

**GLOBAL AL-QAEDA: AFFILIATES, OBJECTIVES,  
AND FUTURE CHALLENGES**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM,  
NONPROLIFERATION, AND TRADE

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## **GLOBAL AL-QAEDA: AFFILIATES, OBJECTIVES, AND FUTURE CHALLENGES**

**THURSDAY, JULY 18, 2013**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM, NONPROLIFERATION, AND TRADE,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2 o'clock p.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ted Poe (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. POE. The committee will come to order. Without objection, all members may have 5 days to submit statements, questions, extraneous materials for the record subject to the length limitation in the rules of the committee.

We have been told that al-Qaeda is on its last legs, that al-Qaeda died with bin Laden, and that whatever remnants of al-Qaeda that remain are too weak for us to be concerned about. The purpose of this hearing today is to see whether that is a correct statement or an incorrect statement.

These locations in red are where al-Qaeda operated prior to 9/11. Since September 11th occurred, we are now looking at the global al-Qaeda today. The red is al-Qaeda. And the blue is other terrorist groups that operate in these regions of the world, primarily the Middle East and North, Western, and Eastern Africa. And our purpose of this committee hearing today is to go into depth about al-Qaeda's presence and to some extent, other terrorist groups as well.

I will submit the rest of my statement for the record, and I will turn over to the ranking member, Mr. Sherman from California, to hear his remarks in his opening statement.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your brevity. It will not be reciprocated. [Laughter.]

Mr. POE. You have 5 minutes.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you for your maps. I will notice that the first map did not show Iran in blue as an area of non-al-Qaeda terrorist base. Certainly, Iran was as worthy of being marked in blue on your first map as on your second.

Al-Qaeda has failed to carry out a major attack in the United States since 9/11. However, the danger posed by al-Qaeda to the United States is still significant. Al-Qaeda's structure has become more decentralized, less of an integrated corporation, closer to a franchise. Its chief terrorist activity is now being conducted by its local and regional affiliates.

Over the past few years, al-Qaeda's core in Pakistan has been weakened. We have killed four of the top five leaders. And, of course, the top of their leadership changes from time to time as some are dispatched to where they ought to go.

On May 23 of this year, the President outlined tighter rules for drone strikes. The President discussed how our system to make an effort to dismantle terrorist organizations must continue. He stated that this war, like all wars, must end, but the intensity of this war is less than virtually all of the others that we have faced and its length is longer than virtually—well, than certainly all of the wars we have faced. Obama has announced his intention to work with Congress to refine and ultimately repeal the 2001 authorization for use of military force, which is now 12 years old, is laudable but even while our activities in Afghanistan wind down, terrorism directed at the United States and its allies remains a significant threat.

It is true, as the President says, that not every collection of thugs that uses the al-Qaeda name poses a credible threat to the United States, but it is also true that the war against terrorism is not over.

The fastest growing al-Qaeda affiliate is in Syria. Jabhat al-Nusra is emerging as the best motivated, best trained, and best equipped force fighting the Assad regime. The modern umbrella group, the Free Syrian Army, has been losing fighters and capacities to Jabhat al-Nusra. And Jabhat al-Nusra has even taken to assassinating competing rebel commanders. I will be interested in learning from our panelists what role Qatar and the Saudis have played in funding Jabhat al-Nusra and other questionable groups in Syria.

The Alawite community in Syria is in the cross-hairs of Sunni extremists. And we have to arm the best elements in Syria but do so quite carefully. In March of this year, I joined with Eliot Engel, the ranking member of this committee, and House Intel chairman Mike Rogers in introducing the Free Syria Act, which would authorize the President to provide lethal assistance to carefully vetted Syrian opposition groups.

Through al-Qaeda and the Islamic Maghreb, we have seen chaos in Libya since 2011. We have seen it spill into surrounding regions, including the Tuareg fighters, who supported Gaddafi and have taken weapons into Mali. And then we saw those weapons in the hands of those who killed three Americans in Algeria.

It is, of course, the most jingoistic and politically popular thing to say that America should take the lead in everything. The fact is France took the lead in Mali. We supported. And we have to get away from the natural attractions of Machismo and realize this is a complicated conflict in which sometimes we will play a secondary role in some of the theaters.

This will be a long effort. I doubt there will be any triumphal end to this war. We have to manage this problem and do so at the least cost of lives, treasure, the least cost to our privacy, and the least cost to our other competing foreign policy objectives.

Eventually, even those who have been told that objectives can be achieved over a period of many decades through terrorism will come to realize that al-Qaeda methods and al-Qaeda ideology will

not improve the world and will not bring about a worldwide caliphate, but until we win this war, it will continue.

I yield back.

Mr. POE. The gentleman yields back the remainder of his time. All other members of the subcommittee who wish to make an opening statement, I am asking that they submit those for the record.

I will introduce each witness and then give them time for their opening statements before questions. Dr. Seth Jones is Associate Director of International Security and Defense Policy Center at the RAND Corporation as well as an adjunct professor at Johns Hopkins University School for Advanced International Studies. He specializes in counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, including a focus on Afghanistan, Pakistan, and al-Qaeda.

Dr. Fred Kagan is Christopher DeMuth chair and director of the Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, previously an associate professor military history at West Point. Dr. Kagan is a contributing editor at the Weekly Standard and has written for Foreign Affairs, the Wall Street Journal, and other periodicals.

Mr. Thomas Joscelyn is a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and a senior editor of the Long War Journal. Mr. Joscelyn is also a frequent contributor to the Weekly Standard and was a senior counterterrorism adviser to Mayor Giuliani during the 2008 Presidential campaign.

Dr. Thomas Hegghammer is the Zukerman fellow at Stanford University Center for International Security and Cooperation and a senior research fellow at the Norwegian Defense Research Establishment in Oslo. Dr. Hegghammer frequently advises government agencies in North America and in Europe on counterterrorism issues.

I want to welcome all four of our panelists here today. Each of you have 5 minutes. Your statements have already been made part of the record. And we will stick to the 5-minute rule after each of you have testified. And members of the committee will ask you questions. Dr. Jones, you are first.

**STATEMENT OF SETH JONES, PH.D., ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,  
INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND DEFENSE POLICY CENTER,  
RAND CORPORATION**

Mr. JONES. Thank you, Chairman Poe, Ranking Member Sherman, and other members of the committee. Thanks for inviting me and a really esteemed crew here on global al-Qaeda.

I would first point out that I think the growth of al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria and other recent developments make this hearing particularly timely and important.

In reviewing al-Qaeda's evolution since 1988, I am going to make three arguments in my opening remarks. First, contrary to some interpretations of the weakness of al-Qaeda today, I would respond that it is actually quite resilient. As I look at both al-Qaeda as it stood reflected, in part, in your map, Mr. Chairman, there has been a net expansion in the number and the geographic scope of al-Qaeda affiliates and allies over the past decade, indicating that al-Qaeda, at least in my view, and the movement are far from defeated. I will explain in a moment what I mean by al-Qaeda.

This growth in my view is caused by at least two factors. One is the Arab uprisings, which have weakened regimes across North Africa and the Middle East and created an opportunity for al-Qaeda and its affiliates to establish or attempt to establish a foothold or a safe haven. I would submit that the developments in Egypt are of particular concern. It is where the current head of al-Qaeda is from. And it is another potential avenue for a foothold depending on how that situation develops over the next several weeks and months.

In addition, the growing sectarian struggle across the Middle East between Sunni and Shi'a, which has been funded on the Sunni side by both states and non-state actors, has increased the resources available to militant groups, including to al-Qaeda and its affiliates. So the first point is that I think there has been a slight net expansion in al-Qaeda's geographic scope and its number.

Second, however, this expansion has, along with the weakness of central al-Qaeda in Pakistan, recently anyway, created a more diffuse and decentralized movement. And I do think this is important because I think what we see as we look at Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra, Iraq, al-Qaeda in Iraq, Somalia, al Shabaab, Yemen, the al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in North Africa, the main affiliates, they largely as I interpret it run their operations somewhat autonomously, though they still communicate with the core and still may take some strategic advice.

And I would note that what is interesting in the Syrian front is the attempt from the core in Pakistan to adjudicate a dispute between al-Qaeda in Iraq and Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria and then to have the affiliate in Syria essentially break away from Iraq, the al-Qaeda in Iraq segment, and swear allegiance directly to the core element in Pakistan, which to me symbolizes that there is still some importance to that leadership.

Now, the way I would, if pressed, define al-Qaeda today would include the core in Pakistan. And I would say, even if Zawahiri were killed, there are at least three potential replacements that sit in Iran today, all of whom are quite well-esteemed and are members of what was called the Management Council and one that sits in Yemen. So, even with the death of Zawahiri, I still think you would get a movement that would continue.

And, then, third, let me just say that within this disparate movement, most al-Qaeda affiliates are not actively plotting today attacks against the United States homeland. In the near term, I would probably say the Yemen contingent poses the most serious threat in the sense that we see the most notable plots coming out of Yemen, along with the inspired networks.

I think the Boston bombings should be viewed in the al-Qaeda context. The bomb-makers reviewed al-Qaeda documents from Inspire magazine, listened to al-Qaeda leaders including Anwar al-Awlaki, and must be viewed as inspired individuals of al-Qaeda.

Other groups do not appear to pose a threat, at least in the near term, to the U.S. homeland, but I think, as the Syria context shows, the Jabhat al-Nusra's recruitment and funding networks in Europe, in particular, should be a cause of U.S. policy-makers.



So, taken together, I will just conclude by saying these arguments suggest that the U.S. needs to adopt a nuanced approach to countering al-Qaeda. Where there is a direct threat, I think there is opportunity for the U.S. to pursue terrorists. And I think where there is not a direct threat to the U.S. homeland, as we saw in North Africa, with al-Qaeda and the Islamic Maghreb, having allies like France take the lead is well within our grounds.

Let me just say my final sentence. To conclude, this is going to be likely a long war, much like the Cold War, and I think we need to view it in those terms. This is really a decades-long struggle.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Jones follows:]

## Re-Examining the Al Qa'ida Threat to the United States

Seth G. Jones

RAND Office of External Affairs

CT-396

July 2013

Testimony presented before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade on July 18, 2013

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Seth G. Jones<sup>1</sup>  
The RAND Corporation

*Re-Examining the Al Qa'ida Threat to the United States*<sup>2</sup>

Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade  
United States House of Representatives

**Global al Qaeda: Affiliates, Objectives, and Future Challenges**

July 18, 2013

Chairman Poe, Ranking Member Sherman, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify at this hearing, "Global al Qa'ida: Affiliates, Objectives, and Future Challenges." The growth of al Qa'ida's affiliate in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusrah, and other recent developments make this hearing timely and important.

In reviewing al Qa'ida's evolution since 1988, I will make three arguments in this testimony. First, al Qa'ida has been resilient.<sup>3</sup> There has been a net expansion in the number and geographic scope of al Qa'ida affiliates and allies over the past decade, indicating that al Qa'ida and its brand are far from defeated. This growth is likely caused by several factors. One is the Arab uprisings, which have weakened regimes across North Africa and the Middle East, creating an opportunity for al Qa'ida affiliates and allies to secure a foothold. In addition, the growing sectarian struggle across the Middle East between Sunni and Shi'a actors has increased the resources available to Sunni militant groups, including al Qa'ida. Second, this expansion – along with the weakness of central al Qa'ida in Pakistan – has created a more diffuse and decentralized movement. Al Qa'ida's local affiliates largely run their operations autonomously, though they still communicate with the core leadership in Pakistan and may seek strategic advice. Third, within this disparate movement, most al Qa'ida affiliates and allies are not actively plotting attacks against the U.S. homeland. In the near term, Al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) likely presents the most immediate threat to the U.S. homeland, along with inspired networks like the Tsarnaev brothers that perpetrated the April 2013 Boston Marathon bombings. Other groups, such as Jabhat al-Nusrah in Syria, do not appear to pose a near-term threat to the U.S. homeland. But Jabhat al-

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<sup>2</sup> This testimony is available for free download at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT396.html>.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Bruce Hoffman, "Al Qaeda's Uncertain Future," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 36, 2013, pp. 635-653.

Nusrah's growing recruitment and funding networks in Europe should be a cause of concern for U.S. policymakers.

Taken together, these arguments suggest that the United States needs to adopt an increasingly nuanced – but long-term – approach to countering the al Qa'ida movement. In cases where al Qa'ida poses an immediate threat to the U.S. homeland, either through an affiliated group or an inspired network, the U.S. government should work with local partners to target al Qa'ida operatives overseas and at home using a combination of military, law enforcement, economic, diplomatic, and information tools. In areas where al Qa'ida does not pose a significant threat to the homeland, the U.S. government should support local countries and allies as they take the lead – much like the United States did in supporting France's counterterrorism efforts in Mali in 2013. Perhaps most importantly, U.S. policymakers should view the al Qa'ida threat as a decades-long struggle like the Cold War.

This testimony is divided into four sections. The first outlines al Qa'ida's objectives. The second section examines its organizational structure. The third focuses on the al Qa'ida threat to the United States today. And the fourth section offers a brief conclusion.

#### **Al Qa'ida's Objectives**

What are al Qa'ida's objectives? The answer depends, in part, on which al Qa'ida figure one is referencing. Al Qa'ida leaders in various parts of the world – Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (also known as Abu Du'a) in Iraq, Abdelmalek Droukdal in North Africa, Ahmed Abdi aw-Mohammed in Somalia, Nasir al-Wahishi in Yemen, and Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani in Syria – tend to have parochial goals. They want to establish Islamic emirates in specific countries or regions, though they may be agnostic about a broader violent jihad. For al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) leader Abdelmalek Droukdal, for example, the goal is to overthrow regimes in North Africa, especially Algeria, and replace them with an Islamic regime. And France, rather than the United States, is the most significant foreign enemy.

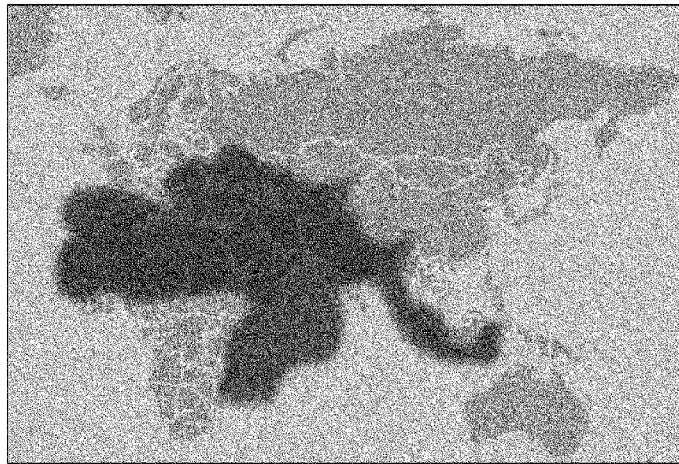
For al Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, the primary goal is broader: to overthrow regimes in key Muslim countries.<sup>4</sup> The governments in these areas constitute the "near enemy," or *al-Adou al-Qareeb*.<sup>5</sup> Al Qa'ida leaders have also attempted to target the United States and its allies as the "far enemy," or *al-Adou al-Baeed*, who support them. But attacking far enemy countries is a

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, "Al-Qaida: Constitutional Charter, Rules And Regulations," Harmony Document AFGP-2002-600175, p. 2; "Interior Organization (of al Qa'ida)," AFGP-2002-000080, pp. 2-3.

<sup>5</sup> On the establishment of a caliphate see, for example, Abu Bakr Naji, *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Ummah Will Pass*, Translated and Published by the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University, May 23, 2006.

means to an end, not an end in itself.<sup>6</sup> Contrary to some arguments, most al Qa'ida leaders are not interested in establishing a global caliphate and do not seek to overthrow regimes in much of the world.<sup>7</sup> For Zawahiri, the envisioned caliphate includes a specific swath of territory in North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, as highlighted in Figure 1. These areas reflect a modified version of the Umayyad caliphate, which lasted from 661 to 750 AD.

**Figure 1: Map of Zawahiri's Envisioned Pan-Islamic Caliphate<sup>8</sup>**



In his book *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, Zawahiri writes, "it is the hope of the Muslim nation to restore its fallen caliphate and regain its lost glory."<sup>9</sup> Most of its leaders are inspired by the works of such individuals as Sayyid Qutb and Abdullah Azzam. Qutb argued that only a strict following of sharia as a complete system of morality, justice, and governance would bring significant benefits to humanity.<sup>10</sup> Modern-day Islam, he wrote in his book *Milestones*, had become corrupt, and he compared the modern Muslim states with *jahiliyya*. As used in the Qur'an, *jahiliyya* describes the state of ignorance in which Arabs were supposed to have lived

<sup>6</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Ma'alam fi al-tariq [Milestones]* (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, David J. Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 165-227.

<sup>8</sup> See the National Counterterrorism Center's interactive map of al Qa'ida's pan-Islamic caliphate at <http://www.nctc.gov/site/map/index.html>. Accessed on December 27, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, trans. by Laura Mansfield (Old Tappan, NJ: TLG Publications, 2002), p. 201.

<sup>10</sup> Qutb, *Ma'alam fi al-tariq*.

before the revelation of Islam to the Prophet Mohammed at the beginning of the seventh century.<sup>11</sup> In two of his key works, *In the Shadow of the Qur'an* and *Signposts on the Road*, Qutb pleaded for contemporary Muslims to build a new community – an Islamic emirate – much like the Prophet Mohammed had done a thousand years earlier.<sup>12</sup> An emirate refers literally to a territory ruled by an "emir," which is sometimes translated as "commander," "prince," "governor," or "ruler." In early Islamic history, emirates denoted local Muslim principalities or small kingdoms nominally subordinate to the Islamic caliphate, established as part of Islam's steady expansion eastwards and westwards.<sup>13</sup> According to Qutb's interpretation, the only just ruler is one who administers sharia according to the Qur'an.<sup>14</sup> After his execution by the Egyptian government in 1966, Qutb's fiery ideology was influential for Islamic radicals from Morocco to Indonesia.<sup>15</sup>

In order to establish a pan-Islamic caliphate, Zawahiri has long sought to replace regimes within this area. To accomplish this goal, al Qa'ida's strategy rests on violent jihad; joining an existing order through peaceful means was never part of bin Laden or Zawahiri's strategy. Captured al Qa'ida documents show that Bin Laden and Zawahiri emphasized guerrilla campaigns as the main vehicle of its jihad against apostate governments.<sup>16</sup> During the 1990s, for example, the curriculum of al Qa'ida's training camps in Afghanistan and Sudan focused primarily on guerrilla warfare and theological indoctrination. Even after al Qa'ida turned to terrorism in 1996, it developed terrorism capabilities alongside its guerrilla war capabilities, not as a replacement of them.<sup>17</sup>

#### Organizational Structure

Over time, the al Qa'ida movement has become more diffuse and decentralized. In 2001, al Qa'ida was composed of a shura council and several committees, such as those dedicated to military, media, finance, and religious issues. It was hierarchically structured. The shura council was the most powerful committee, and served as an advisory body to Osama bin Laden, who acted as its chairman. The shura council met regularly, sometimes once a week, to discuss

<sup>11</sup> *The Qur'an*, 5:50.

<sup>12</sup> On Qutb's work see Gilles Kepel, *The Prophet and Pharaoh: Muslim Extremism in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Olivier Carré, *Mystique et politique* (Paris: Presses de la FNSP et Cerf, 1984); Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi, *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Muslim Arab World* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Brynjar Lia, "Jihadi Insurgents and the Perils of Territorialisation," Paper presented at the International Studies Association's 52th Annual Convention, Montreal, Canada, March 16-19, 2011, pp. 6-7.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Qutb, *Ma'alam fi al-tariq*, p. 57.

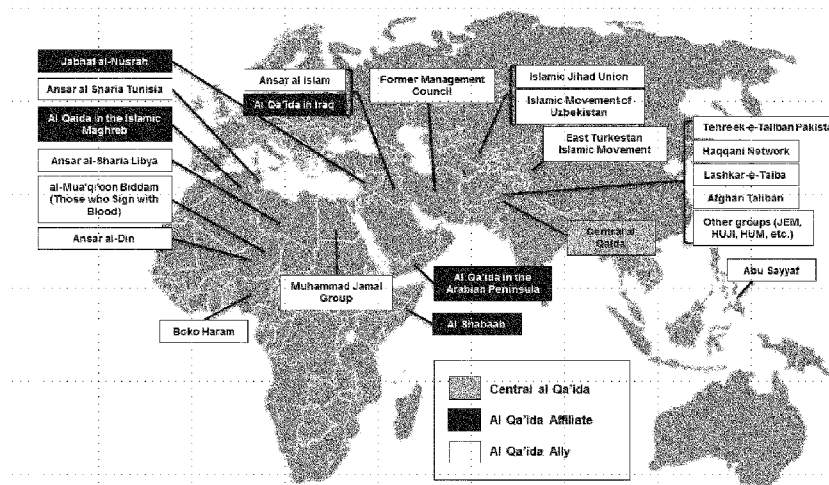
<sup>15</sup> Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004), p. 113.

<sup>16</sup> Kim Cragin, "Early History of Al-Qa'ida," *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (2008), pp. 1047-1067.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Scheuer, *Imperial Hubris: Why the West Is Losing the War on Terror*, First Edition (Washington, DC: Potomac Books Inc., 2004), pp. 63-66; Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, First Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 5-9, 69-72; Daniel Byman, *The Five Front War: The Better Way to Fight Global Jihad* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), pp. 15-16.

important issues. Today, al Qa'ida is a more decentralized organization and can be divided into four tiers: central al Qa'ida, affiliated groups, allied groups, and inspired networks. Figure 2 highlights al Qa'ida affiliates and several key allied groups. This loose movement today is an expansion from 2001, when central al Qa'ida was based in Afghanistan. The organization had a small number of allies in Pakistan and Afghanistan, including the Taliban, but it did not possess a large coterie of affiliates and allies in North Africa and the Middle East.

Figure 2: Al Central, Affiliates, and Some Allied Groups



First, *central al Qa'ida* includes the organization's leaders based in Pakistan. It is led by Ayman al-Zawahiri, who is buttressed by such figures as Abu Zayd al-Kuwaiti (Kuwaiti), Hamza al-Ghamdi (Saudi), and Abd al-Rahman al-Maghrebi (Moroccan). There are still a range of Americans in central al Qa'ida (such as Adam Gadahn) and operatives that have lived in America (such as Adnan el Shukrijumah). Al Qa'ida's senior leadership, including Ayman al-Zawahiri, retain a degree of oversight and, when necessary, may adjudicate disputes among affiliates or provide strategic guidance. There are three al Qa'ida senior leaders in Iran – Saif al-Adel, Abu Khayr al-Masri, and Abu Muhammad al-Masri – who could potentially replace Zawahiri if he were killed, though it is unclear whether they would return to Pakistan.

The second tier includes *affiliated groups* that have become formal branches of al Qa'ida. What distinguishes "affiliates" from other groups is the decision by their leaders, or emirs, to swear



*bayat* (loyalty) to al Qa'ida leaders in Pakistan. These organizations include al Qa'ida in Iraq (based in Iraq), al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (based in Yemen), al Shabaab (based in Somalia), al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (based in Algeria and neighboring countries), and Jabhat al-Nusrah (based in Syria). Jabhat al-Nusrah is the most recent affiliate. As the war in Syria began to intensify in 2011, al Qa'ida in Iraq leaders utilized their established networks in Syria and created Jabhat al-Nusrah as their operational arm. Al Qa'ida in Iraq leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi explained that "we laid for them plans, and drew up for them the policy of work, and gave them what financial support we could every month, and supplied them with men who had known the battlefields of jihad, from the emigrants and the natives."<sup>18</sup> As Jabhat al-Nusrah established its own sources of funding, fighters, and material, it became increasingly independent from al Qa'ida in Iraq. Asserting his independence from al Qa'ida in Iraq, Jabhat al-Nusrah leader Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani declared his loyalty directly to al Qa'ida's central leadership in Pakistan. "This is a pledge of allegiance from the sons of the al Nusrah Front and their supervisor general that we renew to the Sheikh of Jihad, Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri, may Allah preserve him," Jawlani announced in April 2013.<sup>19</sup>

The third involves *allied groups* that have established a direct relationship with al Qa'ida, but have not become formal members. This arrangement allows the groups to remain independent and pursue their own goals, but to work with al Qa'ida for specific operations or training purposes when their interests converge. In Pakistan, one example is Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (led by Hakimullah Mehsud), whose interests remain largely parochial in South Asia. But they have been involved in attacks overseas, including the failed 2010 attack in New York City led by Faizal Shahzad. Outside of Pakistan, there are other allied groups like the Muhammad Jamal network in Egypt and Ansar al-Sharia in Libya. Both groups participated with al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb operatives in killing Christopher Stevens, the U.S. ambassador to Libya, in September 2012.

Finally, the *inspired networks* include those with no direct contact to al Qa'ida central, but who are inspired by the al Qa'ida cause and outraged by perceived oppression in Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Palestinian territory. They tend to be motivated by a hatred of the West and its allied regimes in the Middle East. Without direct support, these networks tend to be amateurish, though they can occasionally be lethal. Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the ringleader of the 2013 Boston bombings, was motivated by the extremist preaching of now-deceased al Qa'ida leader Anwar al-Awlaki. Tsarnaev and his brother also used al Qa'ida propaganda materials, including an article from

<sup>18</sup> Audio Statement by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, April 10, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Audio Statement by Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, April 10, 2013. On the broader debate between Jabhat al-Nusrah and al Qa'ida in Iraq also see Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Nusrah Front Leader Renews Allegiance to al Qaeda, Rejects New Name," *Long War Journal*, April 10, 2013.

*Inspire* magazine, to build the bombs. But many others, such as the cell led by Russell Defreitas that plotted to attack New York City's John F. Kennedy International Airport in 2007, were rudimentary and their half-baked plot would have been difficult to execute.

Taken together, the al Qa'ida movement is more diffuse movement today. But there has been a growth in the number and geographic scope of al Qa'ida affiliates and allies over the past decade, indicating that al Qa'ida and its brand are far from defeated. This growth has been facilitated by the Arab uprisings, which have weakened regimes across North Africa and the Middle East.<sup>20</sup> In addition, the growing Sunni-Shi'a struggle across the Middle East involving countries and sub-state actors has increased the resources available to Sunni militant groups like al Qa'ida.

#### **The Al Qa'ida Threat to the U.S. Homeland**

Not all al Qa'ida affiliates and allies present a direct threat to the U.S. homeland. In the near term, Al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula likely presents the most immediate threat, along with inspired networks like the Tsarnaev brothers that perpetrated the April 2013 Boston Marathon bombings. The growth in social media and the terrorist use of chat rooms, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other sites has facilitated radicalization inside the United States. While al Qa'ida leaders did not organize the Boston attacks, they played a key role by making available the propaganda material and bomb-making instructions utilized by the Tsarnaevs.

Other affiliates do not appear to pose a near-term threat to the U.S. homeland. Al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb is focused on overthrowing regimes in North Africa, including Algeria. Al Shabaab's objectives are largely parochial. It has conducted attacks in Somalia and the region, even though some Americans have fought with al Shabaab in Somalia. And al Qa'ida in Iraq and Jabhat al-Nusrah are primarily interested in establishing Islamic emirates in their respective countries and the region. Indeed, the vast majority of al Qa'ida activity has been in the context of an insurgency where it has attempted to overthrow "near enemy" countries.<sup>21</sup> Between 1998 and 2011, al Qa'ida and its affiliates in Yemen, Iraq, North Africa, and Somalia conducted nearly 1,000 attacks, killed over 8,000 people, and wounded over 12,000 others.<sup>22</sup> As Figure 3

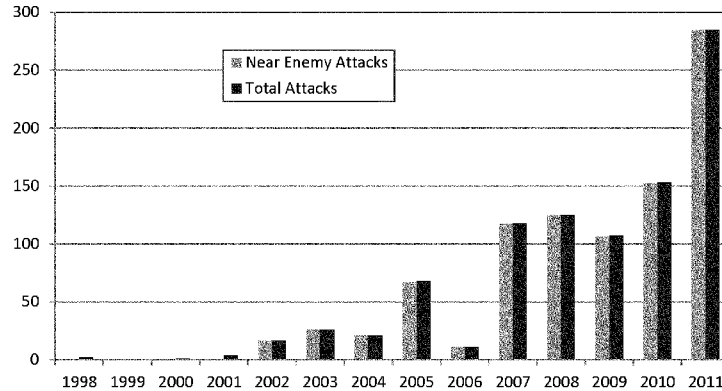
<sup>20</sup> On al Qa'ida and the Arab uprisings, see Hoffman, "Al Qaeda's Uncertain Future," pp. 635-653; Seth G. Jones, "The Mirage of the Arab Spring," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 1, January/February 2013, pp. 55-63.

<sup>21</sup> Fawas A. Gergez, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Data are from the Global Terrorism Database at the University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). Accessed at [www.start.umd.edu/gtd/](http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/) on June 29, 2012.

highlights, approximately 98 percent of these attacks were part of an insurgency where operatives tried to overthrow a local government or secede from it – and were not in the West.<sup>23</sup>

**Figure 3: Al Qa'ida Attacks, 1998-2011<sup>24</sup>**



Still, most of al Qa'ida's affiliates and several of its allies pose a threat to the United States overseas. Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia, for instance, has planned attacks against U.S. diplomats and infrastructure in Tunisia, including the U.S. embassy. As previously noted, al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb and its allies were involved in the 2012 attack that killed U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens.

Other groups, like Jabhat al-Nusra, could be a long-term threat. Jabhat al-Nusra's access to foreign fighters, external network in Europe and other areas, and bomb-making expertise suggest that it may already have the capability to plan and support attacks against the West. There appears to be a growing contingent of foreign fighters – perhaps several thousand – traveling to Syria to fight in the war. A substantial portion of these fighters are coming from the region, including Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq. Some have come from Chechnya. Others have apparently come from Afghanistan and Pakistan. But a significant number also appear to be coming from the West, especially from Belgium, France, and Sweden. Extremists have traveled

<sup>23</sup> The data for fatalities were lower. Approximately 55 percent of fatalities from al Qa'ida attacks were in near enemy countries, largely because the September 2001 attacks in the United States killed nearly 3,000 people. Without the September 11 data, however, 89 percent of fatalities were in near enemy countries.

<sup>24</sup> Data are from the Global Terrorism Database at the University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). Accessed online at [www.start.umd.edu/gtd/](http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/).

to Syria from other European countries. According to Spanish officials, for example, a network based in Spain and Morocco sent approximately two dozen fighters to Jabhat al-Nusrah over the past year. It is unclear how many of these fighters have returned to the West, but some have apparently returned to Germany, Denmark, Spain, and Norway among others. In October 2012, authorities in Kosovo arrested the extremist Shurki Aliu, who had traveled from Syria to Kosovo and was involved in recruiting and providing material to Syrian opposition groups. A small number of Americans – perhaps less than a dozen – have apparently traveled to Syria to fight with the Syrian opposition.<sup>25</sup>

It is currently unclear whether most of these fighters will remain in Syria over the long run, move to other war zones such as North Africa, or travel to the West to conduct attacks. And even if some return to the West, it is uncertain whether they will become involved in terrorist plots, focus on recruiting and fundraising, or become disillusioned with terrorism. Still, foreign fighters have historically been agents of instability. They can affect the conflicts they join, as they did in post-2003 Iraq by promoting sectarian violence and indiscriminate tactics. Perhaps more important, foreign fighter mobilizations empower transnational terrorist groups such as al Qa'ida, because volunteering for war is the principal stepping-stone for individual involvement in more extreme forms of militancy. When Muslims in the West radicalize, they usually do not plot attacks in their home country right away, but travel to a war zone first. A majority of al Qa'ida operatives began their militant careers as war volunteers, and most transnational jihadi groups today are by-products of foreign fighter mobilizations.<sup>26</sup>

#### **U.S. Counterterrorism Efforts**

Based on an examination of counterterrorism efforts against al Qa'ida's since its establishment in 1988, three steps can help weaken al Qa'ida.<sup>27</sup> The first is implementing a light footprint strategy that focuses on covert intelligence, law enforcement, and Special Operations Forces to conduct precision targeting of al Qa'ida and its financial and logistical support networks. In Afghanistan, the United States should withdraw most conventional forces, relying primarily on clandestine operatives as it has done in Colombia, Philippines, and other counterinsurgencies. Most of the terrorists involved in serious homeland plots after September 11 – from José Padilla's plot to blow up apartment buildings in the United States to Najibullah Zazi and Faisal Shahzad's plots to conduct terrorist attacks in New York City – were motivated by the large U.S. conventional military deployments overseas and by a conviction, however erroneous, that Muslims were its

<sup>25</sup> Author interview with government officials from Europe and the Middle East, April and May 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad," *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Winter 2010/11, pp. 53-94.

<sup>27</sup> Seth G. Jones, *Hunting in the Shadows: The Pursuit of Al Qa'ida Since 9/11* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012).

helpless victims. A light footprint strategy means refraining from large numbers of U.S. forces in Muslim countries. The bulk of the U.S. military should focus on such tasks as preparing for conventional wars in the Korean Peninsula, the Taiwan Straits, and other theaters.

The second step is helping local governments establish basic law and order as a bulwark against al Qa'ida and other extremists. In cases where al Qa'ida does not pose a significant threat to the homeland, the U.S. government should support local governments and allies as they take the lead – as the French did in Mali in 2013. The U.S. government should work with local governments using a combination of military, law enforcement, economic, diplomatic, and information tools. The countries most in danger of becoming an al Qa'ida safe haven lie in an arc that extends from North Africa to the Middle East and South Asia, an area that once made up the Umayyad Caliphate from 661 to 750 AD. It is no coincidence that al Qa'ida has attempted to set up its affiliates in these areas: al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb in North Africa, al Shabaab in the Horn of Africa, al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, al Qa'ida in Iraq, Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria, and al Qa'ida central in Pakistan. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the Arab Spring has undermined stability and eroded the strength of governments across this arc. The U.S. goal should be to establish effective and legitimate governments with security agencies capable of undermining al Qa'ida's ideology and capabilities.

The third is aggressively undermining al Qa'ida's extremist ideology. In 1999, the State Department disbanded the U.S. Information Agency, which played a prominent role in countering Soviet ideology during the Cold War. Today, no U.S. government agency has the lead role for countering al Qa'ida's ideology. The State Department has the lead for public diplomacy, but has not developed a comprehensive inter-agency strategy to counter al Qa'ida's ideology. The CIA is involved in some clandestine activity, but most senior officials do not view undermining al Qa'ida's ideology as its core mission. The Department of Defense is also involved in some efforts, but they are dispersed among U.S. Central Command, U.S. Special Operations Command, and other organizations. Ultimately, it is the President and the National Security Staff's responsibility to appoint a lead agency and hold it responsible.

These three steps – utilizing a light footprint strategy, improving the effectiveness of governments in countries threatened by al Qa'ida, and undermining al Qa'ida's ideology – would help weaken al Qa'ida.

### A Long War

Let me add a final note. One of the most important battlefields will be on the Internet since the struggle against al Qa'ida and its allies remains, in part, a battle of ideas. Over the past decade, radicalization has become much less formal. "Extremists are moving away from mosques to conduct their activities in private homes and premises," a British intelligence report concluded. "We assess that radicalization increasingly occurs in private meeting places, be they closed prayer groups at mosques, self-defense classes at gyms or training camps in the UK or overseas."<sup>28</sup>

The rise of the Internet and social media fundamentally changed terrorist activities. Individuals like Anwar al-Awlaki, Adam Gadahn, and Shaykh Abdallah Ibrahim al-Faisal utilized YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Internet chat rooms, and other forums to distribute propaganda, recruit new supporters, and seek financial aid. Some, like Awlaki before his death, were successful in motivating individuals to conduct terrorist attacks. Others, like Gadahn, largely failed. As one al Qa'ida communiqué blithely noted in 2011, "In today's world, there's a place for the underground mujahideen who support the religion of Allah, men and women and youths in their cities and villages, and from their homes, and with their individual creativity and what is possible for them, as long as they are parallel with the general plans of the mujahideen ... the arena of electronic warfare."<sup>29</sup>

Yet al Qa'ida increasingly stumbled here. Parents, siblings, wives, and other family members of operatives were often devastated – even embarrassed – about their relatives' terrorist activity. The wife of Mohammad Siddique Khan, the lead London bomber in 2005, was "ashamed" of her husband's activities. One of Najibullah Zazi's relatives remarked that "I'd bring him myself" to justice for his actions. Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab's parents were troubled by their son's attempt to blow up a Northwest Airlines flight, and had warned U.S. and Nigerian authorities that he was radicalizing. Abdulmutallab's Internet colleagues were also shocked, with one harshly reprimanding him for giving "Islam a bad name." And Faisal Shahzad's father-in-law was incredulous that he would "go to this extreme" with a wife and "two really lovely children."

Many al Qa'ida operatives also failed to practice what they preached. Anwar al-Awlaki was arrested twice in San Diego for soliciting prostitutes. Adnan el-Shukrijumah was arrested in Broward County, Florida for child abuse and battery. Adam Gadahn was arrested in Orange County, California for assault and battery. These were the activities of criminals and gangsters,

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Christopher Andrew, *Defend the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), p. 827.

<sup>29</sup> As-Sahab Media, "You Are Held Responsible Only for Thyself – Part Two," June 2011.

not hallowed religious leaders. Al Qa'ida leaders also came under withering criticism from Muslims worldwide, including deeply conservative Sunni leaders. Ayman al-Zawahiri faced criticism for slaughtering Muslims in his 2008 Internet question-and-answer session. Senior officials from Palestinian Hamas, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, and Egyptian Islamic Jihad dismissed al Qa'ida's leaders – and their ideology – as un-Islamic and supporting a fringe phenomenon.

In the end, the struggle against the al Qa'ida movement will be long – measured in decades, not months or years. Much like the Cold War, it is also predominantly an ideological struggle. Al Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri said it best in a 2005 letter to al Qa'ida in Iraq leader Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi: "I say to you: that we are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is in the battlefield of the media. And that we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, July 9, 2005. Released by the Harmony Project, Combating Terrorism Center, West Point.

Mr. POE. Dr. Kagan?

**STATEMENT OF FREDERICK W. KAGAN, PH.D., CHRISTOPHER DEMUTH CHAIR AND DIRECTOR, CRITICAL THREATS PROJECT, AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE**

Mr. KAGAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Sherman. And thank you to the committee for holding the hearing on this topic and scoped in this way.

I think it is extremely important that we be able to have a conversation about what the threat actually is, divorced somewhat from what we actually want to do about it. And so I want to make it clear of what I am not here today to do. I am not here today to propose a solution. I am certainly not here today to propose invading other countries or repeating Iraq or something else like that.

There is a caricature of what the position is of some of those who critiqued the current administration's strategy. My main critique is that we do not have a strategy that is remotely adequate. And I think, as Seth said, extremely well, what is required is a nuanced strategy that will require different approaches, that will require creativity, but that, above all, will understand that the al-Qaeda network is a holistic network, the parts of which interact with one another, and that the administration's attempts to parse out only those groups that currently have the stated intent of attacking the United States and treat them as threats and the others as much less threats or not threats at all is extremely dangerous and distorts the actual threat from the movement as a whole because, as Seth explained, the groups interact with one another in a variety of ways. And they also changed their minds. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula was not, from the outset focused on attacking the United States directly. One would have made long odds that we would not have anything connected to the Islamic emirate or the caucuses in any way show up on our shores. Groups do change their positions. And that is something that we need to be very cognizant of.

Seth's point about the sectarian war is extremely important. The context within which we are having this conversation today is fundamentally different from the context in which we were having anything like this in the early 2000s in the early part of the struggle. The sectarian war in the Middle East, which is expanding rapidly, is our concern for a number of reasons, but from this standpoint, it is our concern because that sectarian conflict opens up room and space for radicals like al-Qaeda and affiliates to expand their reach as a way of claiming that they are protecting Sunni populations against Shi'a attacks. We have seen this in Iraq. It was, unfortunately, very effective for al-Qaeda in Iraq. And it is effective for al-Qaeda in Iraq again. And it is tremendously effective for Jabhat al-Nusra. The more that you have an expansion of sectarian conflict, the more you will have initiative for and scope for and encouragement for extremist groups, some of them affiliated with al-Qaeda, to take root and take advantage of public fear.

I want to highlight a couple of things that I think have been lost in this discussion and thank the terrific staff at Critical Threats Project, Katherine Zimmerman, who is here, and Sasha Gordon, for their work on al-Qaeda and on Yemen, in particular, to say part



of my concern stems from the fact that the places where we have had strategies like Yemen, the strategy is failing. It is not working. We have had a strategy of very limited direct attacks against senior al-Qaeda and Arabian Peninsula leaders, coupled with a strategy that focused on the diplomatic resolution of the challenges in Sana'a and assistance to the Yemeni security forces.

Most of the fighting against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula was done by the Yemeni security forces. And they did a very good job of retaking ground that AQAP had taken. And I think the ranking member's point is a very important one. We certainly do need to work through our allies whenever possible and strengthen our allies whenever we can in this fight. The problem is that the Yemeni security forces are not only not being strengthened. Not only are they being weakened, but they are fracturing. And we have counted more than 24 mutinies in brigade-level units in the Yemeni security forces over the past couple of years.

The rate of mutinying has been accelerating. We have had instances of elite units engaged in the fight with al-Qaeda being effectively dissolved in place by mutinies and the Yemeni Government response. This is a force that is cracking, unfortunately. And, as a result of that, we are seeing AQAP reattack into Abyan, reattack into areas that it had been driven out of, and begin to reestablish itself.

And I raised this specific case because Yemen has been held up as a model. And there are even some people who ignore the fact that Afghanistan has no coastline and suggest that we should apply the Yemen model to Afghanistan. And before we have that conversation, it is incredibly important to understand that the Yemen model isn't working in Yemen.

And if there is any desire on the part of the committee, I would be happy to talk about similar challenges that our strategy in Somalia is facing where our allies there, who are even more limited in capability, are running into very predictable challenges to their ability to maintain gains, let alone to expand on them.

So my bottom line is I think that Seth may have been a little bit too optimistic. I think that we actually need to consider the possibility that we are starting to lose the war with al-Qaeda and that we really need to rethink our strategy. Such as it is, very, very fundamentally in light of the fact that we maybe need to recognize that it actually is failing for all the damage that we have done to the core group in Pakistan.

Thank you for your time.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kagan follows:]

*American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research*



Statement before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade  
On “Global al-Qaeda: Affiliates, Objectives, and Future Challenges”

## **The Continued Expansion of Al Qaeda Affiliates and their Capabilities**

Frederick W. Kagan

Christopher DeMuth Chair and Director, Critical Threats Project

American Enterprise Institute

July 18, 2013

*The views expressed in this testimony are those of the author alone and do not necessarily represent those of the  
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July 18, 2013

The war against al Qaeda is not going well. Afghanistan has seen the most success, since Coalition and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) have been able to prevent al Qaeda from re-establishing effective sanctuary in the places from which the 9/11 attacks were planned and launched. The killing of Osama bin Laden has not been followed-up in Pakistan with disruption to the leadership group there on the scale of operations that preceded the Abbottabad raid. Al Qaeda affiliates in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and West Africa have dramatically expanded their operating areas and capabilities since 2009 and appear poised to continue that expansion. Progress against al Shabaab, the al Qaeda affiliate in Somalia, is extremely fragile and shows signs of beginning to unravel. New groups with al Qaeda leanings, although not affiliations, are emerging in Egypt, and old groups that had not previously been affiliated with al Qaeda, such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, appear to be moving closer to it. Current trends point to continued expansion of al Qaeda affiliates and their capabilities, and it is difficult to see how current or proposed American and international policies are likely to contain that expansion, let alone reduce it to 2009 levels or below. Americans must seriously consider the possibility that we are, in fact, starting to lose the war against al Qaeda.

#### **What Is al Qaeda?**

The policy debate about al Qaeda has been bedeviled by competing definitions of the group and, consequently, evaluations of the threat it poses to the United States, as Katherine Zimmerman shows in a major paper that will be forthcoming from the Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) in September. Whereas the Bush Administration saw the group as a global network of cells, the Obama Administration has focused narrowly on the "core group" in Pakistan around bin Laden and, after his death, around his successor, Ayman al Zawahiri. The current administration has also labored to distinguish al Qaeda franchises that have the intent and capability to attack the United States homeland from those that do not, implying (or sometimes stating) that the U.S. should act only against the former while observing the latter to ensure that they do not change course.

Parsing the al Qaeda network in this way yields two sets of groups: al Qaeda "core" in Pakistan and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (in Yemen) are the only two formal franchises that have declared their intent to attack the American homeland and demonstrated the capability to do so. Al Qaeda in Iraq, Jabhat al Nusra (in Syria), al Shabaab (in Somalia), al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (in West Africa), and the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus (in Chechnya and Dagestan, Russia), have not announced their intentions to attack the U.S. homeland and have not attempted to do so. In the Obama Administration's view, therefore, these groups are of far less direct concern to the U.S. and their gains, while worrying, are not necessarily immediate threats to American national security.

This relatively sanguine view of al Qaeda rests on a number of assumptions whose validity is highly questionable. It assumes that franchises that do not now have the intent to attack the U.S. are unlikely to develop that intent in the future (or, alternatively, that it is preferable to wait until they do develop such an intent before taking action against them). It also assumes that the franchises are not mutually-supporting in any important way, such that groups that do not themselves intend to attack the homeland will not provide material support to the franchises that do. The first assumption is highly problematic. Al Qaeda affiliates are fund-raising

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organizations as well as terrorist groups. They depend on attracting donations from like-minded supporters around the world, but particularly in the Persian Gulf area. They shape both their operations and their media around selling their product--terror--in ways that they think will be most attractive to those supporters. Attacking the American homeland is unquestionably a fund-raising hit, so the fiscal incentive is for trying to do so. The al Qaeda ideology itself, of course, is also fundamentally anti-American and tends easily, although not inevitably, toward attacking us.

The second assumption is demonstrably false. Al Qaeda affiliates definitely move fighters and other resources around, and those that are not actively aiming to attack the U.S. do not shun those that are. Both al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and al Shabaab actively support al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, for example, and the "core group" in Pakistan reportedly receives financing from its affiliates.

Prioritizing groups within the network according to whether they are actively working to attack the homeland makes some sense; ignoring or downplaying the significance of those not currently engaged in that endeavor does not. Let us briefly consider, therefore, the state of play in some of the major theaters in which an al Qaeda affiliate is now operating.

#### **Afghanistan**

American airpower supporting local Afghan militias drove al Qaeda from its training bases near the major Afghan cities of Kandahar and Jalalabad in 2001, but the group retreated to mountain fastnesses near (but not over) the Pakistan border. Since there is now some debate about the wisdom of introducing American ground forces into Afghanistan in the first place, it is worth remembering that only the operations of those (very limited) ground forces we deployed in 2002 actually drove al Qaeda out of Afghanistan almost entirely. Although limited al Qaeda cells and individual (generally low-ranking) leaders have remained in Afghanistan (primarily in the extremely rugged and remote areas of Afghanistan's northeast), the leadership group never returned, nor have new training camps or bases been established. The continued limited al Qaeda presence in Afghanistan and periodic statements by the group, however, indicate that it has not abandoned the desire to re-establish itself in its former strongholds. Continued success in Afghanistan therefore requires ensuring that the ANSF remains strong and coherent enough to prevent al Qaeda from returning after the withdrawal of U.S. combat forces.

#### **Pakistan**

The death of bin Laden was a major blow to al Qaeda, but not as major as one might have hoped. Analysts had differed before the raid about the likelihood of a smooth succession and had considered the possibility of fracturing and power struggle, since Zawahiri, bin Laden's obvious successor, is an Egyptian (bin Laden was Saudi) and far less charismatic. But Zawahiri took the reins with relatively little ado and seems to have established his control not merely over the "core group" in Pakistan, but also over the global movement. Affiliates in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Somalia have all appealed to him on various matters, including leadership, internal disputes, and affiliate prerogatives regarding other affiliates. It was reasonable to conjecture that killing bin

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Laden would cleave a wedge in the group's leadership, but things have unfortunately not evolved in that direction thus far.

President Obama's courageous and correct decision to put "boots on the ground" briefly in bin Laden's compound offered the hope of a more decisive blow against the organization of another variety. The vast trove of information reportedly pulled from bin Laden's home could have contained the data needed to conduct targeted strikes rapidly against other key al Qaeda leaders around the world, potentially decimating the group's top echelon. Although a number of such strikes were reported after the Abbottabad raid, they did not comprise anything like a decisive blow. The diplomatic fallout from the raid was so severe, moreover, that the pace of targeted strikes in Pakistan has reportedly fallen dramatically from its pre-bin Laden peak. It may be, as administration sources suggest occasionally, that there are not many worthwhile targets left because the "core group" is functionally decimated. Let us hope so--since we cannot have a meaningful discussion about this matter without access to highly sensitive classified materials that the administration is rightly reluctant to make public--because the alternative is simply that the "core group" is no longer under the kind of pressure it faced before bin Laden's death.

#### **Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)**

Almost all analysts agree that AQAP poses a direct and immediate threat to the U.S. homeland for the excellent reason that it has already attempted attacks against us on three separate occasions. The group was formed in 2009 as the result of a merger between al Qaeda in Yemen and the remnants of the original Saudi al Qaeda group driven out of the Kingdom after the Saudis began a major crackdown against the group in 2006. It began to increase its operations against Yemeni forces and foreign targets within Yemen almost immediately (in addition to conducting the very-nearly-successful "underwear bomb" attack on Christmas 2009). It seized upon the arrival of the Arab Spring in Yemen in 2011, creating an insurgent wing (Ansar al Sharia). As Yemeni Security Forces were drawn toward the capital to deal with the threat to President Ali Abdullah Saleh's power, AQAP forces seized two key provinces along the southern coast, began expanding into others, and threatened Aden, Yemen's second city, with isolation and a growing car-bomb campaign.

The U.S. and Saudi response was initially focused on negotiating a resolution to the Yemeni Spring (which ultimately led to the departure of Saleh) and, secondarily, on a combination of a very limited number of targeted strikes against AQAP leadership and limited support to the Yemeni Security Forces (YSF) gradually redeployed to retake their land. As AEI's Critical Threats Project's Katherine Zimmerman and Sasha Gordon have described in detail, the initial YSF counter-offensive was largely successful. Yemeni forces drove AQAP out of the provinces it had taken, broke the partial siege of Aden, and established local fighting groups to help keep AQAP from returning while allowing some YSF troops to redeploy. Some have pointed to the "Yemen model" as an example of the right way to conduct operations against al Qaeda franchises--some even advocate transplanting that model to Afghanistan.

But the "Yemen model" is already breaking down in Yemen. As Sasha Gordon has reported, the YSF is gradually dissolving as the political crisis remains unresolved and current President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi tries to root out the remnants of power broker patronage networks from

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within the armed forces. There have been well over 20 mutinies in Yemeni brigades and other tactical formations, including in elite units. One brigade formerly in Yemen's (now-disbanded) Republican Guard was effectively dissolved in place with soldiers taking their weapons home or selling them. The popular committees that had been initially successful in holding ground against AQAP had reverted to tribal fighting, to fighting with the YSF, alienating the local population, and even to fighting with each other by the start of this year, although we have not seen reports of such conflicts since May. Although many YSF troops and popular committees do continue the struggle against AQAP valiantly, AQAP has begun its own counter-offensive into the lands from which it had been expelled and also resumed its targeted assassination campaign. It is likely that the Yemeni fight against AQAP has passed its zenith and that AQAP will, in fact, gradually reclaim operating space and even territorial control over parts of the country--at least, that is the current trajectory.

### **Iraq and Syria**

Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) had been driven from almost all of its strongholds in central and western Iraq, retaining a limited foothold in Ninewah Province and isolated outposts around Baghdad by the beginning of 2009. Its support in Syria was limited to logistical facilitation permitted and overseen by the Assad regime. Today, AQI has regained control of many of its former staging areas in and around Baghdad and has reconstituted its ability to launch weekly waves of multiple car bomb attacks as the work of Jessica Lewis and Ahmed Ali at the Institute for the Study of War has shown. The group is expanding its capabilities at an accelerating rate, and the Iraqi Security Forces appear to be unable to contain it, despite numerous offensive and defensive operations.

AQI is benefiting from two phenomena--the inability of the ISF to maintain adequate pressure on the group without the enablers and support it had expected to receive from the United States after 2011, and the increasingly sectarian policies of Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki, which have driven a considerable portion of the Sunni Arab population away from the political process and toward a renewal of insurgency. The re-mobilization of Iranian-backed Iraqi Shi'a militias is accelerating sectarian conflict in a cycle reminiscent of 2006 after the al Qaeda bombing of the Samarra mosque.

The collapse of the Assad regime in Syria has allowed the al Qaeda in Iraq support nodes to evolve into a fully-fledged combat franchise. Ayman al Zawahiri, in fact, recently recognized Jabhat al Nusra (JN) as an al Qaeda affiliate independent of AQI and reporting directly to him. That decision created tension with AQI's front organization, the Islamic State of Iraq, and has led to the declaration of a broader Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (Levant). Distinct from Jabhat Nusra, this group is actively conducting operations in Syria against both the regime and the moderate opposition functioning under the rubric of the Free Syrian Army. Despite the tensions caused by Zawahiri's recognition of Jabhat al Nusra, AQI continues to cooperate with and support JN, which provides support to the fight in Iraq in turn. JN has benefitted from the active support of Qatar and Saudi Arabia, although the latter has ceased and Riyadh is now attempting to strengthen the moderate opposition against JN. The moderate opposition has received extremely limited external support, leaving JN fighters often better armed and better trained than other opposition troops, which, in turn, has allowed JN to gain leverage over the moderate

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opposition and even the tacit support of local pockets of Syrian population. JN and ISI are attempting to set up Islamist states in areas under their control, with the panoply of "morality police" and Salafist regulation that we have seen in other areas dominated by al Qaeda and affiliated groups.

The entry of Lebanese Hezbollah fighters directly into the Syrian conflict--numbering in the thousands--has at least for the moment given the Assad regime the advantage, allowing it to regain ground around Damascus, Homs, and Aleppo. These regime gains are likely to radicalize the opposition further, as al Qaeda and associated groups around the Muslim world have announced their intention to send fighters to Syria. Groups of fighters from the Caucasus have been identified in Syria, and the emir of the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus, Doku Umarov, recently reversed his opposition to the movement of fighters from his region to Syria. The Pakistani Taliban (Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, or TTP) has also recently claimed that it has sent (or is sending, or will send) fighters to Syria--although we do not assess that it has done so or will do so for a variety of reasons. Its announcement makes clear, however, that Syria has become a clarion call for Salafists around the world, who are reinforcing the al Qaeda affiliates in that conflict even as the West continues to dither about providing any assistance to the moderate opposition. If this trend continues, we can expect to see the Syrian opposition continue to radicalize to the great benefit of several al Qaeda affiliates, which are not only gaining operating space, but are also gaining respect and admiration in the Salafist world. Over time, they may even gain respectability in the eyes of some Sunni who are more concerned with the sectarian fight against Assad's 'Alawite (Shi'a) group than with the fact that they dislike the Salafist worldview. Nothing succeeds like success, after all.

#### **Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)**

AQIM was formed in Algeria on the basis of Salafist groups that have been fighting the Algerian government for decades. Algerian forces had reduced the group to a fringe organization notable mainly for the kidnapping-for-ransom operations it conducted (and from which it derived a considerable profit) rather than for its ability to conduct terrorist strikes. But the fall of Moammar Qaddafi's regime and the disorder that followed flooded the Sahel with weapons and encouraged alienated minorities like the Tuaregs to take up arms. As a result, two al Qaeda associates in Mali--Ansar al Din and the Movement for Tawhid (Unity) and Jihad in West Africa (known by its French acronym, MUJAO)—took control of northern Mali and began a drive on southern Mali that ultimately drew French forces into the fight to prevent them from gaining control of the routes to Bamako, Mali's capital. French forces, supported to a limited extent by Malian and other African Union troops, retook the population centers of northern Mali, but have only driven the Salafists into the hinterland. French forces have already begun withdrawing, furthermore, and it is not likely that the AU forces with which they are theoretically to be replaced will be able to sustain, let alone expand their gains. Mali is also becoming a magnet for Salafists in Africa, and AQIM has seized the opportunity to expand its reach across the Sahel and back into Algeria in a couple of dramatic terror attacks. Violence is also spreading to Mali's neighbors, including uranium-producing Niger.

**Conclusion**

Al Qaeda affiliates have unquestionably expanded their operational reach and capability, and even the amount of territory they actively control and de facto govern, dramatically since 2009. These affiliates are not simply localized groups with local grievance that happen to be flying the al Qaeda flag, moreover. Neither are they new—they all spring from groups that have been active for at least a decade and, in many cases, several decades. They all actually adhere to the al Qaeda ideology, they all have founders and/or current leaders who fought with bin Laden or his associates against the Soviets in Afghanistan or with the Taliban in the 1990s. They are by no means all actively working to attack the United States at this time, and some have denied that they intend to attack the U.S. at all. But how much stock can we put in those facts?

Virtually no one believed that AQAP posed a threat to the U.S. homeland before the Christmas Day underwear bombing attempt. No one believed that the Pakistani Taliban posed a threat until the Times Square bombing attempt. No one thought that the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus was of any serious concern, yet it appears that the Boston Marathon bomber received encouragement, if not active support, from that group during his visit to Dagestan in 2012. We cannot be certain—and should not be comfortable assuming—that AQL, JN, and AQIM will not decide to attack the U.S. homeland as their counterparts in the al Qaeda movement have already done. We can be certain, however, that they will have much more extensive resources and capabilities than any group that has yet tried to attack us, if and when they do.



Mr. POE. Mr. Joscelyn, you have 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF MR. THOMAS JOSCELYN, SENIOR EDITOR, THE  
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MOCRACIES**

Mr. JOSCELYN. Well, thank you, Chairman Poe and Ranking Member Sherman, and other members of the committee, for having me here today. And I am honored to be on this panel besides these gentlemen and to testify before you on this topic.

Like Fred, one thing at the outset I would say is I am somewhat solution-agnostic. I am basically a nerd who follows the details on a day-to-day basis. And so that is sort of what I am here to discuss. And, you know, I think that there is a good, sizable debate to be had about the actual solutions in various areas about how to approach this, what I characterize, as they have as well, as an expanding enemy.

The three points—I would like to keep to the bullet point format. I will say there are three points I would sort of boil this down to. The first is that a lot of times when we talk about al-Qaeda, we talk about the threat to the U.S. homeland, and the ability to carry out mass casualty attacks. And that is understandable as that is the first goal of the U.S. Government, to prevent such attacks.

I would say from a comprehensive review of al-Qaeda's literature and a comprehensive review of their assets and their operational capacity, that has not been their only goal throughout their entire existence, not even close, that attacking us was always a tactic as part of their larger strategum in the game that they are playing, which involves politics in a variety of countries and uncertainties of guerrilla warfare along those lines.

In that regard, I would point to the 9/11 Commission report, which pointed very early on, now more than two decades ago, that Osama bin Laden actually employed a strategy of what I characterize as planting seeds in a variety of countries to try and hopefully cultivate what we now see as affiliates or branches.

Now, these efforts have not been fruitful in every country. They have had fits and starts. And they have not always worked out. But I would argue that in some ways, in some spectacular ways, these efforts have actually worked. And so I don't think the growth of the affiliates is, in fact, a surprise or anything we should take as some sort of random event that just happens by happenstance.

The second point is the committee expressed interest in sort of the delineation between al-Qaeda's core and the affiliates. Part of my concern is that we talk about the al-Qaeda core as if it is this group in Afghanistan, Pakistan solely, which is totally distinct from everything else that is going on around the world, and that, therefore, if we just kill off the core, the threat from al-Qaeda as it manifested itself on 9/11 is no longer a worry for us.

I think even the Bush administration got into that at times as well, making statements like, "We killed 75 percent of senior al-Qaeda leaders." You know, President Obama has now said that we killed 73 percent of senior al-Qaeda leaders. You kind of wonder, you know, how many times we can kill three-fourths of the senior al-Qaeda leaders. You know, they are able to replace their ranks.

And in that vein, al-Qaeda's core is not confined, I would argue, to Afghanistan, Pakistan. The way I look at it based on al-Qaeda's literature, including a recently published letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri, is that it is basically where their general command is actually headquartered. And they have a series of committees and advisers surrounding Ayman al-Zawahiri. But the general command dispatches operatives around the globe to oversee their interests. And I won't get into the nerd analysis for you right now, but I can point to specific operatives we know are in touch with the general command, who have been dispatched by the general command, and they are operating in places such as Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Sinai, you know, across the globe basically.

The third and final point is that, you know, a lot of the discussion centers on, of course, again, the threat to the U.S. homeland. And we should be happy that they haven't been able to execute something on the level of a 9/11-style attack. That is the good news. Certainly America's defenses have improved through the years. We have thwarted plots. We have also gotten lucky on occasion, avoiding mass casualty attacks. But I just want to highlight something in my testimony.

When you talk about the threats to the U.S. homeland now, they are more diffuse, not just abroad but also to us here in this country. Since 2009, the way I look at it, there have been plots from the al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula starting on Christmas Day 2009; plots by the Pakistani Taliban in May 2010, which had the failed Times Square bombing. They actually took credit for that at my Web site. They emailed us the credit for that operation.

The Pakistani Taliban, according to the Obama administration, which has done a good job of describing the Pakistani Taliban, has a symbiotic relationship with al-Qaeda. There is a recent plot early this year connected to al-Qaeda members in Iran which involved derailing the train from New York to Toronto. And we have seen recent evidence that al-Qaeda in Iraq, according to the Iraqi Government anyway, may have considered dispatching operatives to launch some sort of chemical weapons attack in Europe and also the U.S.

In that regard, I point out that al-Qaeda in Iraq actually was tied to the 2007 failed attacks in Glasgow and London and was actually tasked in 2004 by al-Qaeda's general command with coming up with a plan to attack us.

So, just to wrap this up quickly, most of the affiliates spend most of their assets doing something else, fighting guerrilla warfare, trying to gain turf for themselves elsewhere. Most of their assets are not deployed against us in any immediate threat capacity. However, I think we have to be very careful not to assume away that threat and to understand that these threats manifested themselves very rapidly.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Joscelyn follows:]

Testimony of Thomas Joscelyn

Senior Fellow, Foundation for Defense of Democracies

Senior Editor, The Long War Journal

Before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade

United States Congress

“Global al-Qaeda: Affiliates, Objectives, and Future Challenges”

July 18, 2013

Chairman Poe, Ranking Member Sherman and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me here today to discuss the threat posed by al Qaeda. We have been asked to “examine the nature of global al Qaeda today.” In particular, you asked us to answer the following questions: “What is [al Qaeda’s] makeup? Is there a useful delineation between al Qaeda’s core and its affiliates? If so, what is the relationship? Most importantly, what is the threat of al Qaeda to the United States today?”

I provide my answers to each of these questions in the following sections. But first, I will summarize my conclusions:

- More than a decade after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks there is no commonly accepted definition of al Qaeda. There is, in fact, widespread disagreement over what exactly al Qaeda is.
- In my view, al Qaeda is best defined as a global international terrorist network, with a general command in Afghanistan and Pakistan and affiliates in several countries. Together, they form a robust network that, despite setbacks, contests for territory abroad and still poses a threat to U.S. interests both overseas and at home.
- It does not make sense to draw a firm line between al Qaeda’s “core,” which is imprecisely defined, and the affiliates. The affiliates are not populated with automatons, but they are serving al Qaeda’s broader goals. And al Qaeda has dispatched “core” members around the globe. As the 9/11 Commission found, Al Qaeda’s senior leaders have always pursued a policy of geographic expansion. The emergence of formal affiliates, or branches, has been a core al Qaeda objective since the early 1990s. While the affiliates have varying degrees of capabilities, and devote most of their resources to fighting “over there,” history demonstrates that the threat they pose “over here” can manifest itself at any time.
- In addition to its affiliates, al Qaeda operates as part of a “syndicate” in Central and South Asia. As former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said in 2010, “A victory for one [member of the syndicate] is a victory for all.” Al Qaeda and its allies control territory inside Afghanistan today. If additional parts of Afghanistan fall to the syndicate in the coming years, it will strengthen both al Qaeda’s ideological messaging and operational capability.

### **What is al Qaeda?**

This should be a straightforward question to answer. But in reality there is no commonly accepted understanding of al Qaeda. Writing in 2003, Bruce Hoffman wrote that there was

“[d]isagreement over precisely what al Qaeda is.”<sup>1</sup> It is “remarkable,” Hoffman noted, that “al Qaeda remains such a poorly understood phenomenon” even after the 9/11 attacks. Incredibly, any attempt to answer basic questions about al Qaeda’s structure (similar to the ones proposed by this committee), “provokes more disagreement than agreement in government, intelligence, and academic circles.”

Ten years later, Hoffman’s words still ring true. In early 2013, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) commissioned a workshop of experts to assess the future of al Qaeda. CSIS was interested in how al Qaeda will adapt to the “death of Osama bin Laden, the popular uprisings spreading across the Middle East and North Africa, and the global recessionary pressures that are causing governments to re-evaluate their [counterterrorism] strategies.” The final report issued at the conclusion of the workshop reads: “Workshop participants recognized that part of the challenge in imagining AQ’s future lies in the very definition of AQ.” Unsurprisingly, there was a “lack of consensus” among the experts. Echoing Hoffman’s assessment a decade earlier, CSIS found: “How AQ adapts to the challenges and opportunities that will shape its next decade is a source of spirited debate amongst government officials, academic experts, think-tank analysts and private consultants.”<sup>2</sup>

“At its broadest,” the CSIS report’s authors found, “the phenomenon includes a central group of senior leaders commonly referred to as AQ Core, regional affiliates which together with that core make up the AQ network, like-minded groups in the network’s key operating areas (eg, fellow travelers), homegrown Islamist extremists in Western countries, sympathisers across the globe and the AQ ideology itself.” Despite this complex mix, the workshop’s participants concluded that the “AQ Core and its network affiliates” will have “the most profound” impact “on the broader phenomenon’s future prospects.” For the most part, I concur with the CSIS definition of al Qaeda.

#### **The Al Qaeda Network**

The backbone of today’s al Qaeda consists of its “general command” in Afghanistan and Pakistan (others refer to this as the “AQ Core”) and its formal affiliates. The established al Qaeda affiliates include: Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and its Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and Shabaab in Somalia. All of the affiliates have publicly sworn *bayat* (an oath of fealty) to al Qaeda’s senior leadership. Jabhat al Nusra in Syria should also be included in this list as well, because the group has openly proclaimed its allegiance to Ayman al Zawahiri. Collectively, al Qaeda’s general command and the affiliates form an international terrorist network that is focused on both

<sup>1</sup> Bruce Hoffman, “Al Qaeda, Trends in Terrorism and Future Potentialities: An Assessment,” The Rand Corporation, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Canadian Security Intelligence Service, “The Future of Al Qaeda: Results of a Foresight Project,” World Watch: Expert Notes Series publication No. 2013-05-01, May 1, 2013; [http://www.csis-sers.gc.ca/pblctns/cdmctrch/20130401\\_th\\_ftr\\_f\\_lgd-eng.asp](http://www.csis-sers.gc.ca/pblctns/cdmctrch/20130401_th_ftr_f_lgd-eng.asp).

acquiring territory and executing terrorist attacks against the West. There is evidence showing that al Qaeda's general command guides the overall strategy pursued by the affiliates and even sometimes gets involved in specific tactical matters. However, the affiliates enjoy a large degree of latitude in deciding how to run their day-to-day operations. Relentless pressure from the U.S. and its allies has repeatedly disrupted the network, making the general command's job more difficult.

In addition to the established affiliates, there are numerous associated jihadist organizations that the Al Qaeda Network either influences or outright directs without officially recognizing the group as an affiliate. Consider two brief examples. In Mali, AQIM has fought alongside Ansar al-Dine (AAD), which was designated a terrorist organization by the State Department in March.<sup>3</sup> At the time, the State Department noted that AAD "cooperates closely with" and "has received support from AQIM since its inception in late 2011." AAD "continues to maintain close ties" to AQIM and "has received backing from AQIM in its fight against Malian and French forces." Similarly, Boko Haram in Nigeria is not a formal al Qaeda affiliate, but according to the U.S. government the group has maintained ties to three affiliates. "There are reported communications, training, and weapons links between Boko Haram, al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Shabaab, and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, which may strengthen Boko Haram's capacity to conduct terrorist attacks."<sup>4</sup>

Still other pro-al Qaeda organizations have emerged since the beginning of the so-called Arab Spring under the name Ansar al Sharia (Partisans of Sharia Law). The very first Ansar al Sharia was simply a rebranding of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula -- that is, it was a new name chosen by an established al Qaeda affiliate.<sup>5</sup> It is hardly surprising, therefore, to learn that other Ansar al Sharia chapters are run by jihadists with known ties to al Qaeda.

Ansar al Sharia Tunisia is headed by Seifallah ben Hassine (also known as Abu Iyad al Tunisi), who has been designated by United Nations as a terrorist.<sup>6</sup> Ben Hassine previously established the Tunisian Combatant Group (TCG), "in coordination with" al Qaeda, according to the UN. Ben Hassine has known ties to a constellation of al Qaeda terrorists, including the group's senior leaders, and the TCG played a key role in the September 2001 assassination of Northern Alliance leader Ahmed Massoud. Other UN-designated al Qaeda terrorists hold leadership positions within Ansar al Sharia Tunisia, too.<sup>7</sup> Ansar al Sharia Egypt is led by Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ)

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of State Media Note, Office of the Spokesperson, "Terrorist Designations of Ansar al-Dine," March 21, 2013; <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/03/206493.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.rewardsforjustice.net/index.cfm?page=shekau&language=english> (last accessed July 16, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "State Department: Ansar al Sharia an alias for AQAP," *The Long War Journal*, October 4, 2012; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/10/state\\_department\\_ans.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/10/state_department_ans.php).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda ally orchestrated assault on US Embassy in Tunisia," *The Long War Journal*, October 2, 2012; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/10/al\\_qaeda\\_ally\\_orchestr.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/10/al_qaeda_ally_orchestr.php).

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "From al Qaeda in Italy to Ansar al Sharia Tunisia," *The Long War Journal*, November 21, 2012; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/11/from\\_al\\_qaeda\\_in\\_ita.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/11/from_al_qaeda_in_ita.php).

leaders who have remained loyal to al Qaeda emir Ayman al Zawahiri.<sup>8</sup> Ayman's younger brother, Mohammed al Zawahiri, has played a starring role at Ansar al Sharia Egypt's events. Other Ansar al Sharia chapters, including inside Libya, have known al Qaeda ties as well. The groups calling themselves Ansar al Sharia are all open about their support for al Qaeda's agenda. We cannot rule out that the possibility that these organizations are simply al Qaeda's attempt at rebranding. It is easy to connect the dots.

The point is that outside of the formal affiliates, the Al Qaeda Network holds sway over dozens of organizations that are, at a minimum, ideological kinsmen. We often cannot see the operational ties between these groups because al Qaeda still maintains a substantial clandestine apparatus that is tasked with hiding such relationships. For some of these organizations, there may very well be no concrete ties and their relationship to al Qaeda's jihad is purely rhetorical.

#### **The al Qaeda-led 'syndicate' in Afghanistan and Pakistan**

In Central and South Asia, al Qaeda has forged what former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has called a "syndicate" of terrorist groups.<sup>9</sup> "What we see is that the success of any one of these groups leads to new capabilities and a new reputation for all," Gates said during a press conference in 2010. "A victory for one is a victory for all."

Gates continued: "It's dangerous to single out any one of these groups and say if we could beat that group that will solve the problem. Because they are, in effect, a syndicate of terrorist operators." Gates blamed al Qaeda for orchestrating the syndicate's attacks in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. The "syndicate" description remains apt today, as there is no evidence that this coalition has frayed in the wake of al Qaeda's senior leadership losses.<sup>10</sup>

Consider this brief sketch of the main groups that belong to the syndicate.

In Afghanistan, al Qaeda has fought alongside the Taliban since the mid-1990s. Before the September 11 attacks, Osama bin Laden established the 55<sup>th</sup> Arab Brigade to serve as al Qaeda's contribution to the Taliban's side in Afghanistan's bloody civil war. The 55<sup>th</sup> was crushed during the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001, but was later reconstituted as part of the Lashkar al Zil, or "Shadow Army."<sup>11</sup> This paramilitary fighting force is still very much alive.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "Ansar al Sharia Egypt founder 'honored to be an extension of al Qaeda,'" *The Long War Journal*, November 27, 2012; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/11/ansar\\_al\\_sharia\\_egyp.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/11/ansar_al_sharia_egyp.php).

<sup>9</sup> Craig Whitlock, "Gates: Al-Qaeda has assembled a 'syndicate' of terror groups," *Washington Post*, January 20, 2010; [http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2010-01-20/world/36888348\\_1\\_qaeda-al-qaeda-syndicate-of-terrorist-operators](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2010-01-20/world/36888348_1_qaeda-al-qaeda-syndicate-of-terrorist-operators).

<sup>10</sup> Al Qaeda can also be described as the tip of the jihadist spear. For an analysis of al Qaeda's relationships with various other jihadist organizations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, see: Thomas Joscelyn and Bill Roggio, "Analysis: Al Qaeda is the tip of the jihadist spear," *The Long War Journal*, October 8, 2009; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/10/analysis\\_al\\_qaeda\\_is.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/10/analysis_al_qaeda_is.php).

<sup>11</sup> Bill Roggio, "Al Qaeda's paramilitary 'Shadow Army,'" *The Long War Journal*, February 9, 2009; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/02/al\\_qaedas\\_paramilita.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/02/al_qaedas_paramilita.php).

The U.S. has targeted members of the “Shadow Army” in recent weeks.<sup>12</sup> And, in early June, the U.S. Treasury Department added an al Qaeda explosives expert to its list of designated terrorists. This expert, a Libyan, is “in charge of IED component construction at the AQ electronics workshop” and has “provided AQ paramilitary brigades in Afghanistan with timers, circuits, mines, and remote control devices for use in IEDs.”<sup>13</sup> Senior Taliban commanders continue to facilitate al Qaeda operations inside Afghanistan as well.<sup>14</sup>

Other groups fighting in Afghanistan, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), have long been part of al Qaeda’s plan.<sup>15</sup> The IMU operates throughout the country, as well as in Pakistan, and also maintains a facilitation network in neighboring Iran. The Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), a splinter of the IMU, continues to fight alongside other al Qaeda-affiliate parties and take part in anti-Western plotting. Allies such as the Eastern Turkish Islamic Party (ETIP) provide fighters and leaders for the syndicate, too.

In Pakistan, al Qaeda helped establish the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), or Pakistani Taliban, which has unleashed a prolific terror campaign inside Pakistan, fought in Afghanistan, and even exported its operations elsewhere around the globe. Recent reports indicate that the TTP has sent a contingent to Syria, but some within the TTP have denied that claim. As recognized by the State Department, the TTP is clearly a part of al Qaeda’s camp as the two maintain a “symbiotic relationship.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Bill Roggio, “Al Qaeda ‘paramilitary commander,’ Haqqani Network leader reported killed in recent drone strike,” *The Long War Journal*, July 6, 2013; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/07/al\\_qaeda\\_military\\_co.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/07/al_qaeda_military_co.php). See also: Patrick Megahan and Bill Roggio, “Al Qaeda facilitator targeted in eastern Afghanistan,” *The Long War Journal*, June 15, 2013; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/06/al\\_qaeda\\_facilitator\\_2.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/06/al_qaeda_facilitator_2.php).

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of the Treasury Press Release, “Treasury Designates Senior Al-Qa’ida Bomb Maker,” June 6, 2013; <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/j11973.aspx>.

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance: Patrick Megahan and Bill Roggio, “ISAF targets al Qaeda facilitator in eastern Afghanistan,” *The Long War Journal*, May 17, 2003; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/05/isaf\\_targets\\_al\\_qaed\\_6.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/05/isaf_targets_al_qaed_6.php).

<sup>15</sup> *The Long War Journal’s* regular review of press releases from NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has revealed a staggering degree of coordination between the IMU and al Qaeda, as well as other insurgent groups. Osama bin Laden helped convince the Taliban to host the IMU in the late 1990s. See Rashid, Ahmed. *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*. Penguin Books: 2003. Page 229. (“Bin Laden has encouraged the Taliban leaders to embrace a pan-Islamic ideology; for example, he played a key role in persuading the Taliban to give sanctuary to the IMU in 1999.”) For another good description of al Qaeda’s influence on the IMU see the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) database: [http://www.start.umd.edu/start/data\\_collections/tops/terrorist\\_organization\\_profile.asp?id=4075](http://www.start.umd.edu/start/data_collections/tops/terrorist_organization_profile.asp?id=4075) (last accessed July 16, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> According to the State Department, “TTP [Movement of the Taliban in Pakistan] and al Qaeda have a symbiotic relationship; TTP draws ideological guidance from al Qaeda, while al Qaeda relies on TTP for safe haven in the Pashtun areas along the Afghan-Pakistani border. This mutual cooperation gives TTP access to both al Qaeda’s global terrorist network and the operational experience of its members. Given the proximity of the two groups and the nature of their relationship, TTP is a force multiplier for al Qaeda.” Philip J. Crowley, “Designations of Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan and Two Senior Leaders,” State Department Press Statement, September 1, 2010; <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2010/09/146545.htm>.



The Haqqani Network, straddling the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan, remains one of al Qaeda's most important allies. The Haqqanis provide not only key logistical support for the syndicate's Afghan-focused operations, but also a safe haven from which al Qaeda can direct attacks against the West. As the authors of a recent, in-depth profile of the Haqqani Network concluded, "the Haqqani Network has long served as a local enabler of al Qaeda and its global jihad."<sup>17</sup> A string of plots against Europe and the U.S. have been traced to Haqqani-controlled territory.<sup>18</sup>

Other Pakistan-based, al Qaeda-allied groups include: Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI), Harakat-ul-Mujahideen (HUM), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). All of these groups have decades-old ties to al Qaeda, and have cooperated with al Qaeda in operations. These organizations have provided al Qaeda with a deep roster of skilled operatives who have replaced fallen terrorist commanders.

### **What is the relationship between al Qaeda's "core" and the affiliates?**

All of the established al Qaeda affiliates – Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Shabaab and, I would add, Jabhat al Nusra in Syria – have sworn an oath of *bay'at* (loyalty) to al Qaeda's general command and Ayman Zawahiri. As Osama bin Laden's chief co-conspirator, Zawahiri was involved in all facets of al Qaeda's operations, from strategic questions to attack planning. Prior to the slaying of bin Laden: Zawahiri negotiated mergers with al Qaeda affiliates (such as AQIM), reprimanded problematic commanders (such as deceased AQI head Abu Musab al Zarqawi), and oversaw at least parts of al Qaeda's international operations (from calling off a planned 2003 attack on New York City's subways to orchestrating other attacks).

It is impossible to assess how frequently the affiliates are in contact with the general command, as much of that data is not available to the outside world. But Zawahiri is in charge of the Al Qaeda Network. The affiliates recognize Zawahiri as their leader, even when they disagree with his decisions. And Zawahiri is still communicating with his subordinates, even if his missives are delayed due to security concerns. For instance, Zawahiri communicated with one of his Egyptian followers, Muhammad Jamal al Kashef, in 2011 and 2012.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Brown, Valid and Rassler, Don. *Fountainhead of Jihad: The Haqqani Nexus, 1973-2012*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013. P. 229.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 229 – 233.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "Communications with Ayman al Zawahiri highlighted in 'Nasr City cell' case," *The Long War Journal*, February 10, 2013; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/02/communications\\_with.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/02/communications_with.php).

In April and May of this year, Zawahiri sent messages to, and received replies from, the heads of al Qaeda's affiliates in Iraq and Syria.<sup>20</sup> Those communications revealed a serious dispute between the emirs of al Qaeda in Iraq and Jabhat al Nusra over who commands al Qaeda's growing army in Syria. Zawahiri ruled in Jabhat al Nusra's favor, but the head of al Qaeda in Iraq subsequently defied Zawahiri's order.<sup>21</sup> It remains to be seen how this dispute is worked out, but it should be noted that the squabble is over al Qaeda's successful growth inside Syria. In other words, they are not arguing over who owns an unsuccessful franchise. And even with AQI's open defiance, Jabhat al Nusra has proven to be extremely deferential to Zawahiri. Despite AQI's rancor, Al Qaeda's general command has gained a new affiliate inside Syria since late 2011. To put it another way, suppose Zawahiri were to entirely lose AQI's loyalty (so far, there is no reason to believe this is the case), he has still gained Jabhat al Nusra.

Another serious dispute has erupted in Somalia, where Shabaab's leadership has reportedly executed al Qaeda operatives with well-established pedigrees, including Ibrahim al Afghani. This cannot please al Qaeda's general command, as al Afghani was loyal to al Qaeda during the Battle of Tora Bora and the years that followed.

The Al Qaeda Network is not comprised of automatons. Like all manmade organizations, the terror network houses personalities who may clash and sometimes have competing interests. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the network has "fragmented" or "splintered," as some analysts contend. Keep in mind this striking example: Prior to 9/11 there was a significant amount of internal dissent over whether al Qaeda should launch its most devastating attack in history. The 9/11 attacks became al Qaeda's signature strike, and yet several high-level al Qaeda members disagreed with bin Laden's decision to move forward with the operation. This did not force these senior jihadists outside of al Qaeda's ranks. In fact, some of them went on to praise the 9/11 attacks after the fact while maintaining their leadership positions.

Since its inception in the late 1980s, al Qaeda has faced substantial hurdles. Yet, the organization has proven to be remarkably adaptive, in part, because its leaders devised a strong plan for broadening their base of support within the jihadist world and beyond. The plan relies upon loyal followers throughout the world, not just in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

#### **The al Qaeda "core" is imprecisely defined.**

There is no standardized definition of al Qaeda's "core." In general, when U.S. officials and independent analysts use this term, it appears that they are referring to al Qaeda's senior leadership in Pakistan and Afghanistan, which is headed by al Qaeda emir Ayman al Zawahiri. The al Qaeda honcho is, in turn, served by several committees and an unknown number of advisers. As far as I can tell, this is what is meant by the "core" of al Qaeda. As I've made clear

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "Analysis: Zawahiri's letter to al Qaeda branches in Syria, Iraq," *The Long War Journal*, June 10, 2013; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/06/analysis\\_alleged\\_lct.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/06/analysis_alleged_lct.php).

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "Islamic State of Iraq leader defies Zawahiri in alleged audio message," *The Long War Journal*, June 15, 2013; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/06/islamic\\_state\\_of\\_ira\\_3.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/06/islamic_state_of_ira_3.php).

in my testimony, I prefer the term “general command” to “core” (which I have used elsewhere) as this is what is used in al Qaeda’s own correspondence.

It does not make any sense to assume that “core” al Qaeda members, as they are commonly referred to, are confined to Pakistan and Afghanistan. We know, for example, that al Qaeda’s senior leaders have dispatched or otherwise rely upon numerous terrorists around the world to do their bidding, both as part of the group’s operational cells, as well as within the Al Qaeda Network’s affiliates. Consider the following examples.

Headquartered in Yemen, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is led by Nasir al Wuhayshi, a terrorist who served as Osama bin Laden’s aide-de-camp for several years prior to 9/11. Wuhayshi was bin Laden’s protégé and remained loyal to the al Qaeda master even through the darkest times, including the Battle of Tora Bora in late 2001, when all could have been lost. Bin Laden later returned the favor, rejecting a plea by some AQAP members to replace Wuhayshi as their leader with Anwar al Awlaki, the charismatic al Qaeda ideologue who has since been killed in a drone strike. Some of Wuhayshi’s most trusted lieutenants, including several former Guantanamo detainees, also served al Qaeda in Afghanistan well before the 9/11 attacks. Together, they are advancing al Qaeda’s global jihadist agenda, simultaneously fighting for territory inside Yemen while overseeing plots against the United States.

According to the Obama administration, the terrorist who leads al Qaeda’s network inside Iran today is a Kuwaiti named Muhsin al Fadhli. Few al Qaeda terrorists were trusted with foreknowledge of the 9/11 attacks; al Fadhli was one of them. The network that al Fadhli oversees is the result of an agreement with the Iranian regime that was brokered by Osama bin Laden’s right-hand man, who traveled to and from Iran. This Iran-based network serves as a “core” pipeline for al Qaeda’s senior leadership. At least several important al Qaeda operatives have served this Iran-based network while living in other Gulf countries. After 9/11, numerous al Qaeda leaders, including members of the group’s management and military councils, fled to Iran where some were held under house arrest. One of these senior al Qaeda members is Saif al Adel, who has since been allowed to leave Iran, although it is unclear where he is currently stationed. Al Adel and his ilk did not cease being “core” al Qaeda members simply because they fled to Iran after the fall of the Taliban’s Afghanistan.

A Defense Department report (“Al Qaeda in Libya: A Profile”) published by the Library of Congress in August 2012 identified at least two senior operatives who were dispatched to Libya to oversee al Qaeda’s efforts there. The first is known as Abu Anas al Libi, who was long ago convicted of terrorism charges for his role in al Qaeda’s 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. Abu Anas is coordinating his efforts with al Qaeda’s senior leadership in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The second terrorist identified in the report, Abd al Baset Azzouz, was sent to Libya by Ayman al Zawahiri. Another al Qaeda terrorist who was not identified in the Defense Department’s report, but is known to operate inside Libya, is Faraj al Chalabi (or al Shibli), who

was detained earlier this year after returning to Libya from Pakistan.<sup>22</sup> Al Chalabi may have been involved in the September 11, 2012, terrorist attack in Benghazi.

In March, the State Department offered a \$5 million reward for information leading to the capture of an American known as Jihad Mostafa, who is believed to be Ayman al Zawahiri's emissary to Shabaab, al Qaeda's affiliate in Somalia. Shabaab is currently engaged in serious infighting and it is not publicly known how Mostafa's role has been affected.

There are credible reports that senior al Qaeda operatives, including a member of the group's Shura council, have gone to Syria. And Ayman al Zawahiri has appointed a longtime al Qaeda operative known as Abu Khalid al Suri to resolve the dispute between Jabhat al Nusra and al Qaeda in Iraq.

Other core al Qaeda members have returned to their home countries in the wake of the Arab Spring. One declassified Abbottabad document shows that Osama bin Laden recommended that a terrorist named Mohammed Islambouli leave northern Pakistan for Kunar, Afghanistan. Mohammed's brother, Khaled Islambouli, was the assassin who killed Egyptian president Anwar Sadat. While bin Laden was willing to lose some al Qaeda leaders, he was not willing to lose Mohammed Islambouli, who is the equivalent of royalty in jihadist circles and is today a free man inside Egypt, where is joined by other Zawahiri loyalists who have either been freed from prison or returned from abroad.

Nasir al Wuhayshi, Muhsin al Fadhli, Abu Anas al Libi, Abd al Baset Azzouz, Jihad Mostafa, Abu Khalid al Suri, Mohammed Islambouli: These are just some of the men who can be counted on to advance al Qaeda's agenda outside Afghanistan and Pakistan. It does not make sense to consider them anything but "core" al Qaeda members.

#### **Al Qaeda's Affiliate Strategy**

The emergence of al Qaeda's affiliates is no accident. Al Qaeda has always sought to push forward its agenda by working with, co-opting, or otherwise directing like-minded jihadist groups. The principal Al Qaeda organization – its general command – is itself a joint venture, which bin Laden's organization and Ayman al Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) forged through a merger.

Al Qaeda began laying the groundwork for the emergence of its affiliates in the early 1990s.<sup>23</sup> Bin Laden was headquartered in Sudan at the time and, according to the 9/11 Commission, "had a vision of himself as head of an international jihad confederation." Bin Laden established an "Islamic Army Shura," which "was to serve as the coordinating body for the consortium of

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "Benghazi suspect fled to Pakistan, recently detained in Libya," *The Long War Journal*, March 14, 2013; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/03/al\\_qlaeda-linked\\_beng.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/03/al_qlaeda-linked_beng.php)

<sup>23</sup> My colleague at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, Jonathan Schanzer, has written an excellent primer on how al Qaeda's affiliates began to develop. Schanzer, Jonathan. *Al-Qaeda's Armies: Middle East Affiliate Groups & The Next Generation of Terror*. Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2004.

terrorist groups with which he was forging alliances.” The Shura “was composed of his own al Qaeda Shura together with leaders or representatives of terrorist organizations that were still independent.”<sup>24</sup>

As part of this Islamic army, bin Laden “enlisted groups from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Oman, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Somalia, and Eritrea.” The burgeoning al Qaeda network “also established cooperative but less formal relationships with other extremist groups from these same countries; from the African states of Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Uganda; and from the Southeast Asian states of Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia.” Al Qaeda also supported efforts in the Balkans, Central Asia, Chechnya, and the Philippines. Bin Laden and al Qaeda pursued a “pattern of expansion through building alliances” and had laid the “groundwork for a true global terrorist network.”<sup>25</sup>

In 1996, bin Laden was forced to leave the Sudan for Pakistan and then Afghanistan. But al Qaeda’s strategy of alliance building continued. The 9/11 Commission wrote: “The alliance with the Taliban provided al Qaeda a sanctuary in which to train and indoctrinate fighters and terrorists, import weapons, forge ties with other jihad groups and leaders, and plot and staff terrorist schemes.”<sup>26</sup> In addition to maintaining his own facilities, bin Laden “also provided support to and benefited from the broad infrastructure of such facilities in Afghanistan made available to the global network of Islamist estimates.”<sup>27</sup> During this period in Afghanistan, al Qaeda continued “to collaborate closely with the many Middle Eastern groups – in Egypt, Algeria, Yemen, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Somalia, and elsewhere – with which it had been linked when Bin Ladin was in Sudan.”<sup>28</sup> And al Qaeda “reinforced” and “bolstered” its ties to still other groups.

It is estimated that from 1996 to September 11, 2001, between 10,000 and 20,000 fighters “underwent instruction in Bin Laden-supported camps in Afghanistan,” with only some becoming full-fledged al Qaeda members. The remaining newly-trained jihadists were a “potential resource for al Qaeda.”<sup>29</sup>

The connection between bin Laden’s original plan, which evolved through the years, and the emergence of al Qaeda’s affiliates has not been lost on outside observers. In 2011, a Congressional Research Service report noted: “In many ways, the dispersion of Al Qaeda affiliates fits into the larger strategy of Bin Laden and his associates. They have sought to serve as the vanguard of a religious movement that inspires Muslims and other individuals aspiring to

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<sup>24</sup> 9/11 Commission Report, p. 58.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> 9/11 Commission Report, p. 66.

<sup>27</sup> 9/11 Commission Report, pp. 66 -- 67.

<sup>28</sup> 9/11 Commission Report, p. 67.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

join a jihadi movement to help defend and purify Islam through violent means.”<sup>30</sup> After all, the name “Qaeda” means “base,” from “which its members hope to build a robust, geographically diverse network.”<sup>31</sup>

### **What is the threat of al Qaeda to the United States today?**

Today, the Al Qaeda Network is more geographically diverse than ever. Al Qaeda and its affiliates are fighting in more countries than at any other time before or after 9/11. It has several established affiliates, which it lacked on September 11, 2001. The ebb and flow of fighting changes the scope of al Qaeda’s footprint on a regular basis, but the network has shown the capacity to challenge for territory across Africa, through the Middle East and into Central and South Asia. Meanwhile, al Qaeda’s general command maintains safe havens in the Kunar and Nuristan provinces of Afghanistan today.

It is true that al Qaeda’s affiliates allocate most of their resources to waging guerilla warfare against their “local” enemies. But if we have learned anything since 9/11 it is that the gains made by al Qaeda “over there” can easily lead to a threat against Americans “over here.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, al Qaeda’s expansion in recent years has led to more threats against the U.S. Homeland, not less.

Here are four examples.

First, AQAP has emerged as a threat to the U.S. Homeland. AQAP was decimated after 2003 by a relentless counterterrorism campaign. But in early 2009 the group was reborn after al Qaeda’s Saudi and Yemeni wings united. By December 25, 2009, AQAP had placed a suicide bomber on board a Detroit-bound plane. Luck and the vigilance of the passengers on board Flight 253 saved the day. Prior to the Christmas Day bombing attempt, many counterterrorism analysts assumed that AQAP was only interested in attacking targets inside Yemen. Several attempted attacks by AQAP have followed that initial failure.

Second, months later, in May 2010, the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) dispatched a terrorist to Times Square. The SUV bomb did not go off, saving numerous lives. The Pakistani Taliban is the same group, discussed above, that shares a “symbiotic relationship” with al Qaeda. The Pakistani Taliban’s resources are devoted, by and large, to operations inside Pakistan and Afghanistan. And yet the group almost detonated a truck bomb in the heart of New York.

Third, on April 22 of this year, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) announced that they had disrupted an al Qaeda plot to derail a passenger train traveling from New York to

<sup>30</sup> John Rollins, “Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy,” Congressional Research Service, January 25, 2011.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> The “over there”-“over here” dynamic was first employed by the 9/11 Commission. See 9/11 Commission Report, p. 367.

Toronto. This was the first known al Qaeda plot against Canada since 9/11. RCMP officials said the plotters received “direction and guidance” from al Qaeda members in Iran.

Fourth, al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) has had a hand in plots against the West. In 2004, according to the Department of Homeland Security, Osama bin Laden instructed then AQI emir Abu Musab al Zarqawi to assemble a cell capable of striking the U.S. In 2007, failed attacks in London and Glasgow were tied back to AQI.<sup>33</sup> And in June of this year Iraqi officials claimed to have disrupted a sarin and mustard gas plot that was intended to target Iraq, Europe and the U.S.<sup>34</sup>

Luckily, these plots have either been foiled or failed for other reasons. It has always been difficult to mount a large-casualty attack against the U.S. Homeland. But the diversity of attempted attacks against the U.S. Homeland demonstrates that while the Al Qaeda Network is fighting for territory “over there,” it remains a threat to Americans “over here.”

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<sup>33</sup> Raymond Bonner, Jane Perlez and Eric Schmitt, “British Inquiry of Failed Plots Points to Iraq’s Qaeda Group,” *The New York Times*, December 14, 2007;

[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/14/world/europe/14london.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/14/world/europe/14london.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

<sup>34</sup> Bill Roggio, “Iraq breaks up al Qaeda chemical weapons cell,” *The Long War Journal*, June 1, 2013; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/06/iraq\\_breaks\\_up\\_al\\_qa.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/06/iraq_breaks_up_al_qa.php)

Mr. POE. Thank you.

Dr. Hegghammer, is that correct?

Mr. HEGGHAMMER. That is correct.

Mr. POE. Thank you. You have 5 minutes, sir. Thank you for coming from California to be here today.

**STATEMENT OF THOMAS HEGGHAMMER, PH.D., ZUCKERMAN FELLOW, CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION, STANFORD UNIVERSITY**

Mr. HEGGHAMMER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me. And thank you, Ranking Member and all of the distinguished members of the subcommittee. It is a great honor to be here.

I have been doing academic research on al-Qaeda since before 9/11. And never has the future of the jihadi movement seemed more unpredictable to my eyes than it does today. Still, for this testimony, I have decided to try to look ahead and speculate about the long-term future of al-Qaeda. And in these opening remarks, I will highlight my three most important conclusions.

First, it is my assessment that we are past the peak of organized jihadi terrorism in the West. Al-Qaeda core is weak, and most affiliates are not systematically targeting the U.S. homeland. The main threat in the next 2, 3, perhaps 5 years is ad hoc attacks by unaffiliated agents, which are harder to prevent but less lethal on average. Affiliates seem to be holding their fire against the West, partly because they have primarily local agendas, for which overseas operations are not very useful, and partly because they seem to fear the U.S. military response that comes with attacks on the homeland. So deterrence, in other words, appears to be part of the story here. And to maintain this deterrence vis-à-vis jihadi organizations, the U.S. in my view should continue to use military force in counterterrorism selectively, primarily against those groups with a proven willingness to attack the U.S. homeland. Using heavy force against groups that have not yet attacked us runs the risk of provoking the very behavior we are trying to prevent.

My second and more pessimistic point is that the jihadi movement writ large is thriving and will be with us for another decade at least. I think that the optimists were basically wrong in commenting on the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring was not an end of the Cold War moment for jihadism. Al-Qaeda core may be very weak, and al-Shabaab in Somalia may be experiencing setbacks, but the other affiliates are doing just fine. And the new Ansar al-Sharia groups in North Africa are growing. The Syrian war, with its staggering numbers of foreign fighters, has been a major boost to the movement. For now, most of these groups are not targeting the West. This could change, however, and we should pay particular attention in my view to Jabhat al-Nusra because it disposes of so many Western operatives.

My third point, which is more of a guess, really, is that I expect to see a second wave of serious plots in the West some 4, 5, 6 years down the line. And the most likely perpetrator will be an organization that we do not yet know about. It could, of course, come from existing affiliates as well, but these groups have the disadvantage of being known to us and they are led by people who have seen what drones can do, which means they are less likely to try sys-



tematically attacking the West. And if they do, we know where to direct the retaliation.

Future groups, on the other hand, might be less visible to our agencies and be led by a new generation prone to overestimating their own capabilities. Their chances of success will depend on our continued vigilance and ability to spot such grouplets early. More than ever, we need a concerted effort, both in the intelligence community and the academy, to make sense of this rapidly changing jihadi landscape.

Thank you for your attention.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hegghammer follows:]

**The Future of Anti-Western Jihadism**

**Prepared Testimony for the Hearing on  
“Global al-Qaeda: Affiliates, Objectives, and Future Challenges”**

House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade

July 18, 2013

**Thomas Hegghammer**

Zuckerman Fellow, Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University  
Senior Research Fellow, Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI)



Disclaimer: The views expressed in this testimony are my own and do not represent those of Stanford University, the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, or the Norwegian Government.

**Introductory remarks**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you very much for inviting me to testify. It is a great honour. I have been doing academic research on al-Qaida since before 9/11, and never has the future of the jihadi movement seemed more unpredictable to my eyes than now. Still, for this testimony I have decided to look ahead and speculate about the long-term future of al-Qaida. In this presentation I will highlight my three most important conclusions.

First, it is my assessment that we are past the peak of organized jihadi terrorism in the West. Al-Qaida Core is weak and most affiliates are not systematically targeting the US homeland. The main threat in the next 2-3 years is ad-hoc attacks by unaffiliated agents, which are harder to prevent, but less lethal on average. Affiliates seem to be holding their fire against the West, partly because they have local agendas for which overseas operations are not very useful, and partly because they seem to fear the US military response that comes with attacks on the homeland. Deterrence, in other words, appears to be part of the story. To maintain this deterrence vis-a-vis jihadi organizations, the US should continue to use selective military force in counterterrorism, but primarily against those groups with a proven willingness to attack the US homeland. Using heavy force against groups that have not yet attacked us runs the risk of provoking the very behaviour we are trying to prevent.

My second and more pessimistic point is that the jihadi movement writ large is thriving and will be with us for another decade at least. The optimists were basically wrong - the Arab Spring was not an "end of the Cold War moment" for jihadism. AQ core may be dying, and al-Shabaab experiencing setbacks, but other affiliates are doing just fine, and the new Ansar al-Sharia groups in North Africa are growing. The Syrian war, with its staggering numbers of foreign fighters, has been a major boost to the movement. For now, most of the groups are not targeting the West. This could change, however, and we should pay particular attention to Jabhat al-Nusra, because it disposes of so many Western operatives.

My third point, which is more of a guess, is that I expect a "second wave" of serious plots in the West some 4-6 years down the line. The most likely perpetrator will be an organization that we do not yet know about. Existing affiliates have the disadvantage of being known to us, and they are led by people who have seen what drones can do. This means they are less likely to try attacking the West, and if they do, we know where to direct the retaliation. Future groups, on the other hand, might be less visible to our agencies and led by a new generation prone to overestimating their own capabilities. Their chances of success will depend on our continued vigilance and ability to spot such grouplets early. More than ever, we need a concerted effort, both in the intelligence community and the academy, to make sense of this rapidly changing jihadi landscape.

Thank you for your attention.

### The Future of Anti-Western Jihadism

This testimony explores the future of jihadism, in part because the past and present are already quite well described in the literature and partly because there has been considerable debate among experts in recent years about al-Qaida's future. Peter Bergen has literally declared the group "defeated", while a book by Daveed Gartenstein-Ross sets out to explain "why we are still losing the war on terror."<sup>1</sup> Earlier this year, former CIA officials Paul Pillar and Bruce Riedel published op-eds on the very same day making diametrically opposing arguments about the future of al-Qaida.<sup>2</sup> With this testimony I weigh in on this debate and deliberately engage in some qualified speculation about al-Qaida's future.

My overall view is relatively optimistic, in that I see al-Qaida Core as severely weakened, affiliates as largely uninterested in targeting the West, and the macro-trend for the jihadi movement as downward-pointing. However, I also see the decline as a long and slow one with plenty of opportunities for temporary surges in activity. In addition, I make two specific predictions: one is that conservative forms of Islamism and locally oriented varieties of jihadism will remain major forces in Middle Eastern politics for at least a decade, probably two decades, to come. The other is that, some 4-6 years down the line, we may see attempts to form new organizations emulating AQ Core's strategy of systematically targeting the West. I should note a limitation in my empirical focus: my main concern is the future of anti-Western jihadism; space does not allow for assessments of the future of every regional group or of all current trends in jihadi ideology.

From here the analysis proceeds in five steps. First I clarify key terminology; Second, I briefly describe the situation today. Third, I explain why the jihadi movement has declined. In the fourth part I present the case for a second wave of anti-Western jihadi terrorism and in the fifth I address some counterarguments.

#### 1) Definitions

One of the reasons why people often disagree when discussing jihadism is that the prevalent concepts are so slippery that we end up talking about different things. To avoid confusion, let me clarify what I mean by the following key terms:

- *Islamism* refers to any form of political activism in the name of Islam (both violent and non-violent).
- *Jihadism* refers to any form of violent Islamism (both the locally and globally oriented varieties)
- *Anti-Western jihadism* is a subcategory of jihadism and refers to a particular strategy of prioritising Western targets. It is also known as "global jihadism" and "BinLadenism" from the man who championed it. Al-Qaida Core pursues this strategy, while the affiliates, for the most part, do not.
- *Al-Qaida* refers to al-Qaida Core and its affiliates combined.
- *Al-Qaida Core* refers to the mother organization headed by Ayman al-Zawahiri. It has been the main, but not the only perpetrator of anti-Western jihadism.
- *Affiliates* or "*regional organizations*" refer to jihadi groups such as AQAP or AQIM that have organizational links with al-Qaida Core and are sympathetic to its ideology without necessarily sharing all its aims or its strategy.

<sup>1</sup> Peter Bergen, "Time to declare victory: al Qaeda is defeated", *CNN.com*, 27 June 2012; Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, *Bin Laden's Legacy: Why We're Still Losing the War on Terror* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Paul R. Pillar, "Algeria Attack Represents al Qaeda's Dying Gasp", *The Daily Beast*, 24 January 2013; Bruce Riedel, "New Al-Qaeda Generation May Be Deadliest One", *Al-Monitor.com*, 24 January 2013.

- *Independents* refer to individuals and grouplets who are willing to follow al-Qaida's strategy of attacking in the West, but who lack links to a jihadi organization.
- *Foreign fighters* refer to people who travel to fight in regional jihad fronts. They are generally not prepared to follow al-Qaida's anti-Western terrorist strategy, which is why they seek out conflict zones to begin with. However, some foreign fighters radicalize in the field and end up taking part in attacks in the West.

## 2) The actor landscape today

Let me briefly provide a bird's eye view of the jihadi actor landscape today. First, I, like many others, see al-Qaida Core as severely weakened. Many of its leaders have been killed or detained, its membership is low (reportedly well under 100), its plot frequency and quality is down, it runs fewer training camps, and accommodates fewer foreign recruits. It is, essentially, losing personnel faster than it can recruit.

Second, the affiliates are alive and well, but most refrain from systematically attacking the West. The "older" affiliates, such as AQAP, ISI, AQIM, al-Shabaab, the Caucasus Emirate, et al, are all under various degrees of pressure, but most of them are doing just fine and show no sign of imminent collapse. The younger affiliates (such as Jabhat al-Nusra) and sympathizing organizations (such as the Ansar al-Sharia groups), seem to be doing even better.

The crucial point about the affiliates is that most of them seem either unwilling or unable to attack in the West. For all the talk of AQ connections, AQIM and ISI have staged remarkably few attacks in West. AQAP has been an exception, but after the killing of al-Awlaqi and Samir Khan in 2011, their international plotting activity – as reported in open sources – appears to be declining.

Third, despite the Boston bombings and the London stabbing this spring, the plotting activity of independents in the West appears to be declining. In the United States, for example, their activity level, measured in attempted plots, is down substantially from the record highs of 2009 and 2010.

Fourth, foreign fighting remains very popular, much more so than anti-Western terrorism. Syria is the prime destination, but other destinations such as AfPak, Mali and Yemen continue to draw a steady trickle of foreign recruits.

Fifth, conservative forms of Islamism are thriving in both the Middle East and in Europe. In Egypt, for example, Salafis constitute an important political constituency. In Saudi Arabia and much of the Gulf, conservative clergy continue to wield significant formal and informal influence. Europe has seen the emergence of several "semi-radical" organizations – such as al-Muhajiroun in the UK and the Prophet's Umma in Norway - groups that express admiration for al-Qaida but mostly stop short of perpetrating violence in the West.

The bottom line is that the Arab Spring appears not to have the same effect on Islamism as the fall of the Soviet Union had on radical leftism. The overall situation today is reminiscent of – though not identical to – that of the 1990s, when, like now, several jihadi groups with local and regional agendas were operating in across the Muslim world. Then as now, Western governments were unable or unwilling to pursue them militarily, and the groups themselves were unable or unwilling to attack in the West. Then as now, Europe had semi-radical communities operating just within the confines of the law and regularly sending foreign fighters to conflicts in the Muslim world.

The main difference is that in the 1990s, al-Qaida Core did not have the notoriety as it has today, and its strategy of targeting the West was largely untested. There were occasional episodes of anti-Western terrorist activity, but for most groups, systematically targeting the West was inconceivable, which is why Bin Ladin's initiative attracted so much controversy from other activists at the time. Today, AQ Core's "America first" strategy is very much on the table, and the rhetoric of all groups is

substantially more anti-Western. This means that “going global” represents a shorter ideological leap for jihadis today than for their predecessors in the 1990s.

### 3) Why AQ Core is weak and affiliates hold back

The decline of al-Qaida Core is the easiest aspect of the current state of affairs to explain. It is fundamentally a story of what terrorism scholars call government “learning”, i.e., gradual accumulation of information about the identity and location of the members of the rebel group, which in turn allows for increasingly targeted and more effective repressive measures. At the beginning of the war on terror, al-Qaida enjoyed an informational advantage over the US government – as do all terrorist groups at the outset of their campaigns – because it knew where to find us but we did not know where to find them. With the help of time and massive investments in intelligence, we were able to map the organization, contain it, and eliminate leaders faster than it could train new ones.

Learning is also behind the moderate decline in attacks by independents. Advances in data mining and analysis have allowed governments to collect, accumulate, and exploit data about the fringes of the jihadi network to a much greater extent than before, allowing for the identification of many, though not all, plots before they reach execution. Governments are helped here by the fact that true lone wolves are extremely rare, and that, for most individuals, the radicalization process involves socialization with other activists and/or consumption of jihadi propaganda online, both of which leave traces to be exploited. This, incidentally, is one of several reasons why the Internet is proving to be less of a boon to terrorists than many analysts predicted some years ago. For all their skill using the internet for propaganda distribution, jihadis are struggling use the web for operational purposes; they are having particular problems avoiding surveillance and establishing trust between one another online.

The more contentious question is why the affiliates are not attacking in the West more often. One argument holds that this is a capability issue, i.e, that the groups are not operationally capable of circumventing the many countermeasures and detection systems that Western governments have put in place since 9/11. This argument is unconvincing for two main reasons. One is that several affiliates, especially AQIM and al-Shabaab, do have economic resources and human assets that should arguably enable them to carry out at least some attacks in the West. The other reason is if capability was the main problem, we should still expect to see more *attempts*. The combination of high intent and low capability is observable in the form of failed and foiled attacks. The fact that we do not see many such attempts, except from AQAP, suggests most affiliates are not really trying.

I argue that the relatively low supply of anti-Western plots from the affiliates reflects low motivation, which in turn has two origins: a preference for local targets and fear of US retaliation. For all their anti-Western rhetoric and declared allegiance to al-Qaida Core, many affiliates appear to place greater emphasis on achieving local political objectives than inflicting harm on the West. We can infer this preference from the content of group declarations. Some groups say explicitly that they do not plan to attack in the West; others are more ambiguous in their statements, but reveal their preferences by devoting more attention to local topics than to global ones or describing close enemies with more vitriol than distant ones. Groups also reveal their preferences by the way they allocate operational resources. Most affiliates devote their resources overwhelmingly to local or

regional operations. Even those organizations that have attempted operations against the West have conducted a much larger number of operations in the local theatre. This is in stark contrast to AQ core, which devoted nearly all of its resources after 2001 to attacks in the West. By far the most plausible explanation for these allocations is that groups value local political gains higher than international ones. If your aim is to establish control over a given territory and you are caught up in a fight with a regional enemy, it makes little strategic sense to attack the West. However, you might have an incentive to launch *verbal* attacks on the West, because this makes you appear strong and principled in your local setting.

Attacking the West makes even less strategic sense for such groups given the cost to the organization of provoking the ire of the American military. There is solid evidence from captured documentation that leaders of jihadi organizations think strategically and make decisions based on an informed calculus of costs and benefits. Leaders are, as a rule, not suicidal or irrational. There is also extensive evidence – from internal strategy documents – that leaders are aware of the capabilities of the US military and seek to avoid unnecessary exposure to these capabilities. In the 1990s, some jihadi leaders explicitly admitted fearing US retaliation and cited it as a reason not to pursue Osama bin Ladin’s “America first” strategy. Such explicit admissions are rare today, but it would be surprising if the prospect of retaliation did not factor into the decision calculus in an era where the US has proven much more willing to use force against terrorists than perhaps ever before in modern history. Most likely, affiliate leaders understand that targeting the US homeland might bring their own demise.

#### 4) Reasons to expect a “second wave”

Given that AQ core is weak, that the affiliates seem largely deterred, and that independents are too loosely organized to sustain terrorist campaigns, it is my assessment that the prospect of a wave of large-scale jihadi plots in the US is unlikely in the short term. What we will see instead is a steady trickle of ad-hoc attacks, some of which may be large in scale, but *on average* they will be less lethal than plots directed by organizations.

In the longer term, however – 4-6 years down the line, I believe we may well see attempts to mount one or more new organizations that will adopt Bin Ladin’s “America first” strategy in an attempt to finish what he started. It is important to underline that this effort will probably have to be organized and relatively centralized for the attacks to be of strategic significance. I expect something coordinated, along the lines of AQAP’s Awlaki/Khan cell in Yemen in 2009-11, but on a somewhat larger scale. Such an initiative could emerge within a faction of an existing organization, as was the case of the Awlaki/Khan cell, or it could occur as a result of a dynamic of competition (for outside funds and recruits) between grouplets in an area with many actors, such as Afghanistan/Pakistan. My guess would also be that such an initiative would benefit from logistical support from some of the semi-radical communities in Europe, as did the first al-Qaida.

I see six reasons why such a scenario might materialize. The first is the historical precedent - many terrorist campaigns follow a pattern whereby there is an early spike in activity (a product of the above mentioned informational advantage) followed by decline, followed by a second, lower peak, as the group or movement tries, usually unsuccessfully, to turn the ship around.

The second reason is that the jihadi movement is very conscious of its own history and keen to avenge past defeats. This may make a new generation of militants want to emulate the original al-Qaida and finish what Bin Laden started.

The third reason is that there will be arenas for at least one new generation of jihadis to socialize, train and get indoctrinated in the years ahead. As mentioned, the regional affiliates will continue to exist for the foreseeable future. The future founders of the second al-Qaida are likely to emerge from the lower ranks of existing organizations. The semi-radical communities of Europe are also likely to survive for several more years, especially considering the number of Europeans in Syria and the coming release from prison of many icons of Western jihadism imprisoned in the early 2000s.

The fourth reason is that there will still be grievances to provide resonance to the AQ narrative. Anti-Americanism runs very deep in the region, and there are many possible events – from small symbolic ones to real military interventions – that may bring a resurgence of anti-Western attitudes in the region. Moreover, several of the old conflicts highlighted by al-Qaida as symbols of Muslim suffering, such as Palestine, Chechnya, and Kashmir, will persist. In addition, in some Arab countries, the high expectations that accompanied the Arab spring may be dashed by continued malgovernance.

The fifth reason is that the ability of Western and Middle Eastern intelligence agencies to monitor jihadi groups may decline in the years ahead. This can happen as a result of reduced funding; many countries are having to cut public spending, and large counterterrorism apparatuses may not be sustainable during lulls in terrorist activity. Another way is through normative or legal restraints. In many Western countries, drone strikes and extrajudicial killings are politically controversial, and some agencies may see their hands partly tied as a result. Another possible mechanism is complacency: if relatively little happens in terms of plots against the homeland, vigilance may decrease. Finally, agencies may be distracted by other, more pressing issues; this is a particularly real risk for partner agencies in Middle Eastern countries experiencing unrest.

Sixth, we may see unexpected technological advances, for example in digital stealth technology, that empower groups seeking to operate transnationally. As alluded to earlier, governments today seem to have the upper hand on the Internet; because they can often track, view, and store the communications of terrorists. This may change if there is a quantum leap in encryption, for example, that allows terrorists to avoid detection for some time.

##### **5) Reasons not to expect a “second wave”**

I see five main objections to the prediction of a second wave of organized anti-Western jihadism. One consists of saying that the deterrent described above is likely to last, so that no rational actor will dare to launch a campaign on the homeland in the foreseeable future. While I believe this to be true in the short run, I am much less sure about the long run. Even if *most* groups are deterred, there can always be outliers willing to take high risk, for example because poor information make them overestimate the chances of success, or because they value the short term status benefits that come with militancy. It is generally hard to predict the emergence and characteristics of new radical actors, especially small terrorist groups. The social sciences have much to say about group behavior once the group is established and we know its preferences. We know much less about why groups emerge and how preferences are shaped. It is hard to categorically dismiss the possibility that a new



group, led by younger, more optimistic activists, may emerge and attempt to wage a terrorism campaign against the US.

A second objection would consist of arguing that there has been a permanent normative backlash against anti-Western terrorism that will prevent the new Bin Ladin from attracting followers. There is some truth to this. There is measurably less popular support for al-Qaida, terrorism and suicide bombings among Muslims today than ten years ago. Also, there has been a lot of criticism of al-Qaida's anti-Western strategy from within the jihadi movement. However, the normative backlash has not been pervasive by any means. There are still many activists who consider attacks in the West legitimate. Moreover, it would not take many people to wage a campaign of the kind envisaged here. Even though the mean level of support is declining, there is still ardent support at the margins.

The third and perhaps strongest objection is that our knowledge of the jihadi movement and our coercive capabilities are so great that any such initiative will be nipped in the bud; New Bin Ladins will essentially be spotted early and liquidated. This is why I expect such an initiative, if successful, will most likely emerge from the understudied fringe of an existing network. Moreover, I expect the leaders of the "next al-Qaida" to proceed more discreetly than Bin Ladin did when he announced his jihad against the United States in the 1996.

#### **Conclusion**

The bottom line of my assessment is that we are past the peak of organized jihadi activity in the West, but we will see a steady trickle of minor attacks and we may see second wave some 4-6 years down the line. This prediction is of course little more than an educated guess, and it is vulnerable to unexpected political developments, of which we have seen more than a fair share over the past couple of years. For example, Western countries could get drawn into the Syrian conflict for reasons other than counterterrorism, which would substantially increase the terrorist threat against those countries from both Sunni and Shiite militants.

My main policy recommendation is for the US government to continue a differentiated approach to jihadism, according to which the hardest measures are reserved for those groups with a proven intention to systematically target the US or European homeland. A strategy that uses heavy force against actors without such intentions risks provoking the very anti-Western militancy we are trying to curtail.

Mr. POE. I want to thank all of you for being here. I want to go back to the map that I showed you earlier. Won't you comment on the map? It is over to your left or right, whichever way you want to look. And you can see that according to this map, al-Qaeda's presence is in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Algeria, Mali, Libya, Niger, Tunisia, Morocco, and Nigeria. My question is, do you agree that those are accurate countries that al-Qaeda has a presence in or not? Dr. Jones?

Mr. JONES. Mr. Chairman just looking at that for the first time, I would say that al-Qaeda or one of its allies is present in the countries you have identified. Let me just say two things. One is that in some of these cases, I would call them, really, an al-Qaeda affiliate in the case of Somalia and Yemen; in other cases, as in parts of Algeria, there may be the group Those Who Sign With Blood or down in Mali, Ansar al-Dine allies. They have a foreign affiliate.

Mr. POE. Al-Qaeda or al-Qaeda affiliates.

Mr. JONES. Yes.

Mr. POE. Let's use that terminology. Dr. Kagan?

Mr. KAGAN. Yes. Like Dr. Jones, I would agree that there are al-Qaeda or affiliated or allied movements in all of those statements. We might argue about some of the "blobology." And I think the Afghan presence at the moment is a little less than what is implied there.

Mr. POE. Fine.

Mr. KAGAN. But in general terms, yes.

Mr. POE. Mr. Joscelyn?

Mr. JOSCELYN. You know, it is funny. We have this conversation about putting together a map at the Long War Journal constantly, about how to do this because it is actually very tricky.

Mr. POE. You can use my map.

Mr. JOSCELYN. Yes. I agree with most of it. I would have to sort of pick at it a little bit, I think. See, here is the challenge. Okay? You look at, for example, an area like the Sinai, where we are tracking terrorists right now and who is there and we are tracking al-Qaeda operatives right there. They seem to have built the force in the hundreds, if not thousands, in the Sinai right now, including specific individuals. In fact, there is a great article up at the Long War Journal today about a former doctor to bin Laden, who has been basically running some jobs there.

The problem is I agree with most of the map. I would have to sort of pick over it a little bit more. But I think it does make sense to say that you have al-Qaeda or affiliated groups and you also have associated movements, which the collusion there is often a lot stronger than people give them credit for.

Mr. POE. And there are some want-to-be's in the groups, too.

Mr. JOSCELYN. There are some want-to-be's. You have some guys who are really just flying the flag who aren't really connected to the overall network, but I think there are a number of groups. You know, Seth had mentioned Ansar al-Dine, for example. The Treasury Department's designation of them is very clear. The State Department's designation is very clear that they have been working very carefully and closely with AQIM for a long time. So it is reasonable to include those groups in your map.

Mr. POE. All right. Dr. Hegghammer?

Mr. HEGGHAMMER. Well, I agree largely with the map and also with the comments that have been made already. I would also have added perhaps a little red dot in the Sinai.

Mr. POE. Little red dot to the Sinai.

Mr. HEGGHAMMER. Yes.

Mr. POE. Okay.

Mr. HEGGHAMMER. In Egypt, yes. But I would also mention in this context that the size of the area covered is not necessarily a measure of strength. Some of the groups happen to be in desolate areas. So they get a lot of red ink there.

Mr. POE. Because there is nobody else there.

Mr. HEGGHAMMER. That is right.

Mr. POE. There is nobody in those areas.

Mr. HEGGHAMMER. Some of the smaller dots have very powerful affiliates.

Mr. POE. Okay. Thank you.

Dr. Kagan, if I wrote your comments down correctly, you said that the United States lacks an overall strategy. What does that mean? And explain it briefly?

Mr. KAGAN. Sir, I do not think that we have articulated a strategy for defeating al-Qaeda as a global network with affiliates and its associates. I think that we have undertaken a collection of tactics and we have made a number of broad statements about this. But I believe that this is a challenge that is worthy of the kind of analytical and planning effort that went into NSC-68 or any other extremely serious war. And, candidly, especially after the death of Osama bin Laden, I looked for a major planning effort of that variety to think about what the next stage was. And I do not believe, at least if that has happened, then I am completely unaware of it.

Mr. POE. So if I understand what you said, overall strategy of the United States to deal with al-Qaeda, al-Qaeda operatives, affiliates, we don't have one of those. But if events occur, we have tactical response to each specific attack. Is that a fair statement or not?

Mr. KAGAN. Well, more than that. I mean, there is an offensive component to what the Obama administration is attempting to do. And there is a theory behind I think what they are undertaking with their targeted strikes and other activities. But I don't see a coherent, holistic strategy that says, "This is the network we are looking at. These are the effects we need to generate on the network. These are how we are going to apply all the tools of government and so forth to do that." And I think it is going to require an effort of that magnitude to scope the problem and then scope a strategy that might be successful.

Mr. POE. Let me ask you this question. I want to talk about al-Nusra in Syria and their influence in Syria. What are they doing in Syria? I guess of all of the rebel groups there, I am concerned about them. How influential are they? And what are they actually doing? Does anybody want to weigh in on that? You all know. So just somebody tell me.

Mr. KAGAN. Sure. I am happy to keep talking. Jabhat al-Nusra is extremely influential in Syria, and I think its influence is generally growing. That has largely to do with its ability to receive large amounts of external aid.

Mr. POE. From?

Mr. KAGAN. From Qatar, from other countries in the Gulf, and from the international—

Mr. POE. Governments are supporting al-Nusra?

Mr. KAGAN. I can't prove that governments are supporting Jabhat al-Nusra.

Mr. POE. You think they are?

Mr. KAGAN. But I believe that the Qatari Government has been, and I have seen indications that the Kuwaiti Government may be as well, or elements within the Kuwaiti Government may be as well. Certainly private jihadi donors within the Gulf and elsewhere in the world are supporting the movement. And, as a result of that, it is probably the best armed and equipped fighting force in Syria.

I think we are already in a situation where there is going to be a conflict between the Free Syrian Army and the moderate forces that it represents and Jabhat al-Nusra under almost any scenario unless there is a complete Assad victory, which I think is very unlikely. Right now my assessment is Jabhat al-Nusra probably would win that fight.

Mr. POE. So, as we progress, those are the two factions on either side that are going to come to conflict. And your money is on al-Nusra.

Mr. KAGAN. Unless the situation changes, I think that al-Nusra, Jabhat al-Nusra, has the advantage. They also have the advantage in that they have been establishing local government and they have been setting up local authorities in various different parts of Syria that they control and are trying to build themselves now. I don't think they actually have a whole lot of pocket or support for the ideology, but we have seen this phenomenon before that they are effective defenders. And, therefore, they put themselves into leadership roles.

Mr. POE. Thank you.

Ranking member, Mr. Sherman?

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you.

I don't want the panel to think that the absence of Democrats here reflects any disinterest or that my own absence soon will do that. As it happens, we have scheduled an important caucus meeting at the same time as this hearing. And, of course, this hearing was delayed by votes on the floor.

My concern is not just with an attack on the American homeland, although that is a natural focus. I think that attacks on U.S. interests of blood and overthrow of relatively friendly governments pose as great a threat to us as anything else, even a modest attack, at least, on the U.S. homeland. I am concerned, not just with al-Qaeda and its affiliates, but just about any one inspired by the same movement.

This is a complicated area. I mean, in World War II, we could put a color on the map. There were neutrals. There were countries on our side. There were countries against us. Kuwait exists only because we liberated them. Now we are told that the Kuwaiti Government and elements in it are allowing private monies and even government monies to go to Jabhat al-Nusra. That confuses me a little bit. What confuses me more is the testimony we have heard that, on the one hand, Iran is sheltering three of the most important al-Qaeda leaders.

On the other hand, Jabhat al-Nusra may be part of an effort to obliterate the Alawite community. This focuses our attention on the Shiite/Sunni divide and Iran.

Does Iran have those al-Qaeda leaders under house arrest or should we call it hospitality? Mr. Joscelyn?

Mr. JOSCELYN. Well, the answer is both, but because what Seth is talking about in terms of the network inside Iran is very important. In July 2011, then December 2011, then February 2012, and then October 2012, the Obama administration's Treasury and State Departments' designated al-Qaeda network inside Iran that operates under an agreement between the Iranian regime and al-Qaeda. So those are the four things I would point you to to go look at. And there is specific factual detail in those designations that is a very rigorous process the Treasury Department and the State Department go through to explain that.

What they have done is since 2005, at least, there has been a facilitation network inside Iran to basically shuttle fighters to south Asia and elsewhere. And simultaneously the Iranian—

Mr. SHERMAN. So those that are motivated, can arrive in Iran and then end up in Afghanistan or Pakistan?

Mr. JOSCELYN. Sure. And in some cases, I uncovered, for example, that in 2010, one of Osama bin Laden's last plots against the West used the same facilitation network to try and execute Mumbai-style attacks in Europe. So it is a robust facilitation network.

Mr. SHERMAN. Okay. I see what al-Qaeda gets out of it.

Mr. JOSCELYN. Right.

Mr. SHERMAN. They get a sanctuary in a place where we are reluctant to use drones.

Mr. JOSCELYN. Sure.

Mr. SHERMAN. What does Iran get out of it?

Mr. JOSCELYN. Well, I think they want to influence where al-Qaeda is attacking. They don't want al-Qaeda coming after them. They also have common enemies. They have common interests and throughout. They don't have common enemies in Syria right now, which is what I think your question was really pointed at, which is that right—

Mr. SHERMAN. Wouldn't it upset the alliance, if you will, for Iranians to know that this is a group bent on the destruction of the Alawite community when Iran sees itself, first and foremost, as a defender of Shiites, even different flavors of Shiites, than they themselves embrace?

Mr. JOSCELYN. Sure. Even beyond that, you have Hezbollah and the IRGC on one side of the Syrian war and al-Qaeda and its affiliate and related groups on the other.

Mr. SHERMAN. Right.

Mr. JOSCELYN. So they are directly in conflict. I mean, this is something we are watching right now. Just to your point, Muhammed al-Zawahiri, who is the brother of Ayman al-Zawahiri, for example, released a statement calling for attacks against Shiite-led governments because of what is happening in Syria. So this is the type of statement from somebody in al-Qaeda's sphere that shows there is clearly tension over Syria.

The head of al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, has certainly ratcheted up the rhetoric against Iran as well.

Mr. SHERMAN. Finally, where do al-Qaeda and its affiliates and allies get their money? And have we been all too willing to do business with those who countenance such contributions? Dr. Jones?

Mr. JONES. Sure. The proper answer is it depends on which affiliates you are referring to. There is a lot of redundancy among al-Qaeda's affiliates. Some are involved in illegal or in some cases legal charcoal trade. Most get some funding from different players in the Gulf.

Mr. SHERMAN. Charcoal?

Mr. JONES. Yes. There is—

Mr. SHERMAN. That can't be a high-profit item.

Mr. JONES. Well, when you are able to tax various elements of it, you might be surprised. But the broader point that timber trading, gem trading, there have been a range of—when you control trade in a given area, you can tax individuals living there. So there is a redundancy in—

Mr. SHERMAN. Looking at all of the allies and affiliates of al-Qaeda as a group, what portion of their money comes from—what would I say?—revenues they have generated? And what percentage comes from donations from governments and individuals in the Islamic world?

Mr. JONES. I would say I could not put a percentage. And I would say I have never seen anybody put a reliable percentage on it.

Mr. SHERMAN. Give me your best guess.

Mr. JONES. I would say that a fairly significant amount of funding of al-Qaeda's core and its affiliates does come from wealthy donors in the way I would put it in the Gulf.

Mr. SHERMAN. Okay. I will ask each member of the panel if you can just give me your best guess number. What percentage from the wealthy donors? What percentage from—

Mr. KAGAN. Sir, I don't make up numbers. And I have never seen evidence.

Mr. JOSCELYN. You know, I have never seen a specific budget. However, I would say that I agree with Seth that a significant percentage comes from donors in the Gulf, sure.

Mr. SHERMAN. And one quick follow-up. Maybe the doctor can—and that is, what happened to Osama bin Laden's personal fortune? And is that being deployed by this? You know, he was once worth tens of millions of dollars. Go ahead.

Mr. HEGGHAMMER. Regarding the first question, I would also say that I don't know. And I haven't seen any numbers from people who know. My guess would be that the proportion of funds coming straight from donors in the Gulf to al-Qaeda and its affiliates as a whole is relatively small, although this varies between affiliates.

So perhaps the only affiliate that we in the open source world know of is the account of al-Qaeda in Iraq in the mid 2000s. And they got quite a lot of their money from the foreign fighters that were coming from the Gulf. They were bringing the money with them. That was their main supporter. But if you go to another group, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, they get most of the money from a completely different one, which is kidnappings.

Mr. SHERMAN. I yield back.

Mr. POE. The gentleman yields back. As the ranking member mentioned, the Democrat Party has an important caucus this afternoon. And yes, you may. I will yield. And he may need to leave, too. So I will turn the question over to the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Perry, for 5 minutes.

Mr. PERRY. Thanks, Mr. Chairman, the gentleman. Thanks for your testimony. Particularly enlightening for me was some not surprising but new news with Qatar and Kuwait being brought into the discussion; like I said, not surprising but a little new for me anyhow.

Having served in Iraq—and, Tom, you served there as well—I have got to tell you I was particularly frustrated, disappointed in disagreeing with the administration on the lack of a status of forces agreement when we departed. I would like, I think, Dr. Kagan, maybe Dr. Jones, your comment on the effects of that regarding al-Qaeda particularly and then looking forward to Afghanistan, recent posturing, whether it is posturing or not, the same relative discussion regarding Afghanistan and the status of forces agreement in relation to resurgent or revitalized al-Qaeda in both areas.

Mr. JONES. I think those are very good questions. I think the failure to establish and reach a status of forces agreement in Iraq in the U.S. withdrawal allowed two things: It allowed al-Qaeda in Iraq to regenerate. Its attacks are greater this year than they were in the last year of U.S. involvement in 2011.

And, second and perhaps more important there, it allowed al-Qaeda and Iraq to help establish Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria. Those were two I think devastating steps in that region that the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq at least allowed.

And, second, that means that the agreement in Afghanistan assuming it comes will be quite important. I think if the United States leaves Afghanistan with an active al-Qaeda presence up in Kunar, Nuristan, Nangarhar Provinces, it does create the possibility for a reestablishment of the organization in an area that it does have local allies.

Mr. KAGAN. Congressman, thank you. Thank you for your service. And thank you for your question.

I think you can identify three main reasons why the departure of U.S. forces from Iraq has contributed to the revitalization of al-Qaeda in Iraq. One was that the Iraqi security forces were not designed to be able to continue to conduct operations against AQI without American enablers. We knew as we were building the ISF that it would not have the capability to replicate our ISR capabilities, to replicate our precision strike capabilities, or to do a variety of other things that were allowing us and allowing the Iraqi security forces to conduct precise operations that were effective, highly effective, against the al-Qaeda organization.

What we have seen as we have watched Iraqi security forces try to operate against the movement is that they have reverted to patterns that will be familiar to people who have watched how they tried to operate on their own in 2006. And they have been largely ineffective, although they have been in some cases, courageous. That pattern would be replicated in Afghanistan. The Afghan National Security Forces in my opinion are incapable of operating effectively without American enablers after 2014. And we would be

inviting exactly the same situation in Afghanistan that we have in Iraq now if we withdrew all of our enablers.

The second major driver in Iraq has been that the departure of all of our forces, which also, not inevitably perhaps but coincidentally perhaps, matched the departure effectively of all of our influence in the country, enabled, perhaps encouraged, Prime Minister Maliki to embrace his sectarian side. And it is surely not an accident that it was pretty much on the way home from Washington, DC, when he gave the orders to have Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi arrested, which began a process of sectarianization, driving Sunni out of the political process. We had been acting as a significant break on that kind of sectarianism by putting pressure on him, by having visibility on the situation. We are performing a different role in Afghanistan but still a stabilizing role that would go away.

And, lastly, we were performing a critical peacekeeping function along the green line between the Kurds and the Arabs. And we have seen revival of conflict along that line now. And I think you could fear a revival of civil war in Afghanistan if we cease to play a peacekeeping role there.

Mr. PERRY. So real quickly and not many seconds for big foreign policy issues like this, but if you could, the future of al-Qaeda in Iraq based on current trends and their proclivities as you see them, either, any one of you gentlemen? And then our relationship with Pakistan post a pullout of Afghanistan and the resurgent al-Qaeda?

Mr. KAGAN. Well, I am very concerned about the trajectory that al-Qaeda in Iraq is on, particularly conjoined because you can't separate it from the trajectory that Jabhat al-Nusra is on. And I fear the possibility of the establishment of an effectively al-Qaeda-controlled area that crosses from western Iraq into eastern Syria, along those tribal lines. And, of course, as you know, the tribes straddle the border as well. That is of tremendous concern to me. And I think that the issue of threat to the United States is, as my colleagues have made, important because we need to think about the capabilities and capacities that an organization that had that kind of breathing space would have to plan, develop, and conduct a task against the United States if it so chose. And I find that very, very worrisome. And I find the likelihood that it will continue to deteriorate in Iraq very high.

And I have a very serious concern that I would like to air here, which is that there will be a natural tendency for the United States to be drawn in on the side of Nouri al-Maliki in the name of conducting operations against al-Qaeda in Iraq. And those of you who have served in Iraq and have seen that on the ground know exactly what the danger is.

We really will run the risk of becoming the hit squad, a sectarian hit squad, for al-Maliki in a way that will simply make us appear to be the enemy of the Sunni people without being effective against this group. So we are going to have to approach this with a great deal of nuance and complexity such as I don't see apparent so far in our discussions about this such as there have been any.

Mr. POE. Next turn to the gentleman from Illinois, Mr. Schneider.



Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to the witnesses for your testimony and insights today.

I would like to pick up—Dr. Kagan, you talked a little bit about Syria and al-Qaeda’s increasing influence in Syria. We recently saw the assassination of Commander Kamal Hamami, who is one of the senior members of the military council.

And, Dr. Jones, in your testimony, your submitted testimony, you talked about a U.S. strategy to include—I will quote you—“three steps utilizing a light footprint strategy, improving the effectiveness of governments in countries threatened by al-Qaeda, and undermining al-Qaeda’s ideology to help weaken al-Qaeda.” In Syria, in particular, which in many ways someone wants to describe in this room as a hub state at the center, to the whole panel, how do you see our strategy developing to address the threat of al-Qaeda in Syria to take us in a direction that will provide the best outcome in a very bad situation?

Mr. JONES. Well, I think the results are fairly straightforward. The decision not to intervene in any way in Syria strengthened al-Qaeda’s affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra. It is, as I think virtually everybody here has said, probably the most capable al-Qaeda affiliate on the globe with the weapons it has seized from, among other places, Syrian military bases that it has helped overrun.

I think the strategy has got to include two elements of it, which may appear contradictory but I think one can find ways to deal with. One is to take down the Assad regime. And second is to weaken Jabhat al-Nusra at the same time. I am not sure we are doing either particularly effectively right now.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you.

As you look at Jabhat al-Nusra and my understanding is, in addition to Jabhat al-Nusra, there are other al-Qaeda fighters coming into Syria from other places, work to take down the Assad regime, other al-Qaeda fighters in weakening the Free Syrian Army, the prospects for the opposition, how do we address that issue?

Mr. JONES. Well, I think if you look at Syria today and you look at some of the polling data that has come out of the region, it looks like the support for al-Qaeda’s ideology, including Jabhat al-Nusra’s ideology, in Syria is small, is minimal. We saw it recently in Mali when the French deployed. I think the issue is sidelining is—I think the bulk of the Sunni opposition to the Assad regime does not buy into Jabhat al-Nusra’s ideology of an Islamic Emirate, at least in their vision. I don’t think the bulk of the population in Syria supports an Islamic Emirate, at least in the al-Qaeda vision. And so I think the way to do this is to work with a range of those opposition groups to target and undermine the ideology of Jabhat al-Nusra.

I don’t think there is much popular support within Syria for al-Qaeda’s ideology. That is in my view their biggest weakness, not just in Syria but in other areas we see them operate.

They need a vacuum. They don’t have a lot of popular support.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. I think that is a great point, but, Dr. Kagan, as you mentioned, the potential for a vacuum across the border between Iraq and Syria, in that land where you do have tribal affinities, any thoughts or advice you would have for us how to address that or what to be watchful for?

Mr. KAGAN. Yes. Look, I am happy to say very forthrightly that we need to be providing lethal support to the Free Syrian Army and we need to be—because that is one of the best ways to accomplish the goals that staff identified, which are the correct goals.

On the one hand, hastening the fall of the Assad regime, the protraction of this war is one of the greatest dangers to national security from the standpoint of bringing in more foreign fighters, strengthening the al-Qaeda front, turning this more and more into a sectarian conflict. The sooner that one can move past that stage, if it is possible—and now it is looking much harder—the better it would be. But, most of all, because I believe that there is very likely to be a conflict between the moderate forces, which I would entirely agree with Seth, represent the will of the majority of the Syrian people and Jabhat al-Nusra, it is critical for us that the moderate forces win that fight.

And we should be working now to ensure that the outcome of that fight is not endowed, which might be a way of limiting its scale when it actually happened. And that would have positive effects in Iraq also. It is obviously very difficult to imagine what we could do directly in Iraq to shape the situation there, but anything that we can do to weaken the rear of al-Qaeda in Iraq and its ability to use Syria as a base of support, which it is using now, would limit its ability to operate freely in Iraq, but I don't have a good answer for you about what to do in Iraq.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you. I wish I had more time, but I see that I am out. I will yield back. Thank you.

Mr. POE. Thank the gentleman.

Just a follow-up question from Mr. Schneider's comments. You mentioned strategy, strategy, strategy. Big picture. What is al-Qaeda's strategy? What is the point? Can you keep it simple, Dr. Jones?

Mr. JONES. I will keep it simple. In my view, Ayman al-Zawahiri's strategy includes the establishment of a caliphate that cuts across North Africa, the Middle East, and into South Asia. If you were to ask the affiliate leaders, you would probably get a more parochial answer, Islamic Emirates, in their regions. So I think the core would have a slightly different answer than most of your affiliate leaders.

Mr. POE. All right. We turn now to Mr. Cotton from Arkansas for 5 minutes.

Mr. COTTON. Can I answer your question as well, Judge Poe?

Mr. POE. Yes, you can answer my question.

Mr. COTTON. I think their strategy is simple. They want to eject America from where they want to establish a caliphate, and they want to kill you and they want to kill your constituents. That is where I think their strategy is.

Can we talk about what I might call the ghost of Syria future? Al-Nusra right now is a potent force in Syria 2½, 3 years ago. Was there much al-Qaeda presence at all in Syria? Can we just go down the panel? Does anyone think there was much al-Qaeda presence in Syria 2½, 3 years ago, before the uprising?

Mr. JONES. No. Well, Syria was used as a major funnel for fighters into Iraq. So it was used for Iraq facilitation.

Mr. COTTON. Dr. Kagan?

Mr. KAGAN. That was a very limited and carefully controlled, ironically, by the Assad regime pipeline because he feared precisely this would happen. So it was a very limited presence.

Mr. JOSCELYN. That is right. There was a pipeline that was run by Abu Ghadiya, who was the al-Qaeda facilitator. The U.S. forces had to take direct military action against him inside Syria because the Assad regime wouldn't crack down on him. He was aided by Assif Shawkat and other Syrian officials.

Mr. COTTON. Dr. Hegghammer?

Mr. HEGGHAMMER. I concur.

Mr. COTTON. Okay. So not my presence in al-Qaeda in Syria 2½, 3 years ago. Target of opportunity has arisen. I have asked for the map to be put back up. The point here is not the extent of the blobs but where they circle around. AQIM, Syria, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Al-Shabaab are all forming a circle around Egypt.

I would like to get your perspective on the risk that we face of having the kind of magnet or flypaper effect in Egypt given the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood is founded there intellectually and philosophically, the hearts of their world. Ayman al-Zawahiri is Egyptian, has deep ties there and the risk that America faces, either of a situation like Syria or perhaps a situation like Algeria, going forward in Egypt.

Mr. JONES. I think we already saw a statement within the last week from leaders of al-Qaeda and the Islamic Maghreb al-Nusra front and Al-Shabaab supporting jihad against the Egyptian military in Egypt. I would also note the Muhammed Jamal group was involved in the assassination of U.S. Ambassador Stevens in Libya. So Egypt is concerning for, as several people here said, what is going on in Sinai, what has gone on with Muhammed Jamal's network in Egypt, and also what we are seeing as potential support for the opposition to the Egyptian military.

Mr. COTTON. Dr. Kagan?

Mr. KAGAN. In addition, I agree with everything that Seth said. In addition to that, we are tracking fighters moving from Gaza into Egypt in order to fight the Egyptian military as part of this takeover. There have been a number of want-to-be claims, you know. And want-to-be claims are want-to-be claims until they do something and then they get recognized. So I don't think we should dismiss them. I am deeply concerned about this.

And the revolution against Morsi or whatever we are going to call it has absolutely cemented a narrative of "I told you so" from the faction, from Zawahiri's faction, which those rejected political course. And their slogan now is, "Bullets, not ballots." So I am very concerned.

Mr. JOSCELYN. Just real quick, al-Qaeda has been pursuing a two-pronged strategy in Egypt since 2011. One is dawa, or proselytization, inside Egypt's urban areas and settled areas. We don't know how extensive those efforts have been, fruitful in terms of earning new recruits but keep your eyes out for it. They have also used the urban areas as facilitation points for the attack in Libya and elsewhere. And simultaneously in the Sinai, they have been building this contingency of al-Qaeda-related groups in the hundreds of thousands in the Sinai. And I pretty much guarantee you are going to see terrorist attacks from that group very soon.

Mr. HEGGHAMMER. I agree. I think there is a very clear risk of more violence in Egypt in the coming year, but I do think also that in the mid and long term, that that threat is manageable, both because the militants in Sinai will be squeezed between, you know, a police state in central Egypt and Israel. So those actors together I think will be able to manage that. So the casualty here will be democracy in Egypt and the sort of the momentum of the Arab Spring.

Mr. COTTON. Thank you all for your time and your perspective. Let's hope that the map in 2015 doesn't have a blob in Egypt.

Mr. POE. Thank you, sir.

Gentlemen, I appreciate you being here. And it is an honor to have so much wisdom here. If we were to add all of your degrees up together, it would look like a thermometer. So I appreciate you guys being here.

We have got to get this right. I mean, I look out along the group here, and I see a lot of young people. And, you know, I am 58 years old. And when I look back, when we had the first oil embargo, it was in the '70s. And we have been dealing with Middle East conflicts in this country for a long time. We have got to get it right. We want to keep our young men and women here to grow America strong.

And I want to start with you, Dr. Jones. You stated that you felt al-Qaeda was not a direct threat to the U.S., but they claimed responsibility for 9/11 and indirectly with the Boston Marathon, as you said, Mr. Joscelyn, that Osama bin Laden wanted to spread the seeds of al-Qaeda or jihad by seeding countries all over the world. And these were people that were sympathetic to their beliefs. And I think we see that happening. I think Boston was a great example of that. Unfortunately, it was here.

And so my questions come back to, what is the sentiment and the mindset of al-Qaeda fundamentalists today versus that at its creation back in the '80s toward the U.S. and Western countries, I guess Western beliefs more in general? I want to kind of rotate between you guys. So if you would first just kind of answer that question?

Mr. JONES. Two things. One is I do believe al-Qaeda is a threat. So not all of its affiliates pose a threat.

On your question, I think the biggest difference is the social network and social media have allowed the views of key al-Qaeda leaders to influence young Muslims in multiple locations. And so what we have seen is and what makes this different, I think the ideology coming from Ayman al-Zawahiri in my view is not that different from what he was writing about in 1998 and 2000 and 2001, but he has got more access to key mediums to push that information out to influence individuals so that the organization can be more decentralized. You can reach Americans in Detroit and New York and Boston online.

Mr. POE. Right.

Mr. JONES. And that makes this a very different organization than what existed back in September 11th and in many ways a more dangerous one.

Mr. POE. All right. Let me ask you guys this, and you guys all join in. So would you consider our lack of border security? Could

that be a national security threat, you know, not just our northern border but our southern and our coastal? And just is that a national security threat, the lack of border security that we have in this country today?

Mr. JONES. It should be a cause of concern, yes. There are foreigners that are moving back and forth across the U.S.-Mexican border.

Mr. POE. All right. That was going to be my other question. Do you believe the entry through our borders is a security concern? And are they coming? So Dr. Kagan?

Mr. KAGAN. It is a concern, but I would say that what we are seeing that concerns me even more is a tendency in the policy debate and in the administration's policies to try to redraw the defensive line, where we are going to actually take action at our borders or inside our country.

And although the border issue is important, if we harden our borders as much as we want to but give the enemy all the free hits they want from outside, I guarantee you they will find a way through our very large borders, even if we harden them more.

Mr. POE. Okay. Mr. Joscelyn, the national security threat to our borders?

Mr. JOSCELYN. It is a national security concern/threat. I can tell you that Hezbollah, in particular, is one of the terrorist organizations that uses facilitation. My view is that anywhere that there is an open or permissive environment, our enemies are pretty good at finding it.

Mr. POE. Dr. Hegghammer?

Mr. HEGGHAMMER. In my view, the main challenge is identifying the people with a bad intention crossing the border because we have to let people cross borders. The problem is—

Mr. POE. We are just talking about securing them, not closing them. So I agree.

Mr. HEGGHAMMER. Right. So in that case, I don't think that increasing the hard physical measures will have a particularly great effect on this. Most of the operatives are coming in through legal means.

Mr. POE. Okay. So you kind of answered my next question. And I want to see if the sentiment is the same with all of you. So based on your statements and answers, you recommend securing the borders, the southern, northern, and our coastal borders, to a certain degree more than we have now? Would you all agree pretty much with that?

[No response.]

Mr. POE. We will take that as an affirmative.

My last question is—and this goes back to developing policy so that we can get it right for now and from this point forward—how do you mount a campaign against an ideology, like radical Islam, whose goal is to remove the calf, or the nonbeliever, you know, or the Western ideologies? When there is not a nation state and when there is not an identified leader, what policies would you recommend that America can do in the Middle East or around the world that would make us more effective at this? If you guys can kind of briefly go through that, if you guys don't mind?

Mr. JONES. Well, I think one of the major mistakes that the U.S. has made in the last several decades is to get rid of organizations like the U.S. Information Agency that did provide a way to push back against ideologies. If you look at the successes of the U.S., against the Soviet Union, it was things like Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty and the U.S. Information Agency that were able to combat that ideology. We do not have an organized, collective effort to push back against extremist ideology.

Where it has been done successfully—and I think it is worth looking at the successful efforts. Saudi Arabia, in facing a very serious threat from al-Qaeda between 2002 and 2008—and Tom has written a really good book about this—did use a very effective strategy to delegitimize al-Qaeda in their state. So we have got some good examples of where it has been done. We have got some good historical examples. I think we need to push those through.

Mr. POE. Could those policies be used here in the United States? I mean, we have got two different governmental systems here.

Mr. JONES. Yes, some of them can. Yes, some of them can—

Mr. POE. Okay.

Mr. JONES [continuing]. Because it involved getting moderates to come out against the—moderate Muslims to come out against—

Mr. POE. All right. Let me hear from Dr. Kagan real quick.

Mr. KAGAN. One of the most effective things that I saw in my time in Afghanistan was the Jordanian, the JET team, the Jordanian Education Team, which went around. It was the de-radicalizing Jordanian preacher. And he just went around and collected crowds of hundreds and told them what the Quran and the Hadith actually say, which is not what they had been told.

We actually absolutely have tools now. Obviously we are not going to bring Jordanians around to do that here, but we actually have tools to do this. But I want to make a key point here. The ideology does not exist in a vacuum. We are fighting an organization that has embodied this ideology now, and it is seen to have embodied this ideology. If al-Qaeda is seen to succeed, the ideology will be seen to be successful. If al-Qaeda is seen to be defeated, the ideology will be to a considerable extent discredited. And we really mustn't imagine that we can talk about the—and I know that you weren't suggesting this but—that we can talk about the ideology as distinct from its pragmatic, practical manifestation in the world today.

Mr. POE. Mr. Joscelyn?

Mr. JOSCELYN. Just real quick, one of the biggest looming issues for al-Qaeda, ideologically and otherwise, is the slaughter of their fellow Muslims around the world. More victims of al-Qaeda and their associated terror have been Muslims than Westerners or any other religion. That is generally who they kill. And that is a big problem that they have message-wise. What I have not seen is a unified purpose across the board, emphasize that everywhere we can, that understanding that their principal enemies are actually their fellow Muslims and not the West, on a day-to-day basis.

Mr. POE. Do you mind if I ask Dr. Hegghammer? Dr. Hegghammer?

Mr. HEGGHAMMER. So I think that today it is very difficult to undermine this ideological phenomenon because it is really several

different things. It is not one coherent ideology, one coherent message that we can kind of pick apart with arguments. They want different things, these groups. And so it is very difficult to undermine it with a sort of information strategy. And maybe there was a time years back when there was a more coherent message that we could have targeted, but that is no longer the case.

Mr. POE. Thank you.

I am going to now recognize Mr. Schneider from Illinois for 5 minutes. And then we will go to Mr. Perry for 5 minutes from Pennsylvania. Go ahead.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you.

Dr. Hegghammer, you talked about Sinai and the concentration or increasing numbers of militants, operatives, terrorists gathering in Sinai. Where in Sinai are they gathering?

Mr. HEGGHAMMER. Well, I think Mr. Joscelyn may know more of the details here, but I suspect that most of the bases and sort of the armed casualties are up in the mountains, where the reach of the Egyptian police is limited.

Mr. JOSCELYN. It is the northern Sinai principally.

Mr. HEGGHAMMER. Northern Sinai, yes.

Mr. JOSCELYN. I think what Tom has said about the security forces, there are pressures from both Israel and security forces is right. My one big problem, concern there is that they have overrun security forces in places like Arish and elsewhere.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Right.

Mr. JOSCELYN. And they have also been able to mount limited attacks via rockets and elsewhere in Israel and that sort of thing. So you are going to see a pickup in the tempo there.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. And that is kind of where I am going with the questions. I mean, we saw today I think three Egyptian police were killed in Sinai.

Mr. JOSCELYN. Yes.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. They are having an increasing freedom of movement, but that mountainous area is a difficult area. Between the—I don't know if we call it a nascent government emerging in Egypt and Israel and U.S. support for both of them, what strategy should we be taking there to make sure that al-Qaeda doesn't get another foothold in Sinai?

Mr. JOSCELYN. Well, we certainly have to support. This is a tough situation because you have the politics of the whole thing and then you have the security concerns of the whole thing.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Right.

Mr. JOSCELYN. And oftentimes they can conflict. But we certainly have to support some measures security-wise from the Egyptian regime against the al-Qaeda presence there just because it is a growing presence and it is going to be a threat to our interests around the region. Again, the big problem is balancing that with our other interests inside Egypt.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Dr. Hegghammer, any thoughts on that?

Mr. HEGGHAMMER. I think I would concur with that pretty much exactly. It is a trade-off between, well, democracy in Egypt and security in Egypt. So it is a political issue. Where is that balancing point? You can't have both at this point.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. I would posit that the balancing point moves over time. We have to manage that process across time. I will turn to you, Dr. Jones, because it is a different world with the Internet where messages can go from Afghanistan or Pakistan across the entire Middle East and even into this country. What messages—I will open this to everyone—do you think we need to be communicating and working with our allies to help them communicate so that we can start to win the battle of hearts and minds as well as the battle on the ground?

Mr. JONES. Well, I think part of this is providing forum for legitimate Muslim leaders with support networks to get their views out because when young impressionable kids because that is who many of them are, not all of them, are surfing through the Internet and that evolves into jihadist forums, they need a balance of views. I mean, ultimately this means giving a forum to legitimate individuals.

If you take the example of solidarity in Poland during the Cold War, we didn't have to create anything. It was giving air to legitimate locals. I mean, this is I think what we are talking about now, legitimate moderate networks, giving them the space and the ability to air their views and to directly denounce al-Qaeda. One of al-Qaeda's most significant pushbacks over the last several years was Dr. Fadl in Egypt, who put out a book that denounced Ayman al-Zawahiri, led to huge fissures. That is the kind of stuff I think, letting that air, is quite useful.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Are there other names of people we should be watching or reaching out to in the Arab world that are in that sense the legitimate voice or a legitimate voice that can push back on the message of al-Qaeda and other groups like that?

Mr. JONES. There is a whole range of people, sure. There is a whole range of people across Egypt, across Saudi Arabia. I can push you names of individuals that have outright denounced Osama bin Laden's and Ayman al-Zawahiri's vision of Islam as un-Islamic, yes.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. So if it is not prohibited, if you could give it to us, that would be helpful. So I would welcome those names.

Dr. Kagan, you look like you have something to add or—

Mr. KAGAN. Just to testify to what Seth is saying, having seen it on the ground, as I said, in Afghanistan, the effectiveness of this. There were times when those Jordanian preachers were preaching and there were Taliban in the audience who were asking them questions and getting confused because they weren't winning the arguments. Afghanistan, you know, there is a highly illiterate population. It is easy to mislead them. In Egypt where it is more cosmopolitan, it is harder.

But giving voice to the people who will make these arguments and especially, as Seth says, in the areas, like in Saudi Arabia, like in Jordan, where they has been very effective deradicalization programs, we should be building on that. We should be helping them to build on it. And we should be asking them what we can do to help them build on it because it is their interest as well.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. So if I can just take one more second? I think that is critical. I think those are the types of sorts of investments



we can make with a very high return on investment. So I appreciate it. Again, I thank you all for your time.

Mr. POE. Thank you for your questions. The chair will now recognize Mr. Perry from Pennsylvania.

Mr. PERRY. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks again, gentlemen. I am interested in your perspective of al-Qaeda's influence in the camps, the refugee camps that have become somewhat like cities in Jordan, and what we can look forward to in the near future or the further term as Syria grinds on.

And then I would like—why don't we do that and then see how much time we have left to talk a little strategy.

Mr. JONES. Just very briefly, Jabhat al-Nusra has recruited fighters out of camps, refugee camps, in Lebanon, has recruited individuals out of Jordan, and has recruited individuals, in particular, out of camps in Turkey. So it is a great way for these organizations to recruit, gain some funding, but also to gain intelligence about pipelines. In fact, it is worth noting that the most significant pipeline of fighters moving into Syria right now is through Turkey, which is a NATO country. And so in that sense, there has been a lot of recruitment in Turkey, in particular.

Mr. PERRY. Did you have something you wanted to add, Mr.—

Mr. JOSCELYN. Just real quick. That is right. In fact, the al-Qaeda and Iraq network that sort of Jabhat al-Nusra has built itself off of includes very prominent figures in Jordan who do that recruiting. And they have been doing that recruiting since back in your days when you were deployed in Iraq. It is some of the same network guys sending fighters into Syria today, including a guy that goes by the nom de guerre Arab Usa Yef. He is very prominent in doing that. So it is very much in that regard the same type of enemy you face in Iraq.

Mr. PERRY. So, then, do we need to be concerned about not only recruiting in the camps and transitioning across geographical boundaries but influence in those nation states where the camps are in Turkey and Jordan and what that portends? Do we need to be concerned or not? And how much?

Mr. JONES. I think we absolutely need to be concerned. We also need to be concerned about the spill over of violence into several of these countries. Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon, in particular, are three areas where there is a possibility not just of initial recruitment or additional recruitment but also the spill over of violence, not just sectarian violence, although that is part of it. But yes, this is the potential for regional spill over.

Mr. HEGGHAMMER. If I can add that I agree completely that there is a very distinct risk of spill over? They are not entirely sure whether the refugee camps should be the main concern here. After all, these are people who have left the conflict. So they have taken the decision not to join it. And if you look back at Iraq, hundreds of thousands of people left Iraq at the height of the conflict. And they produced relatively little spill over in the region. There are certainly examples, but, you know, compared to the scale of the exodus, the security implications were not all that large.

So, you know, in the best scenario, you get something similar from Syria, but I think we should keep an eye on sort of multiple

ways in which the spill over can happen, not just the refugee camps.

Mr. PERRY. And maybe rightly or wrongly, I just see the camps as somewhat large, sprawling, lawless, almost cities at this point, without government structures and so on and so forth, that lend themselves to that type activity. I guess, on the other side of the equation, they lend themselves to our ability to be involved and be present and gather intelligence and so on and so forth. I just wonder how acute the threat may be.

If we could move on, regarding the previous line of questioning, the strategy that the United States should take regarding our pseudo-allies, like Qatar, like Kuwait, who will have actors within that will be willing to fund—and that is really I think hard for their government or us to influence. But the state itself, if the states themselves, are sponsoring through funding, what should be our strategy? I know it is a delicate circumstance, but what would you folks think should be our best plan for that?

Mr. KAGAN. You know, I want to make it clear that I have seen reports that there is Kuwaiti funding and so forth, but I am not sure exactly who or what. And it is something that I think merits looking into. And I was surprised by that, candidly. I would not have expected that. And so my first suggestion would be getting to the bottom of whether that is true or not and why that is being tolerated in a state like that, where there is a much greater ability of the family to influence that kind of thing.

Qatar is an entirely different problem because Qatar maintains its sort of balancing position between Saudi and Iran and us and with Al Jazeera and with al-Qaeda. They have a new emir. He is a young guy. It may conceivably be possible to help him see the light some more and help him understand that the policies he has been pursuing have not been helpful to him in the region, which is, in fact, true.

Mr. PERRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will yield.

Mr. POE. Thank you.

Gentlemen, I can't tell you how much I appreciate you being in here because we rely on you guys, the experts, to inform us so that we can help influence foreign policy. And if you can bear one more questions? It is a three-part question. It will be real quick. What role should the U.S. play in Syria? To what capacity? And would it stabilize or destabilize that region more, you know, with the spill over into Jordan, the threat to Israel, you know, in that whole area? And if you can just say what your thoughts are on that briefly, I would greatly appreciate it. Go ahead, Dr. Jones.

Mr. JONES. I think the U.S. role in Syria should be to support the overthrow of the Assad regime. I think it is in U.S. interests. I do think one has to be very careful about how one does that and who one is providing both lethal and non-lethal assistance to, but I think this is a covert, clandestine war. This is really one that is done by the U.S. intelligence community and special operations forces. And I think if it is not done, we will not be able to influence the end results, none of which will be in our interest.

Mr. POE. Okay. Dr. Kagan?

Mr. KAGAN. I agree with that. I think this is not a case where putting a lot of U.S. boots on the ground is wise. And I would not

advocate for that. I am not sure that our role can be entirely clandestine. I think that there may be a requirement to do damage to the Syrian ability to use its airfields to receive critical supplies from Iran and other places and also to conduct operations.

I do not think that a full no-fly zone would be necessary at this point. I think there is much more nuance in that discussion than we have had so far in what kinds of tools we could apply beyond covert aid to assist. But I think it is absolutely vital because I think that all of the trend lines are that the longer this conflict goes in the way that it is going, the more destabilizing it will be, the more spill over there will be, and the more damage to American interests and security there will be.

Mr. POE. Mr. Joscelyn?

Mr. JOSCELYN. Just real quick, in terms of sponsoring the Syrian opposition, I am for it as long as we have a very good idea of how our enemies are constituted and what groups they are working with.

Mr. POE. Right.

Mr. JOSCELYN. They can't co-opt them. That is a very difficult black box a lot of times. Obviously that is why we are still talking about it, you know.

As far as destabilization, it is already about as destabilized as it can get. And I can't see it getting any better absent U.S. intervention or intervention from the outside world. That doesn't mean boots on the ground, but definitely it is a destabilizing factor.

And, lastly, just real quick, there has already been a threat to this to U.S. interests out of Syria, which it needs to be highlighted more often, which is that last year the Jordanian regime, the kingdom, shut down a plot, a very complicated plot, to attack the U.S. Embassy that involved staging attacks against other targets to sort of build up to a massive attack on the U.S. Embassy. You are already seeing that type of spill over. And those were Jabidah, and those were trained fighters throughout the region.

Mr. POE. Doc?

Mr. HEGGHAMMER. My view is that the U.S. should provide weapons to the moderate part of the Syrian opposition, but it should also do two things. One is to make absolutely clear to the Syrian opposition how much support they can expect to get because the biggest problem with providing a little bit of support is that you can get drawn in. You have the sort of slippery slope phenomenon. And so you can maybe see part of the Syrian opposition taking risks that they otherwise wouldn't take because they think they have the American support. So, then, you know, if you provide a little, then make absolutely clear where the line goes. Make sure to communicate that this does not mean that there is more to follow in case there is a crisis.

The other thing that is crucial is to prepare for the civil war that comes after the fall of Assad. There will be one. And it will be crucial to plan for that and to distribute the resources with that conflict and the constellations in that conflict in mind.

Mr. POE. Gentlemen, again I appreciate it. I know the members of this committee appreciate it and Congress appreciates your expertise in being here. And thank you.

This subcommittee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:11 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

# A P P E N D I X



MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

**SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128**

**Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade  
Ted Poe (R-TX), Chairman**

**TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held by the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at [www.foreignaffairs.house.gov](http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov)):

**DATE:** Thursday, July 18, 2013

**TIME:** 2:00 p.m.

**SUBJECT:** Global al-Qaeda: Affiliates, Objectives, and Future Challenges

**WITNESSES:** Seth Jones, Ph.D.  
Associate Director  
International Security and Defense Policy Center  
RAND Corporation

Frederick W. Kagan, Ph.D.  
Christopher DeMuth Chair and Director  
Critical Threats Project  
American Enterprise Institute

Mr. Thomas Joscelyn  
Senior Editor  
The Long War Journal  
Foundation for Defense of Democracies

Thomas Hegghammer, Ph.D.  
Zuckerman Fellow  
Center for International Security and Cooperation  
Stanford University

**By Direction of the Chairman**

*The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202-225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.*



COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade HEARING

Day Thursday Date July 18, 2013 Room 2172

Starting Time 2:42 Ending Time 4:11

Recesses  (to ) (to ) (to ) (to ) (to ) (to )

Presiding Member(s)

Rep. Ted Poe

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session

Electronically Recorded (taped)

Executive (closed) Session

Stenographic Record

Televised

TITLE OF HEARING:

Global al-Qaeda: Affiliates, Objectives, and Future Challenges

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Reps. Poe, Sherman, Schneider, Cook, Perry, Yoho, Cotton

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an \* if they are not members of full committee.)


HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes  No   
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE \_\_\_\_\_

or

TIME ADJOURNED 4:11

  
Subcommittee Staff Director

Rep. Ted Poe

Opening Statement

We have been told that al-Qaeda is on its last legs. That al-Qaeda died with bin Laden. That whatever remnants of al-Qaeda that remain are too weak for us to worry about. I'd like to know if that's true or if there is trouble around the bend that is coming our way. We're here today to help understand what the threat from al-Qaeda really is.

Now we know that there hasn't been a large-scale successful attack on the homeland since 9/11. That's a good sign. But the question is if that means that we are winning the war against al-Qaeda. All around the world al-Qaeda and their affiliates have expanded over the past several years.

This is a map of where al-Qaeda was before 9/11. The red is al-Qaeda. As you can see, al-Qaeda is mostly in Afghanistan, but with a small presence in Tunisia, Algeria, Sudan, and Libya. That's a total of 5 countries.

This is a map of present day. The red is al-Qaeda and the blue is other terrorist groups. Where it is shaded red and blue is where both al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups are located. If you look at the map, you see that Al-Qaeda is in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Algeria, Mali, Niger, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, and Nigeria. That's a total of 13 countries. That's almost 3 times as many countries as before 9/11.

Let's review. While core al-Qaeda in Pakistan may have taken a beating over the past several years, its affiliates are gaining strength in Africa, the Middle East, and the Caucuses. The most concentrated threat was previously from the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. Now, we face a whole bunch of affiliated groups that are transnational, interconnected, and deadly. Allowing them to grow in power does not mean we are winning. If anything, it means that an attack on the United States is more likely.

In Somalia, Al-Shabaab continues to control a big part of the country despite African troops coming in to try and restore order. Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri officially recognized al-Nusra in Syria as an al-Qaeda branch. With better weapons than most, al-Nusra is one the strongest groups in the Syrian civil war now. In Iraq, al-Qaeda has made a comeback following the withdrawal of U.S. troops. Al-Qaeda in Iraq is putting the country on pace to have as many casualties as it did in 2008. After insisting we leave, Prime Minister Maliki is now begging us for help. Across North Africa, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has been linked to both the Benghazi and Algeria attacks. We all witnessed the horrific attack on our consulate in Benghazi that killed four Americans, including Ambassador Chris Stevens.

In Algeria, al-Qaeda jihadists attacked a gas plant and took nearly 800 people hostage. During the rescue operations, more than 80 people were killed, including 3 Americans. One of



them was my constituent, Victor Lovelady. Just last week, in a hearing on North Africa, I heard from Victor's brother Mike. Mike, with Victor's family sitting behind him, told us what it was like to have your own government sit you down and tell you your loved one has just been killed by al-Qaeda. No American should ever have to get that news.

What's worse, be it Benghazi or Algeria, we can't seem to find those responsible and bring them to justice. It has been nearly a year since Benghazi and there has not been one perpetrator indicted or taken out. This shows weakness and invites more attacks from radical extremists.

I'm afraid the lesson that al-Qaeda takes away from all this is that if you hit America abroad, there won't be any consequences. That it's more likely America will pack up and leave rather than go after the perpetrators and bring them to justice.

Some have simply measured our success against al-Qaeda by the number of attacks on the US homeland. But it is more complicated than that. The truth is attacking the United States is not al-Qaeda's main objective. What al-Qaeda really wants to do is establish an Islamic caliphate with strict sharia law all the way from Afghanistan to Morocco. Attacking the United States is only one of the ways it obtains that objective.

Over the last 4 years, al-Qaeda has been moving toward that goal by expanding in new regions of the world. They are increasing their size and scope. They are reaching new populations. We need to have an open and honest discussion about the threat of al-Qaeda.

When our special forces executed the raid in Pakistan that killed bin Laden, troves of information were captured. This information is vital for understanding al-Qaeda and its objectives, yet the Administration has been keeping it all to themselves. According to press accounts, there are hundreds of thousands of documents. The Administration has only publically released 17. I'd urge the Administration to reconsider. Simply saying the threat is no longer there does not make it true.

This Congress and the American people deserve to know the truth about the enemies we face. The goal of this hearing is to bring that truth to light.

# Global al-Qaeda

Pre 9-11



# Global al-Qaeda

## Present Day

