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**AL QAEDA IN YEMEN AND SOMALIA:
A TICKING TIME BOMB**

A REPORT
TO THE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS
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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

UNITED STATES SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC, January 21, 2010.

DEAR COLLEAGUE: This report by the committee majority staff is part of our ongoing examination of Al Qaeda's role in international terrorism. U.S. and allied operations over the past several years have largely pushed Al Qaeda out of Afghanistan and Iraq. Many of those fighters traveled to the tribal region on the Pakistani side of the border with Afghanistan. But ongoing U.S. and Pakistani military and intelligence operations there have made it an increasingly inhospitable place for Al Qaeda. Consequently, hundreds-or perhaps even thousands-of fighters have gone elsewhere. New Al Qaeda cells or allied groups have sprung up in North Africa, Southeast Asia, and perhaps most importantly in Yemen and Somalia. These groups may have only an informal connection with Al Qaeda's leadership in Pakistan, but they often share common goals. Al Qaeda's recruitment tactics also have changed. The group seeks to recruit American citizens to carry out terrorist attacks in the United States. These Americans are not necessarily of Arab or South Asian descent; they include individuals who converted to Islam in prison or elsewhere and were radicalized. This report relies on new and existing information to explore the current and changing threat posed by Al Qaeda, not just abroad, but here at home.

Sincerely,

JOHN F. KERRY,
Chairman.

AL QAEDA IN YEMEN AND SOMALIA: A TICKING TIME BOMB

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, the offshoot of Osama bin Laden's terrorist network operating in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, has evolved into an ambitious organization capable of using non-traditional recruits to launch attacks against American targets within the Middle East and beyond. Evidence of its potential became front-page news after a young Nigerian trained at one of its camps in Yemen tried to blow up a passenger aircraft bound for Detroit on Christmas Day.

For American counter-terrorism experts in the region, the Christmas Day plot was a nearly catastrophic illustration of a significant new threat from a network previously regarded as a regional danger, rather than an international one. The concern now is that the group has grown more dangerous by taking advantage of the weakened central government in Yemen, which is struggling with civil conflicts and declining natural resources. These experts have said they are worried that training camps established in remote parts of Yemen by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) are being run by former detainees and veteran fighters from Afghanistan and Iraq and used to instruct U.S. citizens who have immigrated to Yemen to marry local women or after converting to Islam in American prisons.

Law enforcement and intelligence officials told the Committee staff in interviews in December in Yemen and other countries in the region that as many as 36 American ex-convicts arrived in Yemen in the past year, ostensibly to study Arabic. The officials said there are legitimate reasons for Americans and others to study and live in Yemen, but they said some of the Americans had disappeared and are suspected of having gone to Al Qaeda training camps in ungoverned portions of the impoverished country. Similar concerns were expressed about a smaller group of Americans who moved to Yemen, adopted a radical form of Islam, and married local women. So far, the officials said they have no evidence that any of these Americans have undergone training. But they said they are on heightened alert because of the potential threat from extremists carrying American passports and the related challenges involved in detecting and stopping homegrown operatives.

The staff interviews were conducted just before the failed Christmas Day plot. The ability of Al Qaeda to expand beyond its core members by recruiting non-traditional adherents was one of the lessons drawn by counter-terrorism experts from the failed attempt to blow up the aircraft. The suspected bomber was a Nigerian man,

Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, 23, who had overstayed an education visa in Yemen by several months and had undergone explosives training at one of the remote Al Qaeda camps. His father, a respected retired banker and former Nigerian government official, had warned the U.S. embassy in Nigeria about his son's growing radicalism and disappearance while in Yemen, but Abdalmuttallab was able to use a U.S. visa to board the flight in Amsterdam with a bomb sewn into his underwear. He was overcome by passengers and crew members as he tried to detonate the device and has been indicted by a federal grand jury in Michigan on charges of attempted murder and attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction.

The Yemeni origins of the bomb plot, the Nigerian homeland of the accused bomber, and the flight path from the Netherlands underscored the fact that American counter-terrorism efforts cannot focus exclusively on a single country or region and that an attack could come from anywhere. These concerns are deepened by growing evidence of attempts by Al Qaeda to recruit American residents and citizens in Yemen, Somalia and within the United States. What is required is a measured, strategic assessment of the threats that exist today, wherever they originate.

In important ways, the United States is safer than it was before the attacks of September 11, 2001. Our intelligence and law enforcement agencies have worked effectively at home and abroad to disrupt threats and heighten vigilance. U.S. intelligence and military officials agree that Al Qaeda's capacity to carry out large-scale terrorist operations has been significantly degraded. Its financial and popular support is declining and U.S. and allied operations have killed or captured much of Al Qaeda's leadership, with the notable exceptions of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. Polls show that support for the organization has weakened among Muslims because of its harsh tactics, including repeated suicide attacks that have killed thousands of innocent civilians in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries.

The U.S. military has largely pushed Al Qaeda out of Afghanistan and Iraq. While the military efforts should be praised, they have not eliminated the threat. Many fighters affiliated with Al Qaeda and other militant groups have taken refuge across the Afghan border in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Authority, which remains a major safe haven. At the same time, intelligence and counter-terrorism officials said hundreds and perhaps thousands of veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have relocated to other places, primarily Yemen and Somalia.

While Al Qaeda's short-term goals remain the same-to bring down a U.S. airliner, to push U.S. and NATO troops out of Afghanistan, and to attack a broad range of targets worldwide-its methods have changed in response to American successes against the core organization. Many groups acting under Al Qaeda's banner are only loosely affiliated with the leadership. More often, they raise their own money and plan and execute attacks independently. Operational decisions are routinely made at the local level, rather than by bin Laden or Zawahiri.

Despite these changes, there are common elements that serve as warning signals to U.S. intelligence and counter-terrorism officials.

For example, Yemen and Somalia have a core of trained militants who fought in Afghanistan and Iraq. Both Yemen and Somalia have weak central governments that exercise little or no control over vast swaths of their own territory and forbidding, harsh terrains that would make it virtually impossible for U.S. forces to operate freely. They have abundant weapons and experience using them on the battlefield. Government cooperation with American counter-terrorism efforts has historically been spotty and portions of both populations are hostile to the United States.

In Yemen, the limited reach of the central government and changes in the country's demographics have permitted extremists to thrive. In addition to AQAP, Yemen confronts a tribal revolt in the north of the country, a secessionist movement in the south, and rising poverty rates. The country's foreign minister, Abu Bakr al-Qiribi, recently acknowledged that the rebellion and secessionist movement had distracted the government from going after Al Qaeda in the last year.

AQAP, the primary terrorist group in the country, is closely linked to Al Qaeda. The local affiliate is led by a Yemeni militant who was involved in the 2000 attack on the USS Cole in which 17 American sailors were killed. He was among 23 Al Qaeda fighters who escaped from a Yemeni prison in February 2006, reportedly with help from security officials. The group's deputy is a Saudi citizen who was released from Guantanamo in November 2007. After completing a Saudi government-sponsored rehabilitation program, he slipped south into Yemen and returned to militancy.

Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Salih has promised that his security services will track down members of Al Qaeda and there has been considerable cooperation between U.S. intelligence and military units and their Yemeni counterparts. But Salih's government angered Washington by releasing militants who claim to have renounced violence, including some former Guantanamo detainees and one of the masterminds of the Cole bombing. In early January, President Obama reflected these concerns when he suspended the release of further Yemeni detainees from Guantanamo, where they comprise about half the remaining population.

Al Qaeda also is expanding its presence across the Gulf of Aden in Somalia. U.S. counter-terrorism officials told the Committee staff they fear American citizens are being recruited in Somalia for terrorist operations. They pointed to several Somali-Americans arrested in Minnesota in early 2009 after returning from fighting alongside al-Shabab, which is the dominant militant group in Somalia and has close ties to Al Qaeda. Officials also expressed concern about two dozen Americans of Somali origin who disappeared in recent months from St. Paul, Minnesota; similar disappearances have been reported in Ohio and Oregon. The vast majority of Somali-Americans has been alarmed by these developments and cooperated in investigations.

While most of our counter-terrorism resources are rightly focused on Afghanistan and Pakistan, the potential threats from Yemen and Somalia pose new challenges for the United States and other countries fighting extremism worldwide. The prospect that U.S. citizens are being trained at Al Qaeda camps in both countries deepens our concern and emphasizes the need to understand the

nature of the evolving dangers. President Obama has pledged to strengthen our relationship with the Yemeni government through increased military and intelligence cooperation. Addressing emerging dangers in Yemen and elsewhere in the region constitutes a vital national security interest, and this report is intended to provide information that will help guide us in that mission.

1. AL QAEDA RECONSTITUTED

Al Qaeda has been battered around the world since its attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. The group is facing dwindling financial and popular support and difficulty working with other extremists around the world. U.S. and allied operations against Al Qaeda have killed or captured many of the organization's leaders, while the majority of Muslims around the world are repulsed by its methods.

The U.S. military has pushed Al Qaeda out of Afghanistan. Similar U.S. success in Iraq has forced hundreds of fighters out of that country. As a result, the bulk of Al Qaeda fighters have relocated to Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Authority, along its border with Afghanistan. Large numbers have relocated to other parts of the world, including Yemen and Somalia.

Despite setbacks, Al Qaeda is not on the run. The group has expanded its recruitment efforts to attract non-traditional followers and adapted its operations. U.S. law enforcement authorities told Committee staff they believe that as many as three dozen U.S. citizens who converted to Islam while in prison have traveled to Yemen, possibly for Al Qaeda training. As many as a dozen U.S. citizens who married Muslim women and converted to Islam also have made their way to Yemen. In some cases, Al Qaeda recruits have come from moderate backgrounds, like would-be Christmas bomber Omar Faruq Abdulmutallab, whose father is one of Nigeria's most highly-respected bankers and a former government minister.

While goals have remained unchanged, the methods with which Al Qaeda tries to accomplish those goals have changed. Many groups linked to Al Qaeda are only loosely affiliated and act on their own.

That said, recent history demonstrates that several factors bind Al Qaeda members together. The first is friendship forged on the battlefield. Arabs who fought the Soviets in Afghanistan call themselves "Afghan alumni." Thousands went to Yemen after the Soviets' defeat and were welcomed as heroes. Many of them fought again side-by-side in southern Yemen during that country's civil war in 1994. The second is discipleship. Most young Yemeni Al Qaeda fighters captured in Afghanistan and Pakistan after the September 11 attacks said they had decided to make jihad against the United States only after being prodded into doing so by the imams in their villages. Third are family and tribal ties, although this same dynamic can work against it in Somalia. Arabs have historically married across tribes-and even nationalities-to cement alliances and power, and Al Qaeda benefits from this trend. Somalis, however, have tended to be a more insular society.¹

¹"To Beat Al Qaeda, Look to the East," by Scott Atran, New York Times, December 13, 2009.

Background

Over the past eight years, Al Qaeda has evolved into a significantly different terrorist organization than the one that perpetrated the September 11 attacks. At the time, Al Qaeda was composed mostly of a core of veterans of the Afghan insurgency against the Soviets, with a leadership structure made up mostly of Egyptians and bin Laden, a Saudi of Yemeni descent. Most of the organization's plots either emanated from—or were approved by—the leadership.

The Al Qaeda of that period no longer exists. Due to pressures from U.S. and international intelligence and security organizations, it has transformed into a diffuse global network and philosophical movement composed of dispersed nodes with varying degrees of independence. The leadership, headed by bin Laden and Zawahiri, is thought to be in the mountainous border region of northwest Pakistan, where it continues to train operatives, recruit, and disseminate propaganda.² But Al Qaeda cells or affiliated groups in Yemen, Somalia, Iraq, North Africa, and Southeast Asia now represent critical players in the larger movement. Some cells receive money, training, and weapons; others look to the leadership in Pakistan for strategic guidance, theological justification, and a larger narrative of global struggle. Michael E. Leiter, Director of the National Counter Terrorism Center, said in an April 2009 speech that the trajectory of Al Qaeda is “less centralized command and control, no clear center of gravity, and likely rising and falling centers of gravity, depending on where the U.S. and the international focus is for that period.”³

The Al Qaeda network today also is made up of semi-autonomous cells which often have only peripheral ties to either the leadership in Pakistan or affiliated groups elsewhere. Sometimes these individuals never leave their home country but are radicalized with the assistance of others who have traveled abroad for training and indoctrination. The July 2005 London bombers are an example of semi-autonomous actors in the Al Qaeda universe, as is Najibullah Zazi, an Afghan living in Denver who was charged in September 2009 with conspiring to carry out bombings in the United States. The London bombers, radicalized in the UK, sought training in Pakistan before returning home to carry out their attacks. Similarly, Zazi reportedly was radicalized in the United States before traveling to Pakistan for training.

Another category of today's Al Qaeda movement is self-radicalized individuals, who lack any connection to the larger network but accept Al Qaeda's theological arguments and strategic aspirations. One example is Michael C. Finton, arrested in September 2009 in Illinois on charges of attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction.⁴ Finton, 29, converted to Islam while serving in an Illinois prison from 1999 to 2005 for robbery and battery charges. According to a court affidavit, he traveled to Saudi Arabia in March

²See Kristin M. Lord, John A. Nagl, and Seth Rosen, “Beyond Bullets: A Pragmatic Strategy to Combat Violent Islamist Extremism,” Center for a New American Security, June 2009, p.10.

³Remarks by Michael E. Leiter, Director of the National Counter Terrorism Center,” at The Aspen Institute, April 9, 2009.

⁴For more, see “Men Accused of Unrelated Bomb Plots in Ill., Texas,” Associated Press, September 24, 2009.

2008. An undercover Federal Bureau of Investigation agent posing as a low-level Al Qaeda operative met with Finton in the months leading up to his September arrest. The officer provided him with a van containing materials he said were explosives. Finton then parked the van outside a federal courthouse in Springfield, Illinois, where he was arrested. There is no evidence that Finton underwent Al Qaeda training or conspired with others, like Zazi and the London bombers did.

Despite Al Qaeda's transformation in recent years, its strategic objectives remain the same: to attack the United States and governments seen as supporting the Americans. John O. Brennan, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, told the Center for Strategic and International Studies in an August 2009 speech that "Al Qaeda has proven to be adaptive and highly resilient and remains the most serious terrorist threat we face as a nation."⁵ The U.S. intelligence community assesses that Al Qaeda is "actively engaged in operational plotting and continues recruiting, training, and transporting operatives, to include individuals from Western Europe and North America," according to Leiter's testimony in September 2009 before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.⁶

Thanks in large part to the actions of the U.S. government, Al Qaeda and its leadership in Pakistan are under tremendous pressure. U.S. military and intelligence operations have reportedly degraded the leadership's capacity for conducting external operations and raising funds.⁷ Dennis C. Blair, Director of National Intelligence, told the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in February 2009 that Al Qaeda "today is less capable and effective than it was a year ago."⁸

Though Al Qaeda affiliated groups have carried out numerous deadly terrorist attacks over the past two years, the leadership in Pakistan has demonstrated limited operational effectiveness during that same time span. In part because of the loss of top commanders and continued pressure from U.S. intelligence activities and those of foreign partners, Al Qaeda has been unable to orchestrate successful large-scale attacks. There is also some evidence that Al Qaeda is struggling to retain recruits and raise funds. In June 2009, the group's leader in Afghanistan, Mustafa Abu al-Yazid, released an audio message asking for money because Al Qaeda members were short of food, weapons, and other supplies.⁹

The Al Qaeda movement faces perhaps an even larger challenge in the form of a legitimacy crisis within Muslim communities. According to Blair, the United States has "seen notable progress in Muslim opinion turning against terrorist groups like Al Qaeda."¹⁰ Muslim populations worldwide, some of which approved of Al

⁵Remarks by John O. Brennan, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism," at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 6, 2009.

⁶"Testimony of Michael Leiter at hearing 'Eight Years After 9/11: Confronting the Terrorist Threat to the Homeland,'" before the U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, September 30, 2009.

⁷"Statement of Robert S. Mueller, III, Director Federal Bureau of Investigation," before the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, September 30, 2009.

⁸"Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence," Dennis C. Blair, Director of National Intelligence, February 12, 2009.

⁹William Maclean, "Al-Qaida's Money Trouble," Reuters, June 15, 2009.

¹⁰"Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence," Dennis C. Blair, Director of National Intelligence, February 12, 2009.

Qaeda's actions in the wake of the invasion of Iraq, appear to have turned against the movement. The killing of innocent Muslims in Iraq and Pakistan, as well as the bombing of three hotels in Amman, Jordan in November 2005, produced a significant backlash. For example, a poll conducted by Jordan University's Center for Strategic Studies a month after the Amman bombings showed that only 20 percent of the population viewed Al Qaeda as a "legitimate resistance group," down from 67 percent in 2004.¹¹ Over the past two years, several prominent religious scholars and former Al Qaeda associates—including Saudi fundamentalists Sheikh Salman al-Awda and Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, one of Al Qaeda's original spiritual leaders—have spoken out against the indiscriminate tactics and ideology.

A Continuing Threat in Pakistan

U.S. officials remain concerned that Al Qaeda terrorists maintain bases and training camps in Pakistan and that the group appears to have increased its influence among the myriad Islamist militant groups operating along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Bin Laden and Zawahiri are believed to be hiding in northwestern Pakistan, along with most other senior operatives.¹² Al Qaeda leaders have issued statements encouraging Pakistani Muslims to "resist" the American "occupiers" in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to fight against Pakistan's "U.S.-allied politicians and officers."¹³ A 2007 National Intelligence Estimate on terrorist threats to the United States concluded that Al Qaeda "has protected or regenerated key elements of its homeland attack capability, including a safe haven in [Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas], operational lieutenants, and its top leadership."¹⁴

Islamabad reportedly has remanded to U.S. custody roughly 500 Al Qaeda fighters since 2001, including several senior operatives. U.S. officials say that drone-launched U.S. missile attacks and Pakistan's pressing of military offensives against extremist groups in the border areas have meaningfully disrupted Al Qaeda activities there while inflicting heavy human losses.¹⁵ The August death of Al Qaeda-allied Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud, reportedly caused by a U.S.-launched missile, may have thrown Islamist militants in western Pakistan into disarray. Some analysts worry, however, that successful military operations are driving Al Qaeda fighters into Pakistani cities where they will be harder to target and, fueling already significant anti-American sentiments among the Pakistani people. The Pakistani military has conducted successful counter-insurgency campaigns to wrest two parts of the country from Pakistani Taliban control, the Swat Valley and

¹¹Murad Batal Al-Shishani, "Jordanian Poll Indicates Erosion of Public Support for Al Qaeda," *Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 3, No. 6, February 14, 2006.

¹²"CIA Chief Says Bin Laden in Pakistan," Reuters, June 11, 2009; "Al Qaeda's Global Base in Pakistan, Says Petraeus," *Wall Street Journal*, May 9, 2009.

¹³See, for example, "Qaeda's Zawahiri Urges Pakistanis to Join Jihad," Reuters, July 15, 2009.

¹⁴See <http://www.dni.gov/press-releases/20070717-release.pdf>.

¹⁵"U.S. Missile Strikes Take Heavy Toll on Al Qaeda, Officials Say," *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 2009; "Al Qaeda Seen as Shaken in Pakistan," *Washington Post*, June 1, 2009; "Al Qaeda Weakened as Key Leaders are Slain in Recent Attacks," *Associated Press*, September 19, 2009.

South Waziristan. Still militants continue to use some of the rugged tribal areas as bases of operations.

It is clear that there is a significant Al Qaeda threat in Pakistan. But there are significant Al Qaeda populations in Yemen and Somalia, too. As Al Qaeda members continue to resist U.S. and Pakistani forces along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, some of their comrades appear to be moving to Yemen and Somalia, where the political climate allows them to seek safe haven, recruit new members, and train for future operations.

2. YEMEN: EXPLOITING WEAKNESSES

There are parallels between Pakistan and Yemen, according to U.S. counter-terrorism officials, military leaders, and policymakers. Both have become havens for significant numbers of Al Qaeda fighters formerly active in Afghanistan. Both have weak central governments that have difficulty controlling vast swaths of their own territory and populations that are often hostile to the United States.

The weak central government and alarming socioeconomic changes in Yemen have provided opportunities for terrorist groups to build and maintain a presence. The government's counter-terrorism efforts are further hobbled by the conflicts in the northern and southern parts of the country.

Overall, Islamic extremist groups are not strong enough to topple President Salih's regime—he has co-opted several already—but they are capable of successfully striking a high value target, such as a foreign compound or an oil installation. On September 17, 2008, the Al Qaeda affiliate attacked the entrance of the U.S. Embassy in Sana'a, killing 11 people. Six of the attackers also died. Observers note that despite such a brazen attack, Yemeni militants failed to breach the U.S. Embassy's outer layer of security and killed mostly Yemeni civilians rather than U.S. Embassy personnel. Nevertheless, media coverage may have been enough to satisfy the perpetrators, as the U.S. State Department soon after the attack announced that it would, for the second time in a year, authorize the departure of all nonessential personnel from Sana'a.¹⁶

Yemen exhibits several traits that worry counter-terrorism and intelligence officials. Worsening socioeconomic trends have the potential to overwhelm the Yemeni government, further jeopardizing domestic stability and security across the region. Yemen's oil—the source of over 75 percent of its income—will run out by 2017, and the country has no apparent way to transition to a post-oil economy.¹⁷ More worrisome is the rapidly depleting water supply. Shortages are acute throughout the country, and Sana'a may become the first capital city in the world to run out of water.¹⁸ The country's water is being consumed much faster than it is being replenished. A large amount of Yemen's water consumption is devoted to the irrigation of qat, a semi-narcotic plant habitually chewed by an estimated 75 percent of Yemeni men. Qat is blamed

¹⁶“Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations,” by Jeremy Sharp, Congressional Research Service, page 8.

¹⁷“Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral,” by Christopher Boucek, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Middle East Program, Number 102, September 2009.

¹⁸Ibid.

for decreasing productivity, depleting resources, and contributing to the poverty that leaves nearly half the population earning less than \$2 per day.¹⁹ The country also faces one of the world's highest population growth rates, 3.4 percent a year, which strains the government's ability to provide services and contributes to an illiteracy rate of more than 50 percent.²⁰

A Multifaceted Threat to U.S. Interests

U.S. diplomats and law enforcement officials say that a significant threat to U.S. interests could come from American citizens based in Yemen. Most worrisome is a group of as many as three dozen former criminals who converted to Islam in prison, were released at the end of their sentences, and moved to Yemen, ostensibly to study Arabic. U.S. officials told Committee staff that they fear that these Americans were radicalized in prison and traveled to Yemen for training. Although there is no public evidence of any terrorist action by these individuals, law enforcement officials told Committee staff members that several have "dropped off the radar" for weeks at a time. U.S. law enforcement officials said they are on heightened alert because of the potential threat from extremists carrying American passports and the related challenges involved in detecting and stopping homegrown operatives.

Another concern is a group of nearly 10 non-Yemeni Americans who traveled to Yemen, converted to Islam, became fundamentalists, and married Yemeni women so they could remain in the country. Described by one American official as "blond-haired, blue eyed-types," these individuals fit a profile of Americans whom Al Qaeda has sought to recruit over the past several years. Most of them reside in Sana'a.

Anwar al-Awlaki, a U.S.-born imam who reportedly was the spiritual advisor of Major Nidal Hassan, a U.S. Army officer accused of murdering 13 people at Fort Hood, Texas in November 2009, currently resides in Yemen. U.S. law enforcement officials told Committee staff that Awlaki counsels young Muslim fundamentalists to "continue jihad" and to "fight the Crusaders." Although Awlaki has not yet been accused of a crime, U.S. intelligence and military officials consider him to be a direct threat to U.S. interests.

Meanwhile, according to U.S. law enforcement officials, 34 members of Al Qaeda who came to Sana'a from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and Guantanamo and who registered with the Yemeni government as Al Qaeda members, live in the immediate vicinity of the U.S. Embassy. These Al Qaeda fighters, upon registering their affiliation with the Yemeni government, promised to refrain from all terrorist activities.

Al Qaeda Transformation Underway in Yemen

In January 2009, Al Qaeda militants in Yemen announced that the group's Saudi and Yemeni "branches" were merging under the banner of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The Saudi

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2002rank.html?countryName=Yemen&countryCode=ym®ionCode=me&rank=4#ym>, January 12, 2009.

extremists had carried out a wave of terrorist violence that swept Saudi Arabia from 2003 through 2007, but they were driven south to Yemen after a crackdown. AQAP is led by a Yemeni militant²¹ who in 2006 escaped from a Yemeni prison along with 22 other Al Qaeda fighters, reportedly with help from Yemeni security officials. One of his deputies is a Saudi citizen who was repatriated to Saudi Arabia from Guantanamo in November 2007 and returned to militancy after completing a rehabilitation course in Saudi Arabia. Some counter-terrorism experts suggested that the presence of Saudi militants in Yemen indicates that Al Qaeda's presence in the kingdom has been significantly hampered by Saudi security forces and that they have gone to Yemen because of its more permissive environment.²²

In recent months, AQAP has threatened to attack Yemeni oil facilities and the soldiers protecting them, Western interests in Yemen, and foreign tourists. In March 2009, AQAP suicide bombers killed four South Korean tourists and their local Yemeni guide near the city of Shibam. A week later, they carried out a second attack against a convoy of South Korean officials who had traveled to Yemen to investigate the murders. Some analysts suggested that AQAP may have received assistance from a source inside the security forces in order to carry out a bombing against a well-guarded foreign delegation on its way from the country's main airport.

In 2009, several high ranking U.S. intelligence and defense officials suggested that Yemen was becoming a failed state and consequently a more important theater for U.S. counterterrorism operations. In February 2009, CIA Director Leon Panetta said he was "particularly concerned with Somalia and Yemen. Somalia is a failed state. Yemen is almost there. And our concern is that both could become safe havens for Al Qaeda."²³ A few months later, DNI Director Blair stated that "Yemen is reemerging as a jihadist battleground and potential regional base of operations for Al Qaeda to plan internal and external attacks, train terrorists, and facilitate the movement of operatives." In his April 2009 testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Commander of U.S. Central Command General David H. Petraeus said, "The inability of the Yemeni government to secure and exercise control over all of its territory offers terrorist and insurgent groups in the region, particularly Al Qaeda, a safe haven in which to plan, organize, and support terrorist operations."²⁴

In testimony before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee in April 2009, Michael Leiter, director of

²¹According to a number of sources, the leader of Al Qaeda in Yemen is a 32-year-old former bin Laden secretary named Nasir al Wuhayshi. Like other well-know operatives, Wuhayshi was a member of the 23-person contingent who escaped from a Yemeni prison in 2006. Wuhayshi's personal connection to bin Laden has reportedly enhanced his legitimacy among his followers. After the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001, he escaped through Iran, but was arrested there and held for two years until he was deported to Yemen in 2003. See, Gregory D. Johnsen, "Al Qaeda in Yemen Reorganizes under Nasir al-Wuhayshi," *Terrorism Focus*, Volume 5, Issue 11, published by the Jamestown Foundation, March 18, 2008.

²²According to one Saudi commander, "We have killed or captured all the fighters and the rest have fled to Afghanistan or Yemen. . . . All that remains here is some ideological apparatus." See, "Saudis Retool to Root Out Terrorist Risk," *New York Times*, March 22, 2009.

²³Central Intelligence Agency, "Media Roundtable with CIA Director Leon E. Panetta," press release, February 25, 2009.

²⁴U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Policy on Afghanistan, Pakistan, Statement of David H. Petraeus, Commander, U.S. Central Command, 111th Congress, April 1, 2009.

the National Counterterrorism Center, remarked “We have witnessed the reemergence of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, with Yemen as a key battleground and potential regional base of operations from which Al Qaeda can plan attacks, train recruits, and facilitate the movement of operatives . . . We are concerned that if AQAP strengthens, Al Qaeda leaders could use the group and the growing presence of foreign fighters in the region to supplement its transnational operations capability.”²⁵

U.S. diplomats and western press reports indicate that Al Qaeda has grown bolder in Yemen in the past year. In late December 2009, Al Qaeda militants made a rare public appearance in southern Yemen, telling an anti-government rally that the group’s war was with the United States, and not with the Yemeni army. Al-Jazeera television showed footage of the militant addressing the crowd while an armed comrade stood by as a bodyguard. Both were unmasked.²⁶ Also in late 2009, Yemeni government officials said that Al Qaeda was responsible for a daring armored car robbery in Aden, which netted \$500,000. No arrests have been made.

American concerns have been reflected in stepped-up cooperation with the Yemeni military and security services. In December, the deputy director of the CIA, Stephen Kappes, visited the capital for consultations. After the Christmas Day bomb plot, President Obama announced that the United States would increase its training and equipping of Yemen’s security forces.

A History of Violence and Extremism

Christopher Boucek, a fellow with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, recently wrote that, “Islamist extremism in Yemen is the result of a long and complicated set of developments. A large number of Yemeni nationals participated in the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan during the 1980s. After the Soviet occupation ended, the Yemeni government encouraged its citizens to return and also permitted foreign veterans to settle in Yemen. Many of these Arabs were integrated into the state’s various security apparatuses. As early as 1993, the U.S. State Department noted in a now-declassified intelligence report that Yemen was becoming an important stop for many fighters leaving Afghanistan. The report also maintained that the Yemeni government was either unwilling or unable to curb their activities. Islamist activists were used by the regime throughout the 1980s and 1990s to suppress domestic opponents, and during the 1994 civil war Islamists fought against southern forces.”²⁷

Al Qaeda’s first known attack took place in 1993 in Aden. After several serious attacks in the early 2000s, including on the USS Cole and the French oil tanker MV Limburg, Yemen experienced a brief period of calm. Analysts believe this was the result of a short-lived “non-aggression pact” between the government and extremists and enhanced U.S.-Yemeni counter-terrorism cooperation. By 2004, however, a generational split by younger extremists,

²⁵ “Al Qaeda Focuses on Yemen as Launchpad: U.S.,” *Agence France Presse*, September 30, 2009.

²⁶ “Qaeda Makes Rare Public Appearance at Yemen Rally,” *The Washington Post*, December 21, 2009.

²⁷ “Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral,” by Christopher Boucek, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Middle East Program, Number 102, September 2009.

radicalized in part by the global Sunni Islamist revival and the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, led to the emergence of a group not interested in negotiating with what it viewed as an illegitimate and un-Islamic government in Sana'a. Several prison escapes of experienced and dangerous operatives further energized this younger faction, which launched a new campaign of violent attacks against oil facilities, foreign residents and tourists, and government security targets.

Western targets in Yemen would make attractive targets for a resurgent Al Qaeda. Recent counter-terrorism measures in Saudi Arabia forced extremists to seek refuge elsewhere and analysts have observed a steady flow relocating to Yemen's under-governed areas.²⁸ Saudi authorities recently released a list of 85 most-wanted terrorism suspects, 26 of whom are believed to be in Yemen, including eleven Saudis who had been detained at Guantanamo.

For the central government, the Houthi rebellion in the north and the secessionist movement in the South represent threats to the survival of the state. Al Qaeda has attacked Yemeni government interests in the past, and Al Qaeda figures in the country have made public statements opposing the government. Senior Yemeni officials say frequently that their country is working with allies, including the United States, to fight terrorism. But U.S. officials complain that the Yemeni government often does not appear serious about the Al Qaeda threat because a number of high-profile suspects have either been released from custody or have escaped from Yemeni prisons. U.S. government officials describe Yemeni cooperation on counter-terrorism issues as "episodic at best."²⁹

Weapons and explosives from Yemen, where gunrunners operate with impunity, often find their way to Somalia and have been traced to attacks in Saudi Arabia, including explosives employed in a Riyadh bombing and assault rifles used in an attack on the U.S. consulate in Jeddah. More recently, a Saudi national who had been living in Yemen, attempted to assassinate Prince Muhammad bin Nayif Al Saud, the Saudi Deputy Interior Minister and Director of Counter-terrorism, by detonating a bomb concealed in his undergarments. The device was similar to the bomb used by Omar Faruq Abdulmutallab in his attempt to blow up a Northwest Airlines flight on Christmas Day.³⁰ U.S. law enforcement officials said both men received their training in Yemen.

The U.S. government is aware of Yemen's needs, both in counter-terrorism and in economic security. The Obama administration re-

²⁸ "Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral," by Christopher Boucek, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Middle East Program, Number 102, September 2009.

²⁹ Convicted USS Cole bomber Jamal al-Badawi, for example, was arrested and convicted on terrorism charges related to the attack, and sentenced to 15 years in prison. He escaped twice, allegedly with the help of Yemeni security officials, surrendered twice, and then given conditional release. Despite protestations from the United States, the Yemeni government has refused to extradite Badawi to stand trial. He is currently free in Yemen.

³⁰ On August 27, 2009, AQAP operative Abdallah Hassan al-Asiri, pretending to surrender to Saudi authorities, detonated a bomb hidden in his undergarments and made of pentaerythritol tetranitrate, or PETN, while in the presence of Prince Muhammad bin Nayif. Asiri spent weeks negotiating his false surrender and was invited, as other penitent ex-militants, to meet the prince during a Ramadan fast-breaking event. He bypassed some airport inspections because he was flown from southern Saudi Arabia on the prince's own jet and was not required to change clothes nor thoroughly searched before he met the prince. US officials meanwhile said that Omar Faruq Abdulmutallab also tried to detonate a PETN bomb sewn under his undergarments. Abdulmutallab told US law enforcement authorities that he obtained the materials in Yemen.

requested-and Congress authorized-more than \$50 million in economic and military aid, \$35 million in development assistance, \$12.5 million in foreign military financing, and \$5 million in economic support funds. This represents an increase of more than 200 percent.

3. SOMALIA: FAILURE BREEDS EXTREMISM

Al Qaeda's tentacles reach deeply into Somalia and conditions similar to those in Yemen make it possible for the organization to extend its influence in the archetype of a failed state just across the Gulf of Aden from Arabian Peninsula. The threat from Al Qaeda and from its Somali affiliate, al-Shabab, is increasing. The administration has worked with the Somali president, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, and Secretary of State Hillary R. Clinton praised him last summer as the "best hope" for his country in many years. The Obama administration has decided to bolster Sharif's embattled government by providing money for weapons and helping the military in neighboring Djibouti train Somali troops. Counter-terrorism may be our primary reason for increasing cooperation with Somalia, but the engagement must reach beyond those narrow goals in order to control the spread of Al Qaeda and its message. As Senator Russ Feingold told the Senate last August, U.S. policy should be rooted in a "serious, high-level commitment to a sustainable and inclusive peace."

U.S. diplomats, law enforcement officers and intelligence officials in the region said that a key concern is Somalia's open, virtually defenseless border with Djibouti. The only official border crossing is at the village of Loyada, a dusty and impoverished outpost in the desert, where as many as 200 refugees per day arrive from Somalia and Ethiopia, most on their way to Yemen and the Gulf. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees office in Djibouti reports that there are 10,000 Somali refugees there, with another 80-100 additional refugees processed every week. The Djiboutian government refuses to allow single men from Somalia into the country, fearing infiltration by al-Shabab or Al Qaeda.

The United States has provided Djibouti with technical assistance to help improve the Loyada crossing, but authorities said more money is needed to secure the facility and to improve security at other crossings farther out into the desert. The border is utterly porous and easily breached, and Djibouti needs cameras and radar for the Coast Guard, as Loyada sits only a kilometer inland from the Red Sea. Djiboutian officials told Committee staff that their government has no resources to patrol either the land or sea border, even though at low tide refugees can easily walk through the salt marsh undetected.

Furthermore, U.S. diplomats say that a coherent system is needed to share information on the movement of dangerous people across the border. A Committee staff member watched at least 50 people cross the border on a recent visit to Loyada, only about a third of whom had a passport or any other documentation. A man with an Iraqi passport was turned back by a Djiboutian immigration official who said that no Iraqi national had any reason to be in the area in the first place. The Djiboutian immigration official told a Committee staff member that he had recently turned away

two Somali-Americans with U.S. passports, fearing that they were al-Shabab. He added that the pair could easily have walked a kilometer or two into the desert and crossed into Djibouti without being detected, as many people do.

Americans attempting to cross from Somalia into Djibouti apparently is not unusual. The official told Committee staff that a significant number of Western passport holders, including Americans, have tried to cross illegally between Djibouti and Somalia in the past year. Recently, two Somali-Americans were arrested while trying to transit Djibouti on their way to Somalia for what the immigration official said was terrorist training. Both were prosecuted and jailed in Djibouti for illegal entry. U.S. officials add that Somali-Americans are taught techniques for avoiding detection by the FBI once they make their way to al-Shabab training camps.

Officials in the region said that one of their major worries is that Al Qaeda is trying to take advantage of its Somali-American recruits by establishing a larger presence in Somalia and plotting attacks on the United States or American targets. Bronwyn Bruton, a Somalia expert at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), underscored those worries recently in *Foreign Affairs*, writing that “one of Washington’s primary concerns about Somalia is that Al Qaeda may be trying to develop a base in the country from which to launch attacks against Western interests. Counter-terrorism officials also worry that more alienated members of the Somali diaspora might embrace terrorism. Somali-Americans were arrested in Minnesota in early 2009 after returning from fighting alongside al-Shabab, an extremist group associated with Al Qaeda, and in late August 2009, several Somalis were arrested in Melbourne for planning a major suicide attack on an Australian army installation.”³¹

U.S. intelligence analysts have argued since the mid-1990s that Somalia is fundamentally inhospitable to foreign jihadist groups. Al Qaeda is now a more sophisticated and dangerous organization in Africa, but its foothold in Somalia has probably been facilitated by the involvement of Western powers and their allies. In fact, according to Bruton, the terrorist threat posed by Somalia has grown in proportion to the intrusiveness of international policies toward the country.³² Al-Shabab originally emerged as a wing of militant youths within the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), the group that controlled much of Somalia prior to the country’s December 2006 occupation by Ethiopian forces in cooperation with Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which was struggling with the ICU for power.

In the mid-1990s, Islamic courts began to emerge around the country, especially in the capital of Mogadishu. The absence of central authority in Somalia created an environment conducive to the proliferation of armed factions and a safe haven for terrorist groups. The three terrorists suspected of the 1998 attacks against the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and the 2002 attacks in Mombasa, Kenya, used Somalia to recruit, train, hide, and smuggle weapons.

³¹“In the Quicksands of Somalia: Where Doing Less Helps More,” by Bronwyn Bruton, *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2009, pages 79–96.

³²Ibid.

CFR's Bruton states that Ethiopia's occupation of Somalia, which was meant to oust the ICU, had a dangerous, albeit unintended consequence. "By then, the ICU had exhausted most Somalis' patience, and it dissolved, its leaders scattering in southern Somalia or fleeing to Eritrea. Ethiopia was forced to occupy Mogadishu to prop up the TFG, and its presence ignited a complex insurgency."³³ The U.S.-backed occupation also fueled anti-Americanism in the country.³⁴ Bruton continues that "Responding to these developments, jihadists from the Middle East and as far away as Malaysia arrived to help al-Shabab. They brought with them suicide bombings and sophisticated tactics such as remote-controlled detonations. By the time Ethiopian forces withdrew in early 2009, al-Shabab's influence had spread.

Alliance or Not, a Specific Threat to Americans Exists

Only two of al-Shabab's leaders have pledged fidelity to Osama bin Laden, but some young Al Qaeda fighters who trained in Afghanistan have moved to southern Somalia to train Somalis in al-Shabab camps there. In return, al-Shabab has provided these Al Qaeda trainers with bodyguards, according to Ethiopian government officials.

Estimates of the number of Al Qaeda fighters in Somalia by American and African officials vary widely, from a low of 20 to a high of 300. African officials told the Committee staff that there has been a marked change in al-Shabab's tactics over the past five years, as the Somalis have adopted Al Qaeda's more lethal strategies.

Al-Shabab and Al Qaeda appear to be cooperating closely in their administration of the training camps in southern Somalia, notes CFR's Bruton. "Some of these are reserved for imparting basic ideological precepts and infantry skills to newly enlisted Somali militia members, while others provide more advanced training in guerilla warfare, explosives, and assassination. The latter camps have become a magnet for foreign fighters coming from the Somali diaspora, other African countries, or the Middle East."³⁵

Michael Leiter of the National Counterterrorism Center argues that al-Shabab's training camps are solely Somalia-focused, and that the group does not have goals beyond Somalia's borders.³⁶ Al-Shabab certainly has launched terrorist attacks, but only against domestic opponents in the Somaliland and Puntland regions of Somalia. The Somali-American suicide bomber attacked a Somali opponent of al-Shabab, rather than western interests in Somalia. U.S. law enforcement officials contend, however, that al-Shabab would hit US or other Western targets outside of Somalia if it could.

Leiter recently told Congress that al-Shabab has sent dozens of Somali Americans and American Muslims through training conducted by Al Qaeda. At least seven already have been killed in

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Statement of Ken Menkhaus, "Developing a Coordinated and Sustainable U.S. Strategy Toward Somalia," before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, May 20, 2009.

³⁵ "Peacebuilding Amid Terrorism: Fragile Gains in Somalia," by Andre Le Sage, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policywatch #1594, October 27, 2009.

³⁶ "U.S. Mulls Striking Somali Terrorist Training Camps," Comments by Michael Leiter, National Public Radio, Morning Edition, April 20, 2009.

fighting in Somalia.³⁷ Last summer, Al-Shabab released a video pledging cooperation with Al Qaeda. The video used an American spokesman and showed footage of a training camp featuring a former University of South Alabama student.

Western diplomats also expressed concern about a possible rise in violence against U.S. and other Western interests in Sweden because of that country's growing Somali population. Sweden accepts 1,000 Somali refugees per month, according to western diplomats, and nearly all of those refugees at least initially settle in Gothenburg, Sweden's second largest city. The diplomats reported that pro-al-Shabab refugees in 2009 drove moderates out of the city's largest mosque and took control of its administration. Law enforcement officials believe that the pro-al-Shabab refugees are heavily involved in recruiting for the group, and they are encouraging new recruits to return to Somalia for training. These same officials estimate that there are currently 40 Swedish citizens in al-Shabab in Somalia.

State Failure Offers Further Opportunities for Terrorists

One of Somalia's most serious problems is the lack of all but rudimentary government and civil society. As a result, even basic services like education are not available for many Somalis. Consequently, many parents send their children to Islamic schools or mosques for their education. But madrassas and mosques offer a very limited curriculum, and they tend to be fundamentalist in nature because they are financed by al-Shabab and the Saudi government. Djiboutian authorities complained that while most Gulf States build schools and hospitals in east Africa and send food and medicine to the region, the Saudi government builds mosques and sends Qurans.

Analysts point out that in many areas al-Shabab is the only organization that can provide basic social services, such as rudimentary medical facilities, food distribution centers, and a basic justice system rooted in Islamic law. Western diplomats fear that al-Shabab will continue to win converts by providing services similar to the way Hamas found success in the Gaza Strip.

Experts strongly caution that there is little the United States can do to weaken al-Shabab. The United States has launched air strikes to target high-level members of al-Shabab it believes have links to Al Qaeda. But experts say these air strikes have only increased popular support for al-Shabab. In fact, they argue that two of the only actions that could galvanize al-Shabab and increase its support within Somalia are additional air strikes by the United States, or a return of Ethiopian troops.³⁸

4. CONCLUSION

Terrorism is a tactic that can be defeated, but doing so represents a challenge of extraordinary proportions and a commitment to progress that will sometimes be slow. There are several steps that the United States can take, internally and in concert with for-

³⁷"The Threat from Somalia," *The Washington Post*, November 2, 2009.

³⁸"Al-Shabab," by Stephanie Hanson, Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder, February 27, 2009.

eign governments, to make terrorist operations more difficult, particularly in places like Yemen and Somalia, where the threat appears to be growing.

First, U.S. law enforcement, intelligence, and diplomatic officials must cooperate closely to discern the terrorist threat, including that posed by Americans, and to address that threat. Information sharing is the most important component of this cooperation. The failed Christmas Day bomb plot demonstrated what can happen when U.S. government agencies fail to act on or disseminate information quickly and efficiently.

Second, U.S. government cooperation with foreign partners must be redoubled across the counter-terrorism spectrum: Information-sharing, counter-terrorism and law enforcement training, and border control are all areas where allies will benefit from cooperation. Foreign partners are often the first line of defense: Djiboutian border patrol agents turn away suspect immigrants, Yemeni police raid an Al Qaeda safe house, or an alert immigration officer stops a suspicious traveler at an airport in Europe. But as the Christmas Day bombing attempt proved, one breakdown in the system can be disastrous.

Finally, a viable counter-terrorism strategy must take into account the fact that terrorism is not created in a vacuum, and its causes must be addressed. The U.S. government must engage foreign partners on issues such as literacy, high birth rates, economic development, and human rights. All countries concerned must understand the dangers of attempting to solve the complex problem of terrorism through a one-dimensional military approach. The solution also lies in steady progress toward helping governments in conflict zones like Yemen and Somalia provide a sense of hope and a plausible vision of the future for their people.

No Direct Connection Between al-Shabab and Somali Pirates

Western diplomats and military officials agree that currently there is no direct connection between al-Shabab and Somali pirates, due primarily to clan and tribal differences. The pirates hail almost exclusively from Somalia's Majourteen clan, Issa Musa subclan, which are based in Puntland and Somaliland, in the central and northern parts of the country. Al-Shabab, however, is made up of Somalis of various clans from Mogadishu and southern Somalia that are not related to the Majourteen. Ethiopian academics describe al-Shabab as "an opportunistic organization. Shabab speaks to southern Somalis by using nationalist rhetoric and money." Most of the raiders and their backers on land are involved in piracy solely for the money. Al-Shabab, on the other hand, is "not as xenophobic as the northerners. They welcome foreign fighters, who they call 'Muslims.' They don't make any differentiation by nationality. Al-Shabab doesn't even have its own flag."

There is, however, an indirect connection. In the past year, the pirates have begun operating out of southern ports controlled by al-Shabab. This is a new development in 2009, according to U.S. diplomats. Pirates simply pay a "user fee" to al-Shabab for use of the ports.