and affiliates is simply not clear. Rather, the slow buildup of intra-regional capabilities grew throughout the 1990s, as failures and successes occurred throughout. All of this shared history contributed to the pattern of growth that occurred following the 9/11 attacks.

From the outset, Al-Qaeda under Bin Laden's leadership was designed to proliferate to other parallel movements across the Arab world. The Azzam/UBL split that gave way to the founding of Al-Qaeda in the late 1980s centered on the strategic differences between Azzam and

Bin Laden, the latter of whom argued that the apostate regimes of the Middle East should become the primary target of their organization following the withdrawal of the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup>

The proliferation of Al-Qaeda across the Arab world—consolidating most strongly in the movements in Iraq, Saudi Arabia/Yemen, and Algeria—was not accidental, nor was it exclusively part of an overall campaign plan. Coupled with the aims for the organization was the gradual, and then sudden, intervention of the United States against AQ networks. Many have suggested that the proliferation of the AQ-inspired jihad came from the influence of Abu Musab al-Suri, a senior Al-Qaeda figure who worked closely with the Taliban. Al-Suri, an intellectual and strategist, would pen his own vision for the global jihad movement called *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*.

In his view, Al-Suri envisioned the creation of an Islamic vanguard, much like Azzam and Zawahiri; however, this cadre would be comprised of small bands of Muslim fighters who would carry out attacks against apostate regimes across the region. This cadre, combined with a wave of terrorist-style attacks by a Muslim diaspora across the globe would unite a wider jihad and ultimately defeat the West and its ability to support its regional allies in the Muslim world, an AQ strategy based on Che Guevara's *foco* strategy across Latin America and Africa. The nature of this strategy would be a complete, uncoordinated, and decentralized campaign.<sup>2</sup> However, Al-Suri and Bin Laden were believed to have a strained relationship over opposing views and the inner struggles with the Taliban and other Arab Afghans.<sup>3</sup> Instead of Al-Suri's vision, Al-Qaeda Central adopted an approach that amended the *el foco* strategy, allying itself with parallel groups that AQC sought to work with in order to expand its own capability. These

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Benjamin and Simon Steve, *The Age of Sacred Terror* (New York: Random House, 2002), 103.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Celso, *Al-Qaeda Post-9/11 Devolution: The Failed Jihadist Struggle Against the Near and Far Enemy* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al-Qaeda Strategist Abu Musab al-Suri* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 282-286.

newly sponsored groups could then draw upon the inspiration of the 9/11 attacks as an inspirational model of what could be achieved with appropriate daring and preparation.<sup>4</sup>

Maintaining this global focus was something that Al-Qaeda tried to preserve and reinforce, even while unseen forces attempted to derail its true aims. According to Thomas Hegghammer, what makes the global jihadists, like Al-Qaeda, more global lies upon two factors; 1) These jihadists view the United States and the West as the primary and immediate enemy that much be prioritized at a higher level of importance to bring about the desired endgame, and 2) the operational pattern is transnational in nature; that is, the targets chosen are international targets within the jihadists zone of influence or there exists a willingness to strike at such targets outside of the territorial base.<sup>5</sup>

According to Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, the decision to increase the operational reach of Al-Qaeda to the periphery of the global movement, in places like Yemen and Saudi Arabia, was a strategic and calculated decision by AQ leadership in order to diffuse the perceived territorial center of gravity of Al-Qaeda and to confuse the West as to the true nature of the organization.<sup>6</sup> In total, the decision to proliferate was part of an elaborate smokescreen that would consume resources of Western governments and militaries in their attempts to mitigate and destroy the AQ network.

Prior to 9/11, Saif al-Adl, then AQC's military commander, urged that planning should take place with regard to the expansion of the jihadi theater, which would dilute U.S. efforts

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<sup>4</sup> Anthony Celso, *Al-Qaeda Post-9/11 Devolution: The Failed Jihadist Struggle Against the Near and Far Enemy* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Hegghammer, Thomas. 2006. "Global Jihadism After the Iraq War." *Middle East Journal* 60, no. 1: 11-32

<sup>6</sup> Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, "The Rise and Fall of Al Qaeda Lessons in Post-September 11 Transnational Terrorism," *GCSP Geneva Papers — Research Series no. 3*, September 2011, 21.



against the AQ network.<sup>7</sup> This expansion was meant to draw the United States into an ever-expanding battlefield, frustrating and offsetting its efforts, and ultimately humiliating the U.S. In order to serve as a viable theater, Bin Laden and his closest aides applied geo-political reasoning to determine future operational areas.

According to Norman Cigar, “Important analytical criteria in Al-Qaida’s decision on whether to open a new theater included the need for a certain level of local support, a favorable operating environment, and reasonable prospects for success.”<sup>8</sup> Through the application of Cigar’s paradigm for crafting a proliferation plan for Al-Qaeda, it will be shown in subsequent chapters that Iraq, Yemen, and Algeria presented themselves as viable areas that could support AQ proliferation. Iraq, although not initially a focus of Bin Laden and AQ planners, presented a target of opportunity that could not be ignored. Although Saudi Arabia has, and remains, a key piece of terrain for Al-Qaeda, the conditions within the country stifled AQ efforts through comprehensive crackdowns on existing networks and cells operating within the Kingdom. Naturally, and keeping with Cigar’s view, Al-Qaeda in the region migrated to Yemen, a country that was much more fertile for expansion and sustainment of AQ operations.

In this chapter, I will create a profile of Al-Qaeda Central as it developed up to 2001 through a qualitative analysis of the four variables detailed in the previous chapter: (1) operational ideology and goals, (2) targeting preferences, (3) means of financing operations, and (4) diversity of its fighters. Detailing these variables as they existed within Al-Qaeda prior to the 9/11 attacks and subsequent campaign against it led by the United States will establish a working definition of what Al-Qaeda was in 2001, what its aims were, and how it organized itself. This

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<sup>7</sup> Norman Cigar, “Al-Qaida’s Theater Strategy: Waging A World War,” in *Al-Qaida After Ten Years of War: A Global Perspective of Successes, Failures, and Prospects* eds. Norman Cigar and Stephanie Kramer (Quantico: Marine Corps University Press, 2011), 43.

<sup>8</sup> Cigar, “Al-Qaida’s Theater Strategy: Waging a World War,” 47.

will create the baseline necessary in the study of subsequent movements, which will be analyzed in the following chapters and demonstrate the level and degree of evolution.

First, I will examine Al-Qaeda's operational design, its implementation, and targeting strategies by providing both an historical analysis and the presentation of two case studies of Al-Qaeda-sponsored plots prior to their execution, one of which proved unsuccessful and the other of which demonstrated a high-level of success. I will then provide a general overview of financing practices, which Al-Qaeda exploited and utilized during its earliest days. This section will demonstrate the various means through which Al-Qaeda funded its operations, training, and recruitment, as well as detail some of the financial hardships that befell the organization during its formative years.

This will be followed by an analysis of diversification of members and how Al-Qaeda both organized and utilized this diversity for training and follow-on operations that would be planned once these operatives returned to their countries of origin. This section will also detail the philosophy of AQ-cell development and their role in the global campaign, as well as the hierarchical structure of the organization itself. Details will also be provided on the roles of diversification of leaders throughout the established hierarchy in terms of their respective countries of origin. Finally, I will end this chapter with a series of conclusions based on the analysis provided. This analysis of AQC will establish the overall baseline of this study, and form the context of the research conducted across various AQ affiliates will be done.

## TARGETING AND OPERATIONAL DESIGN

What distinguished Al-Qaeda from other parallel Islamist groups was first its ideology that, with the ouster of the Soviets and the perception of a growing weakness of the United States, the age of dominant powers on the world stage was coming to an end, and in that void

would emerge an Islamic resurgence. Second, a general disenchantment had emerged throughout the Arab Afghan ranks. As Soviet forces withdrew, the allure of confronting Islam's enemies on a tangible field of battle, a notion that drew many volunteers to join the jihad in Afghanistan, was becoming more of a dream than reality. The infighting among Afghan militias and tribal warlords prevented the establishment of a unified Islamic state or Caliphate, a dream of Azzam, Zawahiri, and Bin Laden.

When applied through an ends-ways-means analysis, the classic Al-Qaeda program is much more easily understood. As Assaf Moghadam explains, Bin Laden and his group crafted a very clear approach to achieving its desired end state, which is the reestablishment of the Islamic Caliphate. The manner in which this would be carried out would be in the practice of jihad, most easily understood as a "violent, holy struggle that is at once sanctioned by God, fought for his sake, and pleasing to him."<sup>9</sup> In order to achieve the ultimate goal, several partial goals were established that would facilitate the grand campaign; 1) Reawaken Muslims; 2) Defend Islam; and 3) Defeat Enemies.<sup>10</sup> According to Martin Rudner, the timeline laid out by Al-Qaeda was developed on a twenty-year time horizon, although there is little data to support such a finite timeframe.<sup>11</sup>

By 2001, Al-Qaeda's ideology was focused on the West (as its primary enemy), as it had evolved over the previous decade, and almost exclusively on the United States, as well as the Saudi monarchy. In a 1997 CNN interview with UBL, Peter Bergen and Peter Arnett asked Bin Laden to explain his primary grievances with the Saudi regime, which at that time remained the

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<sup>9</sup> Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008, 68.

<sup>10</sup> Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008, 69.

<sup>11</sup> Rudner, Martin. 2013. "Al Qaeda's Twenty-Year Strategic Plan: The Current Phase of Global Terror." *Studies In Conflict & Terrorism* 36, no. 12: 953-980.

perceived focus of his ire. He answered, “Regarding the criticisms of the ruling regime in Saudi Arabia and the Arabian Peninsula, the first one is their subordination to the U.S. So, our main problem is the U.S. government while the Saudi regime is but a branch or an agent of the U.S.”<sup>12</sup>

In 1998, Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), the organization in which Zawahiri initially emerged, as well as elements from Al-Qaeda, carried out its most devastating and high profile attacks to date, with the dual bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania (which cost approximately \$10,000).<sup>13</sup> Although EIJ would be considered the primary perpetrator for these attacks, Al-Qaeda would provide some level of support.

In 2000, militants launched an attack on the *USS Cole*, as it sat in port in Aden, Yemen, showing that successful attacks against U.S. military targets, even ships of war, were achievable through the application of insurgent and unconventional tactics. Assigning blame to the perpetrators of the *USS Cole* bombing has remained non-definitive, as various investigations concluded that it could not be determined that Al-Qaeda was solely responsible for the operation, but it is assumed that like the Embassy bombings and the Khobar Tower bombings, Al-Qaeda did have some level of involvement.

Although the level of participation in the planning and executing of these attacks throughout the mid-to-late 1990s is vague, what can be determined is that groups operating under the rubric of global jihadist ideology became much more focused on targeting U.S. interests in the region. For Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda during this period, their operational philosophy has been described as a “centralization of decision and decentralization of execution.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Kepel and Milelli, eds., *Al Qaeda in its Own Words*, 51.

<sup>13</sup> John Roth, Douglas Greenburg, and Serena Wille, Staff Report to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States: Monograph on Terrorist Financing, *Staff Report to the Commission* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2004), 27, accessed June 9, 2015, [http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff\\_statements/911\\_TerrFin\\_Monograph.pdf](http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff_statements/911_TerrFin_Monograph.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, 318.

## AL-QAEDA'S CO-OPTION TECHNIQUES

On December 14, 1999, a Port Angeles customs officer apprehended Ahmad Ressam, a thirty-two year old Algerian who had immigrated to Montreal, as he attempted to enter the United States from Vancouver. In his vehicle, Ressam had various explosives, fertilizer, watch timers, and electronic circuit boards. During his trial, Ressam admitted that his mission to blow up the Los Angeles airport was an Al-Qaeda supported operation.<sup>15</sup>

Ressam had fled his native Algeria in 1992, as that country was wrapped in chaos and bloodshed of a violent civil war. After traveling to Marseilles, he eventually landed in Corsica, where he took whatever menial work he could find. While in Corsica, he was arrested for an immigration violation, but he later fled to Canada on a fake French passport before his trial on those charges. By fleeing to Montreal, Ressam had followed the path of other Algerian émigrés, many of whom were practicing jihadi ideologues.<sup>16</sup>

While in Montreal, Ressam's closest companions were in fact Algerian immigrants who not only had fled their native Algeria but also had experience in conducting jihad in Bosnia and Afghanistan. He had little formal training and lived off of government assistance. In 1998, Ressam was convinced by one of his companions, Fateh Kemal, who had obtained a Canadian wife and citizenship following his arrival in 1987, to travel to Afghanistan in order to receive training at the Khaldan camp, which was the entry point for Al-Qaeda recruits in Afghanistan.<sup>17</sup> During his explosives training, Ressam conducted himself well and was spotted by a core AQ member and close lieutenant to UBL, Abu Zubaydah, who served as a scout for potential operatives. Ressam was given \$12,000 and told to assemble a terrorist cell to conduct an

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<sup>15</sup> Randel, *Osama: The Making of a Terrorist*, 163.

<sup>16</sup> Randel, *Osama: The Making of a Terrorist*, 175.

<sup>17</sup> Wright, 297.

operation within the United States in conjunction with the new millennium. The choice of the target was left to Ressam to decide.<sup>18</sup>

Although Ressam's plot was ultimately thwarted, several lessons were learned by core AQ leadership that would be incorporated in the planning for the 9/11 attacks. Namely, Ressam spoke little English, so he was easily shaken when questioned by customs officials, causing him to flee. The operatives chosen for the 9/11 attacks would be much more comfortable operating in the United States, an obvious lesson learned from the Ressam debacle.

Like Ressam, the 9/11 hijackers came from Islamist cells outside of the classic Al-Qaeda pipeline borne from the Soviet jihad, as most, with the exception of Mohammad Atta, would have been too young to participate in the war. Atta, an Egyptian, who had become increasingly radicalized in extremist mosques around Hamburg, arrived in Germany on July 24, 1992, following the completion of his studies as a town planning and architectural engineer at Cairo University.<sup>19</sup>

Over the course of the next four years, Atta became more extreme in his interpretation of Islam, performing his obligatory religious pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina in 1995. It is possible that during this trip, Al-Qaeda recruiters approached Atta. That following year, Atta went to the Al-Quds Mosque in Hamburg to sign a last will and testament and a commitment to sacrificing himself in a martyrdom operation yet to be determined.<sup>20</sup>

Later in 1996, Atta traveled to Afghanistan to attend an Al-Qaeda training camp, where he was tasked with returning to Hamburg to recruit other like-minded Muslims to form a terrorist cell. He would return to Afghanistan in 1999, around the time that KSM and Bin Laden were

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<sup>18</sup> Randel, *Osama: The Making of a Terrorist*, 176-177.

<sup>19</sup> Yosri Fouda and Nick Feilding, *Masterminds of Terror: The Truth Behind the Most Devastating Terrorist Attack the World Has Ever Seen* (New York: Arcade, 2003), 77-78.

<sup>20</sup> Fouda and Feilding, *Masterminds of Terror*, 82.

attempting to find suitable candidates with English skills and experience living in the West to carry out the hijacking operation. Atta, who would later be chosen as the operational commander of the 9/11 attacks, was not informed of the 9/11 plot in its entirety. Instead, his Al-Qaeda handlers in Afghanistan maintained strict compartmentalization of the plot, while simultaneously mentoring and preparing another operational team in Malaysia.<sup>21</sup>

The Ressam and Atta examples show the development in the level of sophistication and the evolution in detailed planning required to successfully execute a large-scale operation against the United States. Ressam and Atta were not core AQ members; however, they, like many others who were inspired by the global jihadi movement, were brought into the fold of AQ-inspired operations and carried out these operations at the behest of core AQ.

In both cases, Al-Qaeda utilized its training camp network to draw potential recruits to its safe haven where they were evaluated, provided some level of military-type training, and then recruited and selected for a mission. The Ressam case demonstrates a routine, if not naïvely conceptualized operation, whereas the 9/11 attacks were much more complex and detail-oriented and took years to develop. Also in both cases, core AQ leadership was able to influence and guide operations far beyond their traditional scope by utilizing the foreign cell template, which worked to reinforce the centralized decision-making/decentralized execution program.

A further point regarding the types of targets that Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda preferred in its early development is highlighted by Oliver Roy, in which he notes that religion and the role of Islam in perceived conflict with Christianity was not translated from ideology into action. As Roy points out, Al-Qaeda chose to target the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, symbols of so-called American imperialism. If Al-Qaeda had chosen to operationalize its ideology along a

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<sup>21</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 105.

religious-themed targeting regime, it could have just as easily chosen to target Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome.<sup>22</sup> The decision to target modern imperialism is much more in-line with the far-leftist approach associated with Marxism or some sort of anti-globalization movement.<sup>23</sup> When one considers Bin Laden's background and education, this targeting proclivity becomes much more clear. As Peter Mandaville explains, Bin Laden was trained in economics and management, not Islamic jurisprudence.<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, martyrdom in the form of suicide operations became an early hallmark of AQ operations. In addition to the 9/11 attacks, all of the major attacks executed by Al-Qaeda during the first several years of its operational existence all involved suicide as the primary mechanism. The dual embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, the USS *Cole* bombings in 2000, the assassination of Ahmed Shah Massoud (the leader of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan) in September 2001, the bombings of a Jewish synagogue in Djerba, Tunisia in April 2002, and the attacks on Israeli tourists in Kenya in November 2002 were all carried out by Al-Qaeda operatives and all involved suicide by the attackers.<sup>25</sup>

## FINANCING OPERATIONS

For an organization such as Al-Qaeda to conduct operations to the degree that it sought, it needed money. In the early days of the organization, money was its strength. It has been reported that Bin Laden's inheritance from his father's company netted him approximately \$25-30 million, which he invested in various international commodities markets.<sup>26</sup> However, the belief that Bin Laden utilized both his personal wealth and the profits made from liquidating his

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<sup>22</sup> Oliver Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for the New Umma*, Columbia University Press, 2004, 46.

<sup>23</sup> Oliver Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for the New Umma*, Columbia University Press, 2004, 46.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Routledge, 2014, 346.

<sup>25</sup> Assaf Moghadem, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008, 86-93.

<sup>26</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, 19.



business holdings in Sudan prior to his departure for Afghanistan is a myth. According to U.S. government reports, “When Bin Ladin moved to Afghanistan in 1996, his financial situation was dire; it took months for him to get back on his feet. While relying on the good graces of the Taliban, Bin Ladin reinvigorated his fund-raising efforts and drew on his ties to wealthy Saudi nationals that he developed during his days fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan.”<sup>27</sup>

During the 1980s, not only did Bin Laden rise to prominence by utilizing his wealth to aid the Arab Afghan cause, but he was also a very skilled and successful fundraiser, traveling throughout the region in order to secure donations through established Islamic charities and private donors. During one of these fundraising drives in Saudi Arabia in 1984, Bin Laden was able to bring in \$5-10 million. Coupled with the deluge of American and Saudi aid to the mujahedeen and their supporters, UBL had more than enough resources to fund the creation of and maintain the Arab legion that would become Al-Qaeda.

The high times would not last, however. After the departure of the Soviets and Bin Laden’s exile to Sudan, he invested heavily in the infrastructure in Sudan. At that time, it is estimated that Bin Laden still had the obligation to pay for the roughly 1000 members of Al-Qaeda and their families, which cost \$6 million per year.<sup>28</sup> Al-Qaeda members were forced to work in Bin Laden’s companies that were set up to conduct the infrastructure projects in Sudan. Coupled with the growing strain on AQ finances, Bin Laden’s yearly stipend of approximately \$1 million for his stake in his father’s company, which he had received since 1970, was frozen

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<sup>27</sup> John Roth, Douglas Greenburg, and Serena Wille, Staff Report to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States: Monograph on Terrorist Financing, *Staff Report to the Commission* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2004), 20, accessed June 9, 2015, [http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff\\_statements/911\\_TerrFin\\_Monograph.pdf](http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff_statements/911_TerrFin_Monograph.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 43.

by Saudi authorities in 1994 as part of a comprehensive crackdown against him.<sup>29</sup> Although reports and rumors of bankruptcy have circulated, Bin Laden himself claimed to have left \$29 million as part of his will to various family members and associates, which he claimed was left in Sudan when he departed the country for Afghanistan.<sup>30</sup>

Some reports suggest that Al-Qaeda was heavily involved in the illicit diamond trade to fund its activities. During the 1990s, the Taliban engaged in a turf war against the Northern Alliance over access to emerald fields, which were under the control of Ahmad Shah Massoud, leader of the Northern Alliance. Prior to this, the Arab-Afghans were also reported to have mined these same fields to assist in funding their own campaign against the Soviets. This led to interest by Al-Qaeda elements in the tanzanite industry, which is exclusive to Tanzania, and a location that Al-Qaeda quickly became more captivated.<sup>31</sup>

A 2001 *Wall Street Journal* report co-authored by Daniel Pearl, the journalist who was abducted and murdered in Pakistan in 2002, indicated that Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda did indeed have a large role in the tanzanite mining industry. The report claimed that Bin Laden had agents working for him within the industry and trading in rare gems on his behalf.<sup>32</sup> However, official U.S. government materials stop short of verifying such funding sources.

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<sup>29</sup> National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, by Philip Zelikow, Executive Director; Bonnie D. Jenkins, Counsel; and Ernest R. May, Senior Advisor (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 170.

<sup>30</sup> "In regards to the money that is in Sudan--Bin Laden's will", Office of the Director of National Intelligence, signed by Osama Bin Laden, declassified March 1, 2016, <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl2016/english/In%20regard%20to%20the%20money%20that%20is%20in%20Sudan.pdf>. Author consulted source in original language (Arabic), available via <http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl2016/arabic/Arabic%20in%20regard%20to%20the%20money%20that%20is%20in%20Sudan.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Douglas Farah, *Blood from Stones: The Secret Financial Network of Terror* (United States: Broadway Books, 2004), 65.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Block and Daniel Pearl, "Bought, Sold by Militants Near Mine, Tanzanite Ends Up at Mideast Souks," *Wall Street Journal* (November 16, 2001), accessed January 6, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB1005860635600904840>.

According to the Monograph on Terrorist Financing, as part of the 9/11 Commission Report,

Al Qaeda and Usama Bin Ladin obtained money from a variety of sources. Contrary to common belief, Bin Ladin did not have access to any significant amounts of personal wealth (particularly after his move from Sudan to Afghanistan) and did not personally fund al Qaeda, either through an inheritance or businesses he was said to have owned in Sudan. Rather, al Qaeda was funded, to the tune of approximately \$30 million per year, by diversions of money from Islamic charities and the use of well-placed financial facilitators who gathered money from both witting and unwitting donors, primarily in the Gulf region. No persuasive evidence exists that al Qaeda relied on the drug trade as an important source of revenue, had any substantial involvement with conflict diamonds, or was financially sponsored by any foreign government.<sup>33</sup>

In its inaugural report on terrorist financing in 2002, The Council on Foreign Relations characterized Al-Qaeda's financial network as built on "layers and redundancies. It raises money from a variety of sources and moves money in a variety of manners. It runs businesses operating under the cloak of legitimacy and criminal conspiracies ranging from the petty to the grand."<sup>34</sup> This same report suggested that prior to 9/11, Al-Qaeda relied heavily on its relationship with the Taliban and its control of the opium trade, although evidence of Bin Laden's open acquiescence of receiving funds from illicit means such as the drug trade simply was not documented.

The development of extensive Islamic NGOs provided the necessary cover for Al-Qaeda operatives to set about building the architecture of the global jihad movement. In many cases, Al-Qaeda loyalists served in positions within these charity organizations, allowing for the development of the various funding streams. According to some sources, Al-Qaeda was able to exploit these organizations, receiving approximately \$300-\$500 million between 1991 and

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<sup>33</sup> National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, by Philip Zelikow, Executive Director; Bonnie D. Jenkins, Counsel; and Ernest R. May, Senior Advisor (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 4, accessed June 9, 2015, [http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff\\_statements/911\\_TerrFin\\_Monograph.pdf](http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff_statements/911_TerrFin_Monograph.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> Maurice R. Greenburg, "Terrorist Financing: Report of an Independent Task Force Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations," (2002), 1.

2001.<sup>35</sup> Prior to 9/11, the Federal Bureau of Investigation was conducting a thorough and robust investigation into the Global Relief Foundation, Inc. (GRF) and the Benevolence International Foundation (BIF), both of which were suspected of acting as front organizations that supplied Al-Qaeda with sizable amounts of funding.<sup>36</sup>

Al-Qaeda's finance and business committee managed its funds, which were comprised of several highly placed individuals across the globe. Some estimates have claimed that Al-Qaeda's annual budget to fund all of its activities, training, weapons, and levels of compensation had approached \$50 million by the early 2000s.<sup>37</sup> Regardless of its annual budget for the entire organization, the overall assessment that Al-Qaeda was living hand-to-mouth by 2001 is quite strong.<sup>38</sup>

## DIVERSIFICATION

Under the leadership of Azzam, MAK placed an increased importance on the Muslim Brotherhood elite in coordinating the flow of fighters and money from across the Arab world into Afghanistan. Furthermore, Azzam demonstrated a proclivity toward providing the Egyptians within his organization positions of increased responsibility. In order for UBL to secure his position as the spiritual guide of Al-Qaeda, the spin-off of MAK, UBL had to show similar favor to the Egyptian cadre in order to broker power across the organization and fortify his position at its head.

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<sup>35</sup> Blake D. Ward, *Osama's Wake: The Second Generation of Al Qaeda*, no. 32, *Counterproliferation Papers: Future Warfare Series* (Maxwell Air Force Base: USAF Counterproliferation Center, 2005), 17.

<sup>36</sup> John Roth, Douglas Greenburg, and Serena Wille, Staff Report to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States: Monograph on Terrorist Financing, *Staff Report to the Commission* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2004), 10-11, accessed June 9, 2015, [http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff\\_statements/911\\_TerrFin\\_Monograph.pdf](http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff_statements/911_TerrFin_Monograph.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 19.

<sup>38</sup> John Roth, Douglas Greenburg, and Serena Wille, Staff Report to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States: Monograph on Terrorist Financing, *Staff Report to the Commission* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2004), 19, accessed June 9, 2015, [http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff\\_statements/911\\_TerrFin\\_Monograph.pdf](http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff_statements/911_TerrFin_Monograph.pdf).

Having emerged as its leader, UBL was keen to separate his newly minted organization from Azzam's MAK, which was considered an associated organization of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Azzam, who positioned himself as the indispensable facilitator of acquiring funding for the Afghan jihad, had traditionally called upon the elite ranks of his parent organization to serve as his operatives. At the outset, UBL decided that his organization would cater to not only devout Muslims but also those volunteers who were not necessarily part of the Egyptian elite. However, the hold-overs from Azzam's influence on the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as Zawahiri's contacts with EIJ, played an important role in establishing the strategic trajectory of Al-Qaeda.

From the beginning, some of Al-Qaeda's earliest members, such as Mohammad Atef (A.K.A. Abu Hafs al-Masri) and Abu Ubaidah al-Banshiri, were non-Muslim Brother Egyptians.<sup>39</sup> At the first training camps devoted to training only Arab fighters for the Afghan jihad, Egyptians were assigned as the instructors at those camps.<sup>40</sup> Zawahiri also urged Bin Laden to place Egyptians in senior positions within the organization. These included Ali Al-Rashidi, Al-Qaeda's first military commander, as well as his successor, Mohammad Atef, both of whom were old guard Egyptian Islamists and Zawahiri loyalists.<sup>41</sup>

In his 2004 study, Sageman determined that Egyptians accounted for sixty-three percent of the Al-Qaeda Central Staff prior to 9/11, yet only constituted fourteen percent of the overall sample size of 172 jihadists spread across the entire organization.<sup>42</sup> For the sample size presented, Egyptians constituted nearly fourteen percent of the organization, with Saudis leading in overall membership at eighteen percent. French (ten percent), Algerian and French (eight

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<sup>39</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, 91.

<sup>40</sup> Kepel and Milelli, eds., *Al Qaeda in its Own Words*, 94.

<sup>41</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, 26.

<sup>42</sup> Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, 71.

percent), and Indonesian (seven percent) origins rounded out the majority of the overall sample.<sup>43</sup>

UBL's policy of placing Egyptians, as well as Saudis, in positions of increased responsibility and those requiring heightened levels of trust, endured into the 1990s. Many Al-Qaeda members who were neither Saudi nor Egyptian often complained that these two privileged groups received much higher salaries than other groups.<sup>44</sup> Of the nineteen hijackers on 9/11, fifteen were of Saudi origin, which could explain Bin Laden's emphasized trust in this group. Prior to 9/11, Saudis were also able to obtain tourist visas for entry into the United States much more easily than other Middle Eastern regions, thus a reasoning behind Saudi nationals being so heavily integrated into the plot.<sup>45</sup>

In its design, Al-Qaeda became an organization that would accommodate Muslims from across the Islamic world. Its training camps were set up to place various nationalities together, like the Algerians, the Yemenis, etc. This would allow these groups to quickly build trust with one another, as well as position them for an eventual return to their native countries following training, in which they could then form their own operational cells. The ethnic homogenization of these cells would raise less scrutiny from authorities that, by this time, were well aware of the dangers posed by transient jihadists looking to take root in countries across the wider Muslim world.

Interestingly, Palestinian membership did not constitute any numbers of real significance in Al-Qaeda during this period. Even though data and historical analysis has shown that the Palestinian issue was very important to early AQ ideologues and has been a driving motivational

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<sup>43</sup> Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, 70.

<sup>44</sup> Wright, 224.

<sup>45</sup> National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, by Philip Zelikow, Executive Director; Bonnie D. Jenkins, Counsel; and Ernest R. May, Senior Advisor (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 156.

factor in the recruitment of Al-Qaeda members, the phenomenon of a relative lack of cooperation between groups like Hamas and Al-Qaeda is surprising. As Thomas Hegghammer and Joas Wagemakers conclude, Palestinian ideologues have played a significant role in shaping the ideology of Al-Qaeda, like Azzam, but this role has been focused more on supplying “Islamic thinkers” vice fighters. They describe this “Palestinian Effect” as important for recruitment of other ethnicities (to include non-Palestinian), but little evidence shows that this motivated empowered Palestinians from affiliating with Al-Qaeda.<sup>46</sup>

## GROWING THE NETWORK

Although this has remained an elusive and oft-debated piece of data, many experts suggest that core Al-Qaeda in 2001 numbered in the hundreds, maybe fewer. According to a Joint CIA-FBI Task Force, core Al-Qaeda numbered between 500 and 1000 members on September 11, 2001.<sup>47</sup> Ten years later in 2011, that estimate had not changed much, as its total strength was believed to be roughly 200-1000.<sup>48</sup> In 2010, CIA Director Leon Panetta remarked that core Al-Qaeda numbers might even be as low as fifty total members remaining in Afghanistan.<sup>49</sup> However, the strength of Al-Qaeda does not lie in its core numbers. Its organization and ideological model is much more adaptable, sophisticated, and fluid, as it was built with a much more decentralized structure in mind.

Rather, it appears that Al-Qaeda utilized its capacity to facilitate training, operations, and coordination for other groups and individuals with whom it shared an ideology and for those who

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<sup>46</sup> Hegghammer, Thomas, and Joas Wagemakers. 2013. "The Palestine Effect: The Role of Palestinians in the Transnational Jihad Movement." *Welt Des Islams* 53, no. 3/4: 281-314, 314.

<sup>47</sup> Ken Silverstein, "The Al Qaeda Clubhouse: Members Lacking," *Harper's Magazine* (July 5, 2006), accessed February 15, 2015, <http://www.harpers.org/archive/2006/07/sb-al-qaeda-new-members-badly-needed-1151963690>.

<sup>48</sup> Carl Bialik, "Shadowy Figures: Al Qaeda's Ranks are Hard to Measure," *Wall Street Journal* (September 9, 2011), accessed February 15, 2015, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111903285704576560593124523206.html>.

<sup>49</sup> David E. Sanger and Mark Mazzetti, "New Estimate of Strength of Al Qaeda Is Offered," *New York Times* (June 30, 2010), accessed August 12, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/01/world/asia/01qaeda.html>.

were ready to unite in a global jihadist enterprise. According to Stanford University's Mapping Militant Organizations Project, Al-Qaeda facilitated the training of between 10,000-20,000 fighters between 1996-2001. Despite this very impressive figure, Al-Qaeda Core remained quite small.<sup>50</sup>

In 2001, the 500-1000 full-fledged members had extensive experience in conducting covert operations across the globe, as they had fought in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Chechnya, and also had experience in covertly acquiring funding for such operations. Al-Qaeda training bases were also present in a variety of Muslim countries, or in countries with large Muslim populations. In order to get the most "bang for the buck" with this relatively small cadre, Bin Laden and AQ leadership emphasized a total decentralization of its activities and the establishment of its global jihadist network, as referenced in the last chapter as centralized decision-making/decentralized execution.

However, this did not mean that the early core members were not involved in operations. As Marc Sageman points out, early Al-Qaeda, especially during UBL's Sudanese exile period, utilized its top aides and those closest to UBL to be involved at the tactical level. Top level operatives such as Abu Ubaydah al-Banshiri, head of Al-Qaeda's military committee; Ali Abdel Su'ud Mohammad Mustafa, who was head of Bin Laden's bodyguard cadre; and Wadih el-Hage, UBL's personal secretary were all highly involved in the planning leading up to the US Embassy bombings in 1998.<sup>51</sup> This point indicates that the early stages of the organization were defined by looseness in organizational and hierarchical design, allowing the fluidity necessary to avoid interdiction by authorities.

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<sup>50</sup> "Al-Qaeda", Mapping Militant Organizations, Stanford University, accessed 30 June 2016, <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/21>.

<sup>51</sup> Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, 42-43.



As Rohan and Gunaratna explain, in Khartoum from December 1991 through May 1996, Al-Qaeda's ambitions focused on the establishment of this regional, decentralized structure.<sup>52</sup> They explain, "Al-Qaeda is structured in such a way that it can react very quickly to changing events on the ground. Mobility, flexibility, and fluidity will be the guiding principles of its post-Taliban structure."<sup>53</sup> This analysis is congruent with the dispersion of the Al-Qaeda brand and matches the fragmentation that took place following the 9/11 attacks. When compared with the network-based analysis conducted by Barber, which indicated that the strength of the relationships between core AQ and its closest regional partners between 1996-2000 continued to develop, one can figure that the success of Al-Qaeda in developing such a network was both a mixture of the failures of other groups to assume leadership of the overall movement and the overall positive relationships with a majority of related groups within the global terrorist network.<sup>54</sup> Simply put, Al-Qaeda Central and Bin Laden neither overstepped their developing capabilities, nor challenged the authority of existing groups within their home territory. The decision to create a diverse and adaptable network could have been in response to the increasing external pressures placed upon it by the United States and its allies, as well as an attractive strategy to increase resiliency of such an organization.<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, a source of strength of Al-Qaeda in 2001 centered on this decentralized structure. The regional nodes that had been established were ran by appointed and trusted affiliated members of Al-Qaeda who had undergone some level of training in AQ training camps, and who reported to a "handler " who remained in safe havens like the tribal areas of

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<sup>52</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, 95.

<sup>53</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, 96.

<sup>54</sup> Victoria Barber, "The Evolution of Al Qaeda's Global Network and Al Qaeda Core's Position Within it: A Network Analysis," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol 9, No 6.  
<http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/469/html>.

<sup>55</sup> Cozzens, Jeffrey B. "Approaching Al-Qaeda's Warfare: Function, Culture and Grand Strategy," in *Mapping Terrorism Research: State of the Art, Gaps and Future Directions*, ed. Magnus Ranstorp, London: Routledge, 2007, p.127-64, 132.

Afghanistan or Pakistan.<sup>56</sup> Although this hierarchical structure would indicate that there existed a layer of centralized control, these regional nodes were allowed a great deal of flexibility in deciding upon their targets and the means in which they were carried out.

The role of these middle managers, this experienced cadre of Al-Qaeda fighters and facilitators, has been identified as a center of gravity for Al-Qaeda. As the organization was designed to provide ideological oversight and guidance at the strategic level to bring grass-roots movements under the same banner at the tactical level, the role played by these middle managers at the operational level cannot be understated.

According to Neumann, Evans, and Pantucci, an ongoing debate has endured as to the true nature of Al-Qaeda's center of gravity, that is, from where it draws its strength. They argue Al-Qaeda middle management does not belong to what has been identified as core Al-Qaeda or a part of the upper echelon of Al-Qaeda leadership.<sup>57</sup> These middle managers are also not part of the low-level membership or affiliates, the "foot soldiers," who underwent some level of training and who returned to their home countries to organize and carry out AQ-inspired operations.<sup>58</sup>

They clarify,

The middle management combines several of the characteristics of the top leadership and the grass-roots. Like the top leadership, middle managers are experienced and skilled, and maintain contact with members of the leadership. The middle managers, in short, are the only members of the group who are connected to both grass-roots and top leadership. As a result, they become critical to forging linkages as well as facilitating the flow of information, resources, skills, and strategic direction between the top and the bottom of the organization.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, 97.

<sup>57</sup> Peter Neumann, Ryan Evans, and Raffaello Pantucci, "Locating Al Qaeda's Center of Gravity: The Role of Middle Managers," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 34, no. 11(2011): 828.

<sup>58</sup> Neumann, Evans, and Pantucci, "Locating Al Qaeda's Center of Gravity: The Role of Middle Managers," 829.

<sup>59</sup> Neumann, Evans, and Pantucci, "Locating Al Qaeda's Center of Gravity: The Role of Middle Managers," 829.

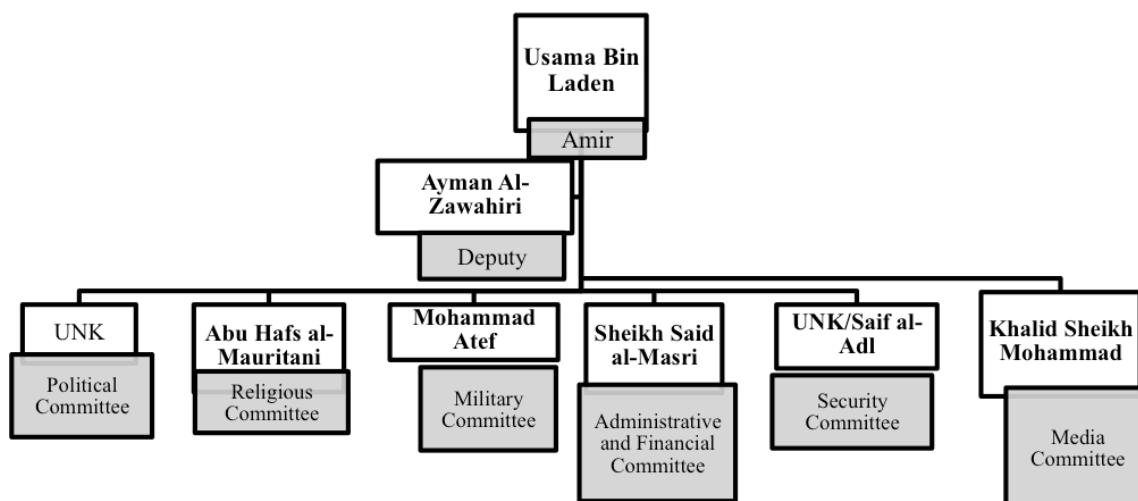
As with any successful organization, Al-Qaeda adeptly managed and implemented its strategy across all levels of its hierarchy. Prior to 2001, Al-Qaeda spent considerable time and effort to cultivate and train these mid-level personnel, which would form the conduit to translate the overall strategic vision to like-minded movements across the globe. Additionally, information on this level of the organization is also much harder to acquire due to the vagaries surrounding these middle managers and their roles in the jihadist culture, which has worked in the organization's favor.

Although the goal of creating an organization that was diffuse and decentralized was clearly pursued by Bin Laden and AQC, the core group did insist on creating and maintaining an organizational structure that could coordinate its activities. As Figure 3.1 indicates below, AQC was organized along a very clearly defined structure, with an Amir (leader) at the head, with a deputy, and six separate committees, known as the Command Council, with compartmentalized responsibilities.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Gunaratna, R. & A. Oreg. "Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no. 12 (2010), 1055.

**Figure 3.1: AQC Structure, 2001<sup>61</sup>**



*Data Source:* Gunaratna, R. & A. Oreg. "Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no. 12 (2010).

Furthermore, this illustration also highlights the multi-national dimension of AQC during this period. As shown here, the diversity of countries of origin of AQC's command council showcases the importance placed on diversity within the organization (Bin Laden-Yemen; Zawahiri-Egypt; Abu Hafs al-Mauritani-Mauritania; Mohammad Atef-Egypt; Saif al-Adl-Egypt; Sheikh Said al-Masri-Egypt; Khalid Sheikh Mohammad-Pakistan). Despite this diversity, this illustration also points to the elevated role played by the Egyptian contingent within the organization, a point of contention previously discussed, and which will be highlighted in later chapters.

<sup>61</sup> Illustration created by the author.

## ORGANIZATIONAL BASELINES

Prior to 2001, Al-Qaeda was on step in fulfilling UBL's goal of establishing an organization that would seek to unify other radical Islamist movements under his strategic vision.<sup>62</sup> The first successful attack that appeared to have been carried out exclusively by Al-Qaeda backed militants was the attack on the *USS Cole* in 2000. Although Al-Qaeda's involvement and figurative fingerprints were all over other related operations, such as the dual embassy bombings and the Khobar Tower attacks, definitive evidence implicating Al-Qaeda as the lone operational mastermind simply is not there. Al-Qaeda acted as a supporting agency or facilitator for other groups or individuals, which was in keeping with Bin Laden's role throughout the Soviet jihad.

In reality, Al-Qaeda struggled with its earliest operations. The failed LAX bombing by Ressaam in 1999, which was filled with an almost comedic assortment of errors, showcases that Al-Qaeda was not as operationally sound as it may have appeared. It was unwilling to commit serious amounts of cash for its operations, and it had an almost childlike understanding of what was required to carry out such high-profile attacks. It was reported that KSM and the planners for the 9/11 operation spent a considerable amount of time playing computer simulation games and watching movies that depicted hijackings during the early stages of planning the 9/11 attacks.<sup>63</sup>

However, what Al-Qaeda lacked in operational experience, it made up for it in its ability to unite various growing jihadist movements across the globe, as well as the ability to attract Muslim youth who cultivated romantic notions of fighting the enemies of Islam on some great

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<sup>62</sup> Leah Farrall, "How al Qaeda Works: What the Organization's Subsidiaries Say about Its Strength," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2011), accessed February 4, 2015, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67467/leah-farrall/how-al-qaeda-works>.

<sup>63</sup> Wright, 349.

battlefield, dying as a martyr, and receiving the promised fruits of Paradise that has become an over-emphasized tenet of Islam. Bin Laden's extensive wealth made him an early leading figure of the Arab Afghan movement, which sustained his high position in the years that would follow. His alleged exploits at Jaji, the site of an historic battle between Soviet forces and severely outnumbered mujahedeen, made him famous throughout the Arab world. Through these exploits, Bin Laden was able to attract significant donations from charities and donors. It was through this success at attracting funds through the extensive Islamic charity networks that Bin Laden was able to build Al-Qaeda into a relevant and dangerous organization. Whereas other Islamic resistance movements perhaps enjoyed a greater measure of success in terms of inflicting damage on their respective enemies, Al-Qaeda and Bin Laden provided what those groups could not: an opportunity to indulge on the ideas of what a united Islamic front could provide and the promise of greater success through collective action.

But he would need religious legitimacy to build his brand. Bin Laden was not a religious scholar in the classic tradition. He was certainly pious and devout, but lacked the clerical training required to justly provide interpretation and guidance based on Islamic jurisprudence. Admittedly, he viewed his role in the early years not so much as the warrior-scholar-cleric that he sought to perpetrate later on, but simply as a financier of operations. In order to build the required religious legitimacy that would place Al-Qaeda as the rightly guided Muslim vanguard, Bin Laden realized that he had to align himself with those religious scholars that would endorse him. He found this in both Azzam and later Zawahiri. This need to layer religious legitimacy in the activities of AQC and its affiliates will be a theme that will be explored in subsequent chapters. In rare cases we will see the affiliate leader serving in both roles: operational commander and religious authority.

In terms of its ideology, Al-Qaeda in 2001 was almost exclusively focused on targeting the United States. From its founding theoreticians, such as Azzam and Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda internalized the belief that a global jihadi movement should be focused on the external forces that worked to subjugate Muslims and prevent the implementation of a pure Islamic society. Whereas other related movements that preceded Al-Qaeda were focused on a resistance against what they believed were apostate regimes and puppets of the West, Al-Qaeda advocated for a global campaign that would target the far enemies of Islam first, before then moving on to the near enemy.

Consequently, Al-Qaeda chose to participate in and plan operations that would have both a large and dramatic effect, while also exclusively focusing on representations of U.S. influence and power in the region. The Khobar Tower bombings, the U.S. Embassy bombings, and the *USS Cole* bombings were all examples in which Al-Qaeda participated on some level. Although these attacks would result in some collateral deaths of Muslims, the primary focus of Al-Qaeda was to avoid the negative publicity that would have befallen it had more civilian Muslims and innocents been killed in its attacks. It is likely that it would have been much easier for Al-Qaeda to support operations that could have targeted regional government entities; however, it chose to avoid this strategy. The chapters that follow will explore if this focus on the far enemy would be enduring.

The financing of Al-Qaeda operations prior to 2001 had been a key factor in solidifying Bin Laden's role in the global jihadi movement. UBL utilized his personal wealth during the earliest years of the organization, subsequent investments, and his ability to harness the global Islamic charity enterprise to fund Al-Qaeda activities. Al-Qaeda sympathizers had infiltrated financial markets across the globe, as well as set up front organizations that were developed to

acquire and distribute funds clandestinely to Al-Qaeda programs. In addition to having to fund its own operations, Bin Laden also had to pay fees to the Taliban and related Islamist groups for providing the safe havens it required, which have been estimated at \$100 million.<sup>64</sup> All in all, the cost to maintain an organization like Al-Qaeda became very expensive. It is likely that the growing pressure on the organization would have increased its financial obligations, as alternative-funding sources would have to be identified.

In order to be a viable organization, Al-Qaeda and Bin Laden discovered that it would have to rethink how it acquired the necessary funding for its operations. No longer could it simply rely exclusively on the personal wealth of Bin Laden himself and wealthy Arab donors. The need for AQ-affiliated groups to finance their own operations would have a significant impact on how the organization would evolve following 2001.

From its earliest days, Al-Qaeda encouraged Muslims from all across the globe to join in its campaign. Bin Laden had initially set about creating an organization that would provide an increased role for Arab volunteers of all backgrounds during the Soviet campaign. Not only was Al-Qaeda's technique of housing volunteers from the same country in its training camps a natural way to build camaraderie and trust, but it also proved to have an operational benefit, as these individuals would then be tasked with returning to their homelands and establishing cells made up of their own countrymen. This was a key tenet and accelerant in establishing the global jihad campaign.

What can be said about Al-Qaeda is that the organization that Bin Laden developed was one that sought to depart from the status quo of established Islamic resistance organizations. Bin Laden founded Al-Qaeda as an alternative movement to the established order. This would clearly explain a large majority of its actions. Both Azzam and Zawahiri had grown

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<sup>64</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, 61.



disillusioned with the Muslim Brotherhood, especially in Egypt, to successfully bring about the desired change that spawned a movement like Al-Qaeda. Bin Laden accepted this by implementing the terrorist-inspired tactics that were advocated by Zawahiri and were not endorsed by the Muslim Brotherhood. Furthermore, Bin Laden saw Al-Qaeda as a further divergence from what had emerged during the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan. He sought to create an organization that would empower Arabs and place them in a leading role in a global jihad vice merely supporting the Afghan mujahedeen, which Azzam favored.

By any measure, Bin Laden had consolidated his position and that of Al-Qaeda as a capable and globally postured organization as it situated itself prior to the 9/11 attacks. However, Bin Laden's vision and ideology did not go unchallenged. Varying roadmaps on the role of an organization like Al-Qaeda were present from the very beginning. Friction between Azzam, Bin Laden, and Zawahiri, as well as other strategists such as Abu Musab al-Suri, colored the manner in which Al-Qaeda's ideology and operational design would be implemented in the years after 9/11. These varying ideas, who would take part in crafting them, who would carry them out, who could be trusted, and who should be feared, all created fissures in the organization.

These fissures did not end with the 9/11 attacks. Rather, the proliferation of Al-Qaeda would embody many of the same points of contention, and these imperfections would be highlighted on a much grander scale as power became dispersed across the affiliates and away from its core. Ultimately, the proliferation of Al-Qaeda following 9/11 would morph into a unique and regionally dependent version of AQC, with frictions ranging across all variables of this study. The patterns of this friction, both internally and externally, are what this study seeks to understand in the chapters that follow.

## CHAPTER 4

### AL-QAEDA IN IRAQ (2004-2007)

#### INTRODUCTION

This chapter will begin with a brief historical account of both the journey of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi to his position as the so-called “Al-Qaeda Prince in Iraq,”<sup>1</sup> as bestowed upon him by Bin Laden himself, and the rise of AQ-inspired groups in Iraq during the early 1990s, especially in the Kurdistan region, in the form of Ansar Al-Islam (AAI), the precursor to AQI and other follow-on groups that would emerge in its wake. Next, I will provide the necessary context to explain the environment leading up to the invasion of Iraq and the elimination of the Hussein regime by American and coalition forces in March 2003, and the related parallel activities of AQC. An analysis of AQI across the four established variables laid out in Chapter 1—ideology and goals, targeting, finance, and diversification of foreign fighters—will follow these sections. I conclude with a synthesis of the data, perceptions, and insights.

The Iraq case study provides unique perspective into Al-Qaeda as a global organization and brand, from the period of the initial invasion by the United States in 2003 and throughout the subsequent occupation and counter-insurgency operations in the years that followed. Such discernments are made possible both by a trove of captured documents on AQI activities and membership<sup>2</sup>, which were uncovered during a U.S. military raid in northern Iraq, and which provide detailed information on the foreign fighter contingent in Iraq at that time. Other materials have been intercepted by anti-AQ factions inside Iraq, to include Kurdish forces, as

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<sup>1</sup> George W. Bush, “President Bush Discusses War on Terror in South Carolina,” (speech, Charleston AFB, South Carolina, 24 July 2008), accessed May 30, 2015, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/07/20070724-3.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Brian Fishman and Joseph Felter, *Al-Qa’ida’s Foreign Fighters In Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records* (The Harmony Project, The Combating Terrorism Center at West Point), accessed June 18, 2015, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/aqs-foreign-fighters-in-iraq.pdf>.

well as recently released documents by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), which were acquired during the U.S. military raid on UBL's compound in Pakistan as part of Operation NEPTUNE SPEAR.<sup>3</sup> This material provides written communications between AQC and AQI leadership and detailed information on ideology, goals, and campaign plans. Additional documents have also been uncovered that provide financial details about sources and infrastructure of the Iraqi affiliate. In totality, these various products provide important insights into the tactics, techniques, and procedures for all aspects of Al-Qaeda's affiliate in Iraq. Much of the analysis done throughout this chapter will be based on those records.

The findings in this chapter confirm that Al-Qaeda in Iraq was an autonomous organization, with its own unique set of principles, ideological goals, and operational plans. The decision by Zarqawi and AQI to pursue a linkage with AQC was simply a means to garner greater credibility within the overall Islamic jihadi movement. This relationship did not represent an AQC presence in Iraq, as very little command and control was executed. Although the franchise tag was requested by AQI and bestowed by Bin Laden and AQC upon the Iraqi movement, this represents the extent of cooperation between the two organizations and is more indicative of a partnership of convenience rather than one of a grander design. Instead, the AQI movement should be considered a movement that belonged to a specific Sunni-led minority in Iraq, as well as those foreign fighters that shared in its outlook, and was specifically tailored to that region but was not part of a greater transnational movement that served the larger organization. In that regard, it is likely that AQI would have pursued its own version of Islamic fundamentalism under the leadership of Zarqawi even if the decision was not made to align the Iraqi movement to the larger AQ enterprise.

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<sup>3</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Bin Laden's Bookshelf*, 20 May 2015, <http://www.dni.gov/index.php/resources/bin-laden-bookshelf>. Author consulted documents from this source in original language (Arabic). Sources available in both Arabic and English translation.

From its founding, AQI was oriented toward the *near enemy*, which clashed with AQC tenets that sought to maintain a focus on the West and the United States, which AQC maintained to be the *far enemy*, and thus much more important to the global campaign. This orientation toward confronting existing regimes, institutions, and regional grievances stands in stark juxtaposition to Bin Laden's AQC. As explained in the last chapter, Bin Laden, through the influence of ideologues such as Qutb and Zawahiri, sought to challenge the West and its perceived nefarious efforts throughout the Muslim world. As Fawaz Gerges explains, this orientation by AQC was based upon its belief that the secular regimes throughout the Middle East would continue to be supported by the West, and therefore failing to confront it would only perpetuate the existing subjugation of non-secular Muslims in their pursuit of establishing an Islamic Caliphate. This pursuit led AQC to proliferate its concepts of jihad on a global scale.<sup>4</sup> As this chapter will show, AQI's orientation, through its actions, stood in contrast to this philosophy, underscoring its autonomous distinction.

Additionally, research and historical data indicate that the fundamentalist ideology espoused by AQI was not well received by the Iraqi population.<sup>5</sup> Coupled with ideology, Zarqawi's decisions to prosecute attacks on religious sites, the Iraqi Shiite population, and local infrastructure eventually led to a backlash against AQI among the local population that it sought as its center of gravity.<sup>6</sup> This was reinforced by the manner in which AQI funded its activities, which relied heavily on the sale of stolen property.

Known initially by its formal name, *Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn* (Al-Qaeda Jihadi Organization in the Land of the Two Rivers), AQI would eventually fracture into various offshoots under both the pressure of U.S. military operations and the abandonment of

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<sup>4</sup> Fawaz Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> M.J. Kirdar, "Al Qaeda in Iraq," *Adam Futures Project Case Study Series*, no. 1 (June 2011): 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> Kirdar, "Al Qaeda in Iraq," 4-5.

support by Sunni tribes in Iraq's Anbar Province in 2006, eventually leading to follow-on mutations and reorientations of the jihadi movement in Iraq.

In general, the findings of the AQI case study conclude that AQI and AQC were misaligned in terms of their respective ideology and goals from the start, as well as the associated targeting to accomplish their desired end-state. Whereas Bin Laden and AQC fought vigorously to maintain a focus on the West and a puritanical and elitist version of the transnational Islamist movement, and urged AQI to do the same, Zarqawi's affiliate was much more concerned with the destabilization of Iraq, especially with regard to activities targeting the Iraqi Shiite population. The manner in which Zarqawi and AQI prosecuted their bloody campaign generated an almost total alienation of Al-Qaeda as a larger organization, as well as led to the restructuring of the Sunni-led jihad movement in Iraq altogether. The United States capitalized upon this loss of support during the Anbar Awakening campaign, beginning in 2006.

Although some comparison can be derived from the hierarchical structure of both organizations, especially in terms of the organizational bureaucracy designed to manage and distribute funding, AQI relied almost exclusively on funds raised from the sale of stolen property and black market activities. Cut off from the financial resources and charitable organizations that had been the hallmark of AQC during its formative years, AQI was either forced or chose to fund its activities through these illicit means, which likely contributed to its loss of support from Sunni tribesman. It is also likely that Zarqawi, seen as a renegade even among jihadi circles, chose to pursue an alternate finding stream as a way to reinforce his autonomy from AQC and the so-called "establishment". This strategy was not totally successful, as the inability of AQI to properly compensate its fighters led to further erosion of its power base.

Finally, the diversification of AQI's foreign fighter contingent is vague. Captured documents suggest that the vitality of diversification remained strong during the earliest years of AQI operations<sup>7</sup>; however, subsequent statements by Iraqi leaders claim that the rate of diversification fell sharply by 2007.<sup>8</sup> This decline in diversification can perhaps be explained through a combination of U.S. pressure, a strengthening Iraqi government and its ability to curtail the influx of fighters, and the loss of local Iraqi support for this movement. Although American officials contested this information regarding this level of diversification, it sparked significant dialogue with regard to the overall strength of Al-Qaeda as a global organization and its ability to expand its operations to various parts of the globe. This debate remains very much a part of the overall dialogue of the state of Al-Qaeda in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### THE STAGE IS SET

From October 2004 to the death of Zarqawi and his spiritual advisor, Sheikh Abd al-Rahman in July 2006 in Baqubah, AQI prosecuted a bloody campaign of violence, intimidation, and torture, while simultaneously carrying out attacks on coalition forces through suicide/martyrdom operations and employment of deadly and effective Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) throughout Iraq, Jordan, and the Greater Levant.

Although early on, AQC had established a robust framework for enduring operations within Saudi Arabia, which would later merge with Al-Qaeda elements in Yemen to form Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), AQI represents the first instance of a parallel radical Islamist organization pledging an allegiance to AQC, and to Bin Laden personally. Additionally

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<sup>7</sup> Fishman and Felter, "Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters In Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records."

<sup>8</sup> Bruce Hoffman, "The 'cult of the insurgent': its tactical and strategic implications," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 61, no. 3 (September 2007): 326, <https://www.ebscohost.com/academic/humanities-international-complete>.

while also adopting the Al-Qaeda brand and moniker to its own organization, AQI served as the test bed for the franchise model that is referenced throughout this study.

Although AQI would emerge as a major actor throughout the U.S.-led war there, Iraq was never really an important part of Bin Laden's long-term plan, or at least he did not indicate as much. In his August 23, 1996 Declaration of War, UBL almost ignored it entirely.<sup>9</sup> For Al-Qaeda Central, the invasion of Iraq in 2003 by U.S. forces represented the perfect opportunity to play the role that UBL had sought during the founding of his organization, and one that he had so famously been denied when the Saudis declined his offer to lead his Arab legion against Saddam's forces in the early 1990s.

Despite Iraq's relative lack of importance in the overall goals of Bin Laden and AQC, the country would become the most important battlefield upon which AQ-inspired militants would engage in jihad throughout the decade following the 9/11 attacks. Although Bin Laden and his lieutenants could not have predicted the situation that would unfold in Iraq following the fall of the Saddam regime, it soon became obvious that Iraq would become a key piece of terrain, both tangibly and in terms of perception by a global audience, that Al-Qaeda would need to influence and control if it were to maintain the momentum it had generated since it became operational.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq's story begins years before Zarqawi's assumption of command and the modern establishment of AQ-supported operations there. Following the Soviet retreat from Afghanistan, the Islamist volunteers that had been lured to fight the Red Army now looked to return to their countries of origin. One of these opportunists was an Iraqi Kurd named Majmuddin Freraj (A.K.A. Mullah Krekar). Krekar had established ties with early Al-Qaeda

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<sup>9</sup> Jean-Charles Brisard, *Zarqawi: The New Face of Al-Qaeda* (New York: Other Press, 2005), 145.

while in Afghanistan, which would later strengthen after his return to Kurdistan in 1991.<sup>10</sup> Within Kurdistan during this period, a growing Islamist movement was gaining momentum, coalescing into the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (IMK). Within the IMK, several factions existed throughout the early to mid-1990s, with groups having a wide range of worldviews, some of which certainly shared Al-Qaeda's radical outlook. Following the 9/11 attacks, leaders from the more radical factions went to Afghanistan to pledge support for Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, forming a new group known as Ansar al-Islam (AAI) shortly thereafter.<sup>11</sup>

While AAI laid the groundwork in Iraq, which would evolve and develop the logistical networks (often referred to as "rat lines") utilized by Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan to influence and develop a like-minded organization in another ungoverned space within the Middle East, this network was not fully exploited until after the 9/11 attacks, when it appeared imminent that the United States would invade Iraq. This invasion would create the perfect battlefield upon which jihadists could flock from across the entire Muslim world, capturing the same level of zeal that had been so attractive to the generation that had journeyed to Afghanistan in the 1980s.

#### THE ODYSSEY OF ABU MUSAB AL-ZARQAWI

The establishment of AQI by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, born Ahmad Fadel al-Khalayah, was not by accident. He had been affiliated with Al-Qaeda as far back as 1999, when he left Jordan for Hayatabad, Pakistan following his release from prison. Oddly, his declared intent was to sell honey, but he soon wound up recruiting Jordanians in Afghanistan to plot attacks back in his native country. In 2000, he became head of an Al-Qaeda training camp in Herat.<sup>12</sup> During this period, he founded his first formal jihadi organization, known as Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-

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<sup>10</sup> Schanzer, J. (2005). *Al-Qaeda's Armies: Middle East Affiliate Groups and the Next Generation of Terror*. Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 132.

<sup>11</sup> Schanzer, J. (2005). *Al-Qaeda's Armies: Middle East Affiliate Groups and the Next Generation of Terror*. Washington Institute for Near East Policy, p. 133.

<sup>12</sup> Brisard, *Zarqawi: The New Face of Al-Qaeda*, 209-210.



Jihad (Unity and Jihad Group) or JTJ, while heading a western-Afghan AQ training camp, which actively pursued the recruitment of volunteers across the Middle East, with specific attention paid to recruiting Levantines. Zarqawi's desire to recruit predominantly Palestinian and Jordanian recruits, what he referred to as *Jund al-Sham* (Soldiers of the Levant), would allow him to plan and carry out operations in Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and other Arab countries in order to affect regional regimes.<sup>13</sup>

Zarqawi's JTJ would be his attempt to gain notoriety within the overall jihadi movement, with an ultimate intent of returning to Jordan to conduct operations within and against his home country. Once established, Zarqawi's JTJ had developed cells across Europe, which proved to be quite sophisticated. Once authorities began to neutralize JTJ operatives in Europe in 2002, international pressure began to build against Zarqawi. Under this international pressure, he spent the next fourteen months transiting between Syria, Lebanon, Iran, and Kurdish-controlled Iraq.

Zarqawi himself had been a product of the Arab volunteer legion in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation, although his exploits there were not noteworthy, as his arrival came much too late to be involved in the real fighting that had been the romantic fantasies of so many Arab youth of that generation. Zarqawi's early life growing up in Jordan had been relatively mundane. He dropped out of high school sometime in 1982, and he worked for a short time in a paper factory before joining the Jordanian military in 1984. After leaving military service, Zarqawi's path became rather rocky, landing in and out of prison, before eventually arriving in Khost, Afghanistan for the first time in early 1989.<sup>14</sup>

After being wounded in an American airstrike in Afghanistan in late 2001, most likely in Tora Bora, Zarqawi fled to Iran sometime between December 2001 and January 2002. He would

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York: Regan Arts Publishing, 2015), 13.

<sup>14</sup> Brisard, *Zarqawi: The New Face of Al-Qaeda*, 207-208.

eventually make his way to Iraq six months later, linking up with the new leader of AAI, Mullah Krekar, and the two agreed to ally with one another in anticipation of the looming American invasion of Iraq.<sup>15</sup>

As AAI had already established linkages with AQC and Bin Laden through his sponsorship, Zarqawi likely saw his alliance with Krekar as an opportunity and as a means of working under an AQ-sponsored network, much like he had been doing since the 1990s. He positioned himself to fight the United States as forces prepared to enter Iraq from the North, news which had been leaked, some say purposefully, to the international media. As an aside, this strategically placed misinformation, which was made even more salacious with the reports that Turkey had publically denied the United States the use of its airspace and military facilities to invade Iraq, aided in fixing AAI and its sympathizers in the North, while the true advance would come from the south across the border in Kuwait.

#### ENTER THE AMERICANS

As has been well documented, attempts at showing a link between Al-Qaeda and a similar Iraqi-styled movement, either through grass roots Islamist organizations like AAI or through official government channels via the Iraqi Intelligence Services (IIS), fueled an enormous amount of debate in the justification for the United States to invade Iraq. In his comments before the United Nations Security Council on February 5, 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell famously stated the following:

Iraq and terrorism go back decades.... But what I want to bring to your attention today is the potentially more sinister nexus between Iraq and the Al Qaeda terrorist network, a nexus that combines classic terrorist organizations and modern methods of murder. Iraq today harbors a deadly terrorist network headed by Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, an associate and collaborator of Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda lieutenants. Going back to the early and mid-1990s, when bin Laden was based in Sudan, an Al Qaeda source tells us

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<sup>15</sup> Brisard, *Zarqawi: The New Face of Al-Qaeda*, 210-211.

that Saddam and bin Laden reached an understanding that Al Qaeda would no longer support activities against Baghdad.... We know members of both organizations met repeatedly and have met at least eight times at very senior levels since the early 1990s.<sup>16</sup>

The AAI-IIS-AQ link was the subject of several congressional studies and reports, with a pseudo final-analysis being adopted that suggested strong evidence simply did not exist that could confirm that the Iraqi government (i.e. Saddam Hussein) and Al-Qaeda, through AAI, were cooperating.<sup>17</sup>

Some reports suggest that AQC was tentative in taking a position of support for a resistance against the Americans in Iraq, while others provide evidence to the contrary. Even as late as September 2004, Al-Qaeda leadership was still undecided in terms of supporting Zarqawi and his group.<sup>18</sup> Although Bin Laden was perhaps hesitant to support Zarqawi personally or materially, he did show great interest in offering his support to his “Iraqi brothers” as they prepared for the looming invasion in the early spring of 2003. In a recorded video message, Bin Laden stated:

O mujahedeen brothers in Iraq, do not be afraid of what the United States is propagating in terms of their lies about their power and their smart, laser-guided missiles. The smart bombs will have no effect worth mentioning in the hills and in the trenches, on plains, and in forests. They must have apparent targets. The well-camouflaged trenches and targets will not be reached by either the smart or the stupid missiles. There will only be haphazard strikes that dissipate the enemy ammunition and waste its money. Dig many trenches... We also recommend luring the enemy forces into a protracted, close, and exhausting fight, using the camouflaged defensive positions in plains, farms, mountains, and cities. The enemy fears city and street wars most, a war in which the enemy expects grave human losses.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Colin Powell, “Secretary of State Addresses the U.N. Security Council,” (speech transcript, February 5, 2003), accessed 30 May 2015, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2003/sc7658.doc.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> United States Senate, *Report of The Select Committee on Intelligence on Postwar Findings about Iraq’s WMD Programs and Links To Terrorism and How They Compare with Prewar Assessments* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), accessed May 1, 2015, [https://fas.org/irp/congress/2006\\_rpt/srpt109-331.pdf](https://fas.org/irp/congress/2006_rpt/srpt109-331.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> Brisard, *Zarqawi: The New Face of Al-Qaeda*, 149-150.

<sup>19</sup> Osama Bin Laden, “Bin Laden tape: Text,” (speech transcript, BBC News, February 12, 2003), accessed May 30, 2015, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/2751019.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2751019.stm). This source comprises text of an audio message purported to be from Osama bin Laden.

The tone of Bin Laden's address to the Iraqi resistance during this period is interesting, in that he attempts to provide sound military advice on tactical operations to mitigate U.S. military power. Although clearly not delivered in a manner that would indicate clear military-type orders to a subordinate group, his delivery fits that of an experienced commander, which Bin Laden certainly considered himself to be. Regardless of the true soundness of Bin Laden's guidance, his support for the Iraqi program is evident.

In an undated letter that was recovered during the U.S. raid on Bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan in 2011, Bin Laden not only referenced his support for Zarqawi, but also his support in the unification of the AQ movement in Iraq. Bin Laden writes:

This group and the emir of Jihad, brother Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, and other organizations that joined him, are the best, and they fight under Allah's orders... In al Qa'ida organization, we greatly welcome their unity with us. This is a great step, to unify all Mujahidin, to establish the righteous state, and destroy the void state, and we ask Allah to bless and accept it.<sup>20</sup>

In reality, it is possible that Bin Laden was fearful of a growing movement in Iraq that could form and could not be easily managed by him and his lieutenants from their chosen, yet required, isolation in Afghanistan and Pakistan. As will be shown, this anxiety and mistrust would become a characteristic that not only influenced the AQC-AQI relationship but also has been a key trait among the global jihadi movement in general.

## IDEOLOGY AND GOALS

Zarqawi's JTJ, and later AQI, was much more focused on regional activities in Jordan and western Iraq and also attacking Shiites in Iraq than limiting their campaign to the U.S.

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<sup>20</sup> Osama Bin Laden, *Message to the Muslim brothers in Iraq and to the Islamic Nation*, Director of National Intelligence, released 20 May 2015, <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl/english/Message%20to%20%20Muslim%20brothers%20in%20Iraq%20and%20to%20the%20Islamic%20nation.pdf>. Author consulted source in original Arabic, available via <http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl/arabic2/Message%20to%20%20Muslim%20brothers%20in%20Iraq%20and%20to%20the%20Islamic%20nation%20-%20Arabic.pdf>.

presence alone. Zarqawi and AQI, as an exclusively Sunni-Muslim organization, became obsessed with targeting Shiites, who he referred to as “the insurmountable obstacle, the lurking snake, the crafty and malicious scorpion, the spying enemy, and the penetrating venom,”<sup>21</sup> which was a clear manifestation of the centuries-old conflict between the two major sects.

By default, AQI’s obsession with Shiite activities centered on perceived Iranian influence in Iraq and the wider Middle East, specifically the backing of Nouri al-Maliki by the United States. Maliki’s support by the West and quiet sponsorship by the Iranians fueled Zarqawi’s campaign against Shiites in Iraq. Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda historically maintained a policy of peaceful coexistence with Iran and Shiites in general. Despite the opportunities to turn their sights toward a campaign of violence against them during the period of brutal infighting among the Afghan warlords after the departure of the Soviets and during the protracted Iran-Iraq War, Bin Laden and his group did not specifically target Iran or Shiites, either through physical attack or through rhetoric.<sup>22</sup>

Unlike AQC, the Zarqawi network was predisposed to focus on the *near enemy*, both by the nature of the organization and by Zarqawi’s personal preferences. This stems from the initial days of JTJ in Afghanistan and during the earliest days of Bin Laden and Zarqawi’s mutual acquaintance, which occurred sometime around 1999. These earliest encounters established both competitiveness and an opposing agenda between the two leaders, both of which would influence the trajectory of the AQ-AQI relationship.

From the outset, Bin Laden viewed Zarqawi with a great deal of skepticism, as his demeanor came across as both arrogant and brash, despite the fact that Zarqawi would pledge his

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<sup>21</sup> Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, “Letter from Abu Musab al-Zarqawi to Osama Bin Laden,” *Council on Foreign Relations* (1 February 2004), accessed June 14, 2015, <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/letter-abu-musab-al-zarqawi-osama-bin-laden/p9863>.

<sup>22</sup> Brisard, *Zarqawi: The New Face of Al-Qaeda*, 145-146.

allegiance to Bin Laden during this early period. Matched with Bin Laden's cool and aloof character, it is easy to imagine a personality clash with the uneducated Jordanian who offered no signs of hubris and a relative lack of religious scholarship that Bin Laden so skillfully sought out, as he had done with his relationship with Abdullah Azzam and Ayman al-Zawahiri, both respected Islamic scholars.

Additionally, Bin Laden was extremely cautious in dealing with Zarqawi, as the Al-Qaeda leader had suspicions that Jordanian intelligence could possibly be using former Jordanian prisoners like Zarqawi to infiltrate Al-Qaeda and to gather information on the organization.<sup>23</sup> Despite Bin Laden's skepticism, Zarqawi found favor with Al-Qaeda's security chief at that time, Saif al-Adel, who convinced Bin Laden to give Zarqawi \$5,000 to start and operate the training camp in Herat, which was on the other side of Afghanistan and far away from Bin Laden's territory.<sup>24</sup>

Following the U.S. invasion of Iraq, AQI and AQC maintained diametrically different positions in terms of the focus of their jihad. For Zarqawi, he was adamant that Shia Muslims were to be targeted and prioritized at a much higher level than the *far enemy*, which for his purpose, were the U.S. forces that happened to be in his proximity. AQ leadership remained skeptical as to Zarqawi's intentions, demonstrating a level of apprehension, anxiety, and mistrust that would later come to define both the relationships between AQC and its affiliates, as well as within the affiliate groups themselves.

Despite Bin Laden's apprehension, it became apparent to AQC that the potentialities of Zarqawi's AQI, especially in terms of an opportunity to fight the Americans, were simply too good of an opportunity to pass up. In July 2005, Zawahiri, the de facto spiritual advisor of Al-

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<sup>23</sup> Kirdar, *Al Qaeda in Iraq*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Kirdar, *Al Qaeda in Iraq*, 3.

Qaeda, famously penned a letter to Zarqawi, detailing a litany of items and thoughts that Zawahiri wanted to ensure that Zarqawi was being mindful of, as well as a great deal of thought on post-war Iraq and the conditions necessary for the establishment of an Islamic caliphate there. In the letter, Zawahiri makes it very clear that Zarqawi is in a very influential and blessed position, having the opportunity to conduct jihad against the United States, but also being able to do so in the heart of the Muslim world, a fact that perhaps made the old Egyptian radical nostalgic for days gone by. Zawahiri enviously wrote,

Dear brother, God Almighty knows how much I miss meeting with you, how much I long to join you in your historic battle against the greatest of criminals and apostates in the heart of the Islamic world, the field where epic and major battles in the history of Islam were fought. I think that if I could find a way to you, I would not delay a day, God willing.<sup>25</sup>

Of note, Zawahiri also alludes to what he sees as the rightful location of the Islamic Caliphate, which indicates both his long-term sentiments for the future of the Muslim vanguard and the need to support and shepherd Zarqawi as a means to achieve such ends. He continues,

It has always been my belief that the victory of Islam will never take place until a Muslim state is established in the manner of the Prophet in the heart of the Islamic world, specifically in the Levant, Egypt, and the neighboring states of the Peninsula and Iraq; however, the center would be in the Levant and Egypt.<sup>26</sup>

This letter is important for several reasons. Not only does it formalize the support of Zarqawi by AQC, but it also clearly supports Al-Qaeda in Iraq and acknowledges the overall importance of the jihad being conducted there. Secondly, the tone of the letter is delicate, written as though Zawahiri knew the precariousness of an ability to shape or control its affiliates

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<sup>25</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi* (West Point: Combatting Terrorism Center, July 9, 2005), <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/zawahiris-letter-to-zarqawi-english-translation-2>. Author also consulted source in original Arabic, available via <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/zawahiris-letter-to-zarqawi-original-language-2>.

<sup>26</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi* (West Point: Combatting Terrorism Center, July 9, 2005), <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/zawahiris-letter-to-zarqawi-english-translation-2>. Author also consulted source in original Arabic, available via <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/zawahiris-letter-to-zarqawi-original-language-2>.

while AQC leaders remained isolated in the Afghan-Pakistan border regions. Zawahiri mentions several times that he is indeed removed from the battlefield in Iraq and does not know the conditions well enough to dictate a tactical plan. As a religious scholar, Zawahiri attempts to lend his wisdom to Zarqawi, hoping to influence him, ensuring that Zarqawi's operations are conducted in line with Islamic traditions, edicts, and texts.

There was assuredly a fear of AQC leadership that affiliates operating under the banner of Al-Qaeda could quickly exceed the control of the parent organization, potentially ruining or eroding public support for their global campaign in general, and the confidence in Bin Laden to remain such an important figure in the global campaign. As late as 2003, Bin Laden continued to enjoy high levels of notoriety and confidence from many Muslims throughout the Middle East, in which those polled stated that they had a high level of confidence in Bin Laden.<sup>27</sup> This need of maintaining public support and refraining from becoming unattached to the people of Iraq, and what he claims “would be a decisive factor between victory and defeat”<sup>28</sup>, is emphasized by Zawahiri:

Therefore, I stress again to you and to all your brothers the need to direct the political action equally with the military action, by the alliance, cooperation and gathering of all leaders of opinion and influence in the Iraqi arena. I can't define for you a specific means of action. You are more knowledgeable about the field conditions. But you and your brothers must strive to have around you circles of support, assistance, and cooperation, and through them, to advance until you become a consensus, entity, organization, or association that represents all the honorable people and the loyal folks in Iraq. I repeat the warning against separating from the masses, whatever the danger.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Pew Research Center, *Views of a Changing World* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2003), accessed May 26, 2015, <http://www.peoplepress.org/2003/06/03/views-of-a-changing-world-2003/>.

<sup>28</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi* (West Point: Combatting Terrorism Center, July 9, 2005), <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/zawahiris-letter-to-zarqawi-english-translation-2>. Author also consulted source in original Arabic, available via <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/zawahiris-letter-to-zarqawi-original-language-2>.

<sup>29</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi* (West Point: Combatting Terrorism Center, July 9, 2005), <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/zawahiris-letter-to-zarqawi-english-translation-2>. Author also consulted source in original Arabic, available via <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/zawahiris-letter-to-zarqawi-original-language-2>.



Despite Zawahiri's urgings, Zarqawi's actions would play an enormous role in creating animosity among Iraqis, especially those in Anbar Province, creating the opportunity for coalition forces to persuade the Sunni tribes to turn against Zarqawi and AQI, slowly eroding their influence and closing like a vice around the organization.

Other evidence indicates that Zarqawi, despite his affiliation with Al-Qaeda in the Afghan training camps, was unsure of the trajectory and manner in which Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda were sponsoring the global jihad in places such as Bosnia, Kashmir, and Chechnya. In a letter obtained by the Counter Terrorism Center at West Point, which details a meeting that took place in July 2002 discussing the status of the global jihad, when Zarqawi was likely in northern Iraq, he expresses his adamant disagreement regarding the support of these causes by Muslims, as he saw these campaigns as simply a ploy to overlay some sort of secular, democratic form of government, which was not in accordance with shari'a law.<sup>30</sup> These views had essentially landed him on the fringes of the accepted AQ worldview and labeled him as an outcast, even in radical Islamist circles.

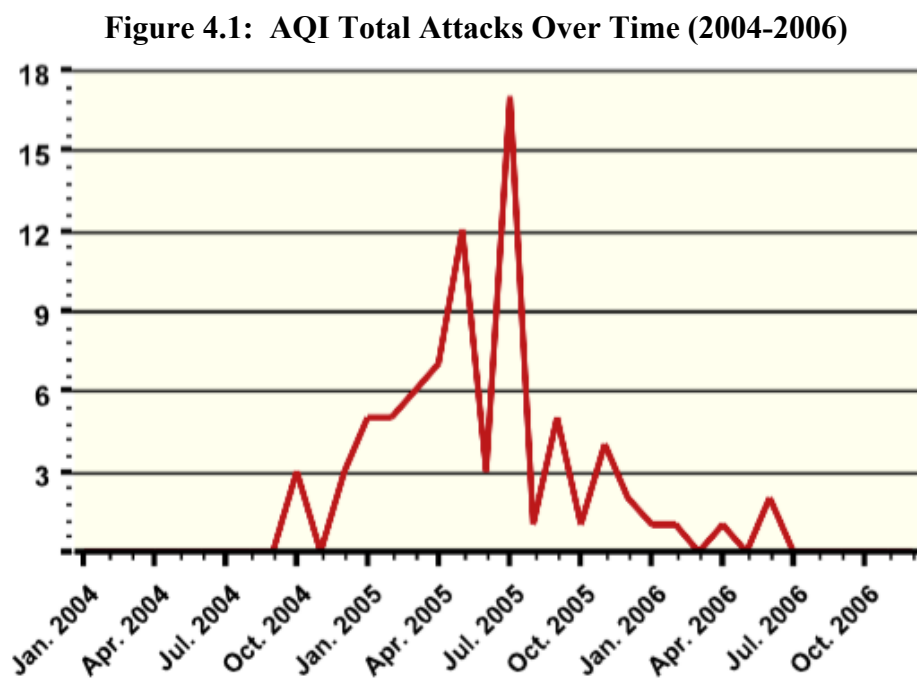
Furthermore, Zarqawi's extremist views on the new Shia-dominated Iraqi government consumed and drove his group's activities much more than targeting U.S. forces. Ultimately, he aimed to create and fuel a civil war that would produce un-controllable instability in Iraq, undermining the Iraqi government's ability to control the country, with a secondary effect of leaving the Americans in a dangerous quagmire.

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<sup>30</sup> Abu Mus`ab, *Letter from Abu Mus`ab to Abu Muhammad regarding a meeting with Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi* (West Point, Combatting Terrorism Center, date goes here), <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wpcontent/uploads/2013/09/Status-of-Jihad-Original.pdf>. Author consulted source in original Arabic.

## TARGETING

Under its relatively short life as a named Al-Qaeda affiliate from 2003-2006, AQI reached its zenith in terms of numbers of attacks in July 2005. This climax occurred roughly two years after the formal allegiance of Zarqawi to Bin Laden. As indicated in Figure 4.1, the rate of attacks dropped precipitously following that month, which is based on several factors that is discussed throughout this chapter.



*Data Source:* National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, *Global Terrorism Database* [data file], 2016, accessed August 14, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

From the outset, Zarqawi developed his own plan to execute his brand and visions of jihad in order to not only repel U.S. forces but also bring about their international humiliation. Zawahiri was careful in his correspondence with Zarqawi, expressing a humble deference to what the commander (Zarqawi) felt and saw on the ground, essentially granting a great deal of flexibility in a similar manner that AQC had adopted with its other sponsored cells and agents prior to 9/11, as was the case in the Millennium plots mentioned previously. Although unclear as to the level of coordination with AQC, Zarqawi carefully prepared and executed a multi-level plan to accomplish his goals. As explained in a detailed report published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies:

First, he intended to isolate American forces by targeting their international and coalition partners—for example, the August 2003 truck bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad. Second, he aimed to deter Iraqi cooperation with the transition process by targeting police stations, recruitment centers, and Iraqi politicians. Third, he targeted the rebuilding process through high-profile attacks against civilian contractors and humanitarian aid workers. Finally, he sought to ensnare U.S. troops in a Sunni-Shiite civil-war by attacking Shiite targets and provoking retaliatory responses against Sunni communities.<sup>31</sup>

Data from the Global Terrorism Database, as shown in Figure 4.2, is helpful in understanding one of the key variables of this study. In analyzing this data, we find that seventy-eight terrorist-related events were attributed to AQI between October 2004, which began when Zarqawi pledged his allegiance to AQC, and June 2006, which was the last month of Zarqawi's leadership of AQI before his death the following month.<sup>32</sup> During this period, AQI conducted 83.5% of its attacks on military/police forces, followed by attacks on private citizens and property at a rate of 25.6%.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Kirdar, *Al Qaeda in Iraq*, 4.

<sup>32</sup> National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, *Global Terrorism Database* [data file], 2013, accessed May 5, 2015, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

<sup>33</sup> National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, *Global Terrorism Database* [data file], 2013, accessed May 5, 2015, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

**Figure 4.2: Diversity of AQI Attacks (October 2004-July 2006)<sup>34</sup>**

Target Type	Number of Incidents
Business	5
Government (Diplomatic)	10
Government (General)	10
Journalists, Media	1
Military	17
Other	1
Police	20
Private Citizens, Property	8
Religious Figures/Institutions	4
Tourists	1
Utilities	1

*Data Source:* National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, *Global Terrorism Database* [data file], 2013, accessed May 5, 2015, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

Although data on direct confrontation and armed combat with coalition forces, specifically U.S. military forces, is difficult to attribute to AQI, it can be determined that AQI purposefully chose to target non-U.S. specific personnel and property (Figure 1). Its campaign of terror, which was hallmarked by kidnappings, suicide bombings, and general intimidation, worked to destabilize the entire country, especially in Anbar Province, which represented AQI's stronghold, but also drove a large wedge between AQI and the population on which it depended for its popularity and survival. This break, forewarned by Zawahiri, would ultimately prove fatal for Zarqawi and AQI.

AQI also perfected its ability to conduct its operations much more cheaply than its AQC sponsor. By most accounts, previous Al-Qaeda operations had required many thousands of dollars to fund and execute. In addition to the reported \$500,000 required to conduct the 9/11 attacks, other AQC plots also had very high costs compared to those that its affiliates would

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<sup>34</sup> Chart created by the author.

conduct. The Madrid train bombings in 2004 required about \$80,000, while the London bombings in 2005 required approximately \$15,000.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, the U.S. Embassy bombings in 1998 cost approximately \$50,000.<sup>36</sup> Left to fund its own activities, Zarqawi and AQI utilized tactics that required much less financial support than the more high-profile attacks that had defined Al-Qaeda as a whole. A RAND study found that during the height of AQI operations, the cost of conducting an attack, to include the necessary preparation, funding of personnel, and other associated costs was approximately \$2,700.<sup>37</sup>

Establishing a culture of violence in order to promote and achieve its political ends also became a hallmark of Zarqawi's AQI. Borne from its AAI legacy of the 1990s, which had a history of utilizing such brutal tactics, AQI not only sought to participate and lead such acts but also was uniquely occupied with capturing these acts on video for distribution on the Internet and other jihadi forums. Beginning in 2004, Zarqawi instituted a graphic propaganda campaign in which his group routinely filmed and uploaded videos of operations and executions of hostages. According to Peter Bergen, "Zarqawi's revolution was not only televised but also promptly uploaded to the Internet for almost real-time global distribution. His rise to become the most feared leader of the Iraqi insurgency benefited considerably from the fact that around the same time broadband Internet access was becoming more available, ensuring that these bandwidth-consuming videos had a wide distribution."<sup>38</sup> AQI's legacy at utilizing media campaigns to

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<sup>35</sup> Craig Whitlock, "Al-Qaeda Masters Terrorism on the Cheap," *The Washington Post*, August 24, 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Joshua Prober, "Accounting for Terror: Debunking the Paradigm of Inexpensive Terrorism," Policy Watch #1041, Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, November 1, 2005.

<sup>37</sup> Benjamin Bahney et al., *An Economic Analysis of the Financial Records of al-Qa'ida in Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010), 68, <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG1026>. Also available in print form via eBook Collection, <https://www.ebscohost.com/>.

<sup>38</sup> Peter L. Bergen, *The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict Between America And Al-Qaeda* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 162-163.

induce support and gain notoriety is a trend that has become a large part of ongoing movements in Iraq and Syria, to include those carried out by the so-called Islamic State (IS).

As mentioned in the previous section, Zarqawi's plot to fuel a civil war between rival religious sects led him to target Shi'a holy sites and neighborhoods across central and western Iraq. In order to do this, he focused on a campaign of suicide attacks against these sites, the most dramatic of which was the February 22, 2006 bombing of the Askariya shrine, the Shiite "Golden Mosque" in Sunni-inhabited Samarra.<sup>39</sup> In the aftermath of the Askariya shrine bombing, droves of Shiite militiamen, many of those loyal to Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, launched retaliatory strikes against Sunni mosques across the entire country. The Shiite response led to twenty separate attacks on Sunni mosques, leading to eighteen killed.<sup>40</sup> Zarqawi would be provided with many willing volunteers willing to sacrifice themselves for such suicide operations. According to seized documents detailing foreign fighter recruitment, 56.3% of those fighters entering the country during this period were seeking to conduct suicide operations.<sup>41</sup>

Figure 4.3 shows the corresponding numbers of suicide attacks carried out by AQI between 2003-2006. Between October 2004-April 2006, AQI conducted forty-four suicide operations against a variety of targets, a majority of which were against military or police targets.<sup>42</sup>

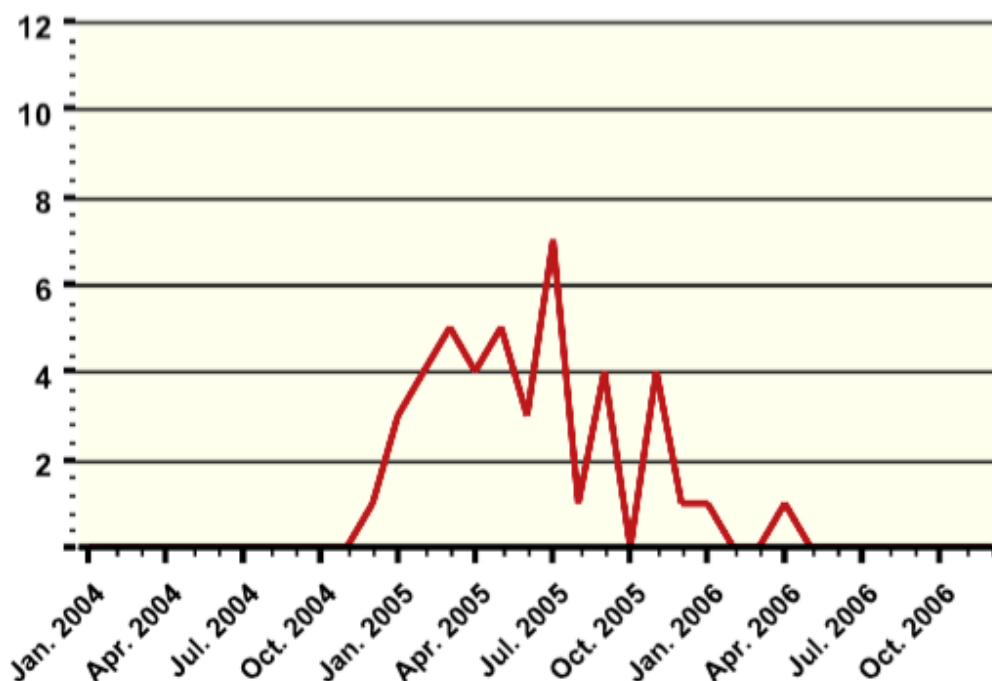
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<sup>39</sup> Kenneth Katzman, *Al-Qaeda in Iraq: Assessments and Outside Links*, CRS Report for Congress RL32217 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, August 15, 2008), 11, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/RL32217.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> Ellen Knickmeyer and K.I. Ibrahim, "Bombing Shatters Mosque in Iraq," *The Washington Post* (February 23, 2006), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/22/AR2006022200454.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Fishman and Felter, *Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters In Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records*, 18.

<sup>42</sup> National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, *Global Terrorism Database* [data file], 2013, accessed May 5, 2015, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

**Figure 4.3: AQI Suicide Attacks Over Time (2004-2006)**

*Data Source:* National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, *Global Terrorism Database* [data file], 2016, accessed August 14, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

In May 2006, AQI planned and carried out an attack in Karbala, as Shiites gathered to celebrate Ashura, a Shiite holy festival that had been banned under Saddam. AQI deployed multiple suicide bombers to Karbala, as well as various other sites across the country, resulting in 169 killed with many more hundreds wounded.<sup>43</sup> In April of that same year, AQI also carried out an attack on the Buratha Mosque in Baghdad, which belonged to the Superior Council of Islamic Revolution in Iraq and resulted in ninety fatalities.<sup>44</sup>

Despite Zarqawi's penchant for targeting Shiite religious symbols, data indicates that AQI under Zarqawi's leadership successfully carried out only four attacks against religious

<sup>43</sup> Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task* (New York: Penguin, 2013), 121.

<sup>44</sup> National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, *Global Terrorism Database* [data file], 2013, accessed May 5, 2015, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

figures or institutions, which represents only five percent of total attacks between October 2004 and July 2006. Despite this relatively low percentage of attacks on religious sites and figures, these activities drew a large proportion of the outrage expressed by moderates within Iraq, as well as the international community at large.

Although AQI and Zarqawi became more inclined to target Shiites and their religious sites as AQI evolved from 2004-2006, this relatively small number of attacks can possibly be explained by Al-Qaeda Central's avoidance of targeting religious-based targets, or possibly based on the adherence to Zawahiri's urging to avoid such attacks. Either way, it has been determined that Zarqawi held strong beliefs on Shiites well before he established JTJ and AQI. In the absence of some restraint, either self-induced or organizational pressure to avoid such targets, it is likely that AQI was more committed to maintaining unity with its parent organization that originally considered. Eventually, the inability of AQC to restrain AQI would fracture the entire movement, but it appears, at least, that AQI was attempting to operate along the established lines of the traditional AQ brand.

AQI also refrained from focusing on targets of economic impact. Although Iraq maintained significant oil reserves and refinery capabilities, Zarqawi appeared to so little interest in targeting such facilities. In 2004, Bin Laden released a videotaped message that sanctioned the targeting of oil facilities in order to affect Western economies, especially the United States. Despite Iraq averaging nearly 2,000 barrel/day of production capacity from 2004-2006, AQI failed to target these facilities in any focused manner.<sup>45</sup> This can possibly be explained by the penchant of Zarqawi to focus on targets that were more socially or politically motivated, or possibly due to the reduced impact of attacking oil infrastructure during periods of low crude oil

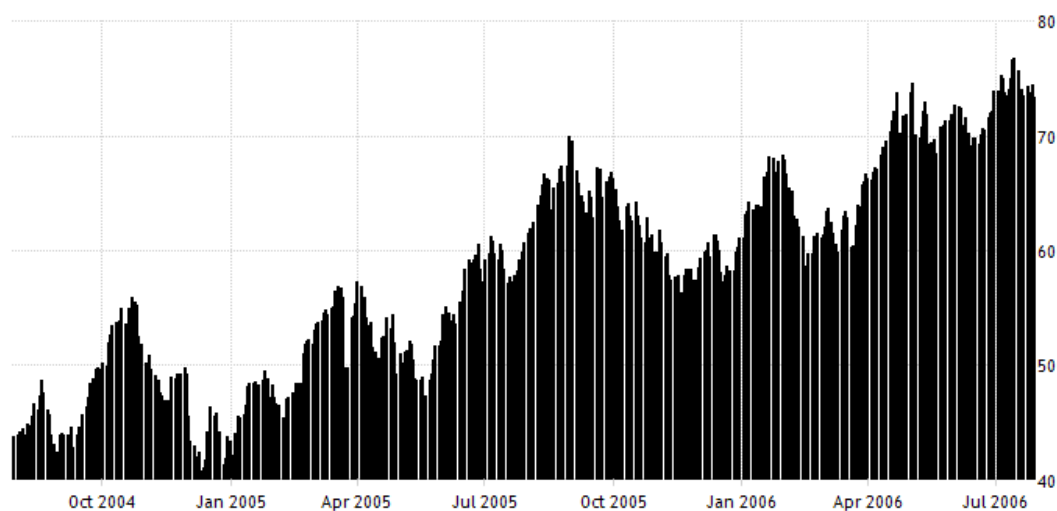
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<sup>45</sup> Iraq Crude Oil Production by Year, IndexMundi, accessed 30 July 2016.  
<http://www.indexmundi.com/energy/?country=iq&product=oil&graph=production>.



prices. Figure 4.4 indicates the crude oil prices between July 2004-July 2006, which hovered below \$50/barrel during this period. Shockingly low oil prices could have contributed to a loss of interest on behalf of AQI in targeting Iraqi oil infrastructure.

**Figure 4.4: Crude Oil Prices by Year (October 2004-July 2006/Dollars per barrel)**



*Data Source:* Trading Economics, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/commodity/crude-oil>.

In late-2004, Bin Laden issued a statement that supported attacks on Middle East oil infrastructure, yet his declaration appeared to offer little motivation to AQI. Up until then, Bin Laden and AQC leadership had refrained from sanctioning such activity, believing that oil export would represent the lifeblood of the renewed Islamic Caliphate and should not be threatened for fear of undermining such a success.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Tim Pippard, “‘Oil-Qaeda’: Jihadist Threats to the Energy Sector,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2010), accessed 20 July 2016. <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/103/html>.

## FINANCING OPERATIONS

On the surface, groups such as AQI would appear to have been merely a radicalized group of fighters, led by an ideologue, with little thought applied to overall operational sight picture, hierarchical order, or the administrative framework needed to organize a region-wide movement. The creation of this hierarchy, especially in terms of financial management, can be attributed to the traditional AQ-franchise model as explained in the previous chapter. According to Steve Kiser and supported by the AQC case study, the franchise model shows that AQC provided the necessary funds to establish its affiliates and would urge them to become entirely self-sufficient as soon as possible in order to finance their own operations.<sup>47</sup> Under this construct, AAI began formally receiving financial support from Al-Qaeda Central in September 2001, when reports suggest that an AQ-style camp was established for AAI in Kurdistan with \$300,000.<sup>48</sup> This linkage would provide the necessary inroads and logistical framework that would later be exploited by AQI.

Without any additional context, it would be unclear as to why an organization under constant pressure from coalition forces and the Iraqi government would seek to establish this hierarchical design employed by AQI. Such bureaucracy could only make the organization more susceptible to infiltration and operations to counter it. However, in order to gain and maintain its legitimacy, AQI required this bureaucracy to not only manage day-to-day life of its subordinate units but also control the flow and expenditure of funds among subordinate cells and groups, all while under pressure from Iraqi and coalition forces. This hierarchical order also served to exert

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<sup>47</sup> Steve Kiser, "Financing Terror: An Analysis and Simulation to Affect Al Qaeda's Financial Infrastructures," (dissertation, RAND Corporation, 2005), 77, [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/rgs\\_dissertations/2005/RAND\\_RGSD185.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/rgs_dissertations/2005/RAND_RGSD185.pdf).

<sup>48</sup> Dave Eberhart, "Iraqi Terrorist Detail Ties to Bin Laden," *NewsMax* (March 18, 2002).

some sort of control over the activities of smaller cells and to tightly control the flow of funds to higher echelon elements.

According to a RAND study, AQI cultivated and maintained a robust administrative council, which supervised all functional departments within the wider organization, to include security, legal, medical, mail, media, prisoners, support battalions, and military operations across the established six regions within which AQI operated.<sup>49</sup> The regional emir of the administrative council would be responsible for collecting funds from the subordinate groups operating within his sector. Sectors would be responsible for generating their own operational funds, which would be fed into the larger organization through various means.

Keeping with that construct, from June 2005 to May 2006, arguably the height of the insurgency, AQI in Anbar Province generated approximately \$4.5 million, which equates to roughly \$373,000 per month.<sup>50</sup> Of that \$4.5 million, over half of those revenues were acquired thorough the sale of stolen property, which included construction equipment, generators, and electrical cables.<sup>51</sup> Of note during this period, only five percent of these revenues were generated through donations or some form of taxation of the local population. This small percentage would indicate that perhaps AQI was not as connected to the global Islamic charity networks as other parallel groups or AQC, which had served as the backbone for the global AQ network. Operating within this isolation, AQI was left with few options to generate income.

Under these financial pressures, AQI's inability to provide sufficient sustenance to its fighters would be another constraint. The issue of compensation of fighters would prove to be a key element to the financial health of AQI, as well as ensuring that its fighters would remain a

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<sup>49</sup> Benjamin Bahney et al., *An Economic Analysis of the Financial Records of al-Qa'ida in Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010), 33, <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG1026>. Also available in print form via eBook Collection, <https://www.ebscohost.com/>.

<sup>50</sup> Bahney et al., 36.

<sup>51</sup> Bahney et al., 36

part of and loyal to the overall organization, especially in terms of acknowledging and carrying out orders from its leadership. Compensating its members emerged as a requirement in much the same way that AQC had established a compensation scale and program for its fighters, as its members needed a means to care for their families, who in many cases had accompanied the member to the locales in which AQ leaders deemed necessary.

In general, AQI compensated its members at a rate that was far less than the average Anbari citizen.<sup>52</sup> In this context, and in the midst of an almost complete failure of the Iraqi government to provide basic services such as electricity and phone service, it is remarkable that AQI would fail to exceed these levels of compensation, which assuredly contributed to its loss of support by the local populace.

## DIVERSIFICATION

Around 2001, it was estimated that AAI, the predecessor to AQI, had approximately 650 fighters, 120 of which were foreign (non-Iraqi/Kurd), comprised of Lebanese, Jordanian, Moroccan, Syrian, Palestinian, and Afghan fighters.<sup>53</sup> Although these figures indicate the presence of a diversified force, it is unclear to what extent these fighters belonged or were sent by AQC or its related facilitators. However, by 2004, CIA estimates showed that 1300 foreign fighters were in Iraq, all of whom were attached in some way to Al-Qaeda.<sup>54</sup> Sometime between November 2004 and October 2005, it was estimated that 150-200 foreign fighters were flowing into Iraq each month, adding to the estimated 12,000 to 20,000-member insurgency that was

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<sup>52</sup> Bahney, Benjamin, Corporation Rand, and (U.S.) National Defense Research Institute, *An Economic Analysis of the Financial Records of Al-Qa'ida in Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010), 33, accessed May 5, 2015, <https://www.ebscohost.com/>.

<sup>53</sup> Schanzer, J. (2005). *Al-Qaeda's Armies: Middle East Affiliate Groups and the Next Generation of Terror*. Washington Institute for Near East Policy, p. 134.

<sup>54</sup> Bergen, *The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict Between America And Al-Qaeda*, 167.

contributing to the instability during that period, although this total does not indicate the manning strength of AQI exclusively.<sup>55</sup>

The first study that attempted to uncover the diversification of foreign fighters in Iraq during the earliest years of the conflict precipitated by the U.S. invasion was conducted by Reuven Paz, an Israeli who was able to determine the country of origin of fighters who had died in Iraq by analyzing various profiles and information on jihadi website forums. Paz's findings indicate that of the 154 fighters identified, 61 percent were Saudi, 10.4 percent were Syrian, and 7.1 percent were Kuwaiti.<sup>56</sup> The remaining records indicate various origins from across the Middle East.

Whether these fighters had joined AQI ranks exclusively is hard to determine, as it was possible that many of those fighters chose to operate independently; that is, they sought to achieve their own political or financial ends outside of a sanctioned or organized movement. It is likely, however, that their decision to come to Iraq to participate was either encouraged by AQ propaganda or facilitated in some way through AQ-sponsored means. In such a highly bureaucratic and hierarchical movement, these fighters would need to be plugged into the overall network in order to acquire some level of compensation, or at the very least, an ability to conduct coordinated strikes against either the Iraqi government and security forces, or U.S. forces on the ground. Although conjecture, it can be safely assumed that independent fighters with no support structure would not have lasted very long in Iraq during that period.

During the 2003-2005 period, foreign fighters flowed into Iraq from one of three main routes. The northern route originated in Kurdistan and northeastern Syria, and it flowed down the Tigris River valley through Mosul, Tikrit, Samarra, and eventually into Baghdad. The

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<sup>55</sup> Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task* (New York: Penguin, 2013), 171.

<sup>56</sup> Reuven Paz, "Arab Volunteers Killed in Iraq: an Analysis," PRISM Occasional Papers 3, no. 1 (March 2005), [http://www.e-prism.org/images/PRISM\\_no\\_1\\_vol\\_3\\_-\\_Arabs\\_killed\\_in\\_Iraq.pdf](http://www.e-prism.org/images/PRISM_no_1_vol_3_-_Arabs_killed_in_Iraq.pdf).

southern line was linked to the Jordanian border across Iraq's vast southwestern desert. The most widely utilized route was the Western Euphrates line, which flowed directly from Syria through Al-Anbar Province.<sup>57</sup>

In 2005, the Saudi government released a report based on its own investigation as to the country of origin of some 3,000 foreign fighters in Iraq. It concluded that 12% were of Saudi origin, with Algeria being the most predominant nationality present at a rate of 20%. Algeria was followed by Syria (18%), Yemen (17%), Sudan (15%), and Egypt (13%), with the remainder originating from various sources (5%).<sup>58</sup> Despite these figures, it is believed that the majority of fighters in the insurgency were Iraqi, with some estimates citing an Iraqi majority at 96%.<sup>59</sup>

As detailed by an analysis conducted by the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC), the Sinjar Records, which were a trove of documents that were uncovered during a military operation in northern Iraq, indicate that Saudi Arabia and Libya provided the highest number of foreign fighters to Iraq between August 2006 and August 2007.<sup>60</sup> According to these captured files, 41 percent of the fighters were of Saudi origin, while Libyan fighters represented 18.8 percent.<sup>61</sup> Syria, Yemen, and Algeria were the next most common countries of origin with 8.2 percent, 8.1 percent, and 7.2 percent, respectively.<sup>62</sup> Moroccans accounted for 6.1 percent of the fighters and Jordanians 1.9 percent.<sup>63</sup> An additional analysis of the CTC states, "Nearly all of the home countries listed were in the Middle East or North Africa, although the sample also includes individuals from France (2), Great Britain (1), and Sweden (1). Although Saudi origin represented the highest percentage of fighters in Iraq based on these records, on a per capita

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<sup>57</sup> McChrystal, *My Share of the Task*, 174.

<sup>58</sup> Anthony Cordesman, *Iraq and Foreign Volunteers* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005), accessed October 5, 2015, [http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/051117\\_iraqforeignvol.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/051117_iraqforeignvol.pdf).

<sup>59</sup> Cordesman, *Iraq and Foreign Volunteers*.

<sup>60</sup> Fishman and Felter, *Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters In Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records*.

<sup>61</sup> Fishman and Felter, 7.

<sup>62</sup> Fishman and Felter, 8.

<sup>63</sup> Fishman and Felter, 8.

basis, Libyan fighters (18.55/1 million) entered Iraq at a much higher rate than Saudi Arabia (8.84/1 million).”<sup>64</sup>

These statistics indicate that despite compensation and security concerns, a healthy diversification of fighters still existed by the spring/summer of 2007, which is deduced from the Sinjar Records data. The vast majority of fighters flowing from Libya at this stage (84.2%) reportedly arrived in Iraq via the same ratline: through Egypt, and then via air to Syria, for final infiltration across the border into western Iraq.<sup>65</sup>

In terms of its organizational structure, AQI began with a very similar structure to AQC in terms of its upper leadership echelon and the role that this group would play in the management of and the preparation for jihad waged in Iraq prior to the U.S. invasion. In its earliest manifestation as *Tawhid wal Jihad*, Zarqawi remained hesitant to establish a hierarchy, preferring to lead through his closest advisors through a Shura Council. Zarqawi was eventually encouraged by his aides to establish a hierarchical structure in order to strengthen the overall movement. As Figure 4.5 shows, a very similar organizational structure was put into place that mimicked the AQC structure.<sup>66</sup>

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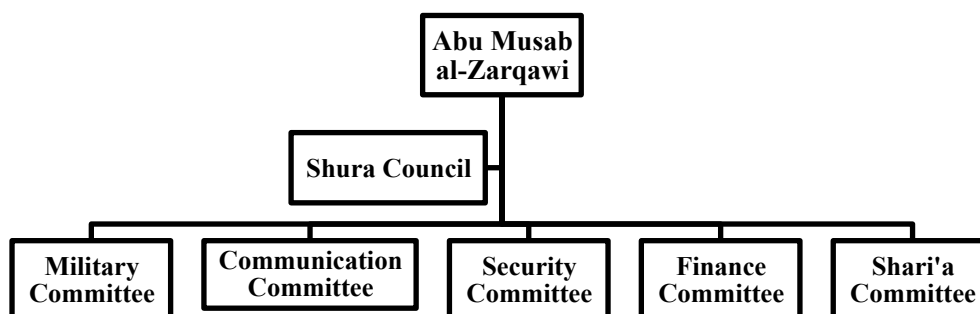
<sup>64</sup> Brian Fishman, ed., *Bombers, Bank Accounts and Bleedout: Al-Qa'ida's Road In and Out of Iraq*, (U.S. Military Academy, West Point, N.Y.: Combating Terrorism Center, 2008), 5.

<sup>65</sup> Fishman, ed., *Bombers, Bank Accounts and Bleedout: Al-Qa'ida's Road In and Out of Iraq*, 10.

<sup>66</sup> Hassan Abu Haniyeh, “Daesh’s Organisational Structure”, Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies, 4 December 2014. Accessed 23 July 2016.

<http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/dossiers/decipheringdaeshoriginsimpactandfuture/2014/12/201412395930929444.html>

**Figure 4.5: JTJ Organizational Structure, 2003<sup>67</sup>**



*Source:* Hassan Abu Haniyeh, “Daesh’s Organisational Structure”, Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies, 4 December 2014.

During this period, Zarqawi did not have a Deputy, preferring to work through his closets advisors within the Shura Council. As a Jordanian, Zarqawi initially surrounded himself with several non-Iraqi Shura members. Among those earliest members were Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, an Egyptian, as well as other Jordanians, including Abu Anas al-Shami (spiritual advisor) and Nidhal Mohammad Arabiat (the group top bomb maker and car bomb designer). In addition, Zarqawi maintained nearly a dozen other Jordanians within this inner circle.<sup>68</sup>

Following the formal affiliation with AQC and the renaming of the Iraqi movement as an official franchise of Al-Qaeda in 2004, the organizational structure underwent some level change, at least in terms of the larger roles played by Iraqis within the organization. As Figure

<sup>67</sup> Illustration created by the author.

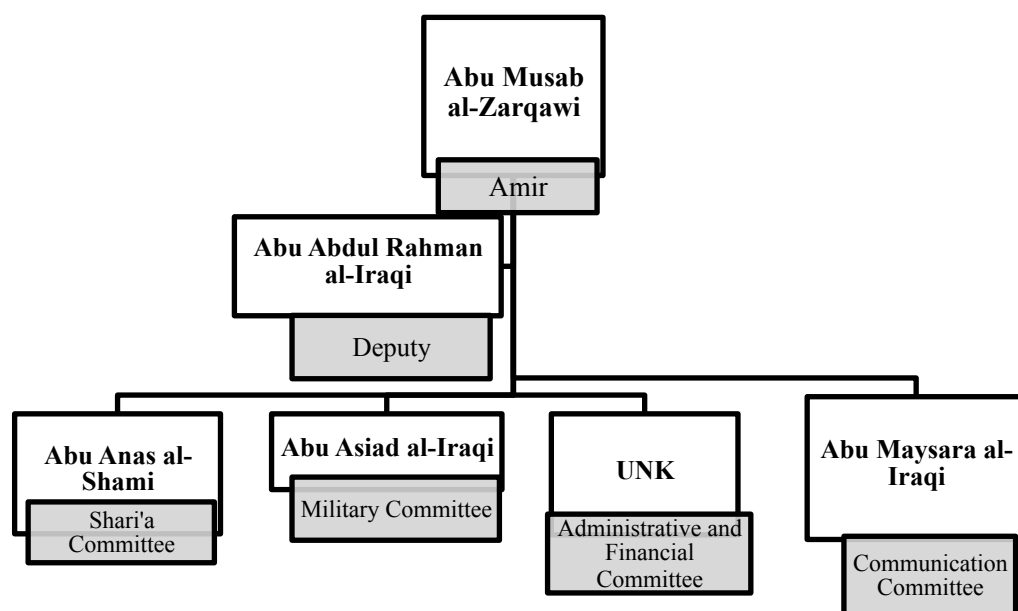
<sup>68</sup> Hassan Abu Haniyeh, “Daesh’s Organisational Structure”, Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies, 4 December 2014. Accessed 23 July 2016.

<http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/dossiers/decipheringdaeshoriginsimpactandfuture/2014/12/201412395930929444.html>



4.6 shows, although the structure remained very similar, the addition of an Iraqi Deputy and the placement of Iraqi nationals in key leadership positions reflected the assumed realization that movement in Iraq would have to implement a more robust level of “Iraqitization” in order to dispel concerns by locals regarding the foreign influence of the movement. Zaraqawi’s Jordanian roots would have to be countered by placing more Iraqis in positions of leadership.

**Figure 4.6: Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), 2004<sup>69</sup>**



*Data Source:* Hassan Abu Haniyeh, “Daesh’s Organisational Structure”, Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies, 4 December 2014.

As the Iraqi insurgency lost momentum and the pressures of the Anbar Awakening began to take their cumulative toll on the Iraqi jihadi movement, the diversification of its membership

<sup>69</sup> Illustration created by the author.

fell sharply. The effects of this U.S.-led operation resulted in desperate action by AQI, which resulted in a wave of attacks on military and police recruitment centers<sup>70</sup>, as well as the deployment of chlorine gas against civilians, Iraqi security forces, and their recruits as an intimidation tactic.<sup>71</sup> By late 2007, some figures and reports indicate that AQI was comprised of almost ninety percent Iraqis and only ten percent foreign fighters.<sup>72</sup> If true, this data would indicate that AQI and its related groups struggled to both recruit and persuade fighters from across the wider region to participate in an Iraqi movement. However, the official U.S. government position during that period reflects an opposite view.

Remarks made by former President Bush in July 2008 portray a much different picture with regard to the foreign fighter contingent operating in Iraq. In an address at Charleston Air Force Base, President Bush summarized the comments of a senior Al-Qaeda leader named Mashadani. Bush stated,

The foreign leaders of Al Qaida in Iraq went to extraordinary lengths to promote the fiction that al Qaida in Iraq is an Iraqi-led operation. He says al Qaida even created a figurehead whom they named Omar al-Baghdadi. The purpose was to make Iraqi fighters believe they were following the orders of an Iraqi instead of a foreigner. Yet once in custody, Mashadani revealed that al-Baghdadi is only an actor. He confirmed our intelligence that foreigners are at the top echelons of al Qaida in Iraq -- they are the leaders -- and that foreign leaders make most of the operational decisions, not Iraqis.<sup>73</sup>

President Bush's remarks certainly show that the diversity of foreign fighters operating inside Iraq was in fact a very telling component to defining the overall character of Al-Qaeda and the health of the global jihadi campaign. Furthermore, it clearly touches on the debate on the

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<sup>70</sup> Kimberly Kagan, "Anbar Awakening: Displacing Al-Qaeda from Its Stronghold in Western Iraq," *Institute for the Study of War* (August 21, 2006-March 30, 2007): 8, accessed July 23, 2015, <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/reports/IraqReport03.pdf>.

<sup>71</sup> Kagan, 10.

<sup>72</sup> Hoffman, "The 'cult of the insurgent': its tactical and strategic implications," 326.

<sup>73</sup> George W. Bush, "President Bush Discusses War on Terror in South Carolina," (speech, Charleston AFB, South Carolina, 24 July 2008), accessed May 30, 2015, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/07/20070724-3.html>.

true nature of AQC senior leadership in the management of AQ affiliates, and alluding to the potentialities of the roles of AQ middle managers that were discussed in the previous chapter.

Interestingly, the data utilized in the 2004 Sageman study shows that only one AQ member was of Iraqi descent, Mamdouh Mahmud Salim (A.K.A. Abu Hajer al-Iraqi) and was a member of the Central Committee. Outside of Salim, there was no indication of Iraqi participation in Al-Qaeda based on this sample.<sup>74</sup>

Additionally, the debate surrounding the foreign fighter contingent shows that this data, its protection, its exploitation, and its supposed manipulation indicate that it is an important metric to understanding groups like Al-Qaeda. Not only does this diversification work to shape the actual make-up of the total force operating in a given region, but it is also an important variable in labeling these groups and their leadership.

## SYNTHESIS

The pledge of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi as the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) to Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda Central (AQC) in October 2004 represents the first instance of this formal declaration by an affiliate that would go on to play a major role in the global Islamic struggle that Al-Qaeda sought to champion. These declarations, which become an often-cascading formality of other groups looking to benefit from the AQ brand, have come to signify a unification of Islamic struggle under the auspice of an Al-Qaeda-themed global campaign and are executed for a variety of reasons. At first glance, Zarqawi's pledge signaled to the rest of the world that Al-Qaeda truly embodied what its founders had set out to accomplish, which was to harness the likeminded and collective efforts of Muslims worldwide to fight against the West and secular regimes, and to bring about the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate.

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<sup>74</sup> Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, 185.

This allegiance was nothing new for Zarqawi. He had long before pledged his personal support to Bin Laden while a part of the on-going struggle for power in post-war Afghanistan during the early 1990s and during the formative years of the new global jihadi movement. Zarqawi was a product of this Arab Afghan support network in Afghanistan, as well as a veteran planner, facilitator, and operator for Al-Qaeda, especially in the establishment of AQ cells in Europe. Many reports have suggested that Bin Laden personally chose Zarqawi to accompany him to his redoubt in Tora Bora for the coming war with the United States following the 9/11 attacks, from which he would eventually escape under U.S. bombardment, eventually landing in northern Iraq.

Superficially, this pledge indicated a willingness on behalf of Zarqawi and AQI to join in the global agenda as described by Bin Laden, and an acknowledgement and understanding that AQI operations would reflect a similar operational program to its parent organization. Another interpretation of the relationship could characterize the interaction as simply one of convenience, which provided some level of benefit to both Zarqawi and Bin Laden but fell short of establishing a hardened linkage between the two groups due to a variety of reasons.

On the surface, AQI appeared to operate as a part of a hierarchical, global AQ network, as Bin Laden had accepted Zarqawi's pledge, with follow-on correspondence between AQC and AQI that suggested some level of cooperation. However, evidence indicates that AQI increasingly became part of the larger organization in name only, choosing to prosecute its own campaign based on its own ideology and outside the control of Bin Laden and AQC.

Although AQC had grand designs for inspiring global jihad, AQI was not a planned franchise for Bin Laden and his organization. As the invasion of Iraq by the United States became imminent, and despite Bin Laden's initial hesitancy and mistrust of Zarqawi, a decision

was made to fully support the Iraqi affiliate by urging fighters to flock to Iraq.<sup>75</sup> Despite Bin Laden's personal thoughts about Zarqawi's character and viewpoints, he agreed to sponsor AQI by lending his support through various outlets, from written communications to videos posted on online jihadi forums.

The Iraq invasion created the perfect conditions for both a savage insurgency and an opportunity for foreign fighters to flock to Iraq to engage in combat in the same spirit as the generation before them had done in Afghanistan. However, the overarching ideologies of Bin Laden and Zarqawi, and subsequently their two organizations, were simply too different. As Brian Fishman determines,

Although they worked together nominally, the central Al Qaeda network, as led by Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, and the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's terrorist group in Iraq held vastly different conceptions of jihad. The U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq minimized the magnitude of that ideological clash, enabling Zarqawi's limited cooperation with Al Qaeda in the Iraqi arena. Although they used each other for tactical support, publicity, and recruiting purposes, their doctrinal differences made them only allies of convenience rather than genuine partners, and as Zarqawi's tactics grew more extreme and indiscriminate, Al Qaeda chose to distance itself from his handiwork.<sup>76</sup>

Bin Laden and his lieutenants entered into the cooperation with AQI with trepidation, as it is likely that Bin Laden and Zawahiri realized that prolonged insurgencies had the potential to divert attention away from the ultimate goal, which was resistance against the West. This key trait will be seen again in analyses of other AQ affiliates.

Zarqawi and AQI made a major miscalculation in November 2005, when his organization launched three deadly attacks on Amman hotels, resulting in the death of sixty Muslims, most of whom were attending a wedding. This overstep created a groundswell of anger directed at Zarqawi, eventually leading to his organization being subsumed under the

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<sup>75</sup> Kirdar, *Al Qaeda in Iraq*, 3.

<sup>76</sup> Brian Fishman, "After Zarqawi: The Dilemmas and Future of Al Qaeda in Iraq," *The Washington Quarterly* no. 4 (2006): 19, accessed May 28, 2015, <http://www2.ebsco.com/sea/PubProdSvcs/projectmuse/Pages/index.aspx>.

newly created Mujahedeen Shura Council (MSC), essentially diluting Zarqawi's and AQI's hold on the jihad being waged in that area.<sup>77</sup>

AQI's program certainly centered on conducting attacks against U.S. forces and the feeble Iraqi governmental institutions that struggled to maintain order during 2004-2006, but the data shows that AQI was more concerned with its own hold on power, specifically within Anbar Province, and its ability to co-opt the Sunni population into supporting AQI's campaign against Shiite Muslims and the Iraqi government. This is revealed by the rates of targeting against Iraqi civilians, as well as the percentage of its operations being funded by the sale of stolen property.

However, some argue that characterizing the Iraqi movement as either a completely independent group or a full-fledged AQ affiliate is inaccurate. Rather, as Andrew Phillips explained in 2009, "AQI should thus be regarded as a hybrid political entity incorporating both foreign and local elements, and one that furthermore constitutes merely one part of a broad and fractious insurgency. AQI's hybrid origins can be discerned also in its strategic outlook, which reflects both the local sectarian anxieties of Iraq's Sunni minority, as well as al Qaeda's universalist aspirations to establish a transnational Caliphate."<sup>78</sup> Either way, it is clear that Zarqawi had his own ideas and versions of his jihad, and it was not a carbon copy of AQC. The inability of AQC to control AQI actions, as evidenced in the dismissiveness and the failure of Zarqawi to heed Zawahiri's warnings, shows that there was a limited, if any, ability of command and control being conducted between AQC and AQI.

Additionally, there is no evidence that suggests that AQC provided any funds to AQI to support its operations. Rather, AQI was forced to develop its own business models for

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<sup>77</sup> Kirdar, *Al Qaeda in Iraq*, 4-5.

<sup>78</sup> Andrew Phillips, "How al Qaeda lost Iraq," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 63, no. 1 (March 2009): 69, accessed May 5, 2015, <https://www.ebscohost.com/academic/political-science-complete>.

generating funds, which relied heavily on stolen property.<sup>79</sup> Although illicit means were utilized to fund AQI activities, no evidence exists that supports high-level involvement in narcotics or other illegal drugs, which does fit with the traditional AQC program. Although AQC was allied with the Taliban in Afghanistan, which was very involved in the international drug trade, Bin Laden did not allow his organization to participate in this activity, at least on an official level.

The diversification of foreign fighters within AQI remained at a high level from its inception to 2007, with records showing a steep decrease in this diversification after that period.<sup>80</sup> Compensation, security concerns, and an erosion of popular support among Sunnis certainly played a role in this reduction. The official U.S. government stance in 2008, as referenced in President Bush's remarks, indicates that U.S. intelligence believed that the total "Iraqi-zation" of the AQ-inspired movement was false. Instead, this falsehood was pushed by senior AQ leaders to sell the idea that an Iraqi, and not AQ middlemen, nor senior leaders from another country, was directing the Iraqi jihad movement.

In the end, AQI was marginalized and ultimately subsumed under the Mujahedeen Shura Council (MSC), which was formed as an attempt to redirect animosities created by AQI operations and fundamentalist ideologies, and to unify Sunni groups across Iraq—essentially a re-branding of the Iraqi-led, global jihadist movement. Although AQI would lose a considerable amount of influence, the network and its logistical underpinnings that it created would later resurface under a new name, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), following the departure of U.S. forces from Iraq and the Syrian civil war.

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<sup>79</sup> Bahney, Benjamin, Corporation Rand, and (U.S.) National Defense Research Institute, *An Economic Analysis of the Financial Records of Al-Qa'ida in Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010), 33, accessed May 5, 2015, <https://www.ebscohost.com/>.

<sup>80</sup> Fishman, ed., *Bombers, Bank Accounts and Bleedout: Al-Qa'ida's Road In and Out of Iraq*, 5.

The failures of AQI, as an acknowledged and full-fledged affiliate of the larger Al-Qaeda network, had dramatic effects on diluting AQC's command of the global jihadi movement. As the Barber study identified, Al-Qaeda's explosive growth occurred during the years following the 9/11 attacks until approximately 2005, the majority of which was dominated by the events unfolding as part of the American invasion of Iraq.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, another study that was conducted at the end of this "boom period" in 2006 highlights that although the Al-Qaeda network was quite healthy in terms of growth and cohesion; the larger organization was failing to meet its strategic goals. This study, conducted by Max Abrahms, lists the following Al-Qaeda strategic goals: 1) Reducing U.S. Military Influence in the Persian Gulf; 2) Destroying U.S. Relations with "Corrupt" Muslim Rulers; 3) Deterring the United States from Killing Muslims; and 4) Ending United States Support for Israel. In all cases, the opposite outcome occurred with respect to Al-Qaeda's goals.<sup>82</sup>

Despite these failures, remnant of AQI remained and which would later reemerge under new leadership and with a renewed sense of purpose. As Al-Qaeda in Iraq became a fractured and diluted movement following the death of Zarqawi, the success of the Sons of Iraq campaign, and continued pressure from coalition forces in Iraq through 2008, some leaders were reluctant to proclaim that Al-Qaeda in Iraq, in some form, was defeated and never to return. In his remarks before Congress in April 2008, General David Petraeus stated that although weakened, groups within Iraq could potentially reemerge, stating,

Terrorists, insurgents, militia extremists, and criminal gangs pose significant threats. Al Qaeda's senior leaders, who still view Iraq as the central front in their global strategy, send funding, direction, and foreign fighters to Iraq. Actions by neighboring states

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<sup>81</sup> Victoria Barber, "The Evolution of Al Qaeda's Global Network and Al Qaeda Core's Position Within it: A Network Analysis," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 9, No 6.  
<http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/469/html>.

<sup>82</sup> Abrahms, Max. 2006. "Al Qaeda's Scorecard: A Progress Report on Al Qaeda's Objectives." *Studies In Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 5: 509-529.



compound Iraq's challenges. Syria has taken some steps to reduce the flow of foreign fighters through its territory, but not enough to shut down the key network that supports AQI.<sup>83</sup>

Under these circumstances and this assessment of the conditions present in Iraq following AQI's leadership of the jihad taking place during the mid-2000s, it is easier to understand how follow-on groups such as the Islamic State picked up where AQI left-off years before.

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<sup>83</sup> *From the testimony of Gen. David Petraeus before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the House Armed Services Committee, and the Senate Armed Services Committee, Congress number goes here (April 8-9, 2008), [http://www.defense.gov/pdf/General\\_Petraeus\\_Testimony\\_to\\_Congress.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pdf/General_Petraeus_Testimony_to_Congress.pdf).*

## CHAPTER 5

### AL-QAEDA IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA (AQAP) (2009-2014)

#### INTRODUCTION

An AQ-inspired presence has existed throughout the Arabian Peninsula, defined here as an area consisting of both the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Yemen, soon after the organization became operationalized in the early 1990s. The returning Arab-Afghan fighters that formed the foundation of the overall organization reinforced this presence throughout the peninsula writ large. This area always held a special significance for Bin Laden personally, as well as the greater goals of the Al-Qaeda brand. Al-Qaeda elements in the earliest phases of operation in Saudi Arabia and Yemen consisted of loosely organized cells that were struggling to coordinate activities under extreme pressure from state authorities and intelligence services, as well as pressure to craft a strategic narrative that would succeed within the socio-political structure throughout this micro-region. Additionally, Al-Qaeda elements in this area have a long track record of targeting regional regimes and Western interests, both of which precede the 9/11 terrorist attacks and which are linked to traditional Islamist movements elsewhere.

Modern-day AQAP emerged from two fledgling and weakened pseudo AQ affiliates, the first generation Al-Qaeda elements in Saudi Arabia in the earliest years following 9/11 and the remnants of Al-Qaeda cells in Yemen, which maintained loose organizational linkages for several years prior to its reestablishment in 2009. As will be shown, prior to reforming under the AQAP acronym in 2009, the related AQ movements in each respective country operated on divergent themes and operational designs, which threatened organizational irrelevance for both. Following the merger of both groups and with the pledge of loyalty (*bayat*) to AQC and Bin

Laden, this new version of AQAP that emerged was much more in line with traditional AQ-inspired thinking, as well as in the manner in which it conveyed its principles. This alignment brought early successes and strengthened the overall organization. Despite this alignment and pledging support to AQC, AQAP eventually distanced itself from the parent organization, redrafting its own brand and strategic narrative that was more relevant and appropriate for the society in which it operated.

This chapter will analyze AQAP as it has evolved from this re-creation and merger in 2009 through the end of 2014. From the official merger of AQ elements in Saudi Arabia and Yemen to present day, the evolution of AQAP will be assessed across the four variables of this study. Although an analysis of AQAP prior to 2009 could provide interesting insights, this study is much better served in assessing AQAP following this merger. This is due to the ability to apply the variables of this study to analyze AQAP as it made the transition from a disjointed immediate subordinate organization of AQC into a definitive affiliate with its own command and control structure, and also the ability to plan and launch its own high-profile attacks. Despite this fact, I will first provide some historical context as to the presence of Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia and Yemen prior to the merger.

Brief summaries of the findings are as follows: AQAP maintained a more domestic, ideological focus versus the traditional international outlook of AQC. This orientation was developed over several years and in response to social and political conditions within Yemen. There have been exceptions to this, as the previous AQAP ideologue Anwar al-Awlaki had been involved in both rhetoric and plots against the United States prior to his death via U.S. drone strike.<sup>1</sup> AQAP, after the merger with the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army (AAIA), grew closer to

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<sup>1</sup> "Al Qaeda's Anwar al-Awlaki killed in Yemen," *CBS News* (September 30, 2011), accessed November 16, 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/al-qaedas-anwar-al-awlaki-killed-in-yemen/>.

AQC due to the affiliations of AQAP leadership<sup>2</sup>. This initial alignment was soon followed by an additional rebranding of the AQAP narrative under a different name, which resulted in a strategy of distancing Yemeni activities from the traditional AQC hierarchy and more focused on local governance and increased political clout among Yemeni tribes.

Although an official merger in 2009 with parallel Saudi elements lent the credibility for the establishment of an AQ element that encompassed the entire Arabian Peninsula, the Yemeni contingent has grown to dominate the organization, which has endured. This has been a result of the vast ungoverned spaces that exist within Yemen, as well as the ongoing crackdown by the Saudi government against AQ cells, limiting Al-Qaeda's ability and motivation to reassert its presence in the country. The safe haven created by tribal supporters and the inability, or lack of desire, of the Yemeni government to affect AQAP made the decision to reinforce AQAP's Yemeni position that much clearer.

The analysis of targeting data indicates that once consolidated and rebranded, AQAP married ideology and targeting much more adeptly than its Iraqi counterpart. AQAP developed a careful balance between targeting Western interests, to include the U.S. homeland, and Yemeni security forces that sought to destroy AQAP ranks and networks. In this regard, AQAP aligned itself with the goals of AQC in maintaining a strategic focus on the West, while also balancing that focus with attacks on the Yemeni regime. This balancing act made the organization operationally relevant, as well as gained favor and credibility across the jihadi spectrum and within the wider community. Initially embarking on a series of prolific attacks against such Western targets, AQAP established its reputation as a viable player in the global jihadi architecture.

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<sup>2</sup> Amr Abdalla and Arezou Hassanzadeh, "Al-Qaeda and Terrorism in the Arab East: Rise, Decline, and the Effects of Doctrine Revisions and the Arab Revolutions," in *Al-Qaida After Ten Years of War: A Global Perspective of Successes, Failures, and Prospects*, eds. Cigar and Kramer (Quantico: Marine Corps University Press, 2011), 113.

Furthermore, a distinct change in targeting design occurred from the periods of loose Al-Qaeda affiliation in the early part of the decade and the targeting data analyzed from the time of rebranding in 2009 through 2014. This trend shows a distinct decrease in attacks on civilians and civil infrastructure that occurred between 2003-2004 in Saudi Arabia and Yemen and an increase in targeting of military and security services, all possible indicators of incorporating the lessons learned from Al-Qaeda's experience in Iraq, as well as a growing penchant for a more domestic focus.

Means of financing AQAP operations were also unique and not totally aligned with AQC. In some instances, AQAP financing operations drove AQC leadership to issue statements of support that sanctioned kidnappings and ransom payments, a tactic that AQC did not traditionally employ. During the period covered in this study, there is no evidence that has emerged that AQAP utilized the illicit drug trade, black market activities, or human trafficking programs, a hallmark of other affiliates, especially AQ groups in North Africa. It is possible that AQAP maintained more favor with AQC, as its leader was tabbed to assume Zawahiri's position as Number Two in Al-Qaeda Central following the Egyptian's assumption of command after Bin Laden's death. Although difficult to prove, it is possible that the financing tactics, as well as other factors, kept AQAP more "pure" in the eyes of AQC leadership, thusly sanctioning its activities as more pious and just.

The diversification of AQAP's ranks also experienced an influx of foreign fighters, especially Somalis. However, Saudis and Yemenis have continued to dominate the organization. Data indicates that AQAP did not experience the same levels of diversification of parallel groups, such as AQI. It is unclear as to the factors that drove this lack of diversification, but it can be speculated that the opportunities for foreign fighters to both gain political legitimacy by

joining AQAP and the relative lack of Western targets in the region made the influx of foreign fighters less likely.

AQAP also presents a unique case study in understanding the evolution of Al-Qaeda in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in that the two independent affiliates that operated in Saudi Arabia and Yemen prior to the 2009 merger can be measured independently, thus lending much more insight into the effects of formally pledging allegiance to AQ. As will be shown in the sections that follow, the consolidation of AQ cells in Yemen brought with it an archive of lessons learned, especially as it pertains to the failings of the Saudi contingent during the mid-2000s and the organizations' ability to learn from the mistakes and missteps of Al-Qaeda in Iraq.

#### THE EVOLUTION OF MODERN ISLAMISM IN SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia occupies a unique position with regard to Islam and political legitimacy, as it is home to the two holiest sites in the Islamic faith: the Sacred Mosque (Masjid al-Haram) in Mecca and the Mosque of the Prophet (Masjid al-Nabawi) in Medina. Effectively, the importance of both the birthplace of Islam and the Prophet Mohammad cannot be understated, as it pertains not only to the Al-Qaeda narrative but also to all adherents of the Islamic faith, regardless of interpretation or adherence to a specific jurist.

During the 1960s, Saudi Arabia was confronted with the expansion and growth of Jamal Abd al-Nasser's pan-Arabism philosophy. Juxtaposed with Nasser's program, King Faisal adopted and supported a pan-Islamism doctrine that looked to balance against Nasser's secular proclivities, as it was determined that Nasser's closeness with the Soviet Union and its espoused atheist perspective threatened Saudi Arabia and the Arab world as a whole.

As a result of the 1973 Arab oil embargo, oil prices quadrupled from \$3/barrel to \$12/barrel.<sup>3</sup> This immediate windfall allowed the Saudi regime to export a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, known as Wahhabism, whose namesake (Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab) was instrumental in the consolidation of the Saudi state in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as the religious legitimizer of Muhammad Ibn al-Saud, the Saudi state namesake.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the high times of the 1970s, the 1980s witnessed a significant drop in oil prices, forcing the Saudi regime to address growing dissent and dissatisfaction within its own populace. In order to deflect this criticism, the Saudi state employed the tactic of praising the Afghan resistance against the Soviet Union, as well as matching U.S. aid dollar-for-dollar to support the cause in Afghanistan. A seminal event in Saudi Arabia and across the wider Muslim world was the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq and the request of assistance by the Saudi regime from the United States to deploy forces on its soil. This deference to the West would become an important justification for Bin Laden to target the United States and the West.

Following the ousting of Soviet forces from Afghanistan; the Saudi state followed a similar strategy during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It provided military assistance and financial backing to the Bosnian Muslims “that was completely out of proportion with the size of the conflict or the previous links between the Kingdom and the Muslims in the Balkans.”<sup>5</sup> As a result of the continued state sponsorship of pan-Islamism and the exportation of money and military participation, many Saudis began to view and accept this as being part of the Saudi culture. Highlighting this infusion of foreign support for Islamic resistance movements within

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<sup>3</sup> Institute for Energy Research, *Forty Years after the Oil Embargo* (October 16, 2013), accessed December 2, 2015, <http://instituteforenergyresearch.org/analysis/forty-years-after-the-oil-embargo/>.

<sup>4</sup> Natana J. Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 34-35.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, “Islamist Violence and Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia,” *International Affairs* 84 (2008): 704.

modern Saudi society, Thomas Hegghammer explains, “The distinction between humanitarian aid and military support became blurred, and support for resistance struggles abroad came to be viewed as charity and altruism.”<sup>6</sup>

During the 1990s, the Saudi Islamist movement split into two branches: the classical jihadists and the global jihadists. The classical jihadists were those who supported the previous state strategy of funding and providing military support in a semi-conventional fashion, and leading Saudi religious scholars sanctioned such activities. The global jihadists were more concerned with waging global war, outside the confines of clerically sanctioned areas. Their goal was to expel U.S. forces from Saudi Arabia, even if confrontation with Saudi forces occurred in the process.<sup>7</sup>

It was during Bin Laden’s exile in Sudan during the early 1990s that he and fellow Al-Qaeda leaders proposed the idea of an organized jihad or resistance against the Saudi monarchy. Bin Laden specifically targeted the Saudi regime in his 1996 Declaration of War due to its perceived acquiescence to American occupying forces.<sup>8</sup> By 1997, Bin Laden was able to establish a small contingent of AQ operatives in Saudi Arabia, with the intent of targeting U.S. and Saudi interests.<sup>9</sup> Other reports suggest that although Bin Laden wanted to establish an AQ presence within Saudi Arabia, his aims were to continue to cultivate the region as a hotbed for recruitment and fundraising and not to begin operations there—a decision that had been made in 1998.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Hegghammer, “Islamist Violence and Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia,” 705.

<sup>7</sup>Hegghammer, “Islamist Violence and Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia,” 706.

<sup>8</sup> Osama Bin Laden, “Bin Laden’s Fatwa,” (speech, August 23, 1996), PBS NewsHour, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/military-july-dec96-fatwa\\_1996/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/military-july-dec96-fatwa_1996/).

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, “The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia,” (Occasional Paper series, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, February 25, 2010), [https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/CTC\\_OP\\_Hegghammer\\_Final.pdf](https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/CTC_OP_Hegghammer_Final.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 161.



Following the 9/11 attacks, and as an outgrowth of the global jihadist tradition, the decision calculus by Bin Laden changed, as the region was no longer producing the financial resources and recruitment numbers. By early 2002, Bin Laden gave the go-ahead for active operations to begin within Saudi Arabia, which were managed by a close associate to Bin Laden during the Afghan years, Yusuf al-Uyayri.<sup>11</sup>

## CONSOLIDATION IN YEMEN

Bin Laden, of Yemeni origin himself, was reported to be exploring the transition of AQ headquarters in Pakistan to Yemen prior to his death. According to some experts, Bin Laden was reported to have discussed his eventual desire to move his base of operations to Yemen should his refuge in Afghanistan become compromised.<sup>12</sup> As Bin Laden's international reputation began to build prior to 9/11, he was quoted as saying that should he be forced to flee his base in Afghanistan, he would look to move his operations to the mountains along the Yemeni-Saudi border.<sup>13</sup> Although Bin Laden's intentions will never be truly known, it is likely that his continued marginalization from the operational Al-Qaeda brand drove him to consider ways in which he could reassert his authority as a planner and facilitator instead of the AQ figurehead.

In Yemen, several iterations of an evolving jihadi movement following the return of fighters from Afghanistan preceded the establishment of a formal branch of Al-Qaeda, the first of which was known as Islamic Jihad in Yemen (1990-1994)<sup>14</sup>, whose name conjures the obvious influence of Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) and its influence on the Arab Afghan

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<sup>11</sup> Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979*, 166-170.

<sup>12</sup> Manal Alafangi, "Expert points to strong evidence of Bin Laden presence in country," *Gulf News Online* (November 3, 2010): <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/yemen/expert-points-to-strong-evidence-of-bin-laden-presence-in-country-1.705680>.

<sup>13</sup> Gabriel Koehler-Derrick, ed., "A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen," (The Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, September 2011), 19.

<sup>14</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, "Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)," *CFR Backgrounders*, accessed July 1, 2015, <http://www.cfr.org/yemen/al-qaeda-arabian-peninsula-aqap/p9369>.

campaign. Yemen has also been an important area that has traditionally played a large role in the Islamic revival movement. Following its formal independence, Yemen struggled to become stabilized, as various groups fought for control of the country, with the National Liberation Front (NLF) eventually assuming control. Leftist-Marxist groups within the NLF eventually took control, ushering in a period that saw South Yemen become closely aligned with both the Soviet Union and The People's Republic of China. During the 1970s and 1980s, South Yemen maintained close military ties to the USSR, allowing the Soviet Navy access to its ports.

Islamic Jihad in Yemen transitioned into the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army (AAIA) organization (1994-1998)<sup>15</sup>, which became increasingly more independent during the 1990s and began to target the Ali Abdullah Saleh regime, as traditional Islamic radicalism texts discuss the overthrow of “apostate regimes.”<sup>16</sup> Saleh maintained tight control over Yemeni society in the classic tradition of Egyptian President Mubarak and Saddam Hussein and was viewed by Islamic revivalists in much the same way. Communiqués during the late 1990s from AAIA indicated pledges to UBL and AQC, and applauded the dual embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania later in 1998.<sup>17</sup>

While exploring its future potentialities in Saudi Arabia, AQC also sought to establish a contingent in Yemen for similar purposes. According to American and Yemeni intelligence reports, prominent officials close to the Ali Abdullah Saleh regime were given a personal grant of \$20 million from Bin Laden in the early 1990s to help settle Yemenis who had fought during the Afghanistan campaign.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, “Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP),” *CFR Backgrounders*, accessed July 1, 2015, <http://www.cfr.org/yemen/al-qaeda-arabian-peninsula-aqap/p9369>.

<sup>16</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Egypt: Islamic Book Service, 1964).

<sup>17</sup> Abdalla and Hassanzadeh, 104.

<sup>18</sup> John F. Burns, “Yemen links to bin Laden Gnow at F.B.I. in Cole Inquiry,” *New York Times* (November 26, 2000), <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/11/26/world/yemen-links-to-bin-laden-gnow-at-fbi-in-cole-inquiry.html?pagewanted=all>.

It is unclear as to the intentions of Bin Laden in funding this resettlement campaign; however, it is likely that he sought to maintain the allegiance of these fighters for potential future operations. Despite Bin Laden's true aims for this resettlement campaign, those returning fighters began to quickly organize themselves, perhaps reinforcing the already established and thriving Islamic revival movement throughout the peninsula.

AAIA eventually evolved into the first attempt at a formal alignment with AQ core leadership, establishing the Al-Qaeda in Yemen (AQY) affiliate in 1998. Some reports indicate that the linkages between AAIA and AQC during this period are foggy at best, which was similar to the perceived relationship between Ansar al-Islam in Kurdistan and Al-Qaeda Central. Despite this, it is believed that three top-level AQ operatives were present in Yemen in 2000 and had some level of involvement or coordination with a series of attacks against U.S. Naval assets, most notably of which was the *USS Cole* bombing.<sup>19</sup> Among those three operatives was Abdul Rahim al-Nashiri, who had been dispatched by Bin Laden to plan and supervise an attack on a U.S. warship. After a failed attempt to attack the *USS The Sullivans* in January 2000, al-Nashiri pleaded with UBL to remain in charge of the operation, which planned to employ a more advanced explosive device designed by al-Nashiri himself for the next attempt.<sup>20</sup>

From the zenith of the Cole bombings, Al-Qaeda's presence in the Arabian Peninsula remained stagnated under the crackdown of the Saudi and Yemeni governments, as well as the operations by the United States to prevent Yemen from becoming an Al-Qaeda stronghold. It became increasingly apparent to AQ leaders in Saudi Arabia and Yemen that a merger would not only preserve the AQ presence and prevent a similar collapse that was taking place in Iraq, but

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<sup>19</sup> Abdalla and Hassanzadeh, 113.

<sup>20</sup> Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 360.

would also work to increase the relevance of Al-Qaeda in the region as a viable leader of the global jihadi campaign.

The 2009 merger, which served as a rebirth or sorts, took place between Said al-Shihiri, the Saudi national who had earned respect as a detainee at Guantanamo Bay, and Nasir al-Wuhayshi, the newly escaped prisoner who had served with distinction as Bin Laden's aide-de-camp during the Afghanistan campaign.<sup>21</sup> Shihiri and Wuhayshi, along with twenty-one other jihadis who escaped their prison cells in Sana'a in 2006, stoked the embers of a renewed AQ presence in Yemen, after which the embers began to smolder. This resurgence, along with the alignment of both Saudi and Yemeni elements, catapulted AQAP into the main echelons of the wider organization. Aligning these two AQ cells would also stave off operational stagnation and preserve the inroads of Al-Qaeda in critically important region.

## IDEOLOGY AND GOALS

Modern AQAP, which was re-branded from Al-Qaeda in Yemen (AQY) following the escape of twenty-three militants from Yemeni prison in 2006, as well as the merger between Al-Qaeda elements in Saudi Arabia, was established in January 2009.<sup>22</sup> Among those escapees was Nasir al-Wuhayshi, who became the leader of the newly minted AQAP. Wuhayshi pledged his allegiance to Bin Laden in 2009, and would later go on to be named Al-Qaeda Deputy by Ayman Al-Zawahiri.

Wuhayshi had fought with Al-Qaeda forces at the Battle of Tora Bora, much like Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founder of Al-Qaeda in Iraq. He also allegedly served as Bin Laden's

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<sup>21</sup> Gregory D. Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, Al-Qaeda, and America's War in Arabia*. W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 2013, 235.

<sup>22</sup> "Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula," *Counter Terrorism Guide* (Washington, DC: United States National Counterterrorism Center), accessed August 19, 2015, <http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/aqap.html>.

former private secretary during the period.<sup>23</sup> Wuhayshi was first arrested in Afghanistan in 2001 for his participation in this campaign and returned to Yemen, where he was sentenced to prison until his escape in 2006.<sup>24</sup>

Under previous leadership of AQAP during the earliest years of sanctioned operations, Yusuf al-Uyayri was a key ideologue who sought to maintain strategic focus on expelling U.S. military forces from the peninsula. Al-Uyayri called upon the long-established networks of former Arab-Afghan mujahedeen. Although early AQAP launched dozens of attacks on westerners, facilities, and security forces, the unprecedented level of retaliation worked to dismantle AQ efforts in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, this campaign by Saudi security services had the undesired effect of drying up sources of funding, recruitment, and ideological backing of AQ-based activities.<sup>25</sup>

Prior to its rebranding in 2009, it can be claimed that both AQY and AQAP in Saudi Arabia made a series of strategic mistakes that indicated a misalignment of the traditional AQ-inspired focus on the far enemy, while gaining and maintaining support from the wider Muslim community. Between 2006 and 2008, AQY carried out attacks that centered on targeting of regime infrastructure, to include oil facilities, which may have contributed to the erosion of recruitment efforts due to a misalignment of strategic vision between the organization and its recruits.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Obituary: Yemen al-Qaeda leader Nasser al-Wuhayshi, BBC News, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33150212>. Accessed 1 June 2016.

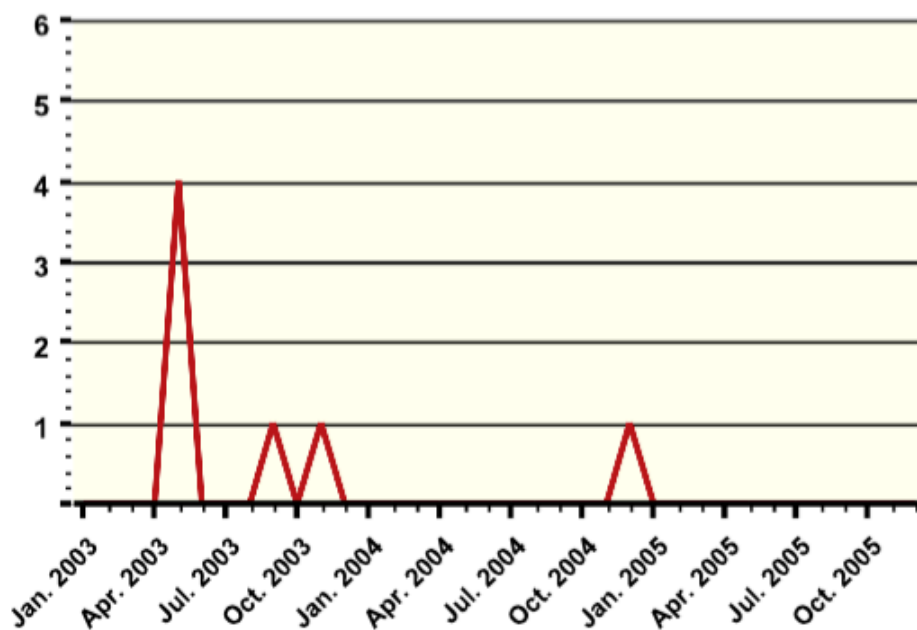
<sup>24</sup> "Al-Qaeda's Emerging Leader: Nasir Al-Wuhayshi – An Advocate Of Lone Wolf And WMD Attacks On Planes, Buses And Subways In Western Countries," *Middle East Media Research Institute Special Dispatch Series*, no. 5409 (August 15, 2013): [http://www.memrijtm.org/al-qaedas-emerging-leader-nasir-al-wuhayshi--an-advocate-of-lone-wolf-and-wmd-attacks-on-planes-buses-and-subways-in-western-countries.html#\\_edn2](http://www.memrijtm.org/al-qaedas-emerging-leader-nasir-al-wuhayshi--an-advocate-of-lone-wolf-and-wmd-attacks-on-planes-buses-and-subways-in-western-countries.html#_edn2).

<sup>25</sup> Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979*, 226.

<sup>26</sup> Benedict Wilkinson and Jack Barclay, *The Language of Jihad: Narratives and Strategies of Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula and UK Responses* (Royal United Services Institute, Whitehall Report 4-11, December 2011), accessed August 19, 2015, [https://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/Language\\_of\\_Jihad\\_web.pdf](https://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/Language_of_Jihad_web.pdf).

Between 2003 and 2007, Al-Qaeda militants in Saudi Arabia conducted a variety of attacks throughout the Kingdom on both civil authorities and security personnel, as well as against Westerners.<sup>27</sup> This violent period was followed by a comprehensive campaign by Saudi authorities to crack down on those suspected of being linked to terrorist activities, resulting in 9,000 arrests by 2008 and 11,500 arrests by 2011.<sup>28</sup> Figure 5.1 shows the pedestrian numbers of attacks carried out by the Saudi AQ cell, which indicates an inability to effectively gain much of a foothold.

**Figure 5.1: Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia Attacks (2003-2006)**

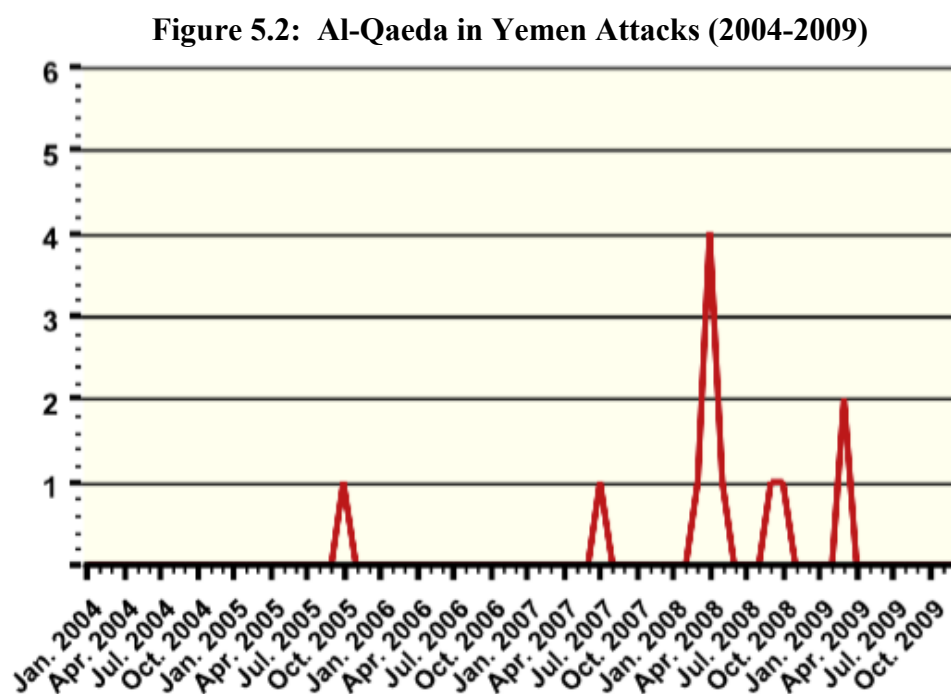


Data Source: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, *Global Terrorism Database* [data file], 2016, accessed August 14, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

<sup>27</sup> Lori P. Boghardt, "Saudi Arabia's Old al-Qaeda Terrorists Form New Threat," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (February 11, 2015), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/saudi-arabias-old-al-qaeda-terrorists-form-new-threat>.

<sup>28</sup> Lori P. Boghardt, "Saudi Arabia's Old al-Qaeda Terrorists Form New Threat," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (February 11, 2015), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/saudi-arabias-old-al-qaeda-terrorists-form-new-threat>.

While Saudi authorities ramped up their campaign against AQ elements within the kingdom, the freedom offered by the ungoverned spaces in various parts of Yemen became more attractive and contributed to its reemergence and solidification there.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the Yemeni contingent had also failed to build significant momentum as a stand-alone organization operating throughout its operational area. Prior to consolidation and rebranding, Al-Qaeda in Yemen (AQY) produced similar results as the Saudi cadre (See Figure 5.2).



*Data Source:* National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, *Global Terrorism Database* [data file], 2016, accessed August 14, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew Michaels and Sakhr Ayyash, "AQAP's Resilience in Yemen," *CTC Sentinel* (September 24, 2013), <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/aqaps-resilience-in-yemen>.

Upon its reestablishment in Yemen, AQAP sought to avoid the strategic mistakes made by both AQI and its predecessor in Saudi Arabia. Not only would it be important to frame its ideological agenda in terms that were palpable to the wider population among which it operated, especially among tribal elders in Yemen, but AQAP also avoided the AQI pitfalls associated with unmitigated targeting and intimidation of civilians. Furthermore, since 2009, AQAP has harnessed the power of its strategic messaging campaign through its media wing as a means of harnessing support for its transnational agenda. Under the mentorship of Anwar al-Awlaki and direct management of Samir Khan, the English-language magazine *Inspire*, which was first published online in January 2010, was an attempt to continue to recruit westerners and urge their participation in a growing transnational jihadi movement.<sup>30</sup>

AQAP also recognized the need to frame its agenda in tribal terms, which increased its strength, especially in Yemen. It also was strengthened early in its reestablishment by the Saleh regime, which saw a release of jihadists that had been jailed during previous campaigns by the government. At the urging of Ayman al-Zawahiri and local AQAP-affiliated negotiators, Saleh agreed to the release of ninety-five jihadists, which the regime surmised that it could use against its common enemies within separatist movements in the south.<sup>31</sup> On the heels of the Arab Spring in early 2011, AQAP sought to exploit the destabilization of Yemen as the government dealt with widespread unrest, especially in areas that traditionally produced violent resistance

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<sup>30</sup> Jarret Brachman et al., "Inspire Magazine: A Critical Analysis of its Significance and Potential Impact Through the Lens of the Information, Motivation, and Behavioral Skills Model," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (January 2014): 1-18.

<sup>31</sup> Jane Novak, "Yemen strikes multifaceted deals with al Qaeda," *The Long War Journal* (February 11, 2009), [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/02/yemens\\_multifaceted.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/02/yemens_multifaceted.php).



movements.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, AQAP aligned itself with prominent Yemeni tribal elites, some of whom have been very active in AQAP ranks.<sup>33</sup>

Through *Inspire*, AQAP's globally distributed magazine, and other jihadi online forums and within Yemen itself, AQAP developed and refined an approach that AQI was unable or unwilling to do, which was its conscious effort to maintain both a local and transnational agenda. Although AQI, in theory, maintained and cultivated fronts against both the near and far enemy as embodied by the Shia-dominated Iraqi Government and the U.S. forces present in the country, its miscalculations among the Iraqi populace spelled its downfall.

As explained by Benedict Wilkinson and Jack Barclay, modern AQAP developed this two-tiered construct, which came to shape its operational design in the years that followed.<sup>34</sup> By 2010, AQAP had fully developed this construct, which allowed it to successfully target the West, as evidenced by the parcel plots launched against the United States in October of that year, as well as increasing operations against the Saleh regime in Yemen.<sup>35</sup>

However, this two-tiered ideological approach eventually led to a distancing of AQAP activities from AQI altogether. By 2012, AQAP focused on attempts to distance itself from the AQ brand entirely. Under the alias of Ansar al-Sharia (AAS), which was the moniker of like-minded movements in North Africa, especially in Libya and Tunisia, AQAP sought to create a more localized message focused on the implementation of shari'a law within the areas that it

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<sup>32</sup> Christopher Boucek and Mara Revkin, "The Unraveling of the Salih Regime In Yemen," *CTC Sentinel* ( March 1, 2011), <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-unraveling-of-the-salih-regime-in-yemen>.

<sup>33</sup> Andrew Michaels and Sakhr Ayyash, "AQAP's Resilience in Yemen," *CTC Sentinel* (September 24, 2013), <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/aqaps-resilience-in-yemen>.

<sup>34</sup> Benedict Wilkinson and Jack Barclay, "The Language of Jihad: Narratives and Strategies of Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula and UK Responses," *Royal United Services Institute, Whitehall Report* 4-11 (December 2011), accessed August 19, 2015, [https://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/Language\\_of\\_Jihad\\_web.pdf](https://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/Language_of_Jihad_web.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> James Gallagher, "Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in 2010: The Intensification of the Near War," AEI's Critical Threats Project, March 8, 2011. Accessed 25 July 2016. <http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/aqap-2010-intensification-near-war-march-8-2011>.

exerted control.<sup>36</sup> Within these controlled sectors AQAP/AAS began to provide basic services in order to garner increased support, a strategy completely neglected by AQI. Alternatively, AQC was traditionally not concerned with local governance, as it operated under the sponsorship of the Taliban. The decision of AQAP to transition its focus from transnational jihadism to localized governance resulted from the likelihood that some Yemenis found it more acceptable to support localized movements like AAS that support the implementation of Islamic law but want to refrain from supporting the global terror agenda of AQAP.<sup>37</sup>

## TARGETING

Unlike AQI, AQAP was careful not to inadvertently attack targets that would erode the support of its tribal base, as this has been a key tenet of its operational ideology. Beginning in 2009, AQAP became prolific and creative in crafting plots against the West while also targeting and fighting Yemini forces. However, AQAP forces deliberately refrained from conducting attacks that would produce a large number of civilian casualties—a miscalculation of AQI during the height of its campaign from 2004-2007, as well as previous elements of AQAP and AQY prior to the merger in 2009.

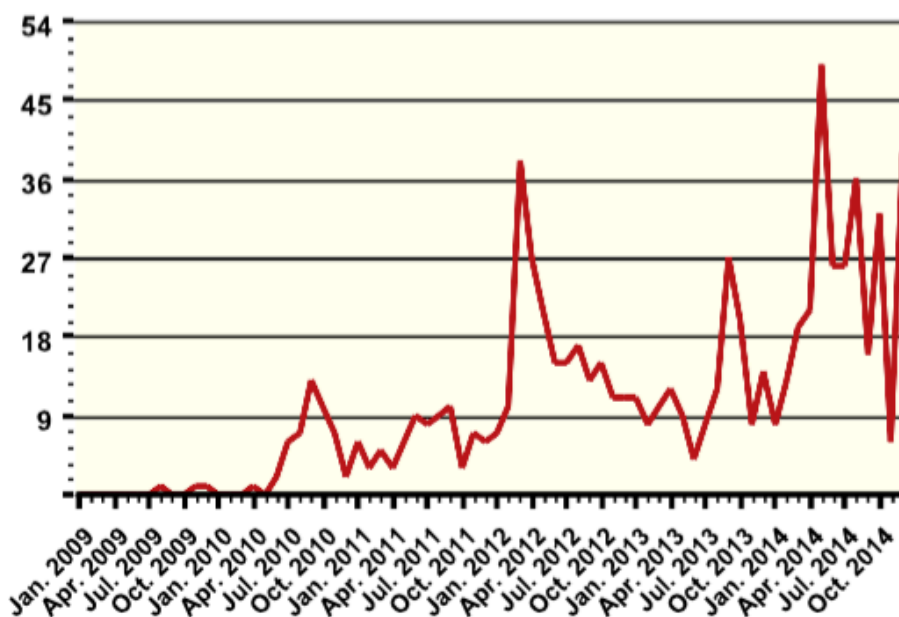
AQAP also experienced as much more sustained level of attacks following consolidation with the Saudi group. Not only were attacks occurring at a much higher rate than either AQY or AQ in Saudi Arabia were able to generate, but the numbers of attacks continued to increase every few months from 2009-2014 (See Figure 5.3).

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<sup>36</sup> Office of the Spokesperson, “Terrorist Designations of Ansar al-Sharia as an Alias for Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula,” (media note, Washington, DC, October 4, 2012), <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/10/198659.htm>.

<sup>37</sup> Robin Simcox, “Ansar al-Sharia and Governance in Southern Yemen,” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 14 (December 27, 2012), 60, [http://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1139/20130124\\_ct14simcox.pdf](http://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1139/20130124_ct14simcox.pdf).

**Figure 5.3: AQAP Attacks Over Time (2009-2014)**



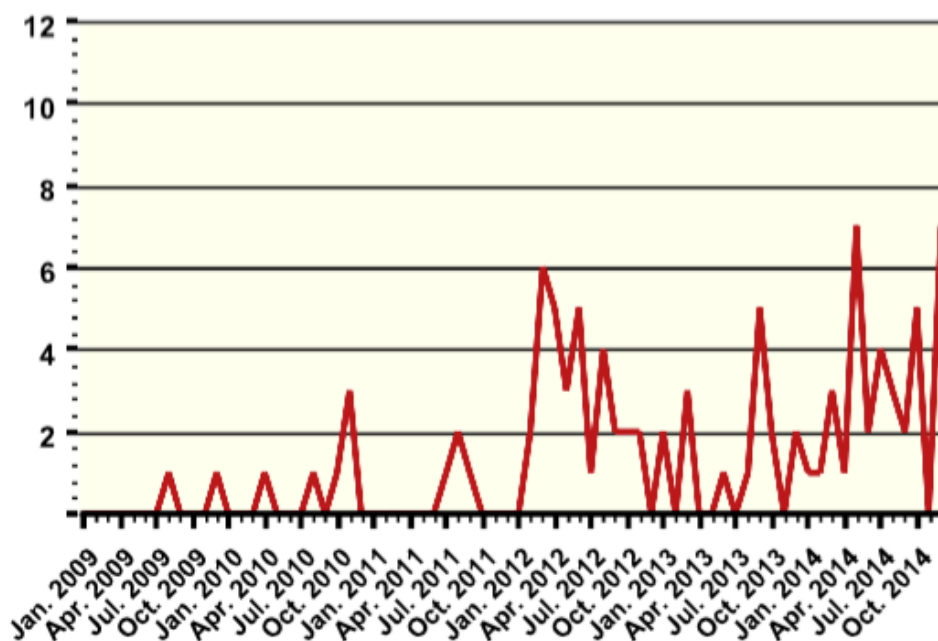
*Data Source:* National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, *Global Terrorism Database* [data file], 2016, accessed August 14, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

The first set of assaults that were ordered by AQAP following its merger were a series of attacks by suicide bomber targeting civilians and tourists in the city of the *Hadramawt* region. This attack, which killed a number of South Korean tourists, was followed by an attack on the South Korean delegation that had arrived in Yemen to investigate the first bombing. Although no one from the delegation had been killed, these attacks proved that AQAP had its sights set on more ambitious attacks.<sup>38</sup> Later that same year, AQAP operatives attempted and failed to assassinate a member of the Saudi royal family and a government official, Prince Muhammad

<sup>38</sup> Gregory D. Johnsen, "AQAP In Yemen And The Christmas Day Terrorist Attack", CTC Sentinel, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, January 3, 2010. <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/aqap-in-yemen-and-the-christmas-day-terrorist-attack>. Accessed 2 June 2016.

bin Naif, in Jeddah.<sup>39</sup> Abdullah Asiri had been invited to speak with Prince Naif under the guise of rehabilitation of Al-Qaeda militants and their reintegration into Saudi society. Believing the ruse, Naif dispatched his personal plane to retrieve Asiri, only to have the Al-Qaeda operative detonate a suicide bomb during their meeting. Although Naif was miraculously unharmed, it reinforced AQAP's seriousness and its intent to operate outside its traditional borders.<sup>40</sup> Suicide operations became an integral component of the overall AQAP strategy. As Figure 5.4 shows, AQAP demonstrated a steady increase of suicide attacks from 2009-2014.

**Figure 5.4: AQAP Suicide Attacks (2009-2014)**



Data Source: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, *Global Terrorism Database* [data file], 2016, accessed August 14, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

<sup>39</sup> Slackman, Michael. "Would-be Killer Linked to Al-Qaeda, Saudis Say." *The New York Times*, August 28, 2009. [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/29/world/middleeast/29saudi.html?\\_r=2&](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/29/world/middleeast/29saudi.html?_r=2&). Accessed 1 July 2009.

<sup>40</sup> Gregory D. Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, Al-Qaeda, and America's War in Arabia*. W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 2013, pp. 247-250.

Data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) attributes 754 terrorist-related incidents to AQAP between 2009 and 2014, as shown in Figure 5.5. Of those 754 incidents, an overwhelming majority (364) were categorized as targeting uniformed military personnel, which the GTD defines as “attacks against military units, patrols, barracks, convoys, jeeps, and aircraft...also includes attacks on recruiting sites, and soldiers engaged in internal policing functions such as at checkpoints and in anti-narcotics activities...this category also includes peacekeeping units that conduct military operations.”<sup>41</sup> The second most recorded target type was against government entities (109), which includes judges and other legal officials, political leadership and organizations, government employees and facilities, as well as other related categories.<sup>42</sup>

Prior to the merger of AQY and AQ in Saudi Arabia in 2009, the Global Terrorism Database attributes seven large-scale attacks to Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia from 2003-2004. Of those seven attacks, six were aimed at either local businesses or private citizens and property, resulting in a targeting rate of 85.7%. Comparatively, Al-Qaeda in Yemen conducted only four attacks against civilian-based targets out of twelve total attacks carried out between 2005 and 2009, resulting in a rate of 33%.<sup>43</sup> This data indicates that not only were the type of targets amended from the period prior to the merger and alignment with AQC, but also the frequency of attacks increased. Early iterations of Al-Qaeda in the region appear to have attempted to focus on a select number of spectacular attacks. Following the merger, the increased frequency of attacks, while less spectacular, highlight a change in targeting strategy.

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<sup>41</sup> National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, Global Terrorism Database [data file], 2013, accessed July 1, 2015, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

<sup>42</sup> National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, Global Terrorism Database [data file], 2013, accessed July 1, 2015, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

<sup>43</sup> National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, Global Terrorism Database [data file], 2013, accessed September 9, 2015, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

**Figure 5.5: Diversity of AQAP Targets (2009-2014)<sup>44</sup>**

<b>Target Type</b>	<b>Number of Incidents (2009-2014)</b>
Airports and Aircraft	7
Business	23
Educational Institution	6
Government (Diplomatic)	18
Government (General)	109
Journalists, Media	2
Maritime	1
Military	364
NGO	2
Other	1
Police	99
Private Citizens, Property	98
Religious Figures/Institutions	4
Telecommunication	1
Terrorists/Non-State Militias	43
Tourists	4
Unknown	9
Utilities	29

*Data Source:* National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, Global Terrorism Database [data file], 2013, accessed July 1, 2015, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

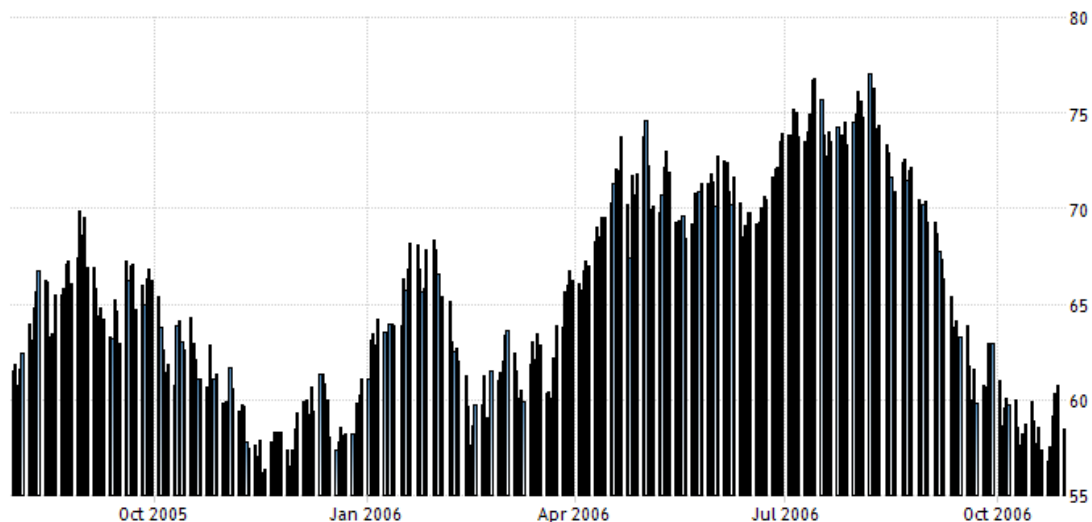
These numbers stand in stark contrast to the overall trend of targeting by terrorist organizations. As explained in the 2013 U.S. State Department Report on Terrorism, the majority (52.1%) of terrorist-related attacks in 2013 targeted private citizens and property.<sup>45</sup> In comparison, AQAP's propensity to target government and uniformed military forces and assets is of interest and perhaps a key indicator of its popularity among the Yemeni population, as it has sought to avoid targeting civilian infrastructure. This is also a key indicator of a change in ideology following the allegiance to AQC in 2009.

<sup>44</sup> Chart created by author.

<sup>45</sup> National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism: Annex of Statistical Information, U.S. Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism, Country Reports on Terrorism 2013, April 2014, 10, accessed August 12, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/225043.pdf>.

Prior to the merger, both AQ elements in Saudi Arabia and Yemen saw the potential in targeting oil infrastructure, a distinct difference between their Iraqi counterparts. AQ elements in Saudi Arabia attempted to attack an oil processing facility in Abqaiq in February 2006. Later that same year in September, AQ elements in Yemen attacked oil terminals along the Gulf of Aden. Figure 5.6 indicates crude oil prices during this period, which shows elevated oil prices in both February and September 2006 at the time of the attacks.

**Figure 5.6: Crude Oil Prices by Month (July 2005-Nov. 2006/Dollars per barrel)**

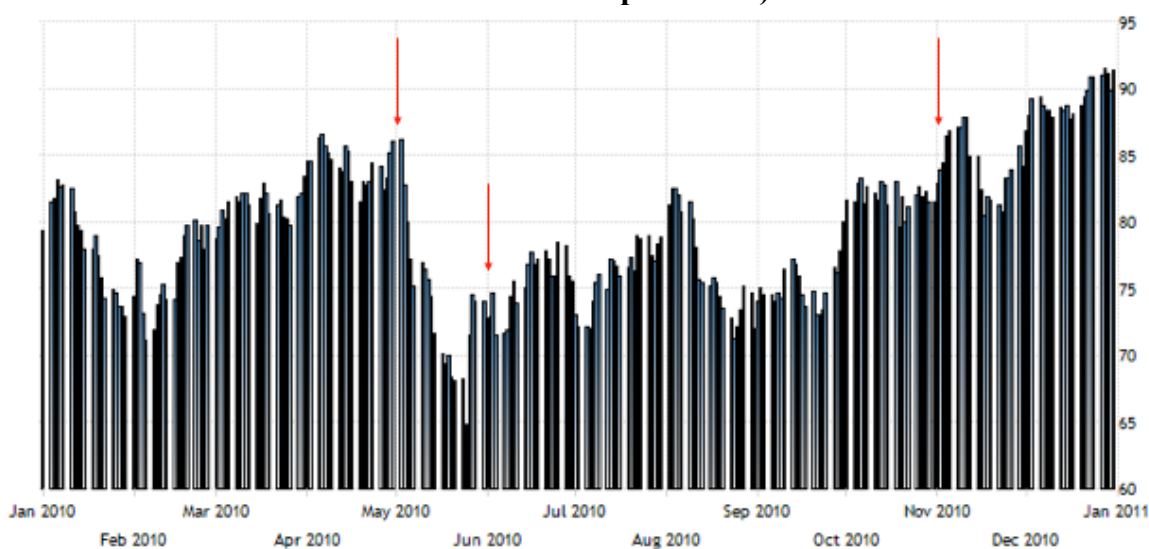


*Data Source:* Trading Economics, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/commodity/crude-oil>.

The first reported strike on oil facilities in Yemen after the merger and rebranding of AQAP occurred in May 2010. Local tribesmen allegedly linked to AQAP blew up an oil pipeline in retaliation for an airstrike that killed Jabir al bin al Shabwani and two of his

bodyguards.<sup>46</sup> Throughout 2010, AQAP targeted oil facilities on three separate occasions, including the attack in May. When compared to crude oil prices during this same period, it is possible that AQAP leadership sought to exploit such elevated oil prices to bring about more of an economic impact.

**Figure 5.7: Crude Oil Prices by Month and AQAP Attacks on Energy Facilities (Jan. 2010-Jan. 2011/Dollars per barrel)<sup>47</sup>**



Data Source: Trading Economics, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/commodity/crude-oil>.

On 9 December 2011, a tribal gunman affiliated with AQAP attacked an oil pipeline in Shabwah governorate.<sup>48</sup> In April 2012, another attack occurred in Shabwah governorate, this

<sup>46</sup> Cody Curran, et. al., “AQAP and Suspected AQAP Attacks in Yemen Tracker 2010, 2011, and 2012,” Critical Threats Project, American Enterprise Institute. Accessed 30 July 2016. <http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/aqap-and-suspected-aqap-attacks-yemen-tracker-2010>.

<sup>47</sup> Graphics added by author to existing chart.

<sup>48</sup> “Gunmen Blow up Oil Pipeline in Southeast Yemen,” Xinhua, December 10, 2011. Available: <http://english.cri.cn/6966/2011/12/10/1461s670983.htm>.



time by several gunmen using rocket-propelled grenades.<sup>49</sup> In the 2011 attack, oil prices had risen from less than \$80 per barrel in October to more than \$100 per barrel by that December.<sup>50</sup> The April 2012 attack occurred during a period of extremely elevated oil prices, which had occurred the previous month. During March 2012, oil prices had reached nearly \$110 per barrel.<sup>51</sup> (See Figure 5.7)

## FINANCING OPERATIONS

Although not available through public forums, it is believed that early AQAP in 2002-2003 was linked to the vast Islamic charitable networks, many of which originated in Saudi Arabia. AAIA, the precursor to AQAP headquartered in Yemen, is believed to have been on the Yemeni government payroll, at least during its earliest manifestations in 1994. The ongoing fragmentation between north and south positioned AAIA as guns-for-hire by the north, and it received significant patronage from President Saleh and his closest advisors. In this capacity, AAIA was employed against the south in the secession attempt that same year.<sup>52</sup> When AQAP reemerged in 2009, the Saleh regime attempted to do the same thing through the negotiations between AQC and AQAP as mentioned previously.

Early success shaped the development of the targeting regime during the initial phases of AQ operations in the region. Almost exclusively, these operations occurred based on a top-down driven process, as regional cells were limited in the flexibility of planning and execution. For the USS *Cole* operation, the official U.S. government stance is that this was a fully planned

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<sup>49</sup> “AQAP Tied to Yemeni Oil Pipeline Attack,” UPI, April 11, 2012. Available: [http://www.upi.com/Business\\_News/Energy-Resources/2012/04/11/AQAP-tied-to-Yemeni-oil-pipeline-attack/UPI-63271334143652/](http://www.upi.com/Business_News/Energy-Resources/2012/04/11/AQAP-tied-to-Yemeni-oil-pipeline-attack/UPI-63271334143652/).

<sup>50</sup> Trading Economics, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/commodity/crude-oil>.

<sup>51</sup> Trading Economics, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/commodity/crude-oil>.

<sup>52</sup> Gregory D. Johnsen, “The Resiliency of Yemen's Aden-Abyan Islamic Army,” *Terrorism Monitor* 4, no. 14 (July 13, 2006), [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=838&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=181&no\\_cache=1#.VfCAnLS4k1g](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=838&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=181&no_cache=1#.VfCAnLS4k1g).

operation by AQC, with Bin Laden personally choosing the type of target to be struck, as well as the operatives who carried out the attack. Bin Laden also personally provided the funding for the purchase of explosives and equipment used in the operation.<sup>53</sup>

With the crackdown of traditional sources of funding by western-allied governments, such as the Islamic charity networks, groups such as AQAP resorted to alternative means to fund operations. Kidnappings and the associated requests for ransom have become a hallmark of AQAP. Although U.S. government policies against paying ransoms to terrorist organizations have prevented a free-for-all in attempting to capture Americans for this purpose, AQAP has been very successful in acquiring ransom payments from other nations with differing policies on hostage payments. It is estimated that AQAP earned \$20 million in this manner between 2011-2013.<sup>54</sup>

In a recorded video address in 2012, Al-Qaeda Chief Ayman al-Zawahiri called upon all Muslims to kidnap Westerners in order to use these hostages as leverage for freeing imprisoned Muslims in the United States; however, financial benefits were not mentioned.<sup>55</sup> Regardless of the feelings of AQC on the financial utility of hostages, it quickly became a tool utilized by affiliates. Later that year, AQAP kidnapped a Saudi diplomat in front of his home in Aden. He was released three years later after Saudi officials paid an undisclosed ransom amount.<sup>56</sup> Reports have indicated that between 2011 and 2013, AQAP had received \$20 million in ransom money,

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<sup>53</sup> National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States. (Philip Zelikow, Executive Director; Bonnie D. Jenkins, Counsel; Ernest R. May, Senior Advisor). *The 9/11 Commission Report*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004, p. 190.

<sup>54</sup> Tom Keatinge, "Finances of jihad: How extremist groups raise money," *BBC News* (12 December 2014), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30393832>.

<sup>55</sup> Chelsea J. Carter, "Al Qaeda leader call for kidnapping of Westerners," *CNN Online* (October 28, 2012), <http://www.cnn.com/2012/10/27/world/asia/al-qaeda-kidnap-threat/>.

<sup>56</sup> Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki, "Three Years After Kidnapping, AQAP Releases Saudi Official," *Yemen Times* (March 20, 2015), <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1864/news/4940/Three-years-after-kidnapping-AQAP-releases-Saudi-official.htm>.

mostly paid by Western governments to secure the release of their respective hostages.<sup>57</sup> It is thought that those funds were utilized to fund a campaign to seize large portions of Yemeni territory by AQAP during that same period.<sup>58</sup>

## DIVERSIFICATION

Information on the composition of early AQAP is unreliable and difficult to uncover. This can possibly be attributed to the vagaries related to information distributed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in its attempt to distort the role of Saudi citizens in the immediate years after the 9/11 attacks in their roles in transnational terrorist organizations, to include Al-Qaeda. Information released seven years after the May 12, 2003 attack on three residential compounds in Riyadh indicated that twenty-four Al-Qaeda fighters took part in the operation, which were mostly of Saudi origin. However, of those twenty-four, the two main planners, Turki al-Dandani and Khaled al-Haj, were of Saudi and Yemeni origin, respectively.<sup>59</sup>

By 2009, AQAP reconstituted itself in Yemen and all indications reflect that a majority of those members were Yemeni, with a small numbers of fighters of varying origins participating in AQAP activities. Of the twenty-three prison escapees in Sana'a, nine escapees formed the bedrock of the rebranded AQAP, led by Nasir al-Wuhayshi, and all were primarily of Yemeni origin. "Among the escapees were Jamal al-Badawi, the alleged mastermind of the 2000 USS

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<sup>57</sup> Ken Dilanian, "Al Qaeda group is operating on ransom money from the West," *LA Times* (October 21, 2013), <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/oct/21/world/la-fg-yemen-ransom-20131021>.

<sup>58</sup> David Cohen, "Remarks of Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David Cohen before the Center for a New American Security on 'Confronting New Threats in Terrorist Financing'" (speech transcript, Washington, DC, March 4, 2014), <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl2308.aspx>.

<sup>59</sup> "Al Qaeda Sought to Replicate 9/11 Attack in 2003 Riyadh Bombings," *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* (June 21, 2010), <http://english.aawsat.com/2010/06/article55250311>.

Cole bombing that killed 17 American sailors, and Jaber al-Banna, a Yemeni with U.S. citizenship who was counted among the FBI's 26 most wanted.”<sup>60</sup>

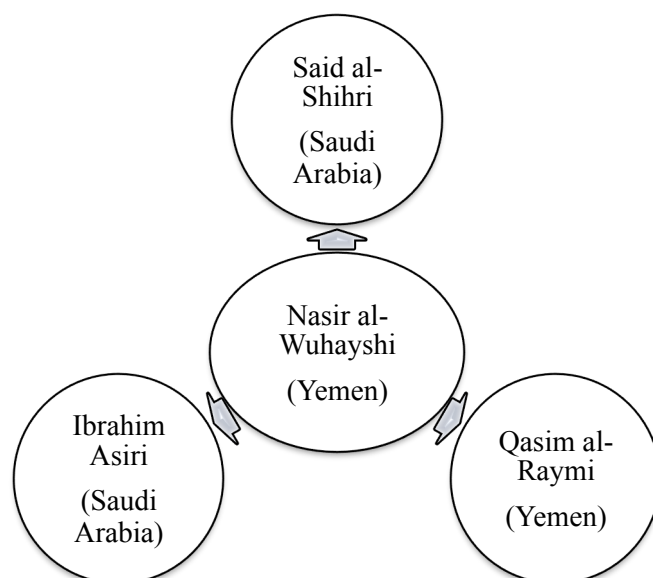
Figure 5.8 shows the early foundational structure around the time of consolidation between the Saudi and Yemeni Al-Qaeda affiliates under Wuhayshi's leadership. At that particular time, Wuhayshi was much more hesitant to establish a hierarchical organization, preferring to work with a sound and tightknit group of operatives. However, Wuhayshi realized early on that implementing a power sharing dynamic between the Yemeni contingent and the Saudi contingent would strengthen the organization overall and increase its legitimacy. He appointed the Saudi Said al-Shihri as his Deputy, a man who had been extradited back to Saudi Arabia after his capture in Afghanistan in December 2001 by and his detention at Guantanamo Bay. Saudi officials would eventually release al-Shihri as a graduate of its controversial Islamist rehabilitation program. He later escaped over the border into Yemen to join with Al-Qaeda forces there.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Michelle Shephard, “Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: A Primer. New Republic, January 1, 2010. <https://newrepublic.com/article/72226/al-qaeda-the-arab-peninsula-primer>. Accessed 2 June 2016.

<sup>61</sup> Gregory D. Johnsen, “A Profile of AQAP's Upper Echelon”, CTC Sentinel, July 2012, Vol. 5, Issue 7, 7.

**Figure 5.8: Early AQAP Structure, 2009<sup>62</sup>**



*Source: Gregory D. Johnsen, "A Profile of AQAP's Upper Echelon", CTC Sentinel, July 2012, Vol. 5, Issue 7*

In addition to Wuhayshi, the most prominent Yemeni involved in the organization during this period was Qasim al-Raymi. Al-Raymi had spent some amount of time in Afghanistan in Al-Qaeda training camps and was one of the twenty-three escapes from the prison in Sana'a who would form the bedrock of AQAP. Al-Raymi was instrumental in developing plots with Said Al-Shihri, especially the plot involving the attempted assassination of Prince Mohammad bin Naif.

As AQAP continued to develop under its newest leadership, other nationalities became more involved in the operational side of AQAP's agenda. Most famously, AQAP senior recruiter Anwar al-Awlaki deployed Nigerian-born Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, to carry out an operation in which he attempted to detonate an explosive device hidden in his underwear aboard

<sup>62</sup> Illustration created by the author.

a Detroit-bound flight on Christmas Day 2009.<sup>63</sup> Al-Awlaki, the notorious Yemeni cleric who spent several years in the United States, also had a significant role in the radicalization of Nidal Hassan, the U.S. Army officer who launched a bloody attack at a military base in Texas in 2009.<sup>64</sup>

The trend of increased roles for non-Yemeni AQAP membership would continue in subsequent years. By 2010, AQAP's ranks were assessed to be approximately 500 members.<sup>65</sup> Reports occurring during that same year judged that radical groups in Somalia, such as Al-Shabab, and AQAP were engaged in a militant sharing program, which saw exchanges occurring on both sides.<sup>66</sup> By 2012, AQAP had maintained close to 1000 fighters within the organization.<sup>67</sup> Somalis made up approximately half of the non-Yemeni fighters operating in Abyan Province, with Saudi fighters accounting for approximately one third. The remainder was reported to be of Jordanian, Nigerian, Pakistani, and Afghan origin, with a hand-full of western fighters.<sup>68</sup> The increased Somali presence can be attributed to the rise of Al-Shabab in the Horn of Africa (HOA) sub-region and its increased alignment with AQAP efforts.

Additionally, social media data that was collated by Jerry Long and Alex Wilner from May to August 2013 shows that of the more than 200 eulogies captured on a Facebook site set up

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<sup>63</sup> *The United States of America versus Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab*, United States Court Of Appeals For The Sixth Circuit (December 5, 2013), <http://www.ca6.uscourts.gov/opinions.pdf/14a0010p-06.pdf>.

<sup>64</sup> David Johnston and Scott Shane, "U.S. Knew of Suspect's Tie to Radical Cleric," *The New York Times*, November 9, 2009, accessed 25 July 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/10/us/10inquire.html>.

<sup>65</sup> Harris, Alistair. 2010. *Exploiting Grievances: Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula*. Carnegie Paper 111. Yemen: On the Brink. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Accessed 24 July 2016. <http://carnegieendowment.org/2010/06/08/exploiting-grievances-al-qaeda-in-arabian-peninsula>.

<sup>66</sup> Plaut, Martin. 2010. "Somalia and Yemen 'Swapping Militants.'" *Online News*. BBC. January 17. Accessed 24 July 2016. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8463946.stm>.

<sup>67</sup> Benson, Pam. 2012. "New Terrorist Plot to Attack Plane Foiled." *Online News*. CNN. May 7. Accessed 24 July 2016. <http://www.cnn.com/2012/05/07/world/meast/yemen-qaeda-plot/index.html>.

<sup>68</sup> Christopher Swift, "Arc of Convergence: AQAP, Ansar al-Shari'a and the Struggle for Yemen," *CTC Sentinel* 5, no. 6 (June 2012): 5.

to honor fighters who had fallen in the ongoing conflict in Syria, sixty-six were of Saudi origin.<sup>69</sup> Although the non-verifiable nature of social media material is inconclusive, if true, this high level of participation by Saudis in light of the domination of Yemenis within AQAP is noteworthy.

Trends can be seen both in the AQI and AQAP case studies. In 2014, the Yemeni government made the claim that seventy percent of fighters belonging to AQAP were of foreign origin, citing home countries as diverse as France, Australia, and Brazil.<sup>70</sup> AQAP leadership refuted these figures, stating, “The vast majority of the mujahedeen are from the sons of this Muslim country, where they were brought together by the brotherhood of faith, and they, with grace from Allah, are rooted in their tribes and among their Muslim brothers.”<sup>71</sup>

Although difficult to compare, details released from Saudi authorities indicate that the majority of arrests of those that are believed to have links to Al-Qaeda have been of Saudi origin. In a May 2014 police campaign, fifty-nine of the sixty-two alleged militants arrested were of Saudi origin. In the July 2014, six alleged AQ operatives attacked a Saudi checkpoint along the Yemeni border, all of who were of Saudi origin. Finally, a September 2014 operation netted the arrest of eighty-eight militants by Saudi security forces, eighty-four of which were also Saudi.<sup>72</sup> Based on this limited data, it can be deduced that AQAP remains a predominately Saudi and Yemeni organization, with non-Arab Somalis playing the most significant role. However, it is unclear if Somali membership in AQAP might have been on a conditional or “provisional” basis

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<sup>69</sup> Long, Jerry Mark, and Alex S. Wilner. 2014. "Delegitimizing al-Qaida." *International Security* 39, no. 1: 126-164, 129.

<sup>70</sup> “Al Qaeda in Yemen denies government claim 70 percent of fighters are foreign,” *Reuters Online* (May 2, 2014), <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/02/us-yemen-qaeda-idUSBREA410BT20140502>.

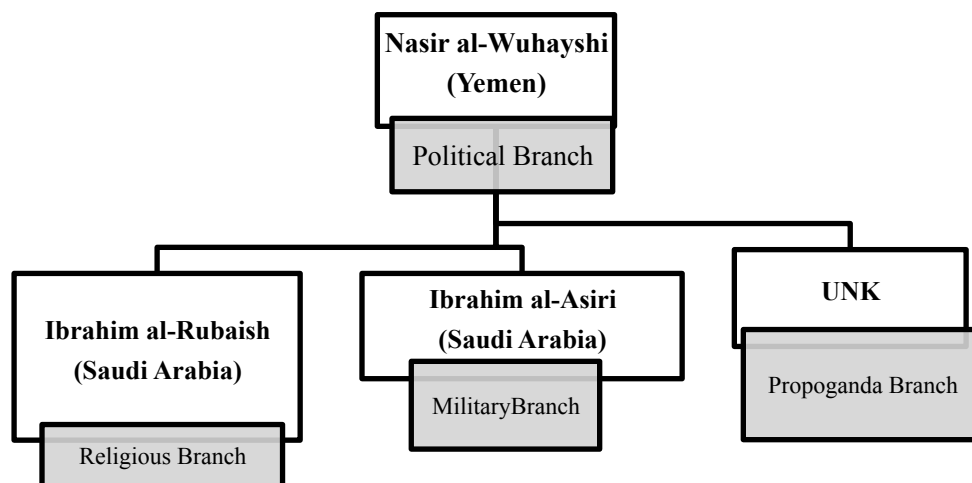
<sup>71</sup> “Al Qaeda in Yemen denies government claim 70 percent of fighters are foreign,” *Reuters Online* (May 2, 2014), <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/02/us-yemen-qaeda-idUSBREA410BT20140502>.

<sup>72</sup> Lori Plotkin Boghardt, “Saudi Arabia's Old al-Qaeda Terrorists Form New Threat,” *The Washington Institute* (February 11, 2015), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/saudi-arabias-old-al-qaeda-terrorists-form-new-threat>.

and not full-fledge members, if such a status did exist. Furthermore, the comments by AQAP leadership regarding the diversity of its ranks during this period reflect the tribal sentiments that have come to define AQAP. This foundation in a greater shared duty of Arab tribesmen who are carrying out their religious duty in defense of both their religion and their family (tribal) honor is a key motivating factor to perpetuate AQAP activities and the recruitment of other like-minded individuals.

By 2014, AQAP had adapted its organizational structure in a much more hierarchical fashion, yet still maintained a power-sharing structure between the two most represented countries of origin, Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Unlike its AQC and AQI forbearers, Wuhayshi crafted an organizational model over time that, in spirit, maintained the traditional components of the AQC design, but the components were weighted much differently than either AQI or AQC. Figure 5.9 shows the AQAP organizational structure in approximately 2014.



**Figure 5.9: AQAP Hierarchy, 2014<sup>73</sup>**

*Data Source: Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Counter Extremism Project*

Instead of the cell-like structure of AQAP during the period following formal alignment with AQC, Wuhayshi eventually developed a more hierarchical structure. Despite this retooling of the bureaucracy, Saudis still found themselves as key players within the organization.

## SYNTHESIS

Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda placed a high premium on establishing a presence on the Arabian Peninsula, as indicated by the large sums of money granted to the Yemeni government for the settlement of Afghan veterans following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Whether Bin Laden sought to continue to support and fund a Yemeni contingent that he could call upon in some future conflict or for some other reason, Bin Laden's intent on creating and maintain an Al-Qaeda presence through the Arabian Peninsula is unquestioned. Early operations

<sup>73</sup> Illustration created by the author.

in the region were directed and planned by senior Al-Qaeda leaders, to include Bin Laden himself. Following 9/11, these cells became more independent as AQC leadership was unable to engage its cells in this region do to increased pressures from Western powers. Those AQ cells that were active demonstrated a continued desire to target both Saudi interests, as well as a Western presence in general.

However, as AQAP gained momentum, Bin Laden and other senior AQC leaders encouraged AQAP to serve as a provisional base for other global operations, and less of a movement that would seek to proliferate across the wider Middle East under its own power.<sup>74</sup> Essentially, Bin Laden and AQC viewed Yemen as its *forward operating base* at the symbolic crossroads in the region. As tensions mounted and pressure continued to build in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Bin Laden's relationship with his hosts, Mullah Omar and the Taliban, began to sour. It is likely that Bin Laden began to lose interest in what he set out to do in Afghanistan when he fled there in the late 1990s. In his written communication with Zarqawi, Zawahiri openly proclaimed that he foresaw the rightful place of an Islamic Caliphate as being headquartered in the Levant and Egypt, not in Afghanistan.<sup>75</sup> It is unclear if Bin Laden totally agreed with Zawahiri's assessment, likely preferring a more peninsula-based focus.

Although it can be safely assumed that AQC would have preferred to have an operational cell entrenched within Saudi Arabia itself, the merger of the Saudi and Yemeni cells, with strong Yemeni leadership, shows the adaptability of AQ elements to migrate to those regions beyond government control that it can exploit. The leadership of AQAP, highlighted by Wuhayshi, all

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<sup>74</sup> Bryce Loidolt, "Managing the Global and Local: The Dual Agendas of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula." *Studies In Conflict & Terrorism* 34, no. 2 (February 2011): 109, accessed June 6, 2015, <https://www.ebscohost.com/academic/academic-search-complete>.

<sup>75</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi* (West Point: Combatting Terrorism Center, July 9, 2005), <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/zawahiris-letter-to-zarqawi-english-translation-2>. Author also consulted source in original Arabic, available via <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/zawahiris-letter-to-zarqawi-original-language-2>.

had linkages to early Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Whereas much more detail is known about conflicting ideological views by Zarqawi and AQI with traditional AQC efforts, operational and targeting data indicate that the dual agenda of both near and far enemy orientations indicate that AQAP sought to pursue a more traditional AQ approach.

Whereas AQI was developed and led predominately by Zarqawi until his death, thus acting under his own unique and specific beliefs, AQAP remained much more decentralized. This decentralization developed from the classic Al-Qaeda model, which urged the rapid autonomy of its affiliates and rapid succession of command and hierarchical reshuffling. AQAP was able to do this through its linkages and relationships with the tribal populace and refrained from alienating its base of support, unlike AQI.

AQAP displayed a high level of ideological flexibility, which served to motivate locals in support of its cause against the regimes of the Arabian Peninsula, as well as maintain support for its objectives with regard to the West.<sup>76</sup> Unlike AQC and AQI, AQAP built its movement from the ground up, focusing on gaining the support of its tribal base. AQAP's decision to place Yemeni leaders as the head of the organization could also be linked to the failures of AQI, which maintained foreign leadership for much of its existence. Wuhayshi managed this pressure in placing himself at the head of the organization, but also positioning Saudis in key positions. This dynamic obviously was meant to serve Yemeni interests, as well as keep the important Saudi contingent satisfied.

AQAP also proved itself to be a resistant organization, as it survived successive losses of its leadership at the hands of U.S. drone strikes. Unlike AQC and AQI, AQAP has not been traditionally linked to one specific leader. Instead, its organizational structure allowed it to absorb the deaths of its leaders without the catastrophic effects that burdened both AQC and

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<sup>76</sup> Loidolt, "Managing the Global and Local: The Dual Agendas of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula," 111.

AQI. As expressed in an analysis by the CTC, “To date, al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula has largely avoided serious mistakes thanks to the guidance of a small group of Yemeni leaders. From its inception—then under the banner al-Qa`ida in the Land of Yemen (AQLY), AQAP has endured...by maintaining rigid organizational discipline; crafting a consistent and highly nuanced discourse; and avoiding military or outreach efforts likely to spark a public backlash.”<sup>77</sup>

The evidence presented in an analysis of attacks carried out prior to the creation of AQAP in 2009 shows its predecessor groups targeting civilian interests at a much higher rate than after the merger. Although it is difficult to attribute this change to a specific cause due to a lack of primary evidence, it is likely that the lessons learned from the failures of the AQI campaign and their alienation of the local populace, a point emphasized by Zawahiri in his communiqués with Zarqawi, drove this evolution.

Although Bin Laden held the Arabian Peninsula in the highest regard in terms of a sustained progress in a global Islamic revival, elements in and across the Arabian Peninsula, especially in Yemen, have been more prone to distance themselves from the puritanical tenets espoused by AQC, and instead have been drawn to a more nuanced approach of melding traditional fundamentalist philosophies with constraining realities on the ground. This distancing of AQAP as a primary affiliate appears to have resulted in the adoption of a similar strategy by AQC, as it possibly sensed its continued marginalization as the leader of the global terror movement that it enjoyed from 2001-2008. By 2010, AQC also adopted a much more inclusive philosophy in terms of developing relationships with other Muslim Nationalist Groups. According to Gunaratna and Nielsen, this was an attempt to repair the damage cause by the failure of the Iraqi affiliate and the hardline approach adopted by Zarqawi. They also consider that Al-Qaeda developed into a much more adept political actor, with the ability and desire to

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<sup>77</sup> Koehler-Derrick, ed., “A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen,” 10.

forge bonds and relationships with those organizations that could provide some tangible benefit to the larger AQ organization. Unlike the earlier iterations of the larger AQ network, in which Bin Laden and Zawahiri maintained an uncompromising worldview for its version of a global Muslim vanguard, later perspectives of AQ leadership suggest that this strict adherence to an idealized version of jihad was simply not viable.<sup>78</sup>

In terms of its financing model, AQAP differed dramatically from both AQC and AQI in terms of how it funded its activities. AQC did not engage in kidnappings at all, and AQI chose to do so without the intent of acquiring ransom payments for the hostages. Kidnappings and ransom payments served as the primary means of funding AQAP activities. With tribal backing and sponsorship, AQAP also likely has much fewer overhead costs to conduct its operations and sustain itself than do other groups. AQI required much more money to sustain itself, forcing it to develop an extensive financial network based on illicit trade and stolen property. Conversely, no evidence exists that AQAP has operated in a similar manner. Rather, it has positioned itself as more of a “people’s movement” that looks to be supported by its tribal base than a burden upon the society that sustains it, an obvious outcome of the Iraqi experiment.

In terms of its diversification, AQAP became dominated by the Yemeni and Saudi contingent. Although Somalis began to play a larger role in the organization in 2012, their presence was more a by-product of cooperation between AQAP and Al-Shabab than a significant role forming for Somalis within AQAP. AQAP displayed an openness to utilizing other nationalities in its operations, but these individuals were more or less expendable and did not serve in any key leadership positions.

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<sup>78</sup> Rohan Gunaratna and Anders Nielsen. 2008. "Al Qaeda in the Tribal Areas of Pakistan and Beyond." *Studies In Conflict & Terrorism* 31, no. 9: 775-807, 798-799.

## CHAPTER 6

### AL-QAEDA IN THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB (AQIM) (2006-2014)

#### INTRODUCTION

Although Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) consolidated under the Al-Qaeda banner years after an official AQ manifestation in both Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula, Bin Laden and his associates did express an early interest in the Algerian Islamist struggle soon after the official founding of Al-Qaeda in the late 1980s. However, the Algerian case has a long and unique history that AQC, AQAP, and AQI simply do not have, adding an additional layer of data that enhances this study. The beginning of AQIM represents a case of a well-established movement adopting the brand of Al-Qaeda for a variety of purposes, whether it was to serve its own ends or in the service to some higher calling as part of the wider Islamic revivalist movement. This decision by AQIM to align itself with the established Al-Qaeda brand will be explored throughout this chapter.

Like Iraq, Algeria represented an opportunity for AQC to expand its trademark and enlarge its operational footprint. As an affiliate with obvious geographic and territorial advantages with regard to Europe and the greater Mediterranean Basin, AQIM provided the Al-Qaeda Enterprise with much more depth and breadth, especially during a period of marginalization of its leaders in the Pakistani border regions. This affiliation also lent credibility to the fledgling Islamist revival that had been sidelined through the fragmentation of the wider movement in Algeria. Affiliation represented an opportunity for an early faction of AQIM to usurp other groups that had their own Islamist agenda within Algeria. However, the Algerian movement initially resisted becoming a part of the wider AQC effort, instead desiring to keep non-Algerians out of its struggle to challenge its own apostate regime, thus disregarding the

transnational component of the traditional Al-Qaeda program. Essentially, early decisions by Algerian leadership regarding whether to join or not to join the Al-Qaeda Enterprise centered on the potential for a loss of control of the Algerian movement to outside actors. However, as the Algerian movement began to struggle and lose momentum as it sought to maintain its independence, the movement adeptly forecasted the benefits of tying into the global jihadist structure and the benefits of aligning with an organization like Al-Qaeda. As part of this calculation, it appeared as though the benefits usurped previous hesitations.

Also unlike AQC, AQI, and AQAP, AQIM was a more fractured organization from the outset, a point that has defined the organization since its re-branding in 2006 and that has remained ingrained within its culture. Initially, the *Groupe Salafiste pour la Predication et le Combat* (GSPC) under the leadership of Nabil Sahraoui, pledged allegiance to both Taliban Leader Mullah Omar and Bin Laden in 2003, although the official affiliation with Al-Qaeda would not come until three years later. Following Sahraoui's death at the hands of the Algerian Army in 2004, Abd al-Malik Droukdal assumed the leadership of the group. However, AQIM maintained a fractious power structure between operational units in the northern contingent and the southern contingent, the latter under the command of Mokhtar Belmokhtar.<sup>1</sup>

In 2012, Belmokhtar, already operating semi-autonomously in the southern regions of Algeria and in Mali with his newly named group *Al-Muajji'oon bi Dima* (Those Who Sign in Blood)<sup>2</sup>, sought to establish his own independent affiliate, an intermediary of sorts, which would be linked directly to AQC instead of having to remain subsumed under Droukdal's leadership in the north. The precedent cited by Belmokhtar in his correspondence with Zawahiri was that in

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<sup>1</sup> Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Mapping Militant Organizations, Stanford University. Accessed 25 July 2016. <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/65>.

<sup>2</sup> "Signers in Blood Battalion", Terrorism and Research Analysis Consortium (TRAC), accessed 30 August 2016. <http://www.trackingterrorism.org/group/signers-blood-battalion>.

order to save the fledgling Saudi affiliate, a consolidation was required with the Yemeni branch, resulting in a transition from the Najd region in Saudi Arabia to the Hadramawt region in Yemen. This transition adjusted the center of power from the Saudi contingent to the Yemeni contingent. Belmokhtar had similar ideas in mind in order to reposition the center of gravity of AQIM southward to the ungoverned expanses of Algeria's southern desert and in Mali.<sup>3</sup>

A brief synopsis of the findings of this chapter are as follows: Despite such internal and external fissures, AQIM initially developed along a trajectory that was much more aligned with AQC than its parallel affiliates in Iraq and Yemen. Ideologically, AQIM certainly remained devoted to the Algerian struggle and focused more on France in its far enemy orientation than the United States. However, under the leadership of Droukdal, AQIM redrafted its ideological approach to lessen its focus on the Algerian state and more in-line with the AQC transnational agenda. Following formal affiliation, data indicates a sharp decline in mention of Algerian Islamist issues and an increase in other global issues.

AQIM's targeting regime consistently aligned with its newfound ideological orientation toward a more transnational scope. Although affiliation did not alter the levels of attacks against Algerian government, military, and security targets, AQIM did seek to target international interests following its formal affiliation, as witnessed in its attack on the UN Headquarters in Algiers in December 2007. Suicide attacks also increased following formal affiliation with AQC. Between April 2007 and September 2008, AQIM conducted nine suicide attacks on a variety of targets; most principally of which were police stations and security personnel.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Mathieu Guid'ere. *The Timbuktu Letters : New Insights about AQIM*. Res Militaris, Res Militaris, 2014, pp. 25, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Bill Roggio, "AQIM suicide bombers kill 4 in Algeria," *The Long War Journal*, July 16, 2011. Accessed 31 July 2016. [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/07/aqim\\_suicide\\_bombers.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/07/aqim_suicide_bombers.php).



To fund its activities, AQIM employed a much wider variety of methods than AQI or AQAP, some of which could be considered forbidden under devout Islamic interpretations, or even amateurish, under the guise of traditional Al-Qaeda funding streams. In addition to fully implementing and sanctioning kidnappings and ransom as part of its financial platform, AQIM also exploited black market trading routes, human smuggling operations, and drug trafficking. When compared to the more traditional means of financing employed by early Al-Qaeda and even affiliate such as AQAP, this trend is surprising.

Diversity among the ranks of AQIM is perhaps the lowest of any of the studied affiliates. Algerians, who played a large part in the Arab Afghan campaign, as well as other conflicts that had a large mobilization of foreign fighters, chose to keep the Algerian movement predominately Algerian. Although local tribesmen, such as the Tuareg, have become more important for AQIM in its southern sectors, non-Algerian inclusion appears to be nearly non-existent throughout the period studied, at least in terms of the official AQIM ranks. Belmokhtar, in his quest to break away from traditional AQIM leadership sought to bring in Tuareg tribesmen, Libyans, and other Arabs to his newly minted group.

## THE ALGERIAN ISLAMIST STRUGGLE

In many ways, Algeria represents one of the oldest battlegrounds in the resurgence of the Islamic renaissance that took place following both World Wars I and II, with the accompanied recession of traditional European colonial powers from the Muslim world and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire during the early-20<sup>th</sup> century. As a long-time colonial possession of France, Algeria experienced great political and social upheaval in its attempt to throw off the chains of colonial control. Upon its independence from France in 1962 after eight years of civil war, led

by the National Liberation Front (FLN), the leader of the FLN Ahmad Ben Bella assumed control, instituting a socialist-type regime.

Houari Boumediene eventually deposed Ben Bella in 1965, after which the Algerian government implemented strict controls over political inclusion and participation by rival parties, as well as other leftist ideological principles on economic policy and international interaction. A collapse of the global oil markets, upon which the Algerian regime so heavily relied to subsidize its economic-political pursuits, generated increased stress on the ruling regime, forcing greater political inclusion. Additionally, the failed economic and social policies of the Algerian regime during this period created a groundswell of interest in a renewed Islamist movement.<sup>5</sup>

In 1989, a loosening of the Algerian regime's policies led to the creation of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), which sought to push back against the Communist-style command economic practices and heavy-handed politics, which rallied Islamists across the country.<sup>6</sup> Elections in 1990 saw the FIS win fifty-five percent of the vote in local elections, and win 188 out of 232 seats in the first round of parliamentary elections in December 1991. Humiliated and fearing a loss of control, the FLN, which maintained support from the Algerian military, swiftly cancelled the remaining elections, reasserted control of the government, and banned the FIS. Over 30,000 of its members were imprisoned in Saharan camps.<sup>7</sup>

As the FIS deteriorated, militant factions within the party began to organize around a renewed Islamist ideology and desire to exert some measure of pressure on the Algerian political process and the FLN. During this same period, battle-hardened and radicalized Algerians began to return from post-war Afghanistan, where they had played a prominent role in the Arab-Afghan

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<sup>5</sup> Ray Takeyh, "Islamism in Algeria: A struggle between hope and agony," Council on Foreign Relations, Summer 2003. Accessed 27 July 2016. <http://www.cfr.org/world/islamism-algeria-struggle-between-hope-agonyp7335>.

<sup>6</sup> Abdel Bari Atwan, *After Bin Laden: Al Qaeda, the Next Generation* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 172.

<sup>7</sup> Abdel Bari Atwan, *After Bin Laden: Al Qaeda, the Next Generation*, 172-173.

movement. Wanting to experience the same euphoria that had emanated from the “victory” against the Soviets, those returning Algerians saw an opportunity to establish a similar Islamic Algerian state like the one being pursued in Afghanistan. These returning fighters, along with radical elements of the FIS, formed the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in 1992 as a direct challenge to FIS and the Algerian government’s attempts to take back control of the country.<sup>8</sup>

From 1993-1997, the GIA prosecuted an exceedingly bloody and violent crusade against Algerian military members, police, and civilians who were believed to be collaborating with the government, as part of a campaign similar to that taking place in Afghanistan under the sponsorship of the Taliban. The GIA’s movement of terror quickly created animosities within the Islamist revival movement, of which rival FIS was a part. GIA dissidents, who were critical of the GIA targeting of innocent civilians and who were unwilling to participate in some sort of political process, led to the creation of the *Groupe Salafiste pour la Predication et le Combat* (Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat) GSPC in 1998, which sought to craft a more moderate approach. However, Algerian jihad as part of some sort of global movement was still the aim of some ideologues within the GSPC; among them was Abd al-Malik Droukdal, who became head of the GSPC in 2003.<sup>9</sup> It would be under Droukdal’s leadership that the GSPC would morph into Al-Qaeda’s affiliate in North Africa.<sup>10</sup>

The Algerian Islamist movement attracted the attention of Al-Qaeda as early as 1991, as Zawahiri and other AQ leaders praised their efforts to remove the secular government in Algeria. Al-Qaeda became involved in sending money, fighters, and supplies to Algeria to show its

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<sup>8</sup> Stephen A. Harmon, *Terror and Insurgency in the Sahara-Sahel Region: Corruption, Contraband, Jihad and the Mali War of 2012-2013* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 50-52.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher S. Chivvis and Andrew Liepman, “North Africa’s Menace: AQIM’s Evolution and the U.S. Policy Response,” *RAND Corporation* (2013), 3.

<sup>10</sup> Harmon, *Terror and Insurgency in the Sahara-Sahel Region: Corruption, Contraband, Jihad and the Mali War of 2012-2013*, 56-57.

support.<sup>11</sup> However, by the mid-1990s, AQC leaders had begun to express some trepidation in the conduct of the Algerian movement. At the same time, GIA leadership also felt similar reservations against aligning with Al-Qaeda during this early period. Although the GIA did have similar worldviews and philosophies in terms of the quest for a unified global jihad, the GIA had very strong feelings regarding the influx of foreigners into Algeria to partake in the movement there. The GIA also remained much more focused on France than the United States, who by this time had assumed the mantle as Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda's primary target.<sup>12</sup>

The command structure of the GSPC under Droukdal's leadership swore allegiance to UBL and AQC, and thus changed its name to AQIM in 2006.<sup>13</sup> Formerly, the GSPC focused on the domestic struggles within Algeria; however, following its allegiance to AQC, it claimed that its agenda included operations against Europe and the United States. It is claimed that Droukdal feared the disintegration of the Algerian movement, and therefore sought to align with Al-Qaeda Central in order to preserve the movement and garner more attention from domestic power brokers and the larger transnational jihadi movement.<sup>14</sup>

AQIM operations eventually began to spread southward, to include surrounding countries such as Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad. As its base of operations shifted from north to south, AQIM found it necessary to co-opt the Tuareg tribes of southern Algeria to expand its pool of recruits and also to provide the sponsorship in a very austere and remote location. Taking a play

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<sup>11</sup> Craig Whitlock, "Al-Qaeda's Far Reaching New Partner," *Washington Post* (October 5, 2006): A01, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/04/AR2006100402006.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Algerian Challenge or Global Threat?," (Carnegie Papers, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, no. 104, October 2009), 4, [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/al-qaeda\\_islamic\\_maghreb.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/al-qaeda_islamic_maghreb.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> William Thornberry and Jaclyn Levy, "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, Case Study Number 4, September 2011, accessed 13 June 2016, <https://www.ciaonet.org/attachments/18990/uploads>.

<sup>14</sup> Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Algerian Challenge or Global Threat?," (Carnegie Papers, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, no. 104, October 2009), 5, [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/al-qaeda\\_islamic\\_maghreb.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/al-qaeda_islamic_maghreb.pdf).

out of the AQC playbook, AQIM attempted to operate in these ungoverned spaces much like AQC did in Afghanistan, with support from the Taliban.

#### LINKAGES BETWEEN AQI/GSPC

The allegiance of the GSPC, later AQIM, to Al-Qaeda provided benefits for both organizations. For Al-Qaeda, it was able to bring an established and capable organization under its sphere of influence, providing the parent organization a much closer capability to threaten Europe, a factor that was much more difficult for existing Al-Qaeda affiliates in Iraq or Yemen. For the GSPC, its affiliation with Al-Qaeda provided an opportunity to improve its image within the global jihadi community, while also granting it new life as it faced the failures of confronting the Algerian government and achieving any of its domestic goals.<sup>15</sup>

However, the linkages between the Algerian movement and AQI cannot be understated. In fact, many view AQIM as more of an affiliate of AQI than of AQC, and demonstrate this linkage with a direct correlation between the life cycle of AQI, its dissolution, and the branding transition of the GSPC to AQIM in 2007.<sup>16</sup> In that respect, the further manipulation of the traditional AQ philosophy, as carried out by AQI, provided much more influence than Bin Laden's classic message.

During the Iraq War of the early to mid-2000s, the GSPC's relationship with AQI created an increased capacity to wage violence both in Iraq and Algeria. A formal arrangement between the GSPC and AQI initially developed sometime in 2004, when Droukdal appealed to Zarqawi to kidnap French citizens in hopes that these hostages could be traded for imprisoned GSPC

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<sup>15</sup> Craig Whitlock, "Al-Qaeda's Far Reaching New Partner," *Washington Post* (October 5, 2006): A02, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/04/AR2006100402006.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Vahid Brown, "Classical and global jihad: Al-Qa'ida's franchising frustrations," in *Faultlines in Global Jihad: Organizational, strategic, and ideological fissures*, ed. Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2011), 106.

leaders.<sup>17</sup> This pact became permanent when two Algerian diplomats were kidnapped in Iraq in July 2005 and executed by AQI with complicity from the GSPC.<sup>18</sup> Shortly after this agreement, the presence of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), whose development and deployment had been perfected in Iraq, had begun to surface in Algeria by 2006.

## IDEOLOGY AND GOALS

Once removed from its AQI influence, AQIM established a strategic narrative that differed from both AQI and AQAP and was much more in-line with the global Salafist ideology of AQC. A main component of AQIM's narrative has always centered on its goals of taking back the "Al-Andalus", a reference to those parts of the Iberian Peninsula that were once under Islamic rule from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>19</sup> In fact, AQIM's media wing is known as *Al-Andalus*, which they have utilized to spread its own interpretation of Salafi-jihadist thought, perhaps positioning the group as maintaining the same level of credibility as other groups, such as AQAP, that have also used mass media very adeptly.<sup>20</sup>

In a rare 2008 interview with Abdelmalek Droukdal, he revealed his opinion on the role of AQIM in the larger global jihad and under the banner of AQC:

We care about staying in contact with our brothers in Afghanistan or Iraq or any other jihad side. Our project is one. Therefore, we have to help, advise, consult each other, and exchange the experiences and coordinate the efforts to face the world's crusade war against Islam.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Steven Simon, "The Iraq War and the War on Terror", in *Balance Sheet: The Iraq War and U.S. National Security*, ed. John Duffield and Peter Dombrowski (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 28.

<sup>18</sup> Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Algerian Challenge or Global Threat?," (Carnegie Papers, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, no. 104, October 2009), 5, [http://carnegiendowment.org/files/al-qaeda\\_islamic\\_maghreb.pdf](http://carnegiendowment.org/files/al-qaeda_islamic_maghreb.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Dario Cristiani and Riccardo Fabiani, "AQIM Funds Terrorist Operations with Thriving Sahel-Based Kidnapping Industry," *Terrorism Monitor* Volume: 8 Issue: 4, (28 January 2010), [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=35963&cHash=b87da876f2#.V19kH-Yr1lg](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=35963&cHash=b87da876f2#.V19kH-Yr1lg).

<sup>20</sup> Geoff D. Porter, "AQIM's Objectives in North Africa," *CTC Sentinel*, February 1, 2011, accessed 14 June 2016, 5, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/aqim%E2%80%99s-objectives-in-north-africa>.

<sup>21</sup> "An Interview With Abdelmalek Droukdal," *The New York Times*, July 1, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/01/world/africa/01transcript-droukdal.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>.

Under Droukdal's leadership, AQIM placed much less emphasis on the Algerian state as a target for its propaganda. Once established, AQIM reduced the mention of "Algeria" by 22.9%. The same data indicates a 5% increase in the mention of the "United States" but a more significant 17% increase in mentioning "France".<sup>22</sup> This reduction in rhetoric was accompanied with a reduction in operations in the northern part of the country, where to majority of the Algerian population resides, and an increased presence in the Sahara regions of the South beginning in 2010. This transition resulted in a rift among AQIM leadership, with Droukdal supporters choosing to focus in the north, while other factions, led by Belmokhtar, focused on the southern campaign. In the south AQIM elements were able to exploit the ungoverned spaces of southern Algeria, northern Niger and Mali, and eastern Mauritania.<sup>23</sup>

The transition to the southern areas of southern Algeria and northern Mali under the leadership of Belmokhtar was supported by their co-option of the local Tuareg tribes and garnering their support. As Peter Pham indicates, by 2010, AQIM displayed a similar hybridity that AQAP developed, as it attempted to reconcile the need to frame its ideological approach as aligned with the global, transnational movement and with the sensitivities that accompany localized operations and the need to garner support from the local population.<sup>24</sup>

Much like AQAP was able to master, AQIM altered its strategic communication after its formal allegiance with AQC. This transition from a domestic to transnational focus occurred quickly in its formative history.<sup>25</sup> Prior to allying with AQC, the GSPC was much more focused on espousing an ideology that sought to undermine the Algerian government and bolster its

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<sup>22</sup> Torres Soriano and Manuel R., "The Evolution of the Discourse of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Themes, Countries and Individuals," *Mediterranean Politics* 16, no. 2 (July 2011): 283-284.

<sup>23</sup> Geoff D. Porter, "AQIM's Objectives in North Africa," 6.

<sup>24</sup> Pham, J. Peter. "Foreign Influences and Shifting Horizons: The Ongoing Evolution of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb." *Orbis* 55, (January 1, 2011): 240-254.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com.proxy.lib.odu.edu/science/article/pii/S0030438711000068?>

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Black, "AQIM's Expanding Internationalist Agenda," *CTC Sentinel* (April 15, 2008), <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/aqim's-expanding-internationalist-agenda>.

legitimacy within Algeria as a political player. After the merger with AQC, AQIM became much less concerned with countering the government and much more concerned with distributing propaganda that supported the global jihad.<sup>26</sup> By 2011, these communication tactics focused on openly claiming responsibility for attacks, as well as maintaining a trend of increased rhetoric against France and the United States in AQIM propaganda, with a simultaneous decrease in propaganda mentioning Algeria, specifically.<sup>27</sup>

According to some reports, Zawahiri was a significant factor in influencing the merger of GSPC and AQIM. He also envisioned AQIM subsuming parallel jihadi movements in Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia.<sup>28</sup> According to documents that were discovered in the raid on Bin Laden's Abbotabad compound in 2011, several letters and other form of communication were discovered that showed engagement between AQIM leaders and AQC from the period of formal affiliation to the raid itself.<sup>29</sup>

## TARGETING

As part of its ideological split with the GIA, the GSPC denounced the open targeting of purely civilian targets and instead focused its targeting regime on military and police targets, as well as other government agencies and facilities. As the Bouteflika government offered amnesty to Islamist fighters in 1999 in an attempt to integrate them into the political process, the GSPC refused, continuing to attack military convoys and bases well into the early 2000s.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Torres Soriano and Manuel R., "The Evolution of the Discourse of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Themes, Countries and Individuals," *Mediterranean Politics* 16, no. 2 (July 2011): 287.

<sup>27</sup> Torres Soriano and Manuel R., 283-284.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Kirschke, "AQIM: The North African Franchise," *World Politics Review* (Jan-Feb 2009), <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/2819/aqim-the-north-african-franchise>.

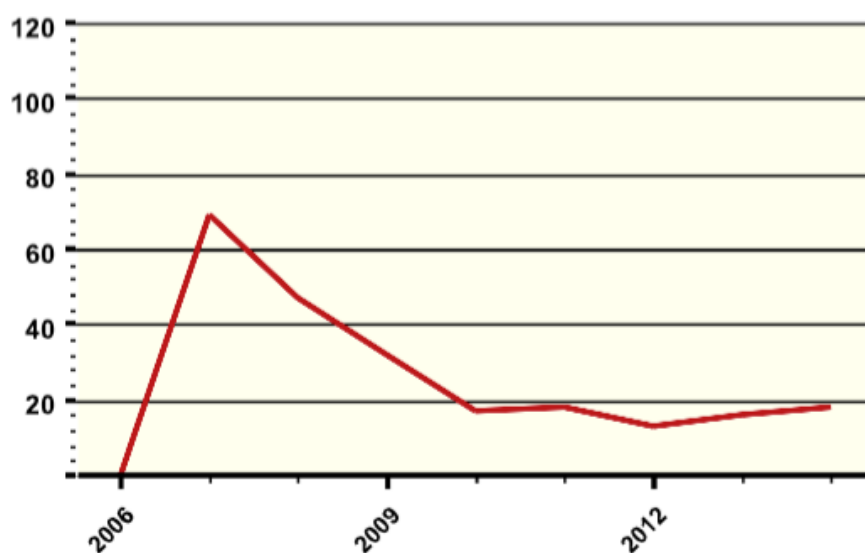
<sup>29</sup> Christopher S. Chivvis and Andrew Liepman, "North Africa's Menace: AQIM's Evolution and the U.S. Policy Response," *RAND Corporation* (2013), 3.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM: The Evolution of an Algerian Islamist Terrorist Group into an Al-Qa'ida Affiliate and Its Implications for the Sahara-Sahel Region," *Association Concerned Africa Scholars Bulletin*, no. 85 (Spring 2010): 15.



At the time of formal affiliation with AQC, AQIM demonstrated a significant increase in the numbers of overall attacks that can be attributed to the organization. As Figure 6.1 shows, this increase was not sustained, as the highlighted by the gradual decline of attacks over time.

**Figure 6.1: AQIM Attacks Over Time (2006-2014)**



*Data Source:* National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, *Global Terrorism Database* [data file], 2016, accessed August 14, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

As shown in Figure 6.2, the GSPC conducted 244 attacks on various targets throughout Algeria and the greater Islamic Maghreb region in the two years prior to affiliating with the Al-Qaeda brand. Of those 244 attacks, 144 were carried out against official government targets (Government, Military, Police), which equates to a rate of approximately 62%. Comparatively,

AQI targeted similar government and official entities at a rate of 83.5% during a similar period from 2004-2006.<sup>31</sup>

**Figure 6.2: GSPC Targets (2006-2007)<sup>32</sup>**

Target Type	Number of Incidents (2006-2008)
Business	13
Government (General)	16
Military	72
Police	63
Private Citizens, Property	59
Terrorists/Non-State Militias	7
Tourists	4
Unknown	4
Utilities	6

*Data Source:* National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, Global Terrorism Database [data file], 2013, accessed July 1, 2015, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

As a comparison, the rate of targeting government entities remained roughly the same following the rebranding of GSPC to AQIM from 2007-2014. Of the 265 attacks, approximately 66% were carried out against the same government, police, and military forces from the previous sample.<sup>33</sup> As shown in Figure 6.3, the diversification of targets did increase, but this is most likely attributed to the increased time period and sample size. Based on this comparison, AQIM did not amend its targeting profile in any significant way once it affiliated with AQC leadership. This can possibly be explained by the long history of previous iterations of the Algerian Islamist

<sup>31</sup> National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, *Global Terrorism Database* [data file], 2013, accessed May 5, 2015, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

<sup>32</sup> Chart created by the author.

<sup>33</sup> National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, *Global Terrorism Database* [data file], 2013, accessed May 5, 2015, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

movement, which was absent in both the AQI and AQAP case study. Long defined by fissures and competing ideologies under previous names and leaders, AQIM's targeting profile appears to have been more ingrained.

**Figure 6.3: AQIM Targets (2007-2014)<sup>34</sup>**

<b>Target Type</b>	<b>Number of Incidents (2007-2014)</b>
Airports and Aircraft	1
Business	17
Educational Institution	4
Government (Diplomatic)	13
Government (General)	19
Journalists, Media	2
Military	79
NGO	3
Other	2
Police	64
Private Citizens, Property	41
Religious Figures/Institutions	3
Transportation	5
Terrorists/Non-State Militias	4
Tourists	6
Unknown	2
Utilities	7

*Data Source:* National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, Global Terrorism Database [data file], 2013, accessed July 1, 2015, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

Additionally, upon the formal affiliation of AQIM within the larger AQE, the North Africa group immediately planned and conducted a large-scale, prolific attack on the UN Headquarters in Algiers. This attack was also followed by several more attacks in Algerian

<sup>34</sup> Chart created by the author.

cities, with the supposed attempt of gaining increased credibility with the global jihadist community.<sup>35</sup>

The targeting of gas and oil facilities was also a hallmark of all previous manifestations of AQIM, as both the GIA and GSPC had a history of targeting such facilities.<sup>36</sup> However, data indicates that AQIM operations against oil and natural gas facilities were surprisingly absent from the period of formal alignment with AQC until 2013. However, in January 2013, AQIM militants conducted a daring attack on the *In Amenas* natural gas facility near the Libyan border, which supposedly was carried out in response to the Algerian Government's decision to allow France the use of Algerian airspace to conduct military strikes in Mali.<sup>37</sup> This attack resulted in the death of 58 people.<sup>38</sup> Figure 6.4 shows trading price of natural gas during the months leading up to this attack, with the arrow marking the date of the attack itself.

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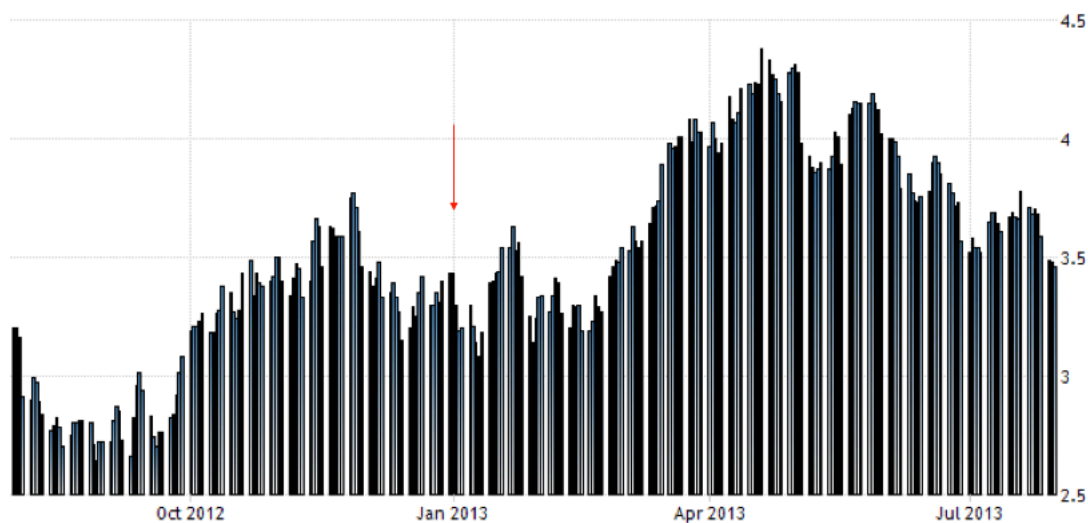
<sup>35</sup> William Thornberry and Jaclyn Levy, "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, Case Study Number 4, September 2011, 3, accessed 13 June 2016, <https://www.ciaonet.org/attachments/18990/uploads>.

<sup>36</sup> Gal Luft and Anne Korin, *Energy Security Challenges for the 21st Century*, ABC-CLIO (2009), 23.

<sup>37</sup> Lamine Chikhi, "Dozens held after Islamists attack Algerian gas field," Reuters, January 16, 2013. Accessed 30 July 2016. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-algeria-kidnap-idUKBRE90F0IN20130116>.

<sup>38</sup> "Algeria: Regional Security In Spotlight Following AQIM Attack On Gas Facilities," Natural Gas Europe, (January 21, 2013), accessed 14 June 2016, <http://www.naturalgaseurope.com/algeria-aqim-attack-on-gas-facilities>.

**Figure 6.4: Natural Gas Price, August 2012-August 2013 (MMBtu/USD)<sup>39</sup>**



Source: Trading Economics, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/commodity/crude-oil>.

A glance at this chart will reveal that this attack occurred during an upswing in the trading price of natural gas, but there simply is not enough evidence to conclude that this attack was conducted in correspondence with this increase or that AQIM sought to exploit this increase to compound the effects of the attack. What stands out more consistently is the decision of AQIM not to target these facilities prior to 2013, even though Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda Central sanctioned the targeting of such facilities in 2004.<sup>40</sup>

According to a separate RAND study conducted on the evolution of GSPC/AQIM attacks, Christopher Chivvis and Andrew Liepman conclude that AQIM expanded attacks; both in terms of area and frequency, once the formal affiliation took place under official Al-Qaeda

<sup>39</sup> Author added graphics to existing chart.

<sup>40</sup> Tim Pippard, “‘Oil-Qaeda’: Jihadist Threats to the Energy Sector,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2010), accessed 30 July 2016. <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/103/html>.

sponsorship.<sup>41</sup> It appears as though this targeting philosophy was aimed at displaying a growing capability to affect the wider North Africa region as a whole and not just targets in and around Algiers. The decision to expand beyond the traditional areas around the capitol could certainly be explained by AQIM's desire to distance itself from the traditional Algerian independence movement.

A main issue with AQIM maintaining any sort of momentum in its operational targeting regime was the overall lack of viable targets, especially in the southern part of Algeria and the Sahara region in general.<sup>42</sup> Moving forward, Geoff Porter concludes that this lack of viable targets in the south could force AQIM to return much of its attention to the north in order to maintain relevance and credibility.<sup>43</sup> Figure 6.5 reflects Porter's assessment, as this graphic depicts the numbers of attacks carried out by Belmokhtar's group in the south and the relative small numbers of overall attacks.

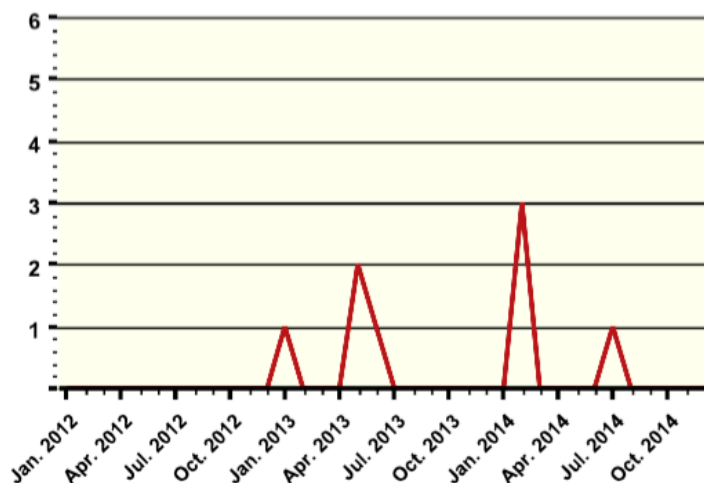
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<sup>41</sup> Christopher S. Chivvis and Andrew Liepman, "North Africa's Menace: AQIM's Evolution and the U.S. Policy Response," *RAND Corporation* (2013), 3.

<sup>42</sup> Geoff D. Porter, "AQIM's Objectives in North Africa," 8.

<sup>43</sup> Geoff D. Porter, "AQIM's Objectives in North Africa," 8.

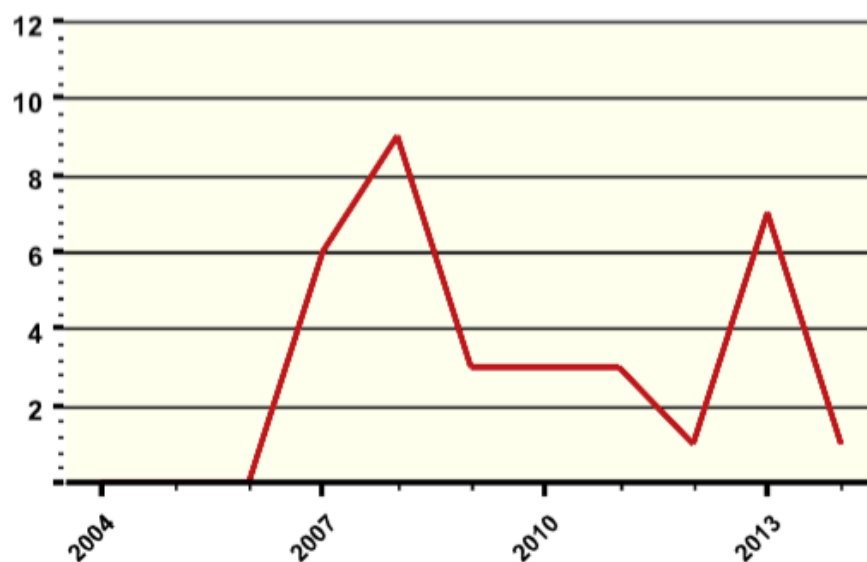
**Figure 6.5: Al-Muaqi'oone bi Dima (Those Who Sign in Blood) Attacks (2012-2014)**



*Data Source:* National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, *Global Terrorism Database* [data file], 2016, accessed August 14, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

As a result, AQIM elements began to expand into Libya after the fall of the Gadhafi regime in 2011, looking to raise a force there to further its own interests. This move was also heavily endorsed and encouraged by Ayman al-Zawahiri.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, the use of suicide as an attack medium also increased when the GSPC changed its moniker to AQIM and formally affiliated with the Al-Qaeda brand. Figure 6.6 shows the total numbers of suicide attacks carried out by AQIM between 2006-2014.

<sup>44</sup> Nic Robertson and Paul Cruickshank, "Al Qaeda sends fighters to Libya", CNN Online, December 30, 2011, accessed 30 August 2016. <http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2011/12/30/al-qaeda-sends-fighters-to-libya/>.

**Figure 6.6: AQIM Suicide Attacks (2006-2014)**

*Data Source:* National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, *Global Terrorism Database* [data file], 2016, accessed August 14, 2016, retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

## FINANCING OPERATIONS

Since its formal affiliation, AQIM has been known to utilize kidnapping, drug trafficking, and human smuggling to fund its activities.<sup>45</sup> AQIM's expansion into other parts of North Africa, to include its transition into the Sahara and away from Mediterranean operations, has been driven not by its religious duty, but rather to expand its human trafficking networks and black market contraband networks, to include a large focus on cigarette smuggling.<sup>46</sup> Some reports have even suggested that cigarette smuggling became the primary financing vehicle for AQIM operations.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Laremont, *Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb*, 140-145.

<sup>46</sup> Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM: The Evolution of an Algerian Islamist Terrorist Group into an Al-Qa'ida Affiliate and Its Implications for the Sahara-Sahel Region," 19.

<sup>47</sup> Kate Wilson, "Terrorism and Tobacco: How Cigarettes Finance Jihad and Insurgency Worldwide," *The Cutting Edge* (June 29, 2009), <http://www.thecuttingedgenews.com/index.php?article=11427>.



AQIM also relied heavily on kidnappings and abductions beginning in 2009. Some figures estimate these financial tactics to have netted AQIM \$100 million dollars over a five-year period from 2010-2014.<sup>48</sup> Additional figures estimate that AQIM received approximately \$33 million for the release of four French hostages who were government employees of the French nuclear firm *Areva*.<sup>49</sup> Another primary means of finance of AQIM operations has been the alleged linkage between drug trafficking operations, which originate in Latin and South America, utilizing North Africa waypoints to reach staging areas for entry into Europe.<sup>50</sup>

Ransom payments, human trafficking, and other smuggling operations through its controlled territory to Europe have also heavily funded AQIM operations, demonstrating a much more transnational economic model than any other AQ affiliate in this study. The Libyan Civil War as also provided opportunities for AQIM militants to acquire huge stores of weapons and other military hardware that could be traded on the illicit weapons market. AQIM has also been involved in providing funds to affiliated groups themselves, reportedly providing \$25,000 to Boko Haram in 2012.<sup>51</sup>

With regard to hostage operations and the paying of ransoms, a further fissure occurred between Droukhal and Belmokhtar, setting up the eventual split between the northern and southern contingents of AQIM. Belmokhtar challenged the idea that AQIM should be involved in hostage taking because he believed that it would bring about undue attention from Western authorities that could interfere with regional operations. He also claimed that hostage taking and

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<sup>48</sup> Tom Keatinge, "Finances of jihad: How extremist groups raise money," BBC News (12 December 2014), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30393832>.

<sup>49</sup> "Remarks of Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David Cohen before the Center for a New American Security on "Confronting New Threats in Terrorist Financing," U.S. Department of Treasury (March 4, 2014), accessed 14 June 2016, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl2308.aspx>.

<sup>50</sup> Tom Keatinge, "Finances of jihad: How extremist groups raise money," BBC News (12 December 2014), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30393832>.

<sup>51</sup> Tom Keatinge, "Finances of jihad: How extremist groups raise money," BBC News (12 December 2014), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30393832>.

the acquisition of ransoms was not religiously sanctioned as part of a greater jihad. This issue was put toward AQIM's Legal Committee, which ruled in favor of instituting kidnapping operations. Belmokhtar apparently never forgave this this betrayal, further fueling his desire to split from Droukdal's leadership.<sup>52</sup>

## DIVERSIFICATION

Algerians played a significant role in Al-Qaeda from its earliest period. The socio-political conditions present in Algeria, borne from prolonged French occupation and a subsequent vicious and bloody war for independence, created a cadre of willing fighters that eventually found themselves fighting alongside the Afghan-Arabs. As the previously mentioned Sageman study details, Algerians made up roughly eight percent of Al-Qaeda's core numbers prior to 9/11.<sup>53</sup>

However, Algeria did not receive the blowback effect that so many other states experienced with returning foreign fighters flowing back from the Afghan jihad. At the beginning of the 1991 conflict inside Algeria, less than ten foreign fighters were present among the GIA. Of those few fighters that were documented, all were of Saudi origin.<sup>54</sup>

By 2010, AQIM was believed to have somewhere between 400 and 800 members.<sup>55</sup> It remains unclear as to the level of foreign fighter presence within AQIM. Instead of being an importer of foreign fighters, it appears as though AQIM was much more of an exporter of its personnel to more popular and globally significant theaters of conflict. In more recent years, AQIM has maintained a socially hierarchical framework for its organization, with Algerians

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<sup>52</sup> Mathieu Guid'ere, "The Timbuktu Letters : New Insights about AQIM," *Res Militaris*, Res Militaris, 2014, pp.25. <hal-01081769>.

<sup>53</sup> Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 70.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters," *International Security* 35, no. 3 (Winter 2010/11): 61.

<sup>55</sup> "Fresh thinking urged to fight terrorism in Sahel," *Middle East Online* (October 8, 2010): 1, <http://middle-east-online.com/english/?id=41806>.

being considered the elites of the organization, while those members from Sub-Saharan Africa have been treated as second-class members. This has likely led to non-Algerians deciding to join other organizations that are more ethnically homogenous.

Additionally, AQIM has been much more open to cooperation with other regional jihadist groups than other AQ affiliates. Due to the territorial nuances of North Africa and the Sahel region spanning its upper tier, AQIM developed relationships with a variety of groups across the region. In addition to its integration within the Tuareg tribes in the south, AQIM also has developed relationships with groups like Ansar al Sharia in Tunisia and Libya, Ansar al-Dine in Mali and Mauritania, as well as Ansaru and Boko Haram in Nigeria.<sup>56</sup>

Little is known about the organizational hierarchy of AQIM. It's deep roots and early reservations about foreigners playing any significant role in the Algerian struggle suggests that the command structure would be completely Algerian in nature. Although Algerians played a large role in both the Soviet jihad period of the 1980s and during the Chechnya campaigns in the 1990s, it is unlikely that any other nationalities have found themselves in leadership positions within AQIM. In fact, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey claimed that AQIM was less hierarchical in nature and more a conglomerate of various factions that come together from time to time to coordinate and plan operations.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, the presence of a variety of jihadist organizations through the Sahara and Sahel regions likely points to ethnicities and nationalities gravitating toward movements within their own countries. The barriers to entry are much lower for those seeking to join such

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<sup>56</sup> Christopher S. Chivvis and Andrew Liepman, "North Africa's Menace: AQIM's Evolution and the U.S. Policy Response," *RAND Corporation* (2013), 7.

<sup>57</sup> Zachary Laub and Jonathan Masters, "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)," CFR Backgrounders, Council on Foreign Relations, accessed 31 July 2016. <http://www.cfr.org/terrorist-organizations-and-networks/al-qaeda-islamic-maghreb-aqim/p12717>.

movements, and the potential political and social benefits, as explained previously, are much higher for those fighters choosing to participate in organizations closer to home.

## SYNTHESIS

The affiliation between AQIM and AQC was one borne out of convenience, much like the relationship forged between AQC and AQI. The formalized Algerian resistance movement, which proliferated during the struggle for independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s showed signs of success. While states like Egypt continued to harness the momentum of the ideas of secularism and Arab nationalism, Algeria successfully repelled its European masters through a renewed focus on consolidation with Islamic overtones. Although similar to AQI in terms of the benefit offered to UBL and AQC to grow its brand, AQIM appeared to be a much more lucrative deal for AQC leadership. As Christopher S. Chivvis and Andrew Liepman explain, “the appearance of expansion to a new continent was good for public relations at a time when Al Qaeda faced worldwide counterterrorism operations. Expansion into Africa demonstrated growing reach, continued resilience, and the type of energy that wins recruits. AQIM, in other words, supports Al Qaeda’s global aspirations by its very existence; it need not attack the West to do so.”<sup>58</sup>

As depicted throughout the chapter, AQIM, despite being the farthest removed from the traditional center of the AQ-inspired movement, displayed perhaps the highest level of effort in attempting to cultivate the larger AQ network and aligning itself with the aims of the transnational movement. AQIM was highly involved in operations in Iraq with AQI, as well as with AQAP, and provided fighters and expertise on a variety of battlefields. Additionally, in 2012, correspondence was exchanged between Nasir al-Wuhayshi, AQAP’s Emir, and Abdel

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<sup>58</sup> Christopher S. Chivvis and Andrew Liepman, “North Africa’s Menace: AQIM’s Evolution and the U.S. Policy Response,” *RAND Corporation* (2013), 4.

Malik Droukdal on the point of governance.<sup>59</sup> In this regard, AQIM not only sought to align itself with the core tenets of AQC, but also sought to understand the impacts it could have in cultivating popular support among the local populace through good governance, a point completely missed by AQI under Zarqawi's reign.

For AQIM, its adoption of the Al-Qaeda narrative of total focus on the far enemy seemed to take root quite well, but its inability, or lack of desire, to more fully integrate into the AQC network solidified its isolation from the goals of AQC. Rather, AQIM found much more in common, both ideologically and operationally, with AQI, supporting operations in Iraq with a steady flow of foreign fighters. AQIM also received increased awareness on tactics and advanced explosives, to include suicide vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIEDs) from their Iraqi counterparts. Balancing both the domestic and transnational agenda became an important component for AQIM. AQIM displayed a significant reduction of rhetoric toward the Algerian regime, highlighting a tangible break between the ideology of the GSPC and the newly minted Al-Qaeda affiliate in North Africa.

AQIM's targeting regime experienced a rapid increase in the numbers of attacks attributed to the organization following the formal association with AQC. More high-profile attacks were underscored, perhaps in order to show a degree of worthiness to the larger movement and to venerate its ascension into the jihadi mainstream. Despite this increase, the types of targets pursued by AQIM as opposed to the GSPC prior to formal alignment were basically the same.

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<sup>59</sup> Zimmerman, Katherine L. 2013. Testimony: AQAP's Role in the Al Qaeda Network. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute. Accessed 24 July 2016.  
[http://www.criticalthreats.org/sites/default/files/pdf\\_upload/analysis/Zimmerman\\_AQAPs\\_Role\\_in\\_the\\_al\\_Qaeda\\_Network\\_September\\_2013.pdf](http://www.criticalthreats.org/sites/default/files/pdf_upload/analysis/Zimmerman_AQAPs_Role_in_the_al_Qaeda_Network_September_2013.pdf).

Gas facilities also remained absent from AQIM's targeting regime for a majority of the years analyzed here. In 2013, the attacks on the *In Amenas* facility represent the only legitimately attributable attacks to AQIM on such facilities. Furthermore, it is unclear if AQIM or perhaps an offshoot conducted these attacks. What is clear is that these types of attacks ever really constituted any significance for AQIM. The decision to begin targeting such facilities could be as a result of the overall lack of significant targets in the region, a point indicated by previous research that suggests that this obstacle could drive AQIM to expand its reach further to maintain credibility.

Suicide attacks also represented a significant portion of the chosen manner in which attacks were carried out under AQIM. In 2007 and its formal affiliation, AQIM demonstrated a large increase in the use of suicide tactics. It is possible to point to the established linkages with AQI and the use of suicide in Iraq under its leadership there, but previously discussed data indicated that AQI had begun to appreciably reduce the numbers of suicide attacks by the end of Zarqawi's reign and the period of a named Al-Qaeda affiliate in Iraq. What is more likely is the AQIM sought to demonstrate a renewed devotion to the AQ doctrine, which clearly supported the use of suicide as a weapon.

In terms of its financing model, AQIM employed a much wider variety of resources. It is speculated that AQIM is quite involved in such areas as human trafficking, drug smuggling, and other black market activities. It is widely known that kidnappings and ransom payments have sustained the group for some time. However, disagreements over the justification of certain funding streams drove a wedge between AQIM leadership, producing challengers to AQIM's sovereignty throughout Algeria and greater North Africa.

Levels of diversification of AQIM ranks also appear to be quite low. Although data of AQIM membership is much less available than other affiliates, all indications are that AQIM remained staunchly opposed to allowing other nationalities to assume any meaningful positions of leadership in the organizations. Although other splinter groups attempted to increase diversity, the lack of data speaks to the challenges of doing just that. This lack of willingness of AQIM, and relatedly the lack of desire by other nationalities to pursue membership in AQIM is perhaps indicative of the fringe status that remains in terms of AQIM's role in the larger Islamic jihadi movement.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSIONS

This study focused on assessing Al-Qaeda and its main affiliates across time and across four separate variables in order to provide an analysis of the Al-Qaeda Enterprise's evolution from 2001 to 2014. When compared, these individual case studies revealed patterns that will be useful when these findings are overlaid over similar groups that could be classified as derivatives of AQC and its main affiliates and as part of some future research. As the Islamic State and other related groups continue to lead the latest manifestation of an ever-evolving embodiment of transnational Islamic terrorism, this study's findings certainly are applicable to these new incarnations. At the time of this writing, other groups, such as the Al-Nusra Front in Syria, an Al-Qaeda offshoot, is in the process of redrafting its brand to demonstrate a definitive break with other groups that it obviously wants to refrain from being associated with. This comes years after the Islamic State itself began the process of distancing itself from the traditional Al-Qaeda organizational leadership. Although the findings of this study cannot definitively describe the phenomenon of evolution and rebranding, these findings do highlight trends that should be considered when assessing similar groups in the future.

Since 9/11, Western conventional wisdom has maintained that the Al-Qaeda network is an ever-changing organization and a very real manifestation of a global Salafist revival. In terms of whether Al-Qaeda serves as the overarching collective that shapes and manages major groups like the Islamic State, Al-Shabab, or even Boko Haram, all of which are groups that share similar ideological views, is a bridge too far. Certainly, the actions, success, and failures of Al-Qaeda over the past fourteen years continue to remain a part of the culture of any group espousing similar worldviews. However, the ebb and flow of the organizational proximity that these



groups have with an overarching authority depends on many factors, some of which were highlighted in this study.

Likewise, in terms of the manner in which it attempted to accomplish its goals of unifying the charged masses in a coordinated and just direction, Al-Qaeda sought to harness the collective efforts of various groups across the wider Muslim world to fulfill its orchestrated ends. As Daniel Byman sums up, “The popular image of al Qaeda is of an organization that draws its membership from disillusioned Muslims who, infuriated by U.S. support for Israel or intervention in the Muslim world -- and beguiled by the idea of a universal caliphate -- go off to join the fight. But in fact, much of al Qaeda's growth in the last decade has been the kind of expansion that any American businessman would recognize: They've systematically tried to absorb regional jihadist start-ups, both venerable and newly created, and convince them that their struggle is a component of al Qaeda's sweeping international agenda -- and vice versa.”<sup>1</sup> In that regard, the view that Al-Qaeda’s leadership of the global jihadi movement, although powerful, compelling, and arguably very successful, should be categorized as simply a snapshot in time of the wider global movement. This is neither the beginning, nor the end, of the continued evolution of this movement.

Based on this snapshot in time, from 2001 to 2014, AQ affiliates in Iraq, Yemen, and Algeria all attempted to alter their respective organizations in order to harness the momentum generated by Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda’s skyrocketing infamy following its actions in 2001. Each affiliate, when measured across four distinct variables, demonstrated similar trends of assimilation, followed by a more lasting period of divergence, both ideologically and operationally. In that sense, the affiliates of Al-Qaeda did indeed increase the wider influence of

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel L. Byman, “Al Qaeda's M&A Strategy”, Brookings, December 7, 2010. Accessed 27 July 2016. <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2010/12/07-al-qaeda-byman>.

Al-Qaeda core leadership across a wider area and region, especially among receptive Muslim youth across the world. However, in reality, this translated to a much more diluted operational influence, command and control over named affiliates, and a further irrelevance within the community.

The reality is that Al-Qaeda, either as an organization or simply an idea, is not fixed, or was its strategy of fragmentation and affiliation prescriptive in any meaningful way. Each affiliate was shown to have its own agendas and philosophies, which many times ran counter to traditional AQ beliefs. Explaining what Al-Qaeda is or isn't, what capabilities it has or does not have, and the nature of the threat it poses to the West, is complex. As has been mentioned, the concepts of victory for Al-Qaeda differ from western views. Are we winning the war against Al-Qaeda? Is Al-Qaeda in decline? These questions limit our understanding of what Al-Qaeda is and what it represents to the overall global jihadi movement. Brian Jenkins provides the following interpretation:

To Al-Qaeda, strategy is a matter of revelation and reinterpretation as events unfold. Strategy does not envision a sequence of military operations leading to victory. Operations are the strategy. Terrorist attacks need not be connected to one another. Each attack awakens the Muslim community, spreads Al-Qaeda's message, builds an army of believers, brings new recruits. It is a jihadist's duty to demonstrate his conviction, his commitment, by fighting to defend Islam, making him worthy of God. Al-Qaeda's jihad is process-oriented, not progress-oriented.<sup>2</sup>

If Jenkins' assessment is true, then the dilution or general lack of control of named affiliates simply does not matter in terms of accomplishing the wider goals of the jihadi movement. If Al-Qaeda and its leaders can provide some level of inspiration, causing adherents to carry out attacks or espouse a certain philosophy in the name of Islam, then the desired end state has been met. The concept of describing Al-Qaeda's evolution as a constant state of

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<sup>2</sup> Brian Michael Jenkins "Al Qaeda in its Third Decade: Irreversible Decline or Imminent Victory?" (Occasional Paper, RAND Corporation, 2012), 9.

“revelation and reinterpretation” is a revelation in itself. When this logic is applied to views like those of Fawaz Gerges, who determines that the failures of Al-Qaeda can be linked to the incompatibility of Al-Qaeda’s core ideology to the universal aspirations of most Arabs, and who describes Al-Qaeda as nothing more than “roving bands limited to the mountains and valleys of Pakistan tribal areas”<sup>3</sup>, we find ourselves no closer to understanding the true nature Al-Qaeda as a movement or as an organization. Rather, this study of affiliates points us toward a need to seek greater understanding of the dynamics within the societies which these groups operate and less about a top-down driven ideology and the ability to control that will ultimately be subsumed under some domestic incarnation and orientation. As the maxim states, “All politics are local”. This seems hold true for the affiliates of Al-Qaeda as well.

Mapping Al-Qaeda and its affiliates over time does not produce clear-cut lines that indicate an organization that can be traced in such a manner. What is relevant, and what this study has demonstrated, is that the patterns of evolution provide insights that can be used in predicting the evolution of other like groups such as the Islamic State or other future groups. The phenomenon of affiliation, pledging loyalty and subservience to a higher authority, has continued under IS leadership of the global jihadi movement at present day. Rather, it is perhaps possible to sum up the role that Al-Qaeda attempted to play in the global jihadi movement by describing it as a global import and export conglomerate that served as both a physical and virtual wholesaler of terrorist activities and capabilities.<sup>4</sup>

To describe Al-Qaeda’s global campaign as a failure, although perhaps true, does little to offer insights into the AQ-inspired groups that will certainly rise in the vacuum left from its

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<sup>3</sup> Gerges, *The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Haider Ali Hussein Mullick, “Power by Proxy: Al-Qaida in Pakistan,” in *Al-Qaida After Ten Years of War: A Global Perspective of Successes, Failures, and Prospects*, eds. Cigar and Kramer (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2011), 166.

recession. The inevitability of Al-Qaeda grasp on the global jihadi movement may have been driven by other factors, the least of which was any failures on the part of Al-Qaeda itself. This erosion can possibly be explained through the sheer volume of proliferation of Salafi-jihadi organizations and worldwide membership. According to a 2014 RAND study, the number of distinctive Salafist groups across the globe grew fifty-eight percent from 2010 to 2013.<sup>5</sup> This same study also documents the doubling of Salafi-jihadi fighters during his same period, with estimates of global Salafi-jihadists numbering over 100,000 members.<sup>6</sup> As estimates show, core Al-Qaeda numbered maybe 1000 members in 2001, with some estimates suggesting only a few hundred.<sup>7</sup>

With so few members and with reduced resources, it could perhaps be expected that Al-Qaeda's place at the head of the jihadi table be bound to fall. Although the 9/11 attacks were unrivaled in their inspiratory power, it appears as though not even the most famous terrorist attack of all time was enough to propel Al-Qaeda through the difficulties it faced in the fifteen years since.

## AN EVOLVING IDEOLOGY

In 2001, Bin Laden and the Al-Qaeda organization had fully formed their respective ideology on the manner in which it would be organized and what orientation it would take to fulfill its determined destiny as the Islamic vanguard. Under this context, Al-Qaeda would be completely oriented against the far enemy, primarily the United States and the West, as it developed ways to affect the U.S., both at home and its interest in the wider Middle East. To do this, Al-Qaeda Central worked to facilitate operations across the Muslim world, with strikes

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<sup>5</sup> Seth G. Jones, "A Persistent Threat: The Evolution of al Qaeda and Other Salafi Jihadists," RAND Corporation, 2014), 26.

<sup>6</sup> Jones, "A Persistent Threat: The Evolution of al Qaeda and Other Salafi Jihadists, 26.

<sup>7</sup> David E. Sanger and Mark Mazzetti, "New Estimate of Strength of Al Qaeda Is Offered," *New York Times* (June 30, 2010), <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/01/world/asia/01qaeda.html>.

carried out in predominately Muslim countries and abroad, focusing on fantastic and high profile attacks that shocked the world in their audacity and success.

At the time of the 9/11 attacks and the months to follow, it is difficult to refute that Bin Laden succeeded. Not only did he successfully orchestrate the most deadly attack on the American homeland in the country's history, but he also solidified himself as both the spiritual and rightful head of a global Islamic revival movement. Although Al-Qaeda became severely weakened by the subsequent operations by U.S.-led coalition against his strongholds in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as other safe havens across the world, Bin Laden's actions and those of Al-Qaeda inspired thousands to take up arms against a common enemy. Those that heeded Bin Laden's call found themselves flocking to like-minded groups and organizations in various battlegrounds around of the globe. Those new organizations, which aligned themselves under the Al-Qaeda umbrella, due to realities and time, produced mixed effects as to the extent in which these new affiliates fully adopted the ideology of the Central Authority.

As Iraq became the new battleground for the jihadist cause, Bin Laden was left with little choice but to support the soon-to-be-bestowed Al-Qaeda affiliate in Iraq (AQI). Under the leadership of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, AQI slowly, but ultimately and completely realized that it would be unable to control its so-called "affiliate" in Iraq. From the outset, Zarqawi's philosophy and ideology clashed with that of Al-Qaeda Central, Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. Although little data exists to confirm Al-Qaeda's presence in Iraq before the American invasion in 2003, Iraq certainly proved to be the place that would forever alter the trajectory of the Al-Qaeda Enterprise in the subsequent decade.

In many ways, the failures of AQI during 2004-2005 were inextricably linked to the lessons learned for subsequent groups that bore the title of an AQ affiliate. Whereas AQI failed

to yield to AQC guidance in refraining from targeting civilians and infrastructure, both AQIM and AQAP implemented visible changes to their operational paradigm as evidenced by the targeting data derived in previous chapters. Although some could argue that this evidence is circumstantial, it fits with the ideological narrative developed and delivered by AQAP and AQIM during this period, and is demonstrated in the types of targets upon which these groups carried out attacks following the allegiance of those affiliates to AQC.

As AQI was increasing its operational presence in early-2003 and throughout the summer of that year, Al-Qaeda Central's affiliate in Saudi Arabia was experiencing difficulties of its own. Fractured, with little command and control to focus activities, and under increasing pressure from Saudi security services, the earliest manifestation of AQAP faltered. In the wake of its collapse, the organization migrated to the ungoverned spaces in Yemen to reconstitute itself under new leadership, with an amended ideological framework. At the time of the reestablishment of AQAP in Yemen under the leadership of Nasir al-Wuhayshi, this Al-Qaeda affiliate positioned itself much more in-step with core Al-Qaeda and its traditional ideology. AQAP immediately ramped up attacks on external targets, to include both the U.S. homeland and other external targets, to include attacks on South Korean tourists and the follow-on delegation to investigate the first attack.

However, demonstrating the flexibility of AQAP and a hallmark of successful evolution, AQAP developed a two-tiered ideological approach. This paradigm allowed for the simultaneous focus on both near and far enemy targets, while also developing increased relationships with local tribes to provide the necessary protection and maneuver space throughout Yemen. As the pull to frame its ideological agenda in more localized terms, AQAP eventually pulled away from the Al-Qaeda brand altogether, believing that its goals and

operations would be better served by shaping an operational design and dialectic that was more tailored to Yemen and the Arabian Peninsula as a whole.

AQIM's ideological leanings positioned it as an excellent candidate to be courted by Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda. Nor only did this group provide a much broader reach to AQ activities, but its long history of resistance to Western powers, namely France, carried with it a certain credibility that AQ attempted to harness. Once elements of the GSPC established the named Al-Qaeda affiliate in North Africa, this group instituted measurable changes to its ideological view. AQIM immediately reduced its focus on the Algerian government and its mention in organizational rhetoric, and also began to seek targets that would have more of an international impact. Divisions within the organization prevented AQIM from harnessing its collective efforts, as senior leaders differed drastically on respective strategies.

Overall, the Al-Qaeda ideology envisioned by Bin Laden was not translatable to the affiliates that emerged to fight under its banner. Rather, those groups that were able to tailor the traditional Al-Qaeda ideology to fit the needs of the population among which it operated proved to be much more successful, as was the case with AQAP. The data presented throughout this study, however, does indicate a genuine attempt to adopt traditional AQ principles and tactics, but in all cases, each affiliate quickly realized that this strategy, without tailoring, would ultimately fail.

## EVOLVING TARGETING PROFILES

As the existing literature shows, early AQIC chose to focus on targets of economic impact, vice those of a religious nature. Also, these attacks were more deliberate and calculated. AQIC chose to alter this paradigm completely, choosing to conduct many, quick, and less planned (also cheaper) attacks that focused on religious or sectarian targets, in addition to U.S./Iraqi

forces or government facilities. As an evolutionary point, AQAP maintained similar frequency levels, but whittled down the types of targets that it focused on. AQAP also avoided targeting domestic civilians, for the most part, whereas AQI almost depended upon this intimidation for its own purposes. AQIM, although farthest from the seat of AQ's power, displayed the most rigor in terms of its targeting regime, seeking to align itself with AQC preferences, choosing to target foreign interests in the region, to include economic targets.

AQC had a fairly definitive targeting regime that it ascribed to, coupled with its ideological foundations. Bin Laden and AQC preferred to maintain a complete focus on the West and its interests. The linkage to attacks on U.S. military personnel at Khobar Barracks in Saudi Arabia in 1996, the dual embassy attacks in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, the Millennium plots, to include the Ressay plots in 1999, the attacks on U.S. warships in the Middle East in 2000, and of course the 9/11 attacks, all highlight Al-Qaeda's preferences and the type of targets that it sought to engage.

The transition of focus to Iraq in the lead-up to the American invasion in 2003 would suggest that the Al-Qaeda Enterprise would have many targets of opportunity in the form of thousands of U.S. and coalition forces, to include facilities and equipment. Although AQI clearly devoted much of its effort to targeting coalition forces, it devoted too much effort on internal Iraqi political targets, intimidating the Iraqi population as a whole, and attempting to sow the seeds of civil war by provoking the majority Shiite population in Iraq. Left on its own with only pleas from the Central Authority to alter its trajectory, and especially with the strong-arm style of Zarqawi, AQI rampaged, totally splitting from AQC in terms of both its ideology and associated targeting preferences. As noted, this quickly eroded support for AQI and the wider Al-Qaeda movement.



AQAP, following its reemergence, instituted a much more efficient and palpable targeting pattern. The data indicates that AQAP reduced the targeting of civilians and civil infrastructure, while simultaneously ramping up the frequency of attacks on government and security forces. AQAP did not engage in the level of sectarian attacks that AQI so focused, even though it did have the opportunity to do so with a large non-Sunni population in Yemen. It appears as though the failures of AQI and its missteps were clearly addressed by AQAP.

AQIM's targeting program altered significantly after aligning itself with AQC, with measurable differences being observed in both the frequency and territorial scale of its attacks. Upon its formal affiliation, AQIM registered a large spike in the numbers of attacks in 2007 and AQIM's use of suicide attacks also peaked during this same period. Other than a spike in 2013, AQIM was not able to sustain the same levels of suicide attacks over time.

The lack of interests in targeting oil and natural gas facilities is also significant. Although Bin Laden clearly sanctioned and encouraged these types of attacks, none of the affiliates demonstrated any significant focus on these targets. Although some affiliates did conduct attacks on these facilities, the data does not indicate that affiliates targeted the energy sectors based on economic impacts

## FINANCING MODEL TRENDS

From 2001 to 2014, Al-Qaeda and its main affiliates evolved its financing models in order to exploit the resources necessary to fund its operations and maintain organization viability. Although kidnappings and ransoms would become a major source of revenue for groups like AQAP and AQIM by 2012, no evidence exists that Al-Qaeda operated in such a way prior to the franchising of its brand to other groups. Over time, Al-Qaeda transitioned its reliance on the extensive charitable networks that siphoned funds from wealthy donors across the

wider Arab world and beyond to more cruder methods. Although the expectations of groups exploring and implementing alternative strategies to fund operations under growing pressures from Bin Laden to quickly become self-sufficient as soon as possible, the methods incorporated by AQ affiliates challenged traditional AQ philosophies.

Al-Qaeda and Bin Laden, especially in its earliest years, saw the financial support that it received as part of the Islamic charity networks as a sanctioning of sorts by the Muslim world. As these funds continued to flow into Afghanistan, it galvanized Bin Laden's mission and sanctioned his personal vision of Al-Qaeda's future, believing it to be supported by Muslims worldwide. Not surprisingly, the United States focused much of its attention on these charitable networks to isolate Al-Qaeda and restrict its ability to continue to operate in such a manner.

At the time that AQI established itself in Iraq at the end of 2002 and the beginning of 2003, the Islamic charity network had been exposed. This prevented AQI from marinating extensive external funding sources, forcing the group to resort to methods that could be cultivated and sustained in war-torn Iraq. As shown in Chapter 4, AQI implemented financing methods that focused on the black market, sale of stolen property, and a limited ability to exhort a form of taxation on the citizens in its operational area, to include Anbar Province. Coupled with its disregard for the security of Iraqis, both Sunni and Shia, in its violent campaign of terror, AQI's methods of finance accelerated its demise, as its base of support was quickly eroded.

AQAP, because it operated among the wealthy donors throughout Saudi Arabia that formed the foundation of the charity networks, appeared not to be as affected by the restrictions that befell these networks that AQC relied upon so heavily. However, over time, AQAP was also forced to amend its funding sources. It appears that AQAP received the highest level of monetary support from AQC, at least initially. This can perhaps be traced to Bin Laden's notion

that Yemen and the Arabian Peninsula as a whole could eventually serve as the next base of operations for Al-Qaeda Central. In that sense, financial support to AQAP by AQC could have been simply an investment for its future. It is also likely that AQAP continued to receive some level of support from the Saleh regime in Yemen, as this was the case during the resettlement period following the end of the Arab-Afghan period.

Primarily, AQAP transitioned to a heavy reliance on ransom and kidnappings to fund its activities. It avoided the taxation of locals that contributed to the collapse of AQI and its loss of control over the movement there in previous years. For AQAP, the utilization of kidnapping and ransoms left the Yemeni population, especially the tribes that provided a great deal of support for AQAP, unaffected and unburdened. The heavy reliance on kidnappings eventually demanded open support by AQC and the blessing of Zawahiri himself. In comparison, AQI did engage in kidnapping operations, but data shows that these kidnappings were not conducted to derive ransom payments but were done for other reasons, to include intimidation, promoting instability, and as bargaining tools for prisoner exchanges.

AQIM, isolated in geography and ideology, appeared to have embraced alternative financing methods from the beginning. Human trafficking, various forms of smuggling, and the drug trade all appear to have been open to execution. However, ideological splits did occur between AQIM leadership over the use of kidnappings and ransoms that further solidified a divergence and fustier within the group.

Over the period of the study, it is obvious that the financial methods employed by the Al-Qaeda Enterprise evolved and adapted to its new reality. As Steve Lewis identifies, "Militant Islamic groups appear to have moved on from the early al-Qaida model, which involved receiving the bulk of its funding from deep-pocketed donors. Now the bulk of finances for

recruitment, training, and arms purchases comes from kidnapping and from extracting revenue from territories under control.”<sup>8</sup>

## TRENDS ON DIVERSIFICATION

In 2001, Al-Qaeda drew much of its appeal and gravitas from the inclusion of a variety of members from across not only the Arab world, but various other countries as well. Bin Laden was very focused on ensuring that Arabs of all countries of origin would now have a place of importance in the global jihad. Throughout the 1980s, Arabs played a secondary role to the Afghans throughout the Soviet conflict. Sageman’s data presented on the make-up of AQ ranks around the time of 9/11 indicates that Saudis, Egyptians, and Algerians made up the largest contingent within the organization. However, the overwhelming presence of Egyptians within the highest leadership levels created some animosities by non-Egyptians, and predetermined the Egyptian role within the organization. This appears to have been a sign of things to come.

AQI had a relatively high level of diversification within its ranks. Led by the Jordanian Zarqawi, AQI appeared to draw a good deal of strength in its ability to recruit and process thousands of foreign fighters from nearly every county throughout the Arab world who were seeking combat against the United States and Coalition Forces. However, over time, it appears as though the diminished prospects of non-Iraqis gaining anything more than being sent to conduct suicide attacks potentially weakened this once strong diversity. Although different opinions exist as to the make-up of AQI by the mid-2000s, the most compelling evidence suggests that non-Iraqi participation reduced drastically.

AQAP, by design, remained dominated by Saudis and Yemenis. Over time, this trend did not change. Although the organizational structure was amended to reflect the need to create a

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<sup>8</sup> Steve Lewis, "Financing terrorism," *Acuity* 2, no. 2 (March 2015): 20-26, <https://www.ebscohost.com/ACADEMIC/business-source-complete>.

more centralized structure, the roles played by Saudi and Yemenis in an apparent power-sharing relationship proved to be foundational to the organization. Similarly, AQIM remained almost completely Algerian, at least in the upper leadership levels. Indications do suggest that other non-Algerians began to play a role in AQIM, especially in the south; however, AQIM's resistance to foreign influence shaped its policies on this issue, dissuading any meaningful involvement by foreigners within the group.

Therefore, between 2001-2014, the Al-Qaeda Enterprise evolved from an inclusive and “welcoming” organization to a series of ethnically and nationally exclusive organizations that were much less welcoming to outsiders; even those outsiders were committed to a similar cause. It is possible that the AQI disaster hardened other groups from the role of outsiders in hijacking a movement that perhaps had much more historical foundations, such as the Algerian independence movement did.

Not only did the Al-Qaeda Enterprise experience changes in the levels of diversification across its network and within the specific regional affiliates over time, the types of fighters drawn to the larger jihadist movement, and those that Al-Qaeda looked to recruit, was driven less by religious duty or true understanding of Islam, but rather more in search of a movement that sought to challenge the accepted international status-quo. As Oliver Roy points out, many of those radicalized Muslims who joined Al-Qaeda's ranks did not have a great deal of religious training or education (with the exception of the Saudi contingent). Of those that were educated, many were Western-educated and had a scientific background. This cadre was a “mix of educated middle-class leaders and working-class dropouts, a pattern reminiscent of most West-European radicals of the 1970s and 1980s.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Oliver Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for the New Umma*, Columbia University Press, 2004, 48.

## DEGREES OF DECENTRALIZATION AND COOPERATION

It is unclear whether AQC and Bin Laden envisioned a high level of cooperation among affiliates. Although planning did occur for the expansion to various theaters, little evidence exists that indicates cooperative intent. From the earliest days of Al-Qaeda, it has been about competition among those that have sought to champion the jihad. This trend continues today. Challenges remain as to who controls the strategic narrative and who is in charge. As the United States embarked on its so-called Global War on Terror (GWOT), regional affiliates emerged that were able to exploit the increased pressures against them, thus creating an opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities against the United States as their own autonomous entity, versus one that answered to another higher headquarters. UBL, intentionally or otherwise, became a spiritual advisor only, a mere figurehead of a movement that he created and ushered into the modern period. Although Bin Laden attempted to exert control over affiliate groups, his seclusion prevented him from really planning and conducting operations following the U.S. response after 9/11.

In a striking example of an overt failure of establishing cooperation among AQ affiliates, it was reported by Moroccan intelligence that an attempt to build a wider partnership between AQAP and AQIM sometime during 2011 ended with the decapitation of the AQAP representative while in Algeria. According to the same official, he stated that the North African group did not like working with any other AQ groups, only AQC.<sup>10</sup>

As Bin Laden's star continued to rise, he began to harden his beliefs on how the global jihad campaign should be ordered. At first content to play the role of financier and cheerleader for the movement, he eventually became set on developing his own unique movement that would

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<sup>10</sup> Craig Whitlock, "Al-Qaeda's Yemen affiliate widens search for recruits and targets," *Washington Post* (November 30, 2010): <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/29/AR2010112905459.html?sid=ST2010112905490>.

serve as a new way of championing the global struggle. Either through ideological rifts or due to the increasing paranoia of having his group infiltrated or attacked by Western governments, Bin Laden became more and more wary of those leaders who wanted to exert their own influence and power beyond the control of Bin Laden himself and AQC. As has been concluded in other analyses, Bin Laden, and subsequently AQC, viewed themselves as “first among equals” and a cadre that was much more religiously pious and aware than the affiliated movements that sought to carry out jihad in its name.<sup>11</sup>

Almost immediately after gaining operational capability in Iraq, AQI and Zarqawi diverted its ideological approach from AQC and Bin Laden’s brand. Zarqawi’s targeting of Muslims as part of a wider strategy against Shiites in Iraq and their related Shia positioning in the new Iraqi government totally drew the focus away from Muslim solidarity that was required for Bin Laden’s vision to continue. Instead, AQI hijacked the AQ brand, as Bin Laden and Zawahiri sought to gain some sort of control over AQI actions. “Despite Zawahiri’s misgivings, Zarqawi’s strategy seemed to work well, as Al Qaeda in Iraq mounted a broad insurgency and for several years controlled some of the Sunni-populated parts of Iraq.”<sup>12</sup>

In that regard, the experiences of AQI totally altered the trajectory of the Al-Qaeda brand. Once lauded as a hero across the Muslim world, Bin Laden and the AQ brand suffered tremendously due to the terror campaign conducted by their Iraqi affiliate. Both Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri recognized this, but could do little to alter this demise. In a poll conducted by Terror Free Tomorrow, a Washington-based non-profit group, Al-Qaeda saw a reduction of favorable rating from thirty-three percent to eighteen percent from 2007 to 2008 among

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<sup>11</sup> Nelly Lahoud et al., *Letters from Abbottabad: Bin Laden Sidelined?* (West Point: Center for Combating Terrorism, 3 May 2012), [https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/CTC\\_LtrsFromAbottabad\\_WEB\\_v2.pdf](https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/CTC_LtrsFromAbottabad_WEB_v2.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Byman, *Al Qaeda, The Islamic State, and the Global Jihadist Movement: What Everyone Needs to Know*, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 166.

Pakistanis. Similarly, Bin Laden's favorable rating among that same group fell from forty-six percent to twenty-four percent over that same period.<sup>13</sup> Although other groups were willing the pledge allegiance to AQC,

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Measuring the evolution of Al-Qaeda from the attacks of 9/11 over the first fourteen years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century perhaps produces more questions than it answers. What this study sought to do was simply add some level of clarity and granularity to an often misidentified and misunderstood phenomenon. When General Franks stated that Al-Qaeda had a presence in seventy countries following the 9/11 attacks, his remarks and the intent behind them were perhaps not that far-fetched or misleading. Al-Qaeda, as an idea or as an inspirational clarion to others almost guaranteed that like-minded individuals would be drawn to its ideology and worldview, some even going so far as to claim allegiance to Bin Laden and his vanguard, despite the fact that these devotees never had any direct communication with anyone from Al-Qaeda. For the main AQ affiliates, the decision to pledge allegiance to Bin Laden and AQC served their own respective purposes. In some cases, Bin Laden welcomed this, and in other cases he and his leaders reluctantly agreed to the formal affiliation.

When assessing the strategic ends that Bin Laden and AQC sought from its earliest years, one can argue that it achieved great success. Not only did Al-Qaeda mastermind and carry out the most prolific terrorist attack in United States history, but it also succeeded in luring the U.S. and its allies into a wider conflict in multiple regions that has yet to end. Some would characterize this unending low-level conflict as a strategic victory for Al-Qaeda, specifically, and

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<sup>13</sup> "Pakistani Support for Al Qaeda, Bin Laden Plunges; Moderate Parties Surge; 70 Percent Want President Musharraf to Resign: Results of a New Nationwide Public Opinion Survey of Pakistan Before the February 18<sup>th</sup> Elections," *Terror Free Tomorrow* (2008), Center for Public Opinion: <http://www.terrorfreetomorrow.org/upimagestft/TFT%20Pakistan%20Poll%20Report.pdf>.



the global jihadist movement, in general. However, the fragmentation of the AQ brand to parallel movements resulted in failure for the Al-Qaeda enterprise at both the operational and tactical levels.

The fact of the matter is that Al-Qaeda was never meant to be a model for governance within the areas in which it gained the strongest foothold, nor was its intention to do so. In stark terms, it failed.<sup>14</sup> The political instability and lack of state capacity to prevent its growth in places like Iraq, Yemen, and Algeria resulted in rapid popularity and strong allegiance to Bin Laden and his espoused ideology. However, the social realities on the ground within this political vacuum, coupled with the influx of foreign fighters with their own agendas, quickly eroded public support for AQ movements. Bin Laden and AQC failed to understand this when building the centralized decision-making/decentralized execution model.

Operationally, AQC's ideas of maintaining support for a global jihad simply did not translate into the conditions and dynamics present in parallel theaters of conflict. When affiliates adopted the AQ brand, they did so simply as a matter of accreditation. Instead, affiliate groups were much more in line with a classic jihad strategy, like what was witnessed in Afghanistan in the 1980s and Bosnia in the 1990s. Under this context, the U.S. occupation of Iraq became a case of classic jihad, one in which the global-focused AQC simply could not control.<sup>15</sup> With the erosion of its own capabilities, Al-Qaeda lost its ability to recruit highly trained operatives to conduct operations on its behalf. As explained in the case study of Ressam in 1999 and Atta in 2001, Bin Laden and AQC maintained a firm grasp across the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of their campaign during this maturation period. With the launch of the Global War on

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<sup>14</sup> Robin Simcox, "Ansar al-Sharia and Governance in Southern Yemen," *Hudson Institute* (December 27, 2012), 60-61, [http://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1139/20130124\\_ct14simcox.pdf](http://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1139/20130124_ct14simcox.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Vahid Brown, "Classical and global jihad: Al-Qa'ida's franchising frustrations," in *Faultlines in Global Jihad: Organizational, strategic, and ideological fissures*, ed. Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2011), 104-105.

Terror and the subsequent diffusion of its capabilities to affiliate groups, Al-Qaeda became less able to control the tactical and operational levels of its campaign, and it eventually lost its ability to affect its affiliates at the strategic level.

In the end, the question as to the evolution of Al-Qaeda over the years following the 9/11 attacks should be focused on one issue-Can an organization like Al-Qaeda usurp the realities of domestic groups operating in various location across the globe? As this study has shown, the answer is no. In all cases studied here, the domestic political, economic, and social realities found within the respective regions that have cultivated AQ affiliates has been more powerful in terms of driving ideology and operations than the attempts to unify these fractious groups toward a common goal. In this sense, the answer to combating groups such as these does not lie in countering the transnational agenda of a select few, yet powerful ideologues, but should be more importantly focused on the forces actively at play in states that sustain these sub-movements.

For a study such as this, the final point should be one of policy considerations for the United States and its allies that continue to face the constant metamorphosis and evolution of global jihadism, transnational Islamic terrorism, and the threats that these movements pose to greater stability. Do generalities exist that the U.S. can utilize in order to address all these terror groups or affiliates, or are they too different for a broad-brush policy approach? In general, this question highlights the ongoing struggle that the U.S. and its allies have in combating these groups and developing strategies to mitigate their impact on both state and international security.

Primarily, it can be surmised that the strategies and policies developed and quickly executed by the United States immediately after 9/11 exerted almost unbearable pressure upon the Al-Qaeda enterprise. Most notably, U.S. and allied efforts led to the total collapse of the global Islamic charity networks, rapidly minimizing Al-Qaeda's global reach and clandestine

nature, forcing many of its activities to emerge from the shadows. These efforts, which were a rare measurable variable of success for the United States in an arena in which such measures are hard to find, precipitated the notion that coalition efforts could be applied across the entire enterprise and produce similar effects. In this case, such generalities proved to be detrimental.

In addition, the military operations carried out in Afghanistan in the late-fall of 2001 and into the winter of 2002 left the illusion that ultimate success-death of Bin Laden and total collapse of his empire-was potentially only days or weeks away. As has been well documented, the illusion of a finish line was just that-an illusion. As Al-Qaeda carried out its planned global proliferation and attached itself to parallel movements, the U.S. and others failed to adapt to these intricacies, seeing the enterprise as a monolithic and coordinated movement instead of a loose assembly of groups with varying loyalties and agendas, was yet another mistake.

Under this rationale, the U.S. should resist the urge to pigeonhole its enemies into comfortable categories that have historically proved successful at harnessing national will. In the classic sense, the enemies of the United States in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were well understood and definable, with fixed goals and motives. More clearly, there was little doubt that the Soviet Union posed the greatest existential threat to the United States during the Cold War. Subsuming national efforts and related policies to confronting this enemy drove military planning and national policy trajectories. Unlike this period, the campaign against Al-Qaeda and transnational jihadism does not fit into a nice, distinct category like those of rival nation-states, despite continuous and voracious attempts to do so by policymakers and media pundits.

Applying western philosophical thought to understanding these terrorist groups will only continue to precipitate vague definitions of who and what these groups are, constantly requiring gross adjustments of strategy in order to fit the priorities that happen to emerge at a particular

time. Instead of focusing on trying to characterize the movement as an imperforated monolith, the U.S. should craft policies that seek to address each group independently, with the understating that transnational movements are extremely difficult to sustain. Policies should focus on exploiting the fractures that are bound to exist within these groups, especially as dispersion and time increase.

Secondly, the ideological underpinnings that drive groups like Al-Qaeda present the strongest evidence as to the greatest factor that guides group behavior. In this way, ideology serves as the foundation for the ends, ways, and means of AQ-inspired groups and related movements, a variable that has much more depth and breadth than other dynamic factors present within these groups. Under these conditions, it would seem prudent to highlight the importance of ideology and to develop strategies to counter such beliefs. However, doing so would help to bridge the gap that makes global coordination so difficult for these groups, as ideology at the macro level has the capability of uniting disparate groups, even those groups that maintain divergent strategies or goals at the micro level. Therefore, the U.S. should focus much less on countering the ideology of these groups and instead focus on exploiting the pronounced differences in interpretation and mechanisms of execution by so-called affiliates and subordinate groups. This policy would exacerbate the ingrained mistrust that these various groups have among the wider movement and their fellow conspirators. Without the mechanisms of control, a point emphasized by this study, contrasting groups will become increasingly isolated, in many cases overwhelmed by the domestic pressures placed on them. Coupled with efforts by a global coalition, led by the United States and a Muslim world more wary of jihadist groups operating within their respective countries, groups that seek to expand both their territory and franchise base may be sowing the seeds of their own demise.

Under this context, it might be worth reassessing the interpretation that the spread of affiliates could be less dangerous than previously considered, which represents a complete paradigm shift from existing counter-terrorism policy goals. Fears over executing such strategies are well understood, yet could be linked to elapsed ideas and definitions highlighted in this study and are not useful for the fight yet to come. Rather, the U.S. should develop policies that continue to draw these groups into the open, exploit their penchant for dispersion to various theaters, and empower allied nations to target these groups. In any regard, the finish line remains distant.

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**VITA**

Nicholas Benjamin Law  
Department of Political Science and Geography  
Batten Arts and Letters, 5115 Hampton Blvd, Norfolk, VA 23529

Nicholas Benjamin Law is an active-duty U.S. Marine Corps Officer, who has served in variety of positions and locations throughout the greater Near East and North Africa. He received his Doctoral degree (Ph.D.) in International Studies from Old Dominion University in 2016. Additionally, he also received a Master of Arts (MA) degree in National Security Studies from the Naval Postgraduate School in 2011, as well as a Master of Military Studies (MMS) from Marine Corps Command and Staff College in 2016. He has taught at the graduate level on subjects related to the socio-political climate in the modern Middle East and the confluence of Islam and governance in the region.