

THE AL QAEDA NETWORK

A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR
DEFINING THE ENEMY



KATHERINE ZIMMERMAN

SEPTEMBER 2013

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A REPORT BY AEI'S CRITICAL THREATS PROJECT

ABOUT US

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The failure to define al Qaeda properly has confused American policy and strategy. The enemy was not just the man shot dead on May 2, 2011, in Abbottabad, Pakistan, nor is it the 1.5 billion Muslims for whom Osama bin Laden claimed to speak.

The United States should have sought to answer key questions about the state of al Qaeda after bin Laden's death and the succession of Ayman al Zawahiri. What is al Qaeda? Is it only the group directly headed by Zawahiri? Or is it more expansive? How is al Qaeda operating today? How do the groups within the al Qaeda network relate to each other and to the core? Answers to these questions are necessary to inform the crafting of a successful strategy to counter the real al Qaeda.

The year of Osama bin Laden's death is the year that the overall al Qaeda network became stronger. The al Qaeda network benefited significantly from the breakdown in governance across the Middle East and North Africa. Affiliates such as al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), and al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) all expanded their area of operations and exploited openings caused by the Arab Spring's unrest. Zawahiri, al Qaeda's new *emir*, named two new affiliates: al Shabaab in Somalia, which had a robust, though covert, relationship with al Qaeda, and Jabhat al Nusra in Syria, established with the assistance of AQI. American strategy remained focused on degrading the capabilities of the core group in Pakistan even as the al Qaeda network expanded.

The al Qaeda network is adaptive, complex, and resilient. Today, it has a formal organizational structure, with the core group at its head providing overall direction. Informal relationships and human networks, one of the most important of which was formed around bin Laden in the 1980s and 1990s, create an underlying latticed structure that bridges the formal structure of the network.

But even as the network becomes increasingly decentralized, the core group continues to direct the al Qaeda network. AQAP, the affiliate most likely to have assumed control over the al Qaeda network, has deferred to the core group, and its *emir* may have even accepted a formal position as Zawahiri's deputy. The decentralization of the al Qaeda network has not made it weaker. On the contrary, affiliate-to-affiliate relationships may

have increased the overall network's resiliency. These relationships may also ensure al Qaeda's survival even if the core group is defeated completely.

Al Qaeda affiliates have evolved and now threaten the United States as much as (if not more than) the core group; they can no longer be dismissed as mere local al Qaeda franchises. The affiliates have also developed relationships with local militant Islamist groups, similar to the relationships between al Qaeda core and Pakistan-based associates, and they have supported the establishment of like-minded local groups, as the al Qaeda core did in the 1990s.

Associated groups support the efforts of the core group and the affiliates and may themselves threaten American personnel or interests. Public recognition of a group's relationship with the network should not be the sole criterion upon which U.S. policy is based because al Qaeda senior leadership advocates plausible deniability as to its relationship with various associates to avoid provoking an American or international reaction to the group. The al Qaeda-associated Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan facilitated the May 2010 Times Square bombing, for example. Policies designed to degrade, neutralize, and disrupt the activities of key associates are essential to a sound strategy to defeat al Qaeda.

The reality is that despite more than a decade of direct and indirect warfare against the group, al Qaeda continues to be a threat to the United States and its interests. The closure of more than 20 diplomatic posts across the Middle East and North Africa on August 4, 2013, underscores the group's continued virulence and reach. AQAP, the affiliate from which that threat allegedly emanated, has spearheaded efforts to target the United States using innovative tactics. Its rise in the network was predictable in retrospect, yet America's strategy did not adjust to effectively counter it.

Understanding precisely which groups contribute to the al Qaeda network and how they operate within that network will better enable American policymakers and decision makers to develop a comprehensive strategy to defeat al Qaeda. Absent that understanding, the United States will continue to engage in a tactical battle that promises only occasional battleground victories, but no real prospect of winning the war.

THE AL QAEDA NETWORK

A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR DEFINING THE ENEMY

Introduction

Al Qaeda has always been more than Osama bin Laden. The wealthy Saudi sheikh founded the group in 1988 and led it until his death in 2011. He became famous as the man who declared war on the United States in 1996, even before the most spectacular mass murder of 2001. A cult of personality formed around him within his movement and beyond. His name and face were, for many years, virtually the only symbol of America's most active enemy.

But he never operated alone. Supporters helped him in Afghanistan. Like-minded violent Islamists sought to join him from across the Arab world and South Asia. By September 2001, his brothers in Islamist terrorism already had groups in Egypt, Libya, Algeria, the Philippines, Uzbekistan, and Yemen—not to mention Afghanistan and Pakistan. President George W. Bush was therefore wise to eschew making America's response to 9/11 a manhunt for bin Laden and to recognize the global nature of the threat. He failed to define that global threat precisely, however, and muddled the issue by declaring a "war on terror" rather than on a clearly delineated enemy. And that failure to define al Qaeda properly in 2001 (or before) has bedeviled American policy and strategy ever since.

Confusion has created notions of an enemy ranging from all 1.5 billion Muslims in the world to the single man shot by a U.S. Navy Seal in a house in Abbottabad. Bin Laden's death and the succession of Ayman al Zawahiri should have been a clarifying moment driving the American policy community and, especially, the counterterrorism community to look hard at what was left of the group bin Laden had founded, as well as its affiliates and associates around the world. But his death has caused only more confusion. Is al Qaeda "on the run," as President Barack Obama and other key administration officials declare? How do the franchises relate to the "core"? How is al Qaeda operating today not only in Pakistan, but around the world? Until these questions receive detailed and well-supported answers,

there can be no sound American strategy for dealing with this threat—or even for evaluating its magnitude. The absence of any such strategy is itself a major threat to the United States.

Al Qaeda is still an active enemy. Bin Laden's group and its affiliates have sustained attacks on the United States and Americans, as well as our closest allies, for 20 years. Al Qaeda operatives trained Somalis in the 1990s and claim involvement in killing American troops during the Battle of Mogadishu in October 1993. Al Qaeda's cell in East Africa masterminded the 1998 American embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania that killed 12 Americans and over 200 locals. Al Qaeda operatives in Yemen bombed the *USS Cole* in Aden, killing 17 American troops in 2000.

Al Qaeda attacks continued after 9/11: Simultaneous bombings on four commuter trains in Madrid killed 191 people and injured over 2,000 others on March 11, 2004. A similar attack in London on July 7, 2005, killed over 52 people in the London Underground and on a bus in Tavistock Square. Al Qaeda operatives detonated a car bomb on June 2, 2008, outside the Danish Embassy in Pakistan, killing at least five people as retribution for the reprinting of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed and the presence of Danish troops in Afghanistan.

Al Qaeda groups have attempted a number of unsuccessful attacks as well, starting with the December 2001 "shoe bomber," Richard Reid, who got his explosives-packed sneakers onto an airliner but could not detonate them. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, formed in Yemen in January 2009, has attempted to strike the American homeland at least three times since then: Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab brought a bomb concealed in his underwear onto a U.S.-bound flight in December 2009; the group mailed two bombs disguised as printer cartridges in October 2010; and, improving on the 2009 device, it attempted to attack the United States again in May 2012. Yet another al Qaeda associate, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, facilitated Faisal Shahzad's attempt to set off a car bomb

in Times Square—an attempt that failed, again, only because the device was faulty.

Seven successful al Qaeda attacks have killed at least 3,254 Americans, British, Spaniards, and Danes, as well as hundreds more Kenyans, Tanzanians, Yemenis, and others. Had Reid or Abdulmutallab managed to detonate the explosives they successfully smuggled past airport security, they would have killed another 487 people. These tallies do not include the thousands of Iraqis and Americans killed by al Qaeda in Iraq between 2004 and today. To put those numbers into perspective, we should recall that Japanese airstrikes killed 2,403 Americans at Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Al Qaeda has been the most lethal and effective enemy of the United States since the end of the Vietnam War and shows every indication of continuing its determined efforts to kill Americans. Understanding this enemy and then building a sensible strategy for defeating it remains without question a vital national security imperative for the United States.

Why Definitions Matter

The target of the “war on terror” has always been somewhat fuzzy. The first time President George W. Bush used the term, he called al Qaeda a “collection of loosely affiliated terrorist organizations.”¹ Days later, he signed Executive Order 13224, sanctioning persons who commit, threaten to commit, or support terrorism.² Twenty-seven individuals and groups were named in the document’s annex, the majority of whom had supported al Qaeda’s mission.

The primacy of the threat from the al Qaeda network in Afghanistan was clear in fall 2001: its leadership had directly coordinated a mass-casualty terrorist attack from its safe haven there. But even then, the ramifications of the organization were also clear. E.O. 13224 designated 10 terrorist groups in addition to al Qaeda, including what would come to be al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (the Salafist Group for Preaching and Jihad and the Armed Islamic Group in Algeria), as well as the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (Zawahiri’s group),ⁱ

i. Ayman al Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden announced a merger between their groups in June 2001.

the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, the Islamic Army of Aden, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. The designation of Hassan Dahir Aweys, today a leader in al Qaeda’s Somali affiliate, al Shabaab, followed two months later. That the movement had global affiliates was apparent by the end of 2001. The relationship between those affiliates and the core leadership that had ordered the 9/11 attacks, however, remained unclear.

The American war in Afghanistan certainly achieved one of its objectives: the U.S. intelligence community assesses today that the ability of that al Qaeda senior leadership, which now operates out of Pakistan, to coordinate a major attack on Americans has been significantly reduced. But the intelligence community also assesses that the threat to Americans is higher from local al Qaeda groups outside the Afghanistan-Pakistan theater.³ Al Qaeda affiliates and associates have remained largely where they were in 2001, apart from Afghanistan, from where they were driven in 2002, and Iraq and Syria, where they entered in 2002. The balance of power between center and periphery has clearly shifted as the network adapted to increased pressure on the core group, and American strategy must shift with it.

The Bush administration did little to combat al Qaeda groups outside Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. It offered minimal assistance to African forces fighting the predecessors of al Shabaab and then al Shabaab itself. It took no notable action against al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), perhaps because that group appeared to be little more than a kidnap-for-ransom and smuggling racket before the Arab Spring. It relied entirely on Yemen’s corrupt, dishonest, and authoritarian president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to manage the groups that would become al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). It allowed al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) to establish a foothold in Syria without response. It outsourced the problems of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, al Gama’a al Islamiyya, and the militant wings of the Muslim Brotherhood to President Hosni Mubarak and Egypt’s Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. The Bush administration did, however, devote enormous energy to dismantling the core al Qaeda group in Pakistan and to chasing down Osama bin Laden himself, although Bush never managed to get his arch nemesis.

The Obama administration refocused America's efforts against the global al Qaeda movement, although it is not entirely clear what threat paradigm or strategy drove this realignment. The withdrawal of all U.S. military forces and the cessation of counterterrorism operations in Iraq at the end of 2011 relieved pressure on AQI just as the Arab Spring drew its erstwhile sponsor, Bashar al Assad, into a sectarian civil war. Obama dramatically expanded the use of targeted strikes against terrorist leaders not only in Pakistan but also in Yemen and even, occasionally, in Africa. He also ordered a surge of some 33,000 troops into Afghanistan to set conditions to ensure that al Qaeda could not return to the country from which it had planned the 9/11 attacks. But Obama has retained his predecessor's heavy reliance on proxies in Yemen (Abdu Rabbu Mansour al Hadi after Saleh's expulsion), in Somalia (African Union forces operating under a United Nations Security Council mandate), in Mali and Algeria, and in Egypt.

These efforts have seen limited success in part because of the continued focus and devotion of U.S. resources to the fight against the al Qaeda leadership in Pakistan and in part because America's local partners have proven to be consistently unreliable. Despite the modest shift in counterterrorism focus and a significant investment of political and military capital toward the fight against al Qaeda over the past 12 years, the United States has not achieved its objective of dismantling the organization or ensuring that al Qaeda and its associates are unable to attack Americans successfully again.

One of the reasons for that failure has been the continuing inability to describe accurately the relationships between the core group in Pakistan, regional al Qaeda groups, and other groups within the network. Policy-makers have used various terms to describe al Qaeda components—core, franchise, affiliate, branch, associate, adherent—loosely and sometimes interchangeably. This vagueness makes understanding the distinctions impossible. What is a franchise, and how is it different from an affiliate or a branch? Might different al Qaeda-friendly groups belong to different categories? How do they interact with one another and with the remnants of Osama bin Laden's group?

Answers to these questions are essential to understanding the broader network and how that network

operates. Clear definitions will permit consistent evaluation of the varying capabilities and intents of all of the groups operating within al Qaeda's network. The use of precise terminology to describe al Qaeda will facilitate a broader comprehension both of how the network has changed over time and of how that network changed during the Arab Spring. Defining the enemy clearly will lay the groundwork for the more substantial undertaking of developing a comprehensive, global strategy to counter the al Qaeda network.

Evolving Definitions of the al Qaeda Network

The al Qaeda network has changed over the years, and so have the various frameworks used to explain it. The corpus of research on al Qaeda is extensive and portrays varying ideas of how the network itself functions, ranging from a core group of senior leaders directing a global network to an amorphous group of individuals driving toward a shared objective. The adaptive nature of the network and the complexity of the ways in which members and groups interact within the network exacerbate the challenge of understanding the organization. Yet we cannot simplify the problem or discount aspects of the network without creating a dangerous misunderstanding that will shape a faulty strategy for combating it.

The al Qaeda Network and the "War on Terror."

The 9/11 attacks forced the Bush administration to devote energy toward the problem of understanding the al Qaeda network. The administration described al Qaeda at the time as a well-financed network composed of "terrorist cells and groups" that had "trained tens of thousands of Jihadists," and was active in more than 40 countries.^{ii, 4} By 2001, it was already understood that bin Laden's group had relationships with

ii. Administration members referenced al Qaeda "affiliates" but did not define the term or indicate how it should be understood. It appears that groups called "affiliates" in the early years under the Bush administration are now commonly called "associates," groups that operate within the al Qaeda network but are not publicly recognized by al Qaeda as members of the network.

other terrorist groups.^{iii, 5} Bin Laden's group was perceived to be both an independent group and the head of a network of other groups pursuing similar objectives, including al Ittihad al Islamiyya (Somalia and Kenya), Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Abyan Islamic Army of Yemen, Chechen Mujahideen (Russia), and the Armed Islamic Group (Algeria). Both the Bush administration and Congress included these groups in their definitions of the enemy, though bin Laden and al Qaeda were identified as primary.

In passing the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF), which remains the legal basis for American military operations against al Qaeda and Associated Movements, on September 14, 2001, Congress defined the enemy as "those nations, organizations, or persons [the President] determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons."⁶

President George W. Bush signed the AUMF on September 18, 2001, and delivered a televised speech before Congress on September 20 that began to identify publicly the groups he viewed as covered under the AUMF (and, thus, part of the al Qaeda network in some way). He described bin Laden's group as being linked to other terrorist groups with a network that extended to over 60 countries and cited the training camps run by al Qaeda in Afghanistan, which trained militants who then returned home.⁷ In that speech, Bush defined the enemy as a "radical network of terrorists" and declared a "war on terror" beginning with al Qaeda but continuing until "every terrorist group of global reach" has been defeated.^{iv}

iii. Then-director of central intelligence George J. Tenet testified in a hearing on the Worldwide Threat in 2000 before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on February 2, 2000, that Osama bin Laden's "organization and other terrorist groups are placing increased emphasis on developing surrogates to carry out attacks in an effort to avoid detection." (See endnote 5.)

iv. The language used in this speech reflected the language in the White House-proposed version of the AUMF, which included the phrase, "and to deter and pre-empt any future acts of terrorism or aggression against the United States." Congress objected to that phrase as giving the president almost unlimited and timeless power

While it avoided scoping the threat to the United States too narrowly to Osama bin Laden and his direct associates, the Bush administration did not clearly delineate the enemy.^{v, 8} A February 2002 background briefing on al Qaeda by a U.S. defense official provides insights into how the administration conceived of the network.⁹ The official emphasized the organizational aspects of the group headed by bin Laden throughout his briefing: he focused on al Qaeda's established infrastructure in Afghanistan, examined the top leaders in the hierarchy, and introduced the concept of "franchises." These franchises were groups headed by al Qaeda operatives that were expected to pursue independent courses of action, rather than following a centralized command from bin Laden and his core group. The assessment was that the franchises would not be as effective or competent as al Qaeda core.

Despite the emphasis on structure, there was a realization that al Qaeda operatives could, and did, tap into an external human network. This human network was not considered to be part of al Qaeda, and the al Qaeda network remained limited to its official members in the administration's exposition. The definition did not appear to include the groups headed by al Qaeda members separate from bin Laden's core group except insofar as those groups aided in the preparation or execution of the 9/11 attacks.

The administration's conception of the enemy evolved as the enemy itself appeared to evolve—although it is not clear from publicly available sources how much of the change reflected changing reality and how much resulted from changes in the perception and understanding of the group within the U.S. government. Director of Central Intelligence George J. Tenet outlined his thoughts on what he described as a growing threat from the Sunni extremist movement in his 2004 testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.¹⁰ He described one of the most immediate threats to the United States as coming from "small *international* Sunni extremist groups

to wage war against any terrorist group he saw as a threat and instead tied the AUMF explicitly to the groups that had attacked the U.S. on 9/11 and those that had aided them. (See endnote 6.)

v. It should be noted that for both the Bush and the Obama administrations, the pursuit of Osama bin Laden was a top priority.

who have benefited from al Qaeda links.”^{vi} He did not identify these so-called “international Sunni extremist groups” as parts of al Qaeda’s network. Of the groups Tenet named, bin Laden officially recognized one as al Qaeda in Iraq, while the others remained closely linked to al Qaeda, including Ansar al Islam (Iraq), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group.^{vii, 11}

The second threat, according to Tenet, came from “small local groups, with limited *domestic* agendas, that work with international terrorist groups in their own countries.” Tenet did not make clear precisely how these locally oriented groups interacted with the al Qaeda network: “These far-flung groups increasingly set the agenda, and are redefining the threat we face. They are not all creatures of bin Laden, and so their fate is not tied to his. They have autonomous leadership, they pick their own targets, they plan their own attacks.”^{viii} Al Qaeda, Tenet testified, is a “learning organization,” and repeated blows to its “central leadership have transformed the organization into a loose collection of regional networks that operate more autonomously.”

Again, it remains unclear from unclassified sources to what extent the group itself had changed and to what extent the change resulted from the intelligence community’s dramatically increased efforts to understand it. Though al Qaeda was still perceived to be limited to the members of the group led directly by bin Laden, these autonomous regional networks would come to be known as al Qaeda’s affiliates.

By the end of the Bush administration, the al Qaeda network was understood to extend beyond just the core

group to select al Qaeda affiliates, such as al Qaeda in Iraq, and to groups associated with al Qaeda core in Pakistan, such as the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan. There was a recognition that the al Qaeda network was no longer as centralized as it had been in the 1990s and early 2000s under Osama bin Laden and that areas such as Somalia, North Africa, and Yemen, where there was ideological alignment combined with undergoverned territory or high levels of insecurity, presented the network with an opportunity to reestablish itself.¹²

The administration’s policies to counter al Qaeda weakened the network in Afghanistan and (starting in 2007) in Iraq, where there was a strong American military presence. But al Qaeda was reconstituting in Pakistan’s tribal areas—a “bleed-out problem”—as then-director of the Central Intelligence Agency Michael Hayden called it. A notable push from the Muslim community against al Qaeda’s perverse ideology seemed cause for optimism then, as al Qaeda’s ideology serves as a binding factor in the network. The administration recognized that countering the al Qaeda network included not only dismantling its different organizations and degrading the leadership networks but also fighting the ideology that motivated individuals within the network. Al Qaeda is a “determined, adaptive enemy” that is “both resilient and vulnerable,” as then-director Hayden said in a November 2008 speech.¹³

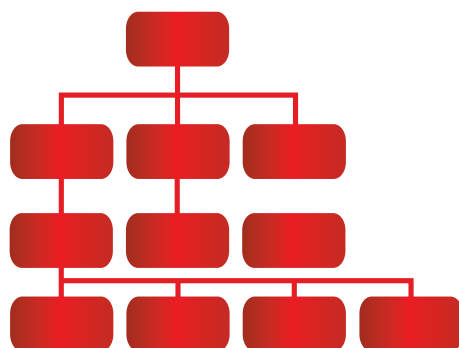
Debating the Structures behind the al Qaeda Network. Part of the confusion over which groups and individuals should be considered “al Qaeda” stemmed from an incomplete understanding of the structure of the al Qaeda network and how it operated. Statements likening Osama bin Laden to the chief executive officer of an organization implied that he had direct control over his subordinates and managed the entire business of al Qaeda.¹⁴ This hierarchical framework focused on the organizational structures within the network—groups and official positions—as well as the official channels of communication. Other statements depicting the network as amorphous tended to focus on the human networks in al Qaeda and individual relationships that followed informal structures.¹⁵ Over time, it has become clear that the al Qaeda network cannot

vi. The spelling of al Qaeda has been changed from the original for consistency in this quote and subsequent quotes throughout the paper.

vii. The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) was closely tied to al Qaeda through Abu Yahya al Libi, Abu Laith al Libi, and Atiyah Abd al Rahman. A purported joint audio statement from Ayman al Zawahiri and Abu Laith al Libi, dated mid-October 2007 and released in November, claimed that the LIFG had joined al Qaeda. LIFG senior leadership rejected this statement and in September 2008 published a 400-page text repudiating al Qaeda’s message.

viii. The spelling of Osama bin Laden’s name has been changed from the original for consistency in this quote and subsequent quotes throughout the paper.

FIGURE 1
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE EXAMPLE



Hierarchical

Source: AEI

be modeled solely based on its organizational structure or on its human networks; instead, it is much more complex.

The Bush administration's initial framework for the al Qaeda network focused on the network's formal organizational structure, emphasizing the network's organizational components. (See figure 1 for an example of a formal organizational structure.) In this framework, the organizational structure provided the shape of the al Qaeda network; the top leadership, its vision; and the core group's direct command and control, its power.

The hierarchical nature of the core group that was led by Osama bin Laden was an important component of this framework: it defined a set cadre of senior leaders who controlled the network, and the directives ran from the top down. These senior leaders included the *emir*, bin Laden; his deputy, Ayman al Zawahiri; and the operational commander, among others. Removing this echelon of individuals from bin Laden's organization through detention, killing, or effective disruption of communications channels would render the subordinates impotent, according to this analysis.^{ix} 16

ix. President George W. Bush repeated in his speeches that the majority of senior al Qaeda leadership had been killed. Former head

Separately, but along the same lines, the core group directly headed by bin Laden served as the senior leadership for the entire al Qaeda network, and the official channel of communication ran from the top down. Only those groups officially recognized by the core group as part of its network were included; relationships external to the formal al Qaeda organization were recognized but not as integral to the network. Under this thinking, focusing efforts on bin Laden's group and weakening it would reverberate throughout the entire network. Like the individual subordinates within the core group, the regional al Qaeda groups would be disempowered and their capabilities severely reduced.¹⁷

The centrality of al Qaeda core to the network, as well as al Qaeda's own focus on its formal organizational structure, lends validity to this framework. The group itself has a formalized hierarchy and official positions.¹⁸ Al Qaeda's *shura* council serves as an advisory body to the *emir*, and al Qaeda correspondence outlines four other committees within the core group, including a military committee, a political committee, a media committee, and a finance committee.^x Each of these committees has a formal structure, set of objectives, and authorities. A formal relationship structure also runs from the core group to the regional ones. The al Qaeda *emir* has an appointed representative co-located with regional leadership to serve as a direct channel to the core group.^{xi} 19 The direct chain

of the Central Intelligence Agency Michael Scheuer said in a November 2004 interview that the Bush administration's focus on killing senior leadership was misplaced. He said, "I think Al Qaeda has suffered substantially since 9/11, and it may have slowed down its operations, but to take the two-thirds number [of leaders killed] as a yardstick is fantasy. . . . To say that they only have one-third of their leadership left is a misunderstanding. They pay a lot of attention to leadership succession, and so one of the main tenets of Al Qaeda is to train people to succeed leaders who are captured or killed." (See endnote 16.)

x. The al Qaeda correspondence cited here that documents al Qaeda bylaws and details the roles of various committees was released in early 2006 by the Combating Terrorism Center. Continued references to many of the formal structures found in subsequent al Qaeda documents, including the 17 declassified letters from the May 2011 Abbottabad raid, support the assumption that al Qaeda core continues to exhibit a formal organizational structure.

xi. Abu Abdullah al Muhajir was al Qaeda's representative in

of command that emanates from the center to the regional al Qaeda groups reinforces their subordination to al Qaeda core. Those groups, too, appear to follow an organizational structure similar to that of the core al Qaeda group.^{xii}

This framework's limitations became apparent quickly, however. Leaders in the al Qaeda network have been killed and replaced, and their deaths have not had a lasting impact. The U.S. military killed or detained thousands of AQI leaders between 2003 and 2006, and even the death of AQI's founder, Abu Mus'ab al Zarqawi, did little to affect the group's strength.²⁰

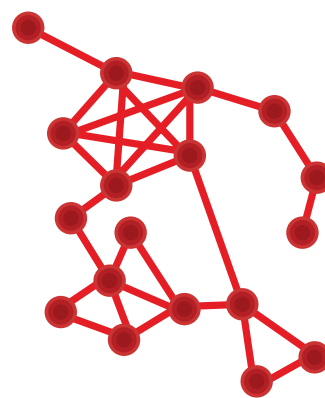
Even severely weakening the core group has not rendered the al Qaeda network impotent. The regional groups continue to thrive, and the threat to the United States from some, such as AQAP, has increased despite damage done to al Qaeda core. Moreover, the model with al Qaeda core at the center and regional groups stemming from it does not sufficiently account for the fact that al Qaeda's regional groups have developed relationships that run horizontally between one another in addition to vertically back to the core group. AQAP in Yemen, for example, has close ties to al Shabaab in Somalia.²¹ These horizontal relationships, outside of the formal organizational structure, add to the network's resilience.

An alternative framework based on the human network that exists behind the formal structure also emerged. (See figure 2 for an example of an informal human network.) It undercuts the idea of the importance of hierarchy and top-down directives and has come to be known as "leaderless *jihad*."²² Social ties and groupings, not organization membership or position, formed the primary structure of the al Qaeda

Somalia as of fall 2011. He may be the same person as Jihad Serwan Mostafa, who includes that name among his aliases (in addition to Anwar al Amriki and Ahmed Gurey). Additionally, al Qaeda *emir* Ayman al Zawahiri recognized Abu Khalid al Suri as his representative in Syria in May 2013.

xii. AQAP, for example, has a *shura* council, a media arm, and a military wing, which appears to be divided between internal and external operations. References to these various bodies within AQAP may be found in the group's own publications through its media arm, al Malahem Foundation. AQIM and al Shabaab also have subdivisions, including media arms (al Andalus and al Kata'ib, respectively), *shura* councils, and military wings.

FIGURE 2
INFORMAL HUMAN NETWORK EXAMPLE



Networked

Source: AEI

network, according to this framework.²³ Social network analysis theory informed many of its conclusions. Individuals who held central roles in the network, most notably Osama bin Laden, dominated the structure. Their social networks—the individuals with whom they had established relationships—formed identifiable groupings. The members of these groupings were likely to know others within their own group, but few would know others outside of the immediate network surrounding the central individual. Removing the individuals who did not form the central node of a group would have little effect on the overall network according to this view. Removing the central individuals, however, would begin to sever key relationships that held the network together.

Moreover, this view argued, al Qaeda's senior leadership played a marginal role in directing activities, contrary to what the previous framework posited; instead, initiative came from below.²⁴ Informal communications and relationships played a significant role in the network, and social groupings, motivated by a localized initiative, were inspired to conduct operations. Bin Laden and his group may have provided the message and facilitated activities at times, but the human relationships, not the formal organizational structure, were

what drove the network, according to this analysis.

This human network-based approach helped explain why policies based on the previous framework had failed to achieve their objectives. Human relationships give the overall al Qaeda network a latticed structure that has increased its resilience. Targeting central individuals—key nodes in the human network, regardless of their formal positions—should weaken the network. According to this theory, bin Laden’s importance to the network was not based on his position as *emir*; rather, it was based on the number of connections that he held to other individuals.

Moreover, evidence pointed to the value placed on personal relationships and the trust capital developed through shared experiences rather than on organizational positions: bin Laden dismissed the credentials of AQAP senior leader Anwar al Awlaki, despite Awlaki’s senior rank, because he was not a member of bin Laden’s direct network.^{xiii, 25} Further evidence supports the theory that the threat from the network came from bottom-up initiatives, which received support and guidance from the core group but were not a result of that group’s directives. Many of the terrorist attacks that have taken place follow this model. The 2004 Madrid bombings and 2005 London bombings were conducted by groups pursuing an operation, likely with support from the network, but not necessarily as the result of a direct order.^{xiv, 26}

xiii. AQAP leader Nasser al Wahayshi recommended to bin Laden that Anwar al Awlaki be given the leadership position for his group. Bin Laden’s response to the request, available in a declassified letter dated August 27, 2010, to one of his senior lieutenants, Atiyah Abd al Rahman, focused on the credentials of AQAP’s senior leader, Anwar al Awlaki. Awlaki, an American-born Yemeni, traveled to Afghanistan in 1993, after the fall of the Soviets. Bin Laden asks Atiyah to ask AQAP’s *emir*, Nasser al Wahayshi, or Abu Basir, for additional information on Awlaki. He also noted that fighting *jihad* helps to verify an individual’s intentions. Bin Laden writes, “How excellent would it be if you ask brother Basir to send us the resume, in detail and lengthy, of brother Anwar al-’Awlaqi, as well as the facts he relied on when recommending him, while informing him that his recommendation is considered. However, we would like to be reassured more. For example, we here become reassured of the people when they go to the line and get examined there.” (See endnote 25.)

xiv. A video released on the first anniversary of the London bombings showed clips of Shehzad Tanweer, one of the suicide bombers, edited into a longer documentary-style video that highlighted

The al Qaeda human network is an extremely important component of the group’s resilience and effectiveness, but it is not the sole component. The concept of leaderless *jihad* minimizes the significance of the core al Qaeda group, emphasizing decentralization and bottom-up operational initiative instead. This view does not correspond with the way al Qaeda leaders and operatives discuss their relationships and activities, which includes explicit recognition of a formal organizational structure and centrally provided guidance. Declassified al Qaeda correspondence, such as the letters recovered during the May 2011 Abbottabad raid, reveals continued communications with the al Qaeda core leadership from the regional groups, references to centrally organized plots, and a deference to orders from the core group.^{xv, 27} A framework focused primarily on the human network to describe al Qaeda would suggest that removing central individuals will break down parts of the network into groups that do not communicate. The death of Osama bin Laden, the most prominent example of the removal of a central individual, appears not to have had a lasting impact on the network’s ability to operate. Individuals and groups who had sworn *bayat*, or allegiance, to bin Laden renewed

speeches from Ayman al Zawahiri and Adam Gadahn. Al Qaeda core’s media organization, al Sahab, produced the video.

xv. A May 2010 letter from Osama bin Laden to Atiyah Abd al Rahman included a reminder from bin Laden that AQAP should coordinate with Atiyah on any operations outside of the Arabian Peninsula. Other references to AQAP plots and directives from bin Laden to AQAP are throughout the documents, including a warning against using ricin. The relationship between al Qaeda core and AQI shows, by contrast, that AQI does not feel bound to obey the dictates of al Qaeda core. A letter dated July 9, 2005, from then-deputy leader of al Qaeda Ayman al Zawahiri to the leader of AQI at the time, Abu Mus’ab al Zarqawi, critiqued Zarqawi’s ruthless tactics in targeting the Iraqi Shi’a population. Despite the diplomatic suggestion that Zarqawi focus the fight against the Americans, AQI continued to conduct sectarian attacks in Iraq. Most recently, a May 23, 2013, letter from Zawahiri to the leadership of Jabhat al Nusra and AQI defined separate areas of operations for both groups (Syria and Iraq, respectively). There are continued reports that AQI (using the name of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, which Zawahiri forbade) operates in Syria, apparently disregarding this order. See points 6(e) and 6(f) in the letter. An unverified June 14, 2013, audio speech that has been attributed to Abu Bakr al Baghdadi appears to reject Zawahiri’s ruling explicitly, citing his use of Western borders to define areas of operations. (See endnote 27.)

their pledges to the new organizational head, Ayman al Zawahiri. The underlying organizational structure in al Qaeda contributed to the network's resilience, as members of the human network continue to recognize and act according to the official hierarchy.

The Obama Administration's Definition of the al Qaeda Network

The body of work that focused on defining the al Qaeda network developed during the years of the Bush administration has been largely cast aside today in favor of a more limited definition of the network. The Obama administration has constrained the network to those groups that have aligned with al Qaeda, which may ignore groups transitioning into the al Qaeda network. The administration has also unduly emphasized the relationships that run between the core al Qaeda group in Pakistan and other groups within the network.

The Obama administration now formally defines the network as comprising al Qaeda core, its affiliates, and its adherents. The core al Qaeda group in Pakistan, frequently referred to simply as "al Qaeda," is the group of senior leaders who were active in the organization as of September 11, 2001 (and some of their successors). These leaders fully subscribe to al Qaeda's ideology and strategic goals, which call for the use of violence to bring about an Islamic state, or caliphate, in Muslim lands.^{xvi}

This leadership cadre has suffered significant losses over the past 12 years. In the past three years, notably, the United States has killed four of the top five leaders of the organization, including Osama bin Laden, Sheikh Said al Masri, Atiyah Abd al Rahman, and Abu Yahya al Libi.²⁸ The recent capture of al Qaeda's spokesman, Sulaiman Abu Ghaith, will also serve to further degrade al Qaeda's senior leadership network.²⁹ Few individuals who served under Osama bin Laden remain at large, with exceptions including his successor, Ayman al Zawahiri, Saif al Adel, and Adnan Shukrijumah.^{xvii, 30}

xvi. Al Qaeda has laid out a strategy that includes attacking American and Western targets to force the West to retreat from "Muslim lands" and supporting insurgent groups in Western-allied countries.

xvii. Saif al Adel is also known as Ibrahim al Madani or Omar al

Obama Administration Definitions

Affiliates: Groups that have aligned with al Qaeda, including *associated forces*, as defined by the 2001 AUMF, and groups and individuals not covered by the 2001 AUMF.

Adherents: Individuals who collaborate with or take direction from al Qaeda, or are inspired to act to further al Qaeda's goals, both the organization and its ideology, through violence targeting the United States, American citizens, or American interests.

Source: The White House, *United States National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, June 2011, www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/counterterrorism_strategy.pdf.

Al Qaeda's affiliates, as defined by the administration, are the groups that have aligned with al Qaeda.^{xviii} This limited definition should include the following groups: al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, al Shabaab, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, al Qaeda in Iraq, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, and Lashkar-e-Taiba. Director of the Central Intelligence Agency John Brennan testified at his confirmation hearing in February 2013 that these groups all have "different features and characteristics" and that many have local agendas, while some also have international agendas.³¹ Director Brennan continued to describe the relationship between these affiliates and the core group

Somali. Seth G. Jones, the associate director of the International Security and Defense Policy Center at RAND, provided additional names of al Qaeda operatives who remain at large in prepared testimony for a hearing on "Global al-Qaeda: Affiliates, Objectives, and Futures Challenges" before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade on July 18, 2013. They include Abu Zayd al Kuwaiti, Hamza al Ghamdi, Abd al Rahman al Maghrebi, Adam Gadahn, Abu Khayr al Masri, and Abu Muhammad al Masri. (See endnote 30.)

xviii. Senior administration officials provided the following definition on background in February 2013: the al Qaeda affiliates are those groups with established ties to al Qaeda that have expressed the intent to attack the United States or the West.

as varied—the core leadership does seek some control, but there is “a lot of independence of effort” underway. This description suggests a shift from the past, in which the core leadership had a central role in directing local groups. It follows the administration’s assertions that the core group is near defeat and is therefore unable to exert the same level of influence as in years past.

Director Brennan in 2011 defined an adherent as an individual who believes in al Qaeda’s ideology and has “engaged in, or facilitated, terrorist activities” in the United States.³² These individuals are more often referred to in the colloquial as the “lone wolf.” A prominent example of an attack conducted by such an individual is the November 2009 Fort Hood shooting by U.S. Army Major Nidal Hasan. In this case, as in nearly all lone-wolf cases, Hasan had been in direct contact with Anwar al Awlaki, a leader in al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen, raising questions about how “lone” he actually was.^{xix, 33} It is important to recognize that nearly all of the so-called lone-wolf individuals were in contact with an individual or a group of individuals who were actively part of the al Qaeda network. It is a very rare exception that an individual self-radicalizes and then becomes operational. The April 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, depicted today as a lone-wolf attack, may be another case with direct links to the al Qaeda network. Tamerlan Tsarnaev’s stay in Russia between January and July 2012, during which time he traveled to Chechnya and Dagestan, may have been when he connected to members of the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus or a group associated with it.^{xx, 34}

Inconsistencies within the current administration’s application of its definitions and terms become apparent

when comparing statements assessing the state of the al Qaeda network with those statements discussing counterterrorism policies. Administration officials present threat assessments that include the affiliates al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, al Shabaab, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and al Qaeda in Iraq when discussing the state of al Qaeda.³⁵ These groups are also listed as affiliates in the June 2011 *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, which assesses the threat from the al Qaeda network.³⁶ Administration officials have used a more refined definition of an affiliate to discuss U.S. counterterrorism policy; they include the requirement that the group has demonstrated its intent to attack the United States or the West. The inconsistent application of the definition removes al Qaeda in Iraq from the counterterrorism policy discussion but adds groups like the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, which is closely aligned with al Qaeda in Pakistan and has attacked the U.S. homeland.^{xxi, 37} Such inconsistencies in defining which groups are al Qaeda affiliates highlight the problem that results from attempting to craft a definition around a desired set of policies and the need to then describe groups within the al Qaeda network to justify policy decisions.

The current administration’s definition falls short of describing the entire al Qaeda network. That network actually extends beyond the groups directly seeking to attack the United States or the West. It includes both groups explicitly and publicly recognized by al Qaeda senior leaders and groups that hide the full extent of their relationship. The collection of groups with local agendas that maintain operational ties to the affiliates ought to be included in any definition of the al Qaeda network because it plays a critical role in facilitating the activities of al Qaeda. In Mali, for example, local militia forces secured a temporary safe haven for al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.³⁸ Instead, Obama characterized these groups in a May 2013 speech as “local militias or extremists” that may “launch periodic attacks against Western diplomats, companies, and other soft targets.”³⁹ Dismissing the role that these groups play in

xix. Another example is the March 2012 French case of Mohammed Merah, cited by a senior U.S. counterterrorism official in a background briefing on the state of al Qaeda. The official stated that Merah “probably [had] some connection to either al Qaeda or an affiliated organization.” (See endnote 33.)

xx. A Russian paper, *Novaya Gazeta*, reported on April 28, 2013, that Tamerlan Tsarnaev had links to Mahmud Nidal and William Plotnikov, a Canadian boxer. Both militants were killed in counterterrorism operations in Dagestan shortly before Tsarnaev returned to the United States. *Novaya Gazeta*’s source in the Russian interior ministry added that Tsarnaev was attempting to join one of the militias in Dagestan. Tsarnaev left Russia three days after Plotnikov was killed. (See endnote 34.)

xxi. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) facilitated the May 2010 Times Square bombing. It meets the administration’s criterion for al Qaeda affiliate status because of its demonstrated intent to attack the United States yet is frequently omitted as an affiliate because its leadership does not follow orders from the core al Qaeda group.

the al Qaeda network is a mistake.

Limiting the network to only those groups al Qaeda recognizes as such, moreover, may blind the United States to rising threats as local groups transition toward operating on the international stage. The administration's depiction of the network places undue significance on the strength of the links between the core group and associates or affiliates and ignores relationships that exist between the various nodes, finally. The network the administration's definition constructed is radial: a core node is at the center, linked to it are affiliates, and linked to them are adherents. Removing the central node should sever the ties within the network, in this view, and radically reduce the collective threat from the al Qaeda network. This has been proven not to be the case. The core group in Pakistan has been severely degraded by over a decade of continued disruption, yet the United States continues to face a significant threat from the al Qaeda network. We must renew our attempts to understand the al Qaeda network to develop a new and more effective strategy against it.

Defining the al Qaeda Network Today

The al Qaeda network is complex and adaptive. A framework is required that defines the various nodes of the network, recognizes the interaction of formal structures and informal relationships within the network, and allows for change over time. Scoping the network—defining who is and is not a member—is one of the first steps toward building this framework. Another step is understanding the layers of relationships between members of the network, both individually and organizationally. The framework must differentiate between the formal relationships and the informal relationships. It must encompass both the roles that underlying human networks play as well as what the formal group hierarchical structure contributes to the network. Finally, the framework needs to be flexible enough to accurately depict the evolving nature of the network.

Previous frameworks have all advanced our understanding of the network, since real-world developments have supported aspects of the various different definitions. The organizational framework describes

a structure that still exists in the al Qaeda network, though it has changed from what it was originally. The “leaderless jihad” framework emphasizes the latticed structure that runs between the different groups and cuts across formal hierarchies. The new framework will need to incorporate both of these understandings and the interplay between them.

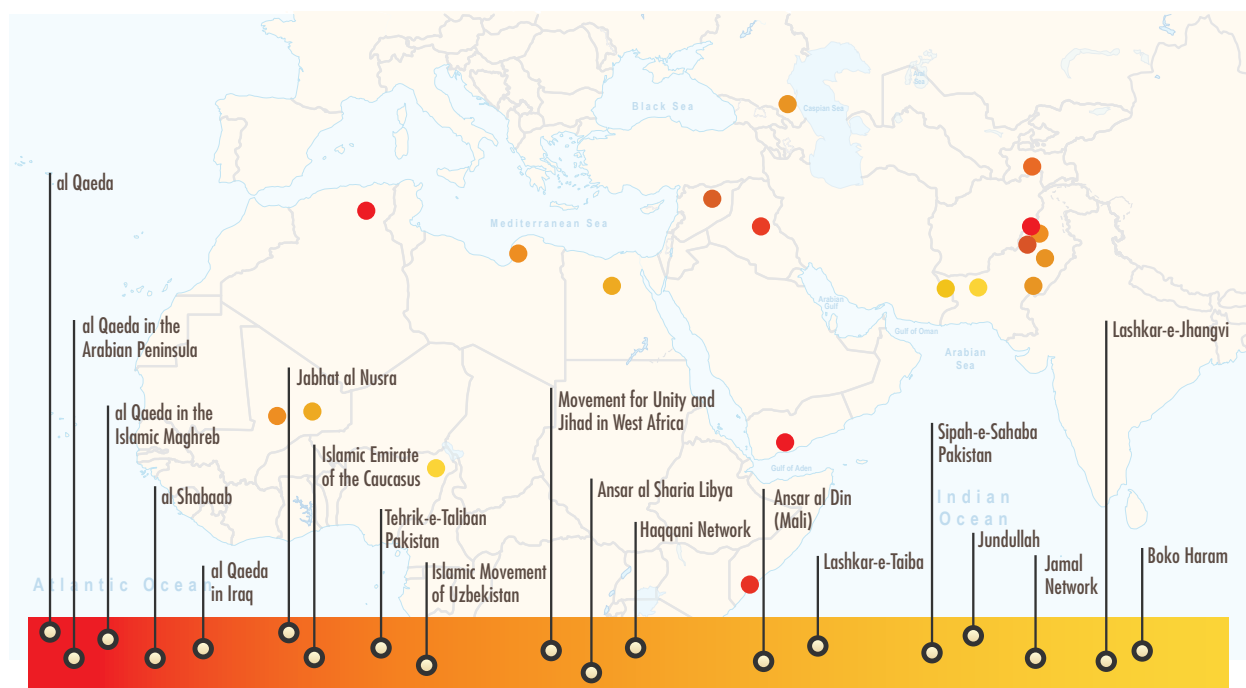
Defining membership in the al Qaeda network is best done extensionally, proceeding from groups and individuals universally recognized as being members and deriving their common distinctive characteristics. Identifying formal inclusion in the network is straightforward: the al Qaeda *emir* recognizes certain groups that have pledged their allegiance, *bayat*, to him. All of these recognized groups share al Qaeda's ideology, and their leaders justify the groups' operations with that ideology. The formally recognized groups also share resources, as we can see from the instructions from bin Laden to al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb to help finance operations in conjunction with al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.^{xxii}, 40 They also have a common signature: similar structures, training procedures, and patterns and methods of operations. Finally, leadership and fighter networks are connected and, in some cases, overlap among the recognized groups. This partial set of characteristics common to the recognized groups, although far from complete, is a sufficient base upon which to build an extensional definition of the network.

Categorizing groups according to this set of characteristics yields a spectrum of degrees of affiliation to the network: the core group is on one end, and at the other are groups only loosely associated. (See figure 3.) Three distinct types of groups within this spectrum stand out: the al Qaeda core group in Pakistan,^{xxiii} groups

xxii. Younis al Mauritani, whom bin Laden had named al Qaeda's official responsible for external operations in Africa and west Asia, had proposed coordinating activities between AQAP and AQIM to attack the West. There is a directive from bin Laden for AQIM to provide him with financial support for the following six months, which bin Laden estimated to be about €200,000. (See endnote 40.)

xxiii. The adoption of the term “al Qaeda core” to recognize the group in Pakistan is to remain consistent with the general understanding of the term. There is also what should be considered an al Qaeda core human network that is not geographically limited to the Afghanistan and Pakistan region, but is dispersed throughout the broader al Qaeda network. For more on the difference between the group and the network, please see appendix 2.

FIGURE 3
SPECTRUM OF AFFILIATION TO THE AL QAEDA NETWORK



Source: AEI

recognized by the al Qaeda *emir* as part of the network, and the groups that may not publicly identify as al Qaeda but that functionally support the network and have adopted the al Qaeda ideology. A group's position on this spectrum can shift as its characteristics change or more is learned about it. (See appendix 1.)

Let us then define **al Qaeda core** to be the group led directly by the al Qaeda *emir*, based in Pakistan. Those groups that the al Qaeda *emir* has publicly recognized as part of the al Qaeda network are al Qaeda **affiliates**. Nearly all of the affiliates have adopted al Qaeda's ideology, share resources, use a common signature, and have overlapping human networks, among other characteristics. There are currently six recognized affiliates: al Qaeda in Iraq, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Jabhat al Nusra, al Shabaab, and the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus. Al Qaeda stood up a network in Iraq in 2003 and publicly recognized it as an affiliate in December 2004; it publicly recognized the Algerian terrorist group, the Salafist

Group for Call and Combat, as an affiliate in September 2006 (to be known from January 2007 forward as al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb); al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula announced its establishment in January 2009 after a merger between the Yemeni and Saudi al Qaeda branches; Zawahiri publicly recognized al Qaeda's relationship with al Shabaab in Somalia in February 2012; and in late May 2013, Zawahiri recognized Jabhat al Nusra as independent from al Qaeda in Iraq.

These affiliates all maintain local agendas, but they have also all threatened American interests abroad and, in some cases, the U.S. homeland. The American intelligence community has assessed that AQAP poses the greatest threat to the United States out of the al Qaeda affiliates.⁴¹

The final set of groups within the al Qaeda network are **associates**: groups that are ideologically and/or functionally aligned with network but have not been publicly identified as al Qaeda. Local groups have historically coordinated and cooperated with the al Qaeda

core group in Pakistan. Over the past few years, the affiliates have also developed similar relationships with local groups in their own countries. The activities of these groups generally support those of al Qaeda and its affiliates, strengthening the network overall. These local groups are al Qaeda associates; they do not operate under the al Qaeda name and, in some cases, have taken precautions to hide their association with the al Qaeda network. Recovered al Qaeda correspondence reveals a predilection for maintaining plausible deniability of a group's relationship with al Qaeda or its affiliates within the senior leadership.^{xxiv, 42}

The determinant for whether the group operates within the al Qaeda network is whether it possesses the qualities that also broadly characterize an affiliate. These include, but are not limited to, shared resources with al Qaeda core or an affiliate, overlapping fighter or leadership networks with al Qaeda core or an affiliate, a common signature, and ideological alignment with al Qaeda. Al Qaeda associates bolster the broader al Qaeda network, and some share all of the characteristics of an affiliate save the public recognition of their membership in the network. In many cases, they have become integral to the operations of al Qaeda and its affiliates.

The network, as has been described, is dynamic and complex. The core group does provide a central source of direction, but it is not the unifying factor within the al Qaeda network. Instead, the subscription to the al Qaeda ideology, of which bin Laden was one of the originators and main proponents, helps drive the development of relational links among the core, the affiliates, and the associates. The network is also bound by personal relationships that stretch across different groups, strengthened by a sense of shared experience and shared overall objectives.

xxiv. See the letter dated August 7, 2010, from Osama bin Laden to al Shabaab's leader Ahmed Abdi Godane (Mukhtar Abu Zubair), which is in response to a previous letter. Godane had requested formal, public unity with al Qaeda. Bin Laden declined the request, citing a fear that public declaration would mobilize "the enemies" (likely the U.S. or other partners) against al Shabaab and that it would inhibit small development projects supported by individuals in the Arabian Peninsula. Ayman al Zawahiri chastised al Qaeda in Iraq *emir* Abu Bakr al Baghdadi for explicitly laying out Jabhat al Nusra's relationship with al Qaeda in a May 23, 2013, letter. (See endnote 42.)

Proposed Definitions

Affiliates: Groups that have publicly pledged allegiance to the al Qaeda *emir* and have in turn received public recognition as part of al Qaeda by the al Qaeda *emir*.

Associates: Groups that exhibit a sufficient number of characteristics common within the al Qaeda network such as shared resources, overlapping fighter or leadership networks, a common signature, and ideological alignment with al Qaeda.

See Appendix 1: *Al Qaeda and Associated Movements Matrix* for more.

One of the most important informal human networks within the al Qaeda network is the one that formed around Osama bin Laden in the late 1980s and in the 1990s.^{xxv, 43} Other such networks include relationships built in mosques and *madrasas* (religious schools).^{xxvi} These relationships, including such shared experiences as being incarcerated together, continue to play a role today in establishing cross-group relations that cut through al Qaeda's formal organizational structure.

One of the challenges has been predicting a group's shift from a local to a regional or international threat. The American intelligence community assessed in 2009 that AQAP was focused on targeting the Yemeni and Saudi Arabian governments and did not present a direct threat to the American homeland.⁴⁴ Countering

xxv. It is also clear that individuals pursuing leadership positions within the al Qaeda network today who were not part of the *jihad* in Afghanistan against the Soviets face additional scrutiny. See footnote 13 for more.

xxvi. Mohamed Jamal Abu Ahmed, the now-incarcerated leader of an al Qaeda-associated network in Egypt, noted that he had received support from his former students in Yemen in establishing his group. These students were al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's *emir* Nasser al Wahayshi, military commander Qasim al Raymi, and former *shari'a* official Sheikh Abu Zubair Adil al Abab (d. October 2012). (See endnote 56.)

AQAP, therefore, was not a top national security priority. This assessment made the U.S. homeland vulnerable to attack: Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, trained by AQAP, attempted to detonate a bomb concealed in his underwear on December 25, 2009, over U.S. soil. It should not have been inconceivable that an al Qaeda affiliate, instead of al Qaeda core, would attempt to attack the U.S. homeland. Identifying movement along a spectrum of the al Qaeda network's characteristics would provide a heuristic method to help predict when a group will move from a local or regional threat to an international one. The spectrum also serves to identify groups that may be entering the al Qaeda network as associates or those that seek to hide the extent of their affiliation to the network.

Al Qaeda's (R)Evolution during the Arab Spring

The eruption of the Arab Spring in 2011 weakened America's position in the Middle East and North Africa, and the United States may continue to feel its aftershocks in the years to come. Partner governments on which many U.S. administrations have relied to execute counterterrorism operations faced serious challenges to their legitimacy from their citizens. Survival, not counterterrorism, became their top priority. Moreover, many of the socioeconomic challenges that fed the uprisings during the Arab Spring continue to test the nascent governments. Even today, the United States has fewer reliable partners in the region: the Egyptian government under Mohamed Morsi made clear that it does not support the close relationship the United States enjoyed with Cairo under the Mubarak regime, and the July 2013 army-installed government is facing significant internal unrest. Regional governments are also weaker where a change in power occurred—in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen—as they seek to consolidate power and establish legitimacy with the people.

Al Qaeda benefited from the Arab Spring in various ways, whereas the United States has lost influence in the Middle East and North Africa. The al Qaeda network thrives in areas with low or poor governance and the challenge to the state in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and now Syria has forced the area under state control

to contract significantly.⁴⁵ The breakdown in security across North Africa over the course of the Egyptian and Libyan revolutions facilitated the outpouring of arms and munitions from Libya. These weapons are resurfacing in areas where al Qaeda affiliates or associates are active, such as Syria and Mali. The Arab Spring effectively catalyzed al Qaeda's growth across the Middle East and North Africa.

The changes throughout the Middle East and North Africa were not the only ones that affected al Qaeda. The killing of Osama bin Laden, the charismatic leader and founder of al Qaeda, resulted in the most significant leadership changes seen within the al Qaeda network. Bin Laden had been the sole leader of the core group in Pakistan for the entirety of its existence, unlike the experience of other affiliates, such as the one in Iraq, which saw regular turnover in its top leadership due to American military operations. America's hunt for its most-wanted terrorist ended in a compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, on May 1, 2011. Senior officials within the Obama administration described the killing of bin Laden as a "crippling blow to the [al Qaeda] organization and its militant allies" and said that it "puts the group on a path of decline that will be difficult to reverse."⁴⁶ Bin Laden's death certainly reverberated throughout the al Qaeda network, but the network remains far from crippled, and there is little evidence indicating that the network on the whole is on the decline.

Al Qaeda's affiliates actually strengthened their positions in 2011 despite the death of bin Laden. The al Qaeda network shifted dynamically to adapt to and to exploit the new environments in which it operated. AQAP, al Qaeda's affiliate in Yemen, took advantage of regime decisions to redeploy forces from the fight against the group and fractures that surfaced within the Yemeni security forces. AQAP fielded an insurgent arm in south Yemen operating under the name Ansar al Sharia that seized and held territory for the majority of 2011 and into 2012.

AQIM, al Qaeda's affiliate in West Africa, benefited directly from the collapse of Muammar Qaddafi's regime in Libya. Many of the weapons moved out of Libya are reappearing in AQIM's arms caches. Further, the group worked to consolidate its strength in north

Mali, exploiting openings created by a secular uprising there in 2012.

The reemergence of AQI following the withdrawal of U.S. forces in 2011 was less spectacular than AQAP's insurgency in Yemen or AQIM's takeover of the Malian conflict. AQI benefited from the political unraveling in Iraq, driven by rising sectarian tensions, and began conducting large-scale operations in the country. Its July 2012–July 2013 “Breaking the Walls” campaign demonstrated that AQI has nearly regained the operational capacity it had in 2007.⁴⁷ It also became actively involved in the Syrian civil war by supporting radical elements of the opposition, including Jabhat al Nusra (the Support Front). Gains made during and after the Arab Spring have offset any loss sustained by the death of bin Laden.

Neither the al Qaeda organization nor the network has disintegrated without bin Laden at its head. Zawahiri became the al Qaeda *emir*. Zawahiri was not a bit player in the core group or in the al Qaeda network before his accession. The Egyptian had worked next to bin Laden for years as his deputy. Bin Laden led his group out of Sudan from about 1992 until 1996; Zawahiri, then the leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), also operated out of Sudan until 1995. During that time, the two organizations coordinated some of their activities. Toward the end of the 1990s, Zawahiri increasingly moved his network into Afghanistan, under bin Laden's protection. Then, in June 2001, Zawahiri formally merged EIJ with bin Laden's group to form the al Qaeda organization known today, and Zawahiri became al Qaeda's second-in-command until bin Laden's death.^{xxvii, 48}

It is extremely important to bear Zawahiri's past in mind when assessing the viability of the al Qaeda core group today. His personal network reaches back to former EIJ members who were imprisoned in Egypt under the Mubarak regime and may influence the future shape of the al Qaeda network. The June 2011 *National Strategy for Counterterrorism* also notes that the death of bin Laden will not dismantle the group: “It is unlikely that any single event—even the death of Osama bin Laden, the only leader al Qaeda has ever

known—will bring about its operational dismantlement.”⁴⁹ This assessment should continue to hold true in the case of Zawahiri's death; senior leaders remain who could succeed the al Qaeda *emir*.^{xxviii}

Almost any organization that undergoes leadership change will see that change reflected in operations and direction. Al Qaeda is no different. The decision to grant al Shabaab affiliate status illuminates a shift in leadership decision making. Two declassified letters recovered during the Abbottabad raid provided insight into al Qaeda's decision not to publicly recognize al Shabaab's role within the al Qaeda network. An August 7, 2010, response from bin Laden to a request by al Shabaab's leader, Ahmed Abdi Godane, for affiliate status lays out bin Laden's reasoning. Bin Laden called for continued secrecy in the relationship because of the mobilization against its affiliates in Iraq (in December 2004) and in Algeria (in September 2006), when they were recognized in December 2004 and September 2006, respectively, and because “an official declaration remains to be [*sic*] the master for all proof.”^{xxix, 50} Additionally, bin Laden noted that it would be easier for merchants to assist those in Somalia if the al Qaeda alliance was not public.

A December 2010 letter implored bin Laden to reconsider his decision to withhold recognition from al Shabaab.⁵¹ Notably, it was not until after bin Laden's death that the relationship between the core group in Pakistan and al Shabaab in Somalia manifested publicly. Al Shabaab held a public press conference with an al Qaeda emissary, Abu Abdullah al Muhajir, in mid-October 2011 to distribute assistance to Somalis suffering during the severe drought.⁵² Shortly thereafter, in February 2012, Zawahiri appeared in a video with al Shabaab's Godane and officially recognized the relationship between the two groups.⁵³

xxviii. Seth G. Jones, the associate director of the International Security and Defense Policy Center at RAND, identified Saif al Adel, Abu Khayr al Masri, and Abu Muhammad al Masri as potential successors to Zawahiri in prepared testimony for a hearing on “Global al-Qaeda: Affiliates, Objectives, and Futures Challenges” before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade on July 18, 2013.

xxix. The letter is signed by “Zamarai,” believed to be Osama bin Laden. Ahmed Abdi Godane is also known as Mukhtar Abu Zubair.

xxvii. The merger between bin Laden's al Qaeda and Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad was effectively in place by February 1998; however, it was formalized only in June 2001.

The Shape of the al Qaeda Network Today

The global al Qaeda network extends far beyond the groups publicly recognized as being affiliated and is supported by local associated groups, many of which focus their efforts almost exclusively on local agendas. These associates not only serve as enablers for the affiliates, however. They may also pose a threat now or in the future to American personnel or interests in the region. Ignoring the role of local associates in furthering the al Qaeda network or discounting the potential threat from these groups would prevent the development of a successful, comprehensive strategy to counter the al Qaeda network.

The al Qaeda network has grown increasingly complex and has adapted to various stresses to remain operational. Both its structure and its adaptive nature have made the network extremely resilient, which has limited the ability of outside actors, such as the United States, to defeat it. Changes in the network are reflected in how bin Laden organized his followers, for example. In the 1990s, al Qaeda operatives moved into Muslim countries to assist local Islamist groups and to attempt to direct their efforts against the local governments. Recovered al Qaeda correspondence discussed groupings of operatives in various regions, such as the “Africa Corps” that was working with members of what would become the core of Somalia’s militant Islamist leadership.⁵⁴ Today, al Qaeda core appears to continue to maintain a designated representative in various regions who interacts with affiliate leadership, but the relationship also runs directly through the affiliate leadership to al Qaeda core leadership.^{xxx, 55} Another shift has been the strengthening of affiliate-to-affiliate ties, which has accompanied the general increase in affiliate-to-associate relationships.

Relationships that run between affiliates and

associates are not an entirely new phenomenon, but as the core group in Pakistan has been weakened, these peripheral ties have grown stronger. It is not clear that there is a direct correlation between the two. The affiliates are increasingly following the model once attributed solely to the core group. They now have relationships with local groups similar to those associated with the core in Pakistan, such as the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and the Haqqani Network, that facilitate and support the affiliates’ operations. The collapse of stability in the Middle East and across North Africa opened up space for groups operating there to increase their public profile, and in some cases individuals who had been part of the al Qaeda network have taken the initiative to found new organizations. Both AQIM and AQAP developed relationships with groups that had been established over the course of 2011. Moreover, these groups may have broadened their reach by working with groups outside of their historical area of operations, such as reported AQAP activity in Egypt.⁵⁶

AQIM seized the opportunity the breakdown in governance in Libya and Mali presented by actively seeking to establish relationships with local groups and to extend its reach in the region. Pressured by the French intervention in Mali, AQIM left behind a trove of documents in Timbuktu that has provided insight into the group’s activities. Detailed accounts of activities within the al Qaeda network have not readily been available since U.S. troops departed Iraq in December 2011. An October 3, 2012, letter described AQIM’s efforts to deploy cells into Libya under the guidance of a senior operative, Abou Zeid. The letter also confirmed that Mokhtar Belmokhtar, a senior commander in AQIM who split from the group in December 2012, had entered Libya as well to establish contacts with groups there.⁵⁷ AQIM now operates training camps in the southwest, near Sebha, Libya.⁵⁸ It is not clear whether the group’s efforts can be directly tied to Ansar al Sharia’s attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, on September 11, 2012, during which militants killed four Americans, including U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens. Ansar al Sharia in Libya, reported to have had contact with individuals from AQIM, operates in and around the

xxx. As noted in footnote 11, al Qaeda *emir* Ayman al Zawahiri named a representative in Syria to mediate between al Qaeda’s affiliates Jabhat al Nusra and al Qaeda in Iraq (Islamic State of Iraq). The appointment was referenced in a letter believed to be from Zawahiri sent to his representative, Abu Khalid al Suri, Jabhat al Nusra leadership and al Qaeda in Iraq leadership. *Al Jazeera* published a copy of this letter on June 9, 2013. (See endnote 55.)

port cities of Benghazi and Derna, which are outside AQIM's historical reach.^{xxxii} 59

There may be AQIM activity in Tunisia as well, especially given the focus on Tunisia in official AQIM statements.⁶⁰ A militia has emerged in Kasserine province in Tunisia called the Uqba bin Nafi Brigade that the Tunisian interior minister said was established to form a branch of AQIM in Tunisia.⁶¹ The province neighbors Algeria; its terrain features Mount Chaambi, Tunisia's highest mountain. There, the militants have reportedly dug tunnels, and the Tunisian army has uncovered planning documents, as well as documents on ammonium nitrate, used in improvised explosive devices.⁶² There are recent reports that AQIM moved fighters into the region around Mount Chaambi between May and July 2013, which, combined with the fact that the Uqba bin Nafi Brigade has only conducted defensive attacks in the region, suggests that AQIM seeks to use it as a safe haven or transit point.⁶³ The Tunisian government spokesman also alleged that many of the Uqba bin Nafi Brigade militants have ties to Tunisia's Ansar al Sharia, which is led by Saifallah ben Hassine, better known as Abu Iyadh al Tunisi.⁶⁴ Abu Iyadh cofounded the former al Qaeda-linked Tunisian Combatant Group. Though he denies any links to the Uqba bin Nafi Brigade and AQIM, it is important to keep in mind that Abu Iyadh is part of the human network that formed fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan.⁶⁵

The outbreak of conflict in Mali, catalyzed by the return of ethnic Tuaregs and flow of weapons from Libya, provided AQIM an opportunity to dramatically increase its profile. AQIM directly supported the militant Islamist groups fighting the Mali army, and later, the secular Tuareg militias. It coordinates and cooperates with a local Tuareg Islamist group, Ansar al Din, and an AQIM splinter group, the Movement for Unity

and Jihad in West Africa.^{xxxii} Iyad ag Ghali, the leader of Ansar al Din, received a €400,000 payment from a senior commander in AQIM's Tariq ibn Ziyad Brigade, for example, and AQIM has also provided his group with logistical support.⁶⁶

A letter, purported to have been written in 2012 by AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel^{xxxiii} to his commanders in the Sahara and Iyad ag Ghali, the leader of Ansar al Din, reveals Droukdel's strategic goals for AQIM in the region.⁶⁷ Droukdel underscored the importance of working with local groups, including, at the time, the secular Tuareg group the Movement for the National Liberation of the Azawad, and the downplaying of groups' relations with al Qaeda and AQIM. AQIM and its associates in Mali controlled all of the major populated areas in the north at one point, and in certain cities, including Gao and Timbuktu, had set up governing apparatus.

AQIM's advances in Mali occurred just one year after AQAP had seized territory in south Yemen. A Yemeni military offensive, the success of which rested on the participation of local tribal militias, eventually pushed AQAP's insurgent arm, Ansar al Sharia, out of the areas it controlled in May and June 2012. Interestingly, AQAP *emir* Nasser al Wahayshi advised AQIM *emir* Abdelmalek Droukdel in two separate letters recovered in the Timbuktu, Mali, document trove.⁶⁸ The first letter, dated May 21, 2012, congratulates Droukdel on his successes in Mali and raises the question as to whether AQIM's relationship with Ansar al Din is like AQAP's with Ansar al Sharia. Providing basic services and fulfilling daily needs, like food and water, will generate support, counsels Wahayshi. The enforcement of *shari'a* also needs to be taken gradually. AQAP experienced a backlash in south Yemen when it imposed some of the more severe forms of *shari'a* law.

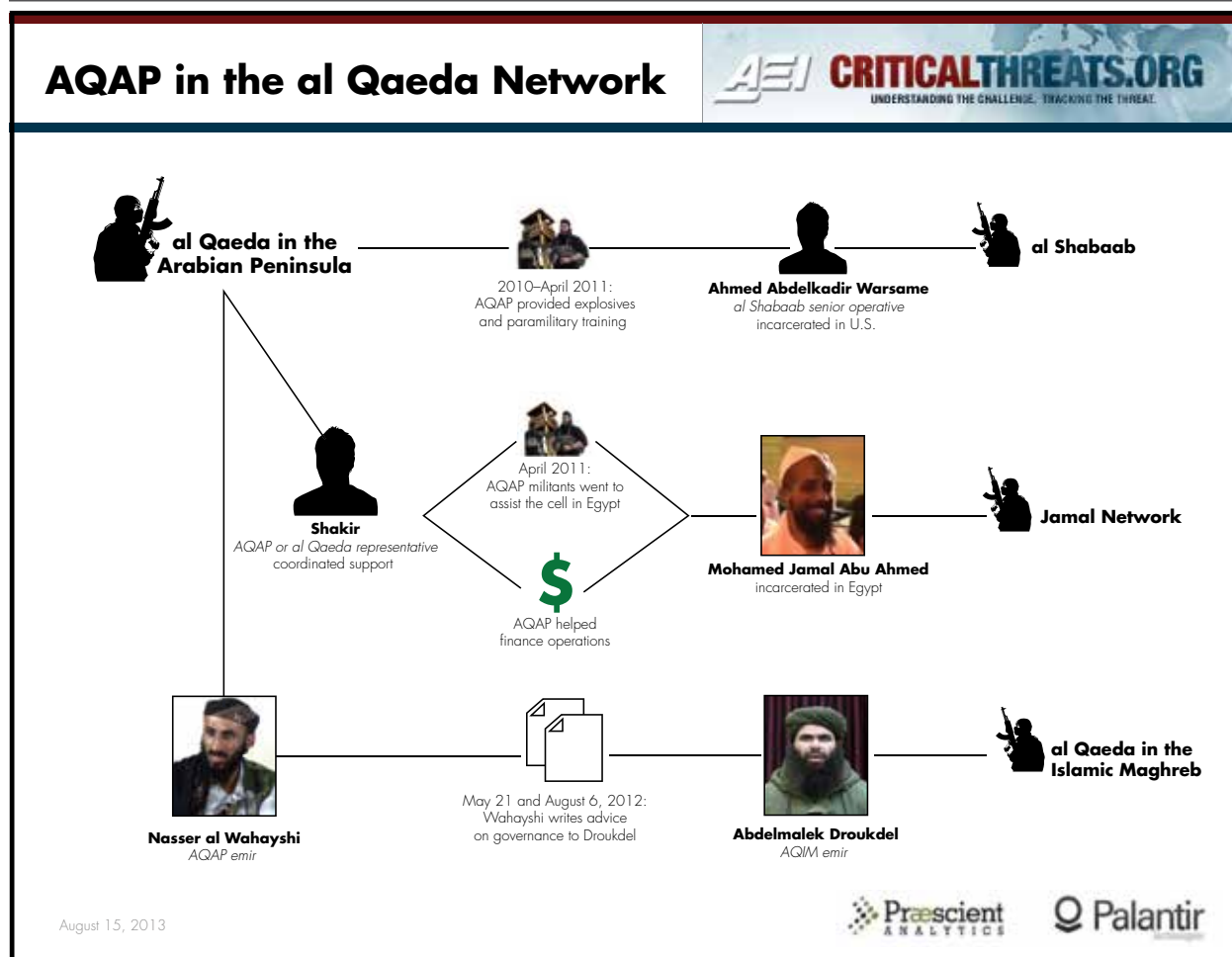
The second letter, dated August 6, 2012, explained AQAP's loss in south Yemen against the Yemeni

xxxii. The map of AQIM's and its associates' areas of influence provided in General Carter Ham's testimony includes these Libyan cities. Interpol also indicated possible links to al Qaeda in a prison break in Benghazi, Libya. Reuters sources claimed ties between the Benghazi attackers and those that attacked the In Amenas gas facility in January 2013. Belmokhtar's group claimed responsibility for the In Amenas attack. (See Chikhi and MacDonald, "Al Qaeda's Widening North African Jihad Confounds Foes" in endnote 59.)

xxxiii. The group is also commonly referred to by the French acronym of its name, MUJAO (Mouvement pour l'Unité et le Djihad en Afrique de l'Ouest). The Arabic name is جماعة التوحيد والجهاد في غرب أفريقيا, or "Tawhid and Jihad Group in West Africa."

xxxiii. Abdelmalek Droukdel is also known as Abu Mus'ab Abdel Wadoud.

FIGURE 4
AQAP IN THE AL QAEDA NETWORK



Note: AQAP has developed relationships with other al Qaeda affiliates and associates. It shares resource and tactics, techniques, and procedures.
Source: AEI's Critical Threats Project

military and cautioned Droukdel against declaring an emirate because he would not be able to fulfill the role of a state and because it may affect broader support for the movement should it fail.^{xxxiv} Notably, at the end of the letter Wahayshi mentions that he is also including communications from al Qaeda core leadership for Droukdel. AQAP's senior leaders' close ties to members of al Qaeda core, and the group's geographic location, likely positions it as a primary connection for AQIM and al Shabaab, which has also communicated with the

xxxiv. This advice parallels that bin Laden gave Wahayshi during the Arab Spring, though Wahayshi appears to have ignored the advice.

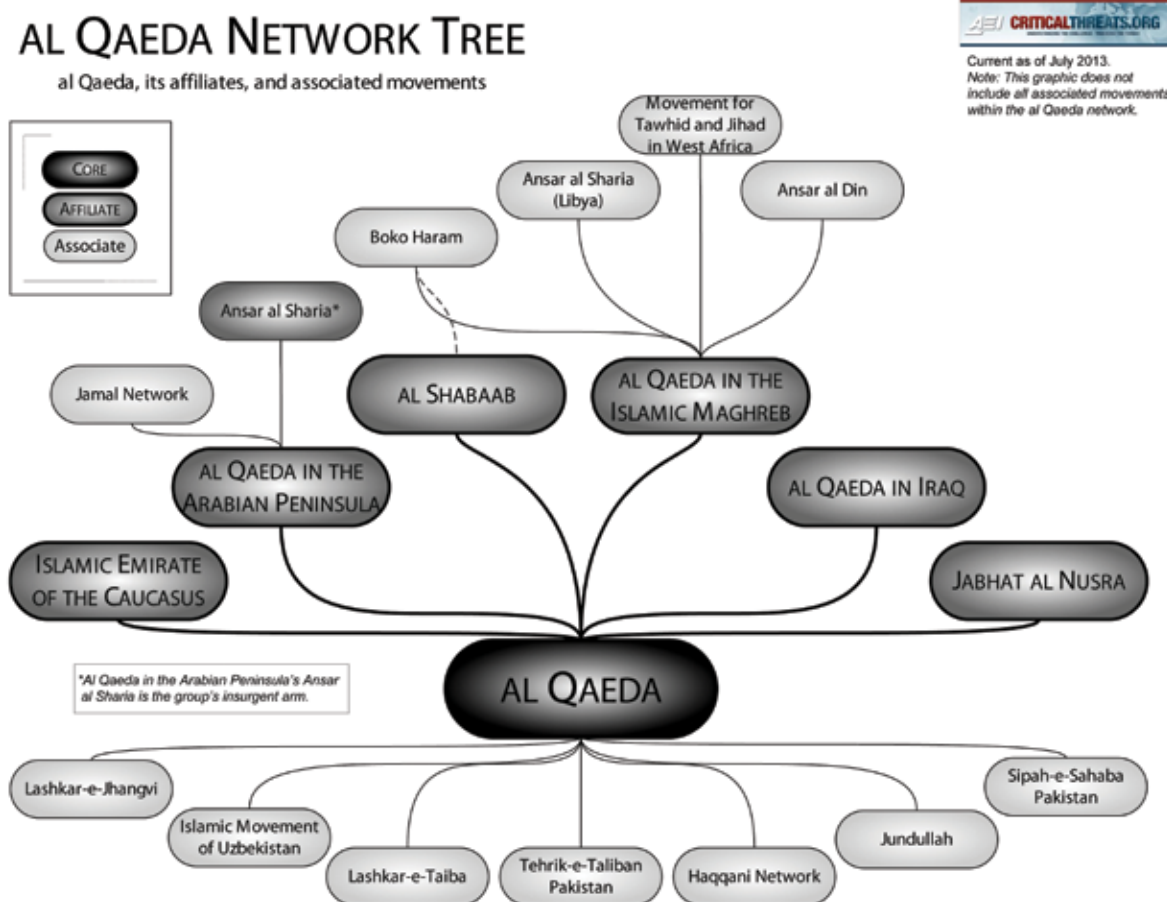
core through AQAP.^{xxxv}, 69

AQAP, like AQIM, has also expanded its reach beyond the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf of Aden. (See figure 4.) By 2011, AQAP had already developed a robust relationship with al Shabaab, al Qaeda's affiliate in Somalia across the Gulf of Aden, as is evidenced by the case of Ahmed Abdulkadir Warsame. Warsame was a senior al Shabaab

xxxv. U.S. counterterrorism officials said that text messages on a flash drive recovered during the May 2011 Abbottabad raid revealed that al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's senior leadership acted, at times, as a link between Osama bin Laden and al Shabaab. (See end-note 69.)

FIGURE 5

AL QAEDA NETWORK TREE: AL QAEDA, ITS AFFILIATES, AND ASSOCIATED MOVEMENTS



Note: The al Qaeda network tree displays the organizational relationships that run from al Qaeda core to the associates and to the affiliates. It does not depict affiliate-to-affiliate or associate-to-associate relationships. (See appendix 2.)

Source: AEI's Critical Threats Project

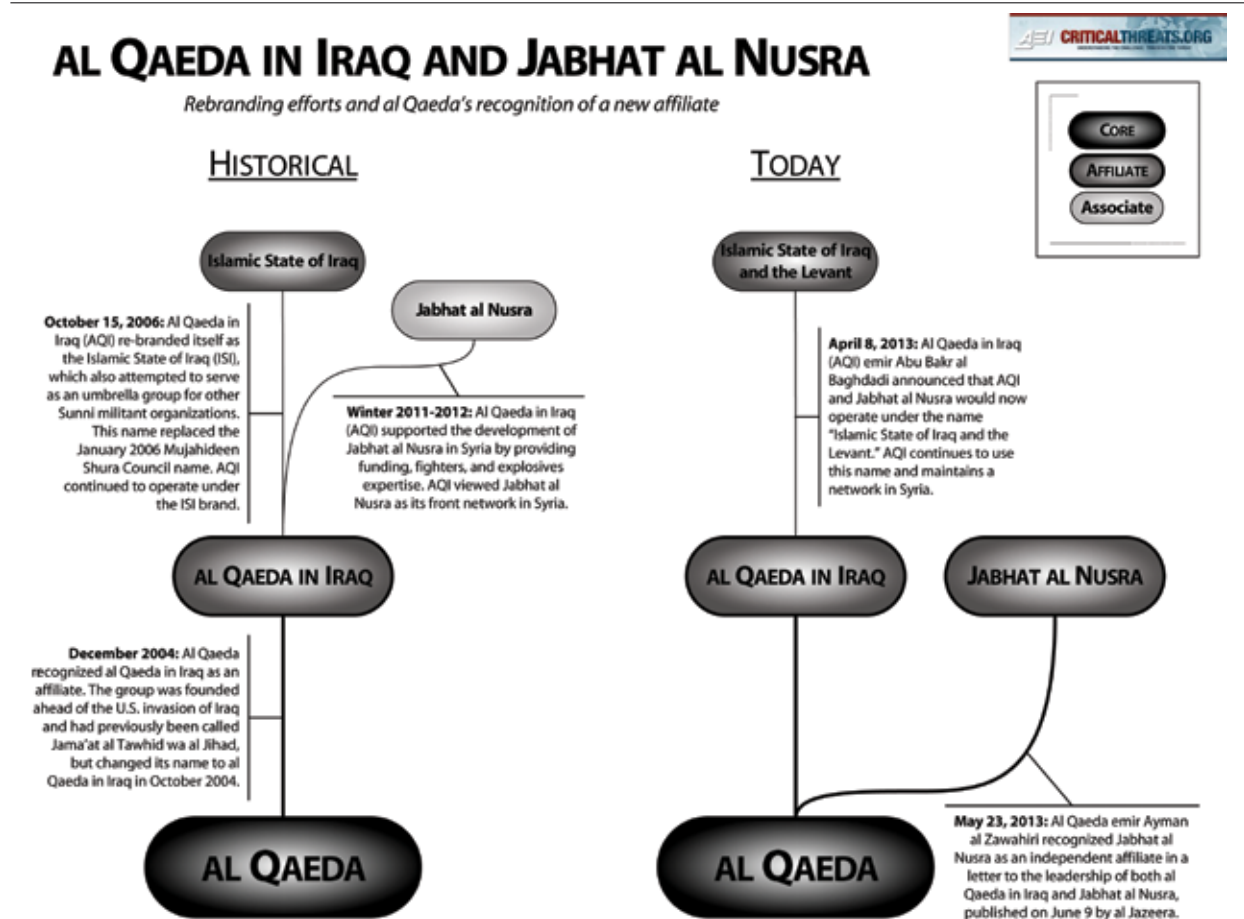
operative who received explosives training from AQAP with the intention of teaching al Shabaab militants.⁷⁰ AQAP allegedly financed and supported the establishment of an Egyptian cell in 2011 and 2012. The leader of the group, Mohamed Jamal Abu Ahmed, was imprisoned in Egypt for his role as an operational head in Ayman al Zawahiri's terrorist group, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, but was freed in 2011.⁷¹ He became a key node between the new Egyptian cell, known as the Jamal network, and the al Qaeda network. An Egyptian paper, *Youn7*, leaked a letter purportedly found on Mohamed Jamal's computer written to Ayman al Zawahiri on August 18, 2012. The letter noted that Mohamed Jamal was working

with an individual, Shakir, in Yemen as well as AQAP leader Nasser al Wahayshi, military commander Qasim al Raymi, and the late *shari'a* official Sheikh Abu Zubair Adil al Abab to set up his group in Egypt and that AQAP had sent militants to form the "nucleus" of the group, as well as funding.^{xxxvi} He sought Zawahiri's approval of the group

xxxvi. It is not clear from the published letter whether Shakir is a member of AQAP or is al Qaeda's representative in Yemen. References to Shakir indicate an assumed familiarity with the name, implying Ayman al Zawahiri knows the individual in question. Nasser al Wahayshi was referred to in the letter by his *kunya* (here, *nom de guerre*), Abu Basir, as was Qasim al Raymi (Abu Hurayrah al Sana'ani).

FIGURE 6

AL QAEDA IN IRAQ AND JABHAT AL NUSRA:
REBRANDING EFFORTS AND AL QAEDA'S RECOGNITION OF A NEW AFFILIATE



Note: Jabhat al Nusra began as an associate of al Qaeda in Iraq. It was recognized as an affiliate by al Qaeda *emir* Ayman al Zawahiri on May 23, 2013.

Source: AEI's Critical Threats Project

and confirmed that he had set up a base in Libya with the intent of using Libya as a gateway to Mali and the Islamic Maghreb.⁷²

Relationships run from the affiliates to the core group in Pakistan, among the affiliates, and also between affiliates and al Qaeda-associated groups. Al Qaeda's affiliates have operated in a manner that mirrors al Qaeda core's outreach activities to such groups as the Haqqani Network, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, and Laskhar-e-Taiba. (See appendix 2.) They, like al Qaeda in Pakistan, have developed relationships with local groups whose activities support and facilitate operations within the broader network. (See figure 5.) These local groups, like

Ansar al Din, are intimately engaged in local issues such as the fight for control of territory in northern towns in Mali, but we should not ignore their role within the broader network. AQIM's partnering with the local Malian groups enabled it to better secure its position in north Mali and may further its capabilities to target American and Western interests. The groups that have associated themselves with the affiliates should also be counted as members of the al Qaeda network even if they themselves do not share al Qaeda's intent to attack the United States and the West directly. Including them in the network analytically, after all, is not tantamount to requiring military—or, indeed, any other

specific—action against them. It is vital to dissociate the definition of the network from the policy recommendations that might or might not flow from it.

These relationships are not static, and affiliation with the al Qaeda network needs to be regularly assessed. Even within the past year, significant developments have changed the organizational structure of the al Qaeda network. Al Qaeda *emir* Ayman al Zawahiri recognized Jabhat al Nusra as al Qaeda's affiliate in Syria in a May 23, 2013, letter, published on June 9 by *al Jazeera*.⁷³ (See figure 6.) The group was established in late fall 2011 in Syria under the leadership of Abu Muhammad al Julani as a front network for AQI, which provided financing, training, and explosives expertise.⁷⁴

The Syrian group has become a formidable force in the fight against the Assad regime. It seized control of territory in northeast Syria when it overran Syrian government forces in al Raqqa, a provincial capital, and has since pursued governance there.⁷⁵ AQI *emir* Abu Bakr al Baghdadi announced the merger of AQI and Jabhat al Nusra under the name “The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” on April 8, 2013.⁷⁶ Julani publicly dismissed the subordination of his group to Baghdadi's on April 10 and renewed a pledge of allegiance to Zawahiri.⁷⁷ Zawahiri accordingly sent a letter to both Baghdadi and Julani on April 11 asking for separate responses and then recognized Jabhat al Nusra's independent status in a May 23 letter. AQI continues to operate in Syria under the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant name, but Jabhat al Nusra, once an associate of AQI, is now an al Qaeda affiliate.

The strengthening of the al Qaeda affiliates may be a byproduct of the weakening of al Qaeda core. The group led by Ayman al Zawahiri still maintains an overall command of the network and sits atop a hierarchical organizational structure. Continued appeals from affiliate leaders to Zawahiri for mediation in internal issues evidence this role. Al Shabaab leaders have asked publicly for Zawahiri to intervene in a yearlong internal disagreement in Somalia, for example.^{xxxvii}, 78

xxxvii. Al Shabaab senior leader Ibrahim al Afghani published “An Open Letter to Our Sheikh and Amir Sheikh Ayman al Zawahiri” in April 2013. (See endnote 78.) Afghani, who avoided making public statements in the past, wrote that the situation was getting

The extent of communications and reporting from the affiliates and the associates to al Qaeda core is unclear; the importance of them is not. Former AQIM senior leader Mokhtar Belmokhtar sought a direct line of communication with al Qaeda core in Pakistan, for example.⁷⁹ Most recently, more than 20 geographically dispersed al Qaeda operatives, including members from associated groups such as Boko Haram, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, participated in a virtual meeting with Zawahiri.^{xxxviii}, 80 Zawahiri used the time to announce that AQAP *emir* Nasser al Wahayshi would be the *ma'sul al 'amm*, al Qaeda's general manager or second-in-command. He also apparently approved AQAP's August 2013 plot to attack U.S. interests in the Middle East and North Africa.⁸¹ Al Qaeda core continues to manage and provide operational directives, and despite being weakened by U.S. military operations, it remains an important node in the al Qaeda network.

Conclusion

American efforts against the core al Qaeda group now based in Pakistan have been successful. That group has been unable to plan and carry out another terrorist attack on the scale of September 11. It cannot operate out in the open the way that it did in Afghanistan, and the leadership has been severely degraded.

This success required a significant investment of U.S. military assets and attention, which will not be sustained in that theater and is unlikely to be duplicated elsewhere. The special case success against al Qaeda in Pakistan, supported also by a massive American military infrastructure as part of the war in Afghanistan, may be reversed after the 2014 drawdown from Afghanistan. It is likely that when pressure is relieved on the group in Pakistan, the leadership will regenerate, as has occurred in such areas as Iraq. Moreover, it is not

worse and there was no visible solution. It is unknown whether Zawahiri responded to Afghani.

xxxviii. The meeting was originally characterized in a Daily Beast article as a conference call; however, one of the authors clarified later that it was not a phone call. He characterized it as a “virtual meeting space.” (See endnote 80.)

clear that the al Qaeda leadership will choose to remain in Pakistan should Afghanistan once again become a viable sanctuary for the group. Pressure on the group in Pakistan has not prevented al Qaeda from consolidating its strength in such areas as Yemen, Iraq, and the Sahel region, where it was already present, and deaths of senior leaders in Pakistan have not reduced the affiliates' strength or changed the conviction in al Qaeda's global *jihād* ideology held by their leaders.

Despite the commitment of American assets to countering the threat from al Qaeda, the groups within the network have continued to seek to attack the United States, and the senior leadership in Pakistan has offered advice to affiliates on how to pursue that goal. Some of this information can be gleaned from the 17 declassified documents recovered during the May 2011 Abbottabad raid. The thousands of other documents that were also recovered likely further detail the relationships between groups in the al Qaeda network and the continued attempts to conduct attacks against the United States.^{xxxix} A March 2010 letter, released to a German prosecutorial team but not fully declassified, from senior al Qaeda operative Younis al Mauritani to Osama bin Laden reveals efforts to coordinate among groups within the al Qaeda network and suggested targets for attacks.⁸² Bin Laden referenced this letter in May 2010 when writing to his deputy, Atiyah Abd al Rahman, and directing Atiyah to inform AQIM's and AQAP's leadership of Mauritani's efforts.^{xl, 83}

At the time, very little attention was paid to AQIM's activities, which were predominantly kidnappings of

Europeans in the Sahel, and the group was frequently dismissed as a criminal racket. The discontinuity between the assessed threat from AQIM and al Qaeda's efforts to plan an attack led by the group reveals a lack of understanding of the al Qaeda network.

Understanding the relationships that run between the affiliates and the core al Qaeda group, as well as the relationships with associated groups, more fully develops a picture of the entire network and how that network can be mobilized to support attacks on Americans. Associated groups in Pakistan currently support al Qaeda core's operations there. Al Qaeda associates elsewhere offer the same benefits to affiliated al Qaeda groups. Recognizing the role that these local groups play is important in crafting a strategy that works to counter the threat from the entire al Qaeda network, not just the most active or senior node. The argument for including associated groups in the al Qaeda network does not necessarily lead to a conclusion that the United States must deploy forces or invest heavily in every place where the al Qaeda network is active. It does, however, require that American policymakers and decision makers begin to undertake what will be a substantial effort to develop a global strategy, tailored to the local groups, to counter the entire al Qaeda network.

Al Qaeda will continue to threaten the United States and its interests until the network is fully dismantled. It is not sufficient to destroy the capabilities of only one node in the network; time has proven that others groups will rise to the occasion and attempt to attack the United States. It is also not acceptable to derive a sense of safety by parsing the network with semantics. Al Qaeda will adapt, as it has before, and will continue to seek to fulfill its objectives. Understanding this, and fully understanding the al Qaeda network does more than provide the framework within which to craft a strategy to defeat al Qaeda. It also reveals the extent of the threat facing the United States today.

xxxix. Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper testified during the 2013 Worldwide Threat Assessment hearing held by the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence that efforts by U.S. Central Command to exploit the information gleaned from the intelligence gathered during the Abbottabad raid are ongoing.

xl. Bin Laden wrote to Atiyah, also known as Sheikh Mahmud, to send two messages, one to Abu Mus'ab Abdul Wadud (AQIM's leader, also known as Abdelmalek Droukdel) and one to Abu Basir Nasser al Wahayshi (AQAP's leader), to ask them to cooperate with Sheikh Younis (Younis al Mauritani). As noted previously, Atiyah was also to ask AQIM to support Mauritani financially. Atiyah was told to arrange for direct and secure communication lines between AQIM, AQAP, and Mauritani. This plot may be the one dismantled by French counterterrorism officials in mid-October 2010. (See endnote 83.)

Notes

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2. “Executive Order on Terrorist Financing Blocking Property and Prohibiting Transactions with Persons Who Commit, Threaten to Commit, or Support Terrorism,” signed by President George W. Bush on September 23, 2001, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/print/20010924-1.html>.

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9. U.S. Department of Defense, “Background Briefing on

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12. “Transcript of Remarks by Central Intelligence Agency Director Michael Hayden at the Atlantic Council,” Central Intelligence Agency, November 13, 2008, <https://www.cia.gov/news-information/speeches-testimony/speeches-testimony-archive-2008/directors-remarks-at-the-atlantic-council.html>.

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AL QAEDA AND ASSOCIATED MOVEMENTS (AQAM) MATRIX

The complexity of the al Qaeda network, particularly given its covert nature, has frustrated attempts to create a rubric defining membership in that network. A matrix of characteristics derived extensionally from groups universally recognized as members of the al Qaeda network is one such rubric.

The matrix here describes a spectrum of association within the broader al Qaeda network. Groups that are most closely associated with the network tend to exhibit a majority of the identified characteristics. Characteristics, along the x-axis, were ordered based on the strength of the determinant (public recognition of the group by the al Qaeda *emir* is given the most weight, for example) and consideration was also given to those characteristics that appeared most frequently within the selected Sunni militant groups.

Matrix Exercise

The definitions of al Qaeda core, affiliate, and associate described in this paper emerged from an exercise the analytical research teams at the American Enterprise Institute's Critical Threats Project (CTP) and at the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) conducted in February 2013. The objective of

TABLE A1
AL QAEDA AND ASSOCIATED MOVEMENTS MATRIX EXERCISE
(AS OF JULY 2013)¹

	AI Qaeda Leadership Recognition	Ideological Alignment	Connected Leadership Networks	Overlapping Fighter Networks	Common Signature	Logistical Alignment	Shared Resources	Intent to Attack the U.S. Abroad	Intent to Attack the West	Intent to Attack the U.S.	Recognized al Qaeda's Leadership
Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Al Shabaab	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Al Qaeda in Iraq	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	? ²			X
Jabhat al Nusra³	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X
Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus	X	X	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	X
Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	~4
Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		5
Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa		X	X	X	X	X	X		X		
Ansar al Sharia (Libya)		X	X	?	X	X	X	X	X		?
Haqqani Network		X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Ansar al Din (Mali)		X	X	X	X	X	X				
Lashkar-e-Taiba		X	X	X		X	X	X	X		
Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan		X	X	X	X	X	X				6
Jundullah		X	?	?	X	X	X				
Jamal Network		X	X	X	?	?	X		X		X
Lashkar-e-Jhangvi			X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Boko Haram			X	X		?	X	X	X		
Quetta Shura Taliban			X	X		X	X				7
Jaysh Rijal al Tariqa al Naqshbandia				X		X	X	?			
Sinal Groups		X	?	?	?	X	?		X ⁸		X
Ansar al Islam		X			X	?					
Hamas						X			X		

Note: The analytical research teams at the American Enterprise Institute's Critical Threats Project and at the Institute for the Study of War produced this matrix, updated in July 2013, by placing the identified groups along the y-axis and the characteristics along the x-axis.

the exercise was to arrive at a set of definitions to describe the groups operating within the al Qaeda network. The CTP and ISW research teams at the time actively followed events in Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Horn of Africa, Iraq, Syria, West Africa, and Yemen. The teams also had limited insight into Libya and the Sinai Peninsula. Groups operating outside of these areas were not included in the exercise because analysts did not have the expertise to assess their characteristics.⁹ The research teams met in July 2013 to review and update their assessments based in part on expanded coverage of the Sahel and the Maghreb, as well as Egypt and the Persian Gulf.

Insights

The AQAM matrix exercise has proven to be a useful one in defining groups associated with al Qaeda. First, it reveals that there are levels of association within the network. Affiliates, groups that have been publicly recognized as such by al Qaeda's *emir*, tend to exhibit a majority of the characteristics whereas other groups within the network are more loosely associated with al Qaeda.

Second, the matrix does not attribute membership in the network to groups that are known not to be part of al Qaeda: Hamas failed the matrix test, for example. Hamas, though a Sunni movement, has historically been supported by the Iranian network. Its connections to the al Qaeda network are limited to shared logistics lines. Interestingly, the Quetta Shura Taliban (QST) has increased its relationship with an al Qaeda associate, the Haqqani network, over the past few months, and therefore should not be excluded fully from the al Qaeda network. It will continue to hold a unique position, however. The QST predates the establishment of al Qaeda. In fact, al Qaeda's founder Osama bin Laden recognized the leader of the QST, Mullah Omar, as *emir al mu'mineen* (Commander of the Faithful) and swore *bay'at*, or allegiance, to him. Despite displaying additional characteristics attributed to the al Qaeda network, the QST will very likely continue to fail on at least one key point: the recognition of al Qaeda's leadership.

Additionally, the AQAM matrix exercise revealed that certain characteristics are not useful metrics in

gauging whether a group is an al Qaeda associate. The intent to affiliate should not lead to an assessment that a group is within the al Qaeda network. Such groups as al Qaeda in the Sinai have made their aspirations clear but do not pass the rest of the AQAM matrix text. Logistical alignment and shared resources also do not indicate association with al Qaeda or its affiliates. There are many criminal networks that very likely share the same logistics as AQAM and very likely also serve as AQAM enablers (groups that facilitate AQAM operations), but these should be excluded from the associated movements group. Those criminal networks do remain of interest, however.

The most interesting conclusion from the matrix is that demonstrated intent to attack the U.S. homeland is not in and of itself a good metric for defining membership in the al Qaeda network. Nearly all of the groups have not demonstrated such intent. Even when applied to the known al Qaeda affiliates—al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al Shabaab, Jabhat al Nusra, and the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus—all save AQAP fail to exhibit that characteristic. AQAP's leadership did not explicitly threaten the U.S. homeland prior to its December 2009 attack. The group did display nearly all of the other characteristics, however. Demonstrated intent to attack the U.S. homeland may be a more useful metric in prioritizing the threats posed to the United States.

The teams have identified additional research avenues to pursue based on the conclusions from the AQAM matrix. Weighting the characteristics by preponderance within the listed groups raises the question of whether groups within the al Qaeda network develop characteristics in stages. Ideological alignment, for example, may be one of the characteristics necessary to move a group from the status of *enabler* to *associate*. This characteristic would also likely be reflected in the leadership, which may then begin to move into the al Qaeda leadership network, and the group's members in the fighter network. The teams also recognized the requirement to attempt to map the known human leadership network, which would better reveal how the affiliates and the associates relate among themselves and to one another.

Definitions

Analysts were asked to draw on a map where groups that might be considered part of the al Qaeda network were present. No definition for what was considered to be an al Qaeda group was given to the analysts. The team compiled the following list:

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: A Sunni militant Islamist group that operates in Yemen.

Al Qaeda in Iraq: A Sunni militant Islamist group that operates in Iraq.

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: A Sunni militant Islamist group that operates in the Sahel region.

Al Shabaab: A Sunni militant Islamist group that operates primarily in Somalia.

Ansar al Din: A Sunni militant Islamist group that broke away from the ethnically Tuareg Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad. It operates in Mali.

Ansar al Islam: A Sunni militant Islamist group that operates in Iraq.

Ansar al Sharia: A Sunni militant Islamist group that operates in Benghazi and Derna, Libya.

Boko Haram: A Sunni militant Islamist group that operates in Nigeria.

Hamas: A Sunni militant Islamist group that governs in the Gaza Strip.

Haqqani Network: A Sunni militant Islamist group that fights NATO and Afghan forces in eastern Afghanistan and operates in the Waziristan tribal areas in Pakistan.

Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus: A Sunni militant Islamist group that operates in the Caucasus.

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan: A Sunni militant Islamist group that operates in Tajikistan and northern Afghanistan.

Jabhat al Nusra: A Sunni militant Islamist group that is fighting the Assad regime in Syria.

Jaysh Rijal al Tariqa al Naqshbandia: A Sufi militant Islamist group that operates in Iraq.

Jundullah: A Sunni militant Islamist group that operates in Pakistan and conducts attacks in Iran.

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi: A predominately Punjabi Sunni militant Islamist group that operates in Pakistan.

Lashkar-e-Taiba: A Sunni militant Islamist group that operates in Pakistan.

Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa: A Sunni militant Islamist group that splintered from al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. It operates in Mali.

Quetta Shura Taliban: A Sunni militant Islamist group comprising the leadership of the Afghan Taliban that is based out of Quetta, Pakistan.

Sinai Groups: The collection of Sunni militant Islamist groups that operate in the Sinai.

Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan: A Deobandi militant group operating in Pakistan.

Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan: A Sunni militant Islamist group that operates in Pakistan.

The ensuing discussion first defined different types of spaces for al Qaeda groups and the level of association within the network. The team decided there were three separate groupings within the network: the core, the affiliates, and the associates.

Al Qaeda Core: The central group of al Qaeda leadership and operatives.

Affiliates: Groups that have publicly pledged their allegiance to the al Qaeda *emir* and have in turn received public recognition as part of al Qaeda by the al Qaeda *emir*.

Associates: Groups that exhibit a sufficient number of characteristics common within the al Qaeda network such as shared resources, overlapping fighter a leadership networks, a common signature, and ideological alignment with al Qaeda.

The discussion then focused on describing characteristics of groups in the al Qaeda network. The analytical team developed a list of characteristics that describe the groups that emerged from the initial mapping exercise. These included connected leadership or overlapping fighter networks with al Qaeda or its affiliates; logistical or ideological alignment with al Qaeda or its affiliates; a common signature or shared resources with al Qaeda or its affiliates; and the aspiration to become affiliated. The team added two additional characteristics: stated intent to attack the United States homeland and stated intent to attack U.S. interests abroad.

(These could be further broken out by adding a column for “demonstrated intent” to the matrix.) Definitions of characteristics:

Shared Resources: Organization’s resources, such as training, funding, and expertise, support al Qaeda or its affiliates and/or the organization receives such resources from al Qaeda or its affiliates.

Connected Leadership Networks: Organization’s leadership network (the human network formed by the leaders) connects directly to al Qaeda’s or its affiliates’ leadership networks.

Overlapping Fighter Networks: Organization’s fighter network (the human network formed by its operatives) supports or receives support from the fighter networks of al Qaeda or its affiliates.

Logistical Alignment: Organization shares lines of communications with al Qaeda or its affiliates.

Ideological Alignment: Organization’s stated ideology supports that espoused by al Qaeda and its affiliates, namely the pursuit of global, violent *jihad* in order to unite the *ummah* (Muslim community) and establish an Islamic Caliphate that rules under the authority of *shari’a*.

Common Signature: Organization models itself after the al Qaeda organization in such areas as structure, training, and operations.

Recognized al Qaeda’s Leadership: Official organizational statements or leadership statements include pledges of loyalty to al Qaeda *emir* Ayman al Zawahiri (previously Osama bin Laden).

Al Qaeda Leadership Recognition: Al Qaeda’s *emir* publicly recognized the organization’s relationship with al Qaeda.

Intent to Attack the U.S.: Official organizational statements or leadership statements include direct threats against the American homeland, or activities indicate or demonstrate intent to carry out such an attack.

Intent to Attack the U.S. Abroad: Official organizational statements or leadership statements include direct threats against the American targets outside of the homeland, or activities indicate or demonstrate intent to carry out such an attack.

Intent to Attack the West: Official organizational

statements or leadership statements include direct threats against Western targets, or activities indicate or demonstrate intent to carry out such an attack.

Notes

1. The groups listed in the matrix are meant to be representative. The matrix should not be considered a comprehensive list of terrorist groups that could be considered as associated with the al Qaeda network.

2. Al Qaeda in Iraq conducted attacks against American targets during the 2003–11 Iraq war as part of the insurgency.

3. Al Qaeda *emir* Ayman al Zawahiri recognized Jabhat al Nusra in a May 23, 2013, letter published on June 9, 2013, by *al Jazeera*. Jabhat al Nusra appears to have avoided issuing statements or threats that are outside the scope of the current fight against the Assad regime in Syria and has limited its stated objectives to protecting the Syrian people, defeating the Assad regime, and implementing governance based on *shari’a* in a future Syria.

4. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) leadership maintains close ties with the al Qaeda senior leadership (AQSL), but it is not clear from leadership statements whether the TTP leadership has pledged *bayat* to al Qaeda’s *emir*. The TTP referred to Osama bin Laden as “our Sheikh” and has also pledged *bayat* to Mullah Omar. The allegiance to Mullah Omar and the Quetta Shura Taliban would supersede that to bin Laden or the al Qaeda *emir*. The group has claimed attacks as retaliatory attacks for the death of Osama bin Laden and frequently addresses AQSL directly in public pronouncements.

5. It is not clear whether the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) leadership pledged *bayat* to Osama bin Laden in the early 1990s when it was established. IMU leadership is closely connected AQSL and one of its leaders sat on al Qaeda’s *shura* council.

6. Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) leadership has not publicly pledged *bayat* to Osama bin Laden or Ayman al Zawahiri. SSP leadership is closely connected AQSL and one of its leaders sat on al Qaeda’s *shura* council.

7. In this case, the relationship runs in the other direction. Al Qaeda’s leadership has pledged *bayat* to Mullah Omar, the leader of the Quetta Shura Taliban.

8. The radical Sunni militant groups operating in the Sinai

are assessed to be focused primarily on attacking Israel and the Egyptian Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, which is much more limited in scope than the other groups that have

been assessed to threaten the West.

9. Notably absent are such groups as the Abu Sayyaf Group, which operates out of the Philippines.

APPENDIX 2

THE AL QAEDA NETWORK TREE

The al Qaeda network's organizational structure resembles a tree. The core group forms the trunk, and its Pakistan-based associates the roots. The affiliated groups branch out from the core group, and they, too, have subsidiary branches. Even as al Qaeda becomes increasingly dispersed and decentralized, the core group will remain central to the network. Moreover, the affiliates' relationships with associates mirror those of the core group, and some branches are starting to intertwine and put down their own roots. It will not be sufficient to target only the trunk or individual branches of the network. We must devise a strategy that can operate on the network as a whole and defeat it as a whole. Otherwise, it will grow back from whatever branches are left when the dust settles.

The group Osama bin Laden established in 1988 was one of many militant Islamist organizations that emerged from the *jihad* against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Bin Laden's group cooperated with others at the time, including the Taliban when it emerged in the mid-1990s. From the early 1990s, it was supporting efforts by militants returned from Afghanistan to wage a similar *jihad* in their native countries. Bin Laden's vision was to replicate the success story in Afghanistan across the Muslim world and to drive the West, especially the United States, out of Muslim lands.

Al Qaeda deployed emissaries to Muslim countries to support this vision in the 1990s. The then-developing al Qaeda network ran through the central leadership, which sought to maintain strict command and control over its operatives and operations; however, it also sought to facilitate the growth of like-minded groups. Al Qaeda documents outline regional "corps" that worked directly with local Islamist leaders either to encourage them to pursue *jihad* in their own country or to provide a direct line of communications to the senior leadership, which directed support for *jihad* by way of financing and training.¹

Bin Laden associates also sought to further his vision of spreading *jihad* across the Muslim world by establishing their own organizations. Qari Said al Jazairi, an Algerian active in Afghanistan in the

late 1980s, was instrumental in founding the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in Algeria in 1992, along with other Algerians who had trained in Afghanistan.^{i, 2} Said had split from Abdullah Anasⁱⁱ and set up a bin Laden-financed guesthouse, *Bayt al Mujahideen*, in Peshawar, Pakistan, in mid-1991.³ The guesthouse served as a training center for many Algerian militants, and Said returned to Algeria to support efforts at establishing the nascent GIA.ⁱⁱⁱ A GIA splinter group would go on to found the Salafist Group for Call and Combat, the precursor to al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. Similarly, Saifallah ben Hassine cofounded the al Qaeda-linked Tunisian Combatant Group from Khost, Afghanistan, in 2000. Hassine now heads Ansar al Sharia Tunisia.^{iv, 4}

The al Qaeda network, however, has had to adapt to stresses on the system. One of the most significant inflection points was in 2001 with the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and the loss of al Qaeda's sanctuary there. Many of the al Qaeda operatives active in other regions remained in place. Many of the al Qaeda members active in East Africa, for example, continued their activities in such countries as Somalia. These individuals include Talha al Sudani, Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, and Fazul Abdullah Mohamed, who continued to

i. Algeria's brutal response to the Islamist challenge killed many of the returnees from Afghanistan in the early 1990s. Those active in the GIA included Qari Said (killed November 1994), Tayyeb al Afghani (arrested and sentenced to death in 1992), Djafar al Afghani (also known as Mourad Sid Ahmed, killed February 1994), and Cherif Gousmi (killed September 1994).

ii. Abdullah Anas is an Algerian who went to Afghanistan in the early 1980s and served as an aide to Ahmed Shah Massoud.

iii. Qari Said al Jazairi was arrested shortly after his return to Algeria but escaped two years later. He was present at discussions that merged Algeria's Movement for an Islamic State, a wing of the Islamic Salvation Front, and the GIA. He was killed in November 1994.

iv. Saifallah ben Hassine, also known as Abu Iyadh (or Ayyad) al Tunisi, traveled to Afghanistan, where he met Osama bin Laden near Kandahar and founded the Tunisian Combatant Group with Tunisian Tarek Maaroufi. Saifallah ben Hassine is now the leader of Ansar al Sharia in Tunisia. Other members of the former Tunisian Combatant Group are also currently active in Ansar al Sharia in Tunisia.

work with successive Somali Islamist groups until their deaths.^{v, 5}

Other al Qaeda members regrouped in their native countries to carry out bin Laden's vision. Most notably, bin Laden's personal secretary, Nasser al Wahayshi, who spent four years with him in Afghanistan, is now the leader of al Qaeda's virulent affiliate in Yemen, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which merged al Qaeda's Yemeni and Saudi branches.⁶ Wahayshi fled Afghanistan after Tora Bora, spent two years in Iranian custody, and was then transferred to Yemen. He and other al Qaeda members led the resurgence of al Qaeda in Yemen after escaping in a February 2006 prison break.^{vi, 7}

Additional senior members and operatives in AQAP found their way from Afghanistan to Yemen. At least five members trained at al Qaeda's al Farouq camp near Kandahar, Afghanistan, including AQAP military commander Qasim al Raymi, AQAP spiritual leader Ibrahim Suleiman al Rubaish, operative (and brother-in-law of AQAP deputy leader Said al Shihri) Yousef al Shihri, and former AQAP members Jabir Jubran al Fayfi and Mohammed Said al Umdah.⁸ AQAP deputy leader Said al Shihri also spent time in Afghanistan.^{vii, 9}

What today is conceived of as "al Qaeda core," the leadership group based in Pakistan, is only a small section of the actual core al Qaeda network. Over the past two decades, the core al Qaeda group included these detached and geographically dispersed individuals who

v. Fazul Abdullah Mohamed is also known as Harun Fazul. Some members of the East Africa cell did leave, as evidenced by the death of Egyptian Mohsen Moussa Metwaly Atwa Dewedar (also known as Abdul Rahman al Muhajir and Mohammed K. A. al Namer) in Pakistan in 2006. The U.N. Security Council delisted Dewedar on July 2, 2012, from the al Qaeda sanctions list, citing his death as the reason. Sudani was killed in a January 23, 2007, airstrike on the Kenyan-Somali border. U.S. Special Operations Forces killed Saleh Nabhan near Barawe, Somalia, on September 14, 2009. Fazul Abdullah Mohamed was shot dead by a Somali government soldier at a checkpoint in Mogadishu, Somalia, the evening of June 7, 2011.

vi. Wahayshi fled Afghanistan in December 2001 and was arrested in Iran. He spent two years in an Iranian prison before being transferred to Yemen. There, he was held without charges until his escape.

vii. Shihri trained at Libyan Camp and also spent time in Mashhad, Iran, working as a travel facilitator for al Qaeda.

worked to support local organizations.^{viii, 10} Nearly all of AQAP's leadership should be considered part of this core group, based on shared experience in Afghanistan. Another member may be Algerian Mokhtar Belmokhtar, a former senior leader in al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) who claimed credit for the January 2013 attack on the In Amenas gas facility in Algeria. Belmokhtar trained in one of bin Laden's camps in Afghanistan and then returned to join the GIA in 1992.^{ix} He split from the GIA with the Salafist Group for Call and Combat and was a senior leader in AQIM.¹¹ Core al Qaeda members also supported Chechen rebel efforts against Russia, successfully contributing to the rise of Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus leader Doku Umarov. The al Qaeda senior leadership (AQSL) now primarily in Pakistan are those core group members who remained around Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan and Pakistan following the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, but AQSL does not fully constitute the core al Qaeda group.

Intercepted communications between AQSL and senior leaders within al Qaeda's affiliates reveal a time lag in AQSL's knowledge of world news and petitions for updates on developments in various areas of interest.

viii. Thomas Joscelyn, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and senior editor at the *Long War Journal*, makes a similar argument in prepared testimony for a hearing on "Global al-Qaeda: Affiliates, Objectives, and Futures Challenges before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade on July 18, 2013. He prefers to use the term "al Qaeda's General Command" to refer to the group headed by Ayman al Zawahiri. Joscelyn testified: "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." He goes on to cite the examples of Nasser al Wahayshi and other top AQAP leadership, Mohsen al Fadhli in Iran, and Abu Anas al Libi and Abd al Baset Azzouz in Libya, among others. (See endnote 10.)

ix. Mokhtar Belmokhtar announced a split from al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) but continues to command forces in the Sahel region. He is the leader of the militia responsible for the January 2013 attack at the In Amenas gas facility in Algeria and has also claimed credit for terrorist attacks targeting a French uranium mine and Nigerien military barracks in Niger in May 2013.

The extent of AQSL's command and control over the network's high-profile operations and affiliates' local strategies appears to have degraded over the course of the decade from the level at which it stood in the 1990s, but it did not break down completely. The continued centrality of AQSL in the network is demonstrated by the consistent stream of communications to and from the various regional affiliates at the time and AQSL's continued preference to send emissaries to various affiliates to move planned operations forward. Additionally, senior leaders of the affiliates did seek decisions from AQSL during this time, such as AQAP's suggestion of changing its leader, which was denied. Relationships began to develop among the affiliates as well, seen clearly in AQAP's 2010 training of an al Shabaab operative to improve the Somalia-based affiliate's capabilities.¹²

Another major inflection point occurred in 2011 with the outbreak of the Arab Spring and the death of Osama bin Laden. The regional al Qaeda affiliates seized the opportunities presented by the Arab Spring. Over the course of 2011, the affiliates began mirroring the operations of al Qaeda core: they developed relationships with local Islamist groups to support al Qaeda's broader mission. These local groups have supported the affiliates' activities and are therefore part of the al Qaeda network, even if they themselves have not expressed al Qaeda's intent to attack the United States and the West directly. Two affiliates—AQAP and al Qaeda in Iraq—fielded front groups, Ansar al Sharia in Yemen and Jabhat al Nusra in Syria, respectively. AQAP's Ansar al Sharia is its insurgent arm, fielded by the group to fight against the Yemeni government. Jabhat al Nusra, however, matured in Syria with the support of al Qaeda in Iraq, and al Qaeda *emir* Ayman al Zawahiri recognized the group as an affiliate in a letter dated May 23, 2013.¹³

The loss of al Qaeda's charismatic leader was a major blow to the network, but the smooth succession to Zawahiri, apparently in line with administrative terms laid out by bin Laden, ensured the continued vitality of AQSL.^{x, 14} Zawahiri maintains a central role in

the network, evidenced by his role in arbitrating disputes in the Levant and a petition from a senior al Shabaab member to mediate between leadership factions there.^{xi, 15} Even as the operations of the affiliates are increasingly independent of direct commands and support from al Qaeda core, it is unlikely that AQSL's importance in guiding the overall direction of the network will disappear.

As it stands today, the organizational mapping of the al Qaeda network resembles a tree. This model is depicted in figure A1.

The tree shape has been mentioned in al Qaeda leadership statements. Abu Abdul Illah Ahmed, also known as Ahmed Deghdegh, the head of AQIM's political committee and a member of its Council of Notables, described al Qaeda as a tree in a May 3, 2009, interview with his group's media wing. He said:

My brother, Islam in its greatness liberates minds and bodies . . . and jihad creates creativity and innovation... al-Qaeda is the university of jihad and a source of inspiration . . . and whoever does not realize these dimensions cannot understand the method of *al Qaeda*, which today, with grace from Allah, is like a good tree whose roots is in the land of dignity, Khorasan, its branches are all over the Muslim lands that shades every day more Muslims . . . and burns what hypocrites and infidels it reaches, so as to cleanse all the Muslim lands from Andalusia to China. [Emphasis added.]¹⁶

More recently in a March 2012 document recovered by the Associated Press in Timbuktu, Mali, AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel, also known as Abu Musab Abdul Wadud, used the tree metaphor to discuss spreading al Qaeda's ideology:

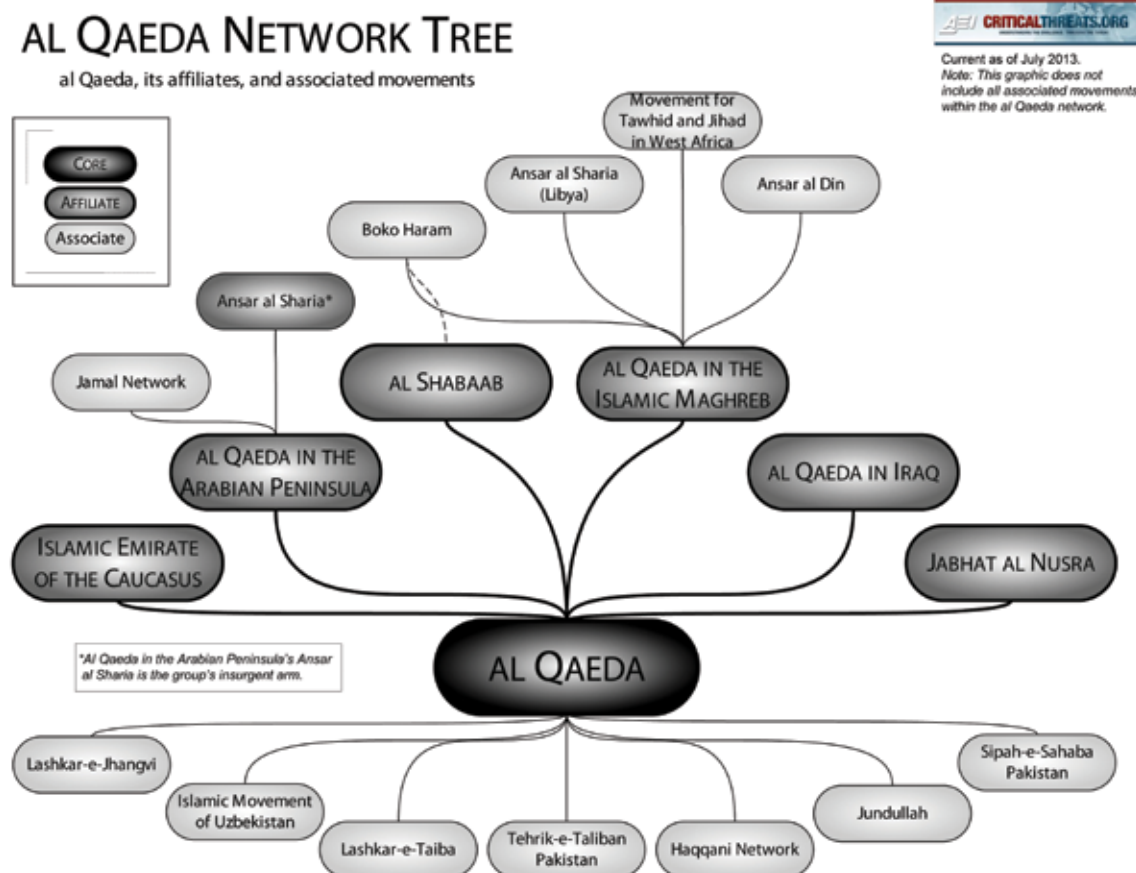
Abbottabad raid and is available through West Point's Combating Terrorism Center.

xi. Various appeals were made to Zawahiri to settle the dispute between al Qaeda in Iraq and Jabhat al Nusra that became public in April 2013. Senior al Shabaab leader Abu Bakr al Zayla'i, whom AEI's Critical Threats Project has identified as Ibrahim al Afghani (also known as Ibrahim Haji Jama Mead), wrote a 15-page letter to Ayman al Zawahiri appealing to him for intervention in Somalia. The Somalia-based Islamic World Issues Study Center published the letter, and it was made available on jihadist forums on April 6, 2013. (See endnote 15.)

x. The terms of succession are detailed in a letter from Osama bin Laden to Atiyah following the late May 2010 death of Mustafa Ahmed Muhammad Uthman Abu al Yazid, also known as Sheikh Said and Said al Masri. The letter was recovered in the May 2011

FIGURE A1

AL QAEDA NETWORK TREE: AL QAEDA, ITS AFFILIATES, AND ASSOCIATED MOVEMENTS



Note: The al Qaeda network tree displays the organizational relationships that run from al Qaeda core to the associates and to the affiliates. It does not depict affiliate-to-affiliate or associate-to-associate relationships. There are limited sources documenting the relationship between al Shabaab and Boko Haram, and it has not been confirmed. Boko Haram claimed to have had militants train in Somalia under al Shabaab in 2011. Source: AEI's Critical Threats Project

And if we can achieve this positive thing in even a limited amount, then even if the project fails later, it will be just enough that we will have *planted the first, good seed in this fertile soil and put pesticides and fertilizer on it, so that the tree will grow more quickly. We look forward to seeing this tree as it will be: stable and magnificent.* [Emphasis added.]¹⁷

The growth of the network from the core group led by Osama bin Laden to the more dispersed network today does not run counter to bin Laden's vision. Instead, it appears that the affiliates have assumed the role held by al Qaeda core in the sense that they, too,

have pursued relations with militant Islamist groups to spread al Qaeda's vision of *jihad* across Muslim lands. The organizational structure of al Qaeda—from the core group, to the affiliates, to the associates—remains an important component of the al Qaeda network, even as other components, such as the informal human network, influence the overall shape and direction of the network.

A successful strategy against al Qaeda will operate on the network as a whole. The affiliates do not draw their strength solely from the core group, which has been weakened, but have put down roots of their own. AQSL has encouraged such a development and

has advised the affiliates in nurturing relationships with local associates. The network today can survive the loss of major parts and has proven itself capable of reviving dying branches. Al Qaeda's affiliate in Iraq was near defeat in 2011 but has almost returned to the operational capacity it had in 2007.¹⁸ This understanding of the network's structure and resilience must be incorporated into any strategy devised to defeat al Qaeda.

Notes

1. References to the regional "corps" are found in recovered al Qaeda correspondence. See the original Arabic- and English-language documents, "The Five Letters to the African Corps," through the Combating Terrorism Center's Harmony Program. Available in Arabic: www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-five-letters-to-the-african-corps-original and translated into English: www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-five-letters-to-the-african-corps-english-translation. For information on al Qaeda's outreach to Somali militant Islamists groups, read Clint Watts, Jacob Shapiro, and Vahid Brown, "Al-Qaida's (Mis)Adventures in the Horn of Africa," Combating Terrorism Center, July 2, 2007, www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Al-Qaidas-MisAdventures-in-the-Horn-of-Africa.pdf.

2. Camille Tawil, *Brothers in Arms: The Story of al-Qa'ida and the Arab Jihadists*, trans. Robin Bray (London: Saqi Books, 2010), 70–82; Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 41; Cherif Ouazani, "Des Emirs plus Sanguinaires les Uns que les Autres," *Jeune Afrique*, January 17, 2005 [French], www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/LIN16015desmisertua0/.

3. For an account of the split between Anas and Said, see pages 22 and 23 of Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*.

4. Frida Dahmani, "Tunisia: Abou Iyadh, l'Ennemi Public Numéro Un," *Jeune Afrique*, October 1, 2012 [French], www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/JA2698p044-048.xml0/; UN Security Council Committee 1267/1989, "Narrative Summaries of Reasons for Listing QE.T.90.02. Tunisian Combatant Group," April 7, 2011, www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQE09002E.shtml.

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Time, November 28, 2007, www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1689207,00.html; "FOXWIRE Navy Seals Kill Wanted Terrorist in Somali Raid," Fox News, September 14, 2009, www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,550100,00.html; Nelly Lahoud, "Beware of Imitators: al-Qa'ida through the Lens of Its Confidential Secretary," Combating Terrorism Center, June 4, 2012, www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/beware-of-imitators-al-qaida-through-the-lens-of-its-confidential-secretary.

6. Gregory D. Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, al-Qaeda, and America's War in Arabia* (New York: Norton, 2013), 57–58.

7. Robert F. Worth, "Is Yemen the Next Afghanistan?" *New York Times Magazine*, July 6, 2010, www.nytimes.com/2010/07/11/magazine/11Yemen-t.html; Johnsen, *The Last Refuge*, 163.

8. See April 24, 2012, email from the Embassy of Yemen, Washington, DC, "High Value Target Killed in Yemen." The email referenced al Umdah's time at al Farouq camp with bin Laden in Afghanistan. Robert F. Worth, "Senior Qaeda Figures Killed in Attack, Yemen Says," *New York Times*, January 16, 2010, www.nytimes.com/2010/01/16/world/middleeast/16yemen.html. Also see declassified Administrative Review Board Summaries from Yousef al Shihri's, Jabir Jubran al Fayfi's, and Ibrahim Suleiman al Rubaish's time at Guantanamo Bay prison referencing their time in Afghanistan: "Yussef Mohammed Mubarak al Shihri," *New York Times* and NPR Guantanamo Docket, <http://projects.nytimes.com/guantanamo/detainees/114-yussef-mohammed-mubarak-al-shihri/documents/1>; "Jabir Jubran al Fayfi," *New York Times* and NPR Guantanamo Docket, <http://projects.nytimes.com/guantanamo/detainees/188-jabir-jubran-al-fayfi/documents/1>; "Ibrahim Sulayman Muhammad Arbaysh," *New York Times* and NPR Guantanamo Docket, <http://projects.nytimes.com/guantanamo/detainees/192-ibrahim-sulayman-muhammad-arbaysh/documents/1>.

9. See declassified Administrative Review Board Summaries from Said al Shihri's time at Guantanamo Bay prison referencing his time in Afghanistan: "Said Ali al Shihri," *New York Times* and NPR Guantanamo Docket, <http://projects.nytimes.com/guantanamo/detainees/372-said-ali-al-shihri/documents/5>.

10. Prepared testimony by Thomas Joscelyn, "Global al-Qaeda: Affiliates, Objectives, and Futures Challenges," before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, July 18, 2013,

<http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA18/20130718/101155/HHRG-113-FA18-Wstate-JoscelynT-20130718.pdf>.

11. Stephen Harmon, "From GPSC to AQIM: The Evolution of an Algerian Islamist Terrorist Group into an al-Qa'ida Affiliate and Its Implications for the Sahara-Sahel Region," *Association of Concerned Africa Scholars Bulletin* 85, (June 2010), <http://concernedafricascholars.org/docs/bulletin85harmon.pdf>.

12. FBI, New York Field Office, "Guilty Plea Unsealed in New York Involving Ahmed Warsame, a Senior Terrorist Leader and Liaison between al Shabaab and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, for Providing Material Support to Both Terrorist Organizations," press release, March 25, 2013, www.fbi.gov/newyork/press-releases/2013/guilty-plea-unsealed-in-new-york-involving-ahmed-warsame-a-senior-terrorist-leader-and-liaison-between-al-shabaab-and-al-qaeda-in-the-arabian-peninsula-for-providing-material-support-to-both-terrorist-organizations.

13. *Al Jazeera* published a copy of this letter on June 9, 2013. It is available in Arabic here: www.aljazeera.net/news/

[pages/a5a7d33e-3c9f-4706-b070-e358b5e67236](http://www.aljazeera.net/news/pages/a5a7d33e-3c9f-4706-b070-e358b5e67236).

14. Declassified letter (SOCOM-2012-0000019) available through the Combating Terrorism Center. The Arabic original is available here: www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/socom-20120000019-arabic and the English translation here: www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/socom-2012-0000019-english.

15. "Shabaab Official Speaks Out Against Leader, Appeals to Zawahiri for Help," SITE Intelligence Group, April 6, 2013. Available by subscription through www.siteintelgroup.com.

16. "AQIM Audio Interview Political Committee Head," SITE Intelligence Group, May 4, 2009. Available by subscription through www.siteintelgroup.com.

17. "Mali: al-Qaida's Sahara Playbook," Associated Press, February 14, 2013, http://hosted.ap.org/specials/interactives/_international/_pdfs/al-qaida-manifesto.pdf.

18. Jessica Lewis, "Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent: The Breaking the Walls Campaign," Institute for the Study of War, forthcoming.

GLOSSARY

INDIVIDUALS IN THE AL QAEDA NETWORK

The following is a glossary of individuals mentioned in the report and its appendices. Individuals are listed in alphabetical order. Organizational affiliations and last known whereabouts are provided next to each name. Known aliases have also been provided, in addition to brief biographical information.

Abbreviations Used:

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula	AQAP
Al Qaeda in Iraq	AQI
Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb	AQIM
Egyptian Islamic Jihad	EIJ
Armed Islamic Group	GIA
Libyan Islamic Fighting Group	LIFG

Abd al Baset Azzouz (al Qaeda, Libya)

Al Qaeda operative in Libya. Azzouz has reportedly been close to al Qaeda *emir* Ayman al Zawahiri since 1980 and traveled to Afghanistan in the 1990s. Zawahiri is said to have sent an operative, identified as “AA” and believed to be Azzouz, to Libya in mid-2011. Azzouz had been detained in Great Britain in 2006 on suspicion of terrorism and left in 2009 for the Afghanistan-Pakistan region.¹

Abd al Rahman al Maghrebi (al Qaeda, Pakistan)

AKA: *Said Bahaji, Zouheir al Maghribi, Mohamed Abbattay*

Deputy head of al Qaeda’s media committee. Maghrebi was a member of the al Qaeda cell in Hamburg, Germany, led by Mohamed Atta, one of the al Qaeda cells involved in the 9/11 attacks. He left Germany on September 3, 2001, and went to an al Qaeda camp in Afghanistan. He is believed to be in Pakistan. He reportedly is a speaker for al Qaeda’s media organization, al Sahab, and is responsible for al Sahab’s technical infrastructure.²

Abdelmalek Droukdel (AQIM, Algeria)

AKA: *Abu Mus’ab al Wadud*

Emir of AQIM. Droukdel became the leader of the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC) in August 2004, which changed its name to AQIM in January 2007. He was previously a member of the Armed Islamic Group.

Abdullah Anas (granted political asylum in England)

AKA: *Boudjema Bounoua*

One of the first Arabs to join the jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan in 1984. Anas, an Algerian, met Osama bin Laden in Islamabad, Pakistan. He became Ahmed Shah Massoud’s deputy, fighting with him in northern Afghanistan. Anas disagreed with al Qaeda’s ideology.³

Abou Zeid (AQIM, d. February 25, 2013)

AKA: *Abdel Hamid al Sufi; Amor Mohamed Ghadir; Abid Hammadou*

Late leader of AQIM’s Tareq ibn Ziyad Brigade and close associate of Abdelmalek Droukdel. He was responsible for multiple kidnappings in the Sahel region. Abou Zeid was killed during a French and Chadian military operation in north Mali.⁴

Abu Abdul Illah Ahmed (AQIM, Algeria)

AKA: *Sheikh Ahmed Abu Abdul Illah al Jjeli al Jaza’iri*

Director of AQIM’s media organization, al Andalus Foundation for Media Production, and head of the group’s political committee. He is also a member of AQIM’s *shura* council and its council of notables.⁵

Abu Abdullah al Muhajir (al Shabaab, Somalia)

Al Qaeda's representative in Somalia as of fall 2011. He appeared publicly at an al Shabaab ceremony to distribute aid from al Qaeda. He may be the same as Jihad Serwan al Mostafa, who includes this name among his aliases and is an operative in Somalia. Jihad Serwan al Mostafa, an American not of Somali descent, was indicted on charges of providing material support to al Shabaab in October 2009. He left for Somalia in 2005.⁶

Abu Anas al Libi (al Qaeda and LIFG, unknown)

AKA: *Anas al Sabai, Nazih Abdul Hamid al Rughay*

Senior al Qaeda operative. He is an expert in surveillance operations and with computers. He relocated to Khartoum, Sudan, with Osama bin Laden in 1992. He has been indicted in the U.S. for his role in the 1998 East Africa embassy bombings. He joined the LIFG in the 1990s before he moved to Qatar. He then moved to Manchester, England, but fled after police raided his home in 2000. He is believed to have returned to Afghanistan and then to have fled to Iran. He was sighted in Tripoli, Libya, in November 2012, but this has not been confirmed.⁷

Abu Bakr al Baghdadi (AQI, Syria)

AKA: *Abu Dua, Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim al Badri al Sammarai*

Emir of AQI. Baghdadi is responsible for managing large-scale operations in Iraq. He changed the name of AQI to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and is now based out of Syria.⁸

Abu Khalid al Suri (al Qaeda, Syria)

Al Qaeda's representative in Syria. Little is known about him except that Ayman al Zawahiri knows him well, indicated by Zawahiri's description of al Suri as "the best of men we had known among the

Mujahidin." Thomas Joscelyn, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and senior editor at the *Long War Journal*, posited that al Suri may be Mohamed Bahayah, an al Qaeda operative who was released from a Syrian prison during the Syrian rebellion. Bahayah is also known as Abu Khalid al Suri and has been described in Western intelligence assessments as a mid-level operative. Bahayah had been involved in plots in Europe in the 1990s.⁹

Abu Khayr al Masri (al Qaeda, Iran)

AKA: *Mohamed Abdullah Hasan Abu al Khayr, Abdallah al Halabi, Mohannad al Jeddawi, Abdallah al Makki, Abdul Latif*

Senior al Qaeda operative. He trained with al Qaeda in the mid 1990s and is known to have recruited at least one operative. He is a senior aide to Ayman al Zawahiri and served in al Qaeda's Black Guard, which provided a security detail for Osama bin Laden and other senior leadership. He is on al Qaeda's finance committee and plays an active role in al Qaeda's network in Iran. A jihadist reported that Mohamed Abdullah Hasan Abu al Khayr had been killed in July 2011, but there has been no confirmation.¹⁰

Abu Laith al Libi (al Qaeda and LIFG, d. January 29, 2008)

Late senior leader in al Qaeda. Abu Laith al Libi fought in Afghanistan in the early 1990s. He returned to Libya in 1994 to fight Muammar Qaddafi's government. There, he became the leader of the LIFG and announced its merger with al Qaeda in November 2007. He also served as a spokesman for al Qaeda. Abu Laith al Libi was one of al Qaeda's senior commanders in Afghanistan and has been linked to multiple bombings, including the February 2007 suicide attack at Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan. He was killed in a drone strike in North Waziristan, Pakistan, on January 29, 2008.¹¹

Abu Muhammad al Julani (Jabhat al Nusra, Syria)

AKA: *Sheikh al Fatih*

Emir of Jabhat al Nusra. Little else is known about his history.¹²

Abu Muhammad al Masri (al Qaeda, Iran)

AKA: *Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah el Alfi, Abu Mariam, Saleh*

Senior leader in al Qaeda. An Egyptian, he went to Afghanistan in the late 1980s and was one of the 480 Arab *mujahideen* who traveled with Osama bin Laden to Sudan. He is one of the planners of the 1998 East Africa embassy bombings. He is believed to be in Iran.¹³

Abu Mus'ab al Zarqawi (AQI, d. June 7, 2006)

AKA: *Ahmad Fadhil Nazal al Khalayleh*

Late founder and *emir* of AQI, which changed its name from Jama'at al Tawhid wa al Jihad. Zarqawi traveled to Afghanistan in 1989, where he met Osama bin Laden. He was arrested and imprisoned in Jordan in 1992 after founding Jund al Sham, a local militant Islamist group. Zarqawi returned to the Afghanistan-Pakistan region and ran a training camp near Herat, Afghanistan, before going back to Jordan. He would return again to fight in Afghanistan in 2001. Zarqawi was killed in a targeted strike in Hibhib, Iraq.¹⁴

Abu Yahya al Libi (al Qaeda and LIFG, d. June 5, 2012)

AKA: *Hassan Mohamed Abu Bakr Qaid, Younis al Sahrawi, Abu al Widdan*

Late senior operative in al Qaeda and described as al Qaeda's second-in-command. Libi escaped from

a U.S. military detention center at Bagram Airfield outside Kabul, Afghanistan, in July 2005. Also a cleric, he had been active in the LIFG in the 1990s. He was killed in a drone strike in Hassu Khel village in North Waziristan, Pakistan.¹⁵

Abu Zayd al Kuwaiti (al Qaeda, d. December 6, 2012)

AKA: *Khalid bin Abdel Rahman al Hussainan*

Late senior leader in al Qaeda and member of al Qaeda's religious committee. Abu Zayd al Kuwaiti succeeded Abu Yahya al Libi as al Qaeda's religious scholar. He appeared in several al Sahab-released videos. He was killed in a drone strike in North Waziristan, Pakistan, on December 6, 2012.¹⁶

Abu Zubair Adil al Abab (AQAP, d. October 2012)

AKA: *Abu Waqar al Athari*

Late *shari'a* official in AQAP. He contributed to AQAP's publications and gave religious justifications for the group's activities. Abab may have studied with Mohamed Jamal Abu Ahmed in 1996.¹⁷

Adam Gadahn (al Qaeda, Pakistan)

AKA: *Adam Yahiye Gadahn, Adam Pearlman, Abu Suhayb al Amriki, Azzam the American*

American member of al Qaeda. Adam Gadahn moved to Pakistan in 1998 from the United States. He first appeared wearing a disguise in an October 27, 2004, video in which he praised Osama bin Laden and threatened the United States. Gadahn first showed his face in a July 7, 2006, al Qaeda-released video that commemorated the July 7, 2005, London bombings. He continues to appear in al Qaeda videos, speaking both English and Arabic, and is believed to be in Pakistan.¹⁸

Adnan Shukrijumah (al Qaeda, Pakistan)

AKA: *Adnan Gulshair el Shukrijumah, Abu Arif, Jaffar al Tayyer, Hamad*

Senior operative in al Qaeda believed to be involved in the group's external operations planning. Shukrijumah lived in the U.S. for over 15 years before he left to train for *jihād* in Afghanistan in the late 1990s. He has been named as a conspirator in the 2009 plot to attack New York's subway system.¹⁹

Ahmed Abdi Godane (al Shabaab, Somalia)

AKA: *Ahmed Abdi aw Mohamed Godane, Mukhtar Abdirahman Abu Zubair*

Emir of al Shabaab in Somalia. Godane reportedly received military training in Afghanistan in the late 1990s.²⁰

Ahmed Abdulkadir Warsame (al Shabaab, incarcerated in the U.S.)

AKA: *Khattab, Farah, Abdi Halim Mohammed Fara, Fareh Jama Ali Mohammed*

Late senior operational commander in al Shabaab. He fought with the group from at least 2007, and beginning in 2009, he sought to train others on explosives. Warsame received explosives and paramilitary training at an AQAP camp in Yemen between 2010 and his April 19, 2011, detention.²¹

Anwar al Awlaki (AQAP, d. September 30, 2011)

Late senior leader in AQAP. Awlaki, a radical Yemeni-American cleric, was investigated by the 9/11 Commission for his ties to two of the hijackers, who attended his mosque in San Diego. He had previously been investigated by the FBI for his ties to terrorism. Awlaki spent about two years in London before moving to Yemen in 2004. He was arrested there in 2006 and was released after 18 months. Awlaki headed AQAP's English-language outreach

efforts through the publication of the Internet magazine *Inspire* and played an operative role in the December 25, 2009, attack on the United States. Awlaki was killed in a September 30, 2011, drone strike in al Jawf, Yemen.²²

Atiyah Abd al Rahman (al Qaeda and former LIFG, d. August 22, 2011)

AKA: *Sheikh Mahmud, Jamal Ibrahim Ashtiwi al Misrati, Atiyah Allah, Atiyah al Libi*

Late al Qaeda senior operational commander. Atiyah had been a senior leader in the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group before becoming part of al Qaeda's senior leadership. He was also part of al Qaeda's financing and facilitation network that ran through Iran. He provided guidance to Libyan rebels fighting Muammar Qaddafi in 2011. Atiyah was killed by a drone strike in North Waziristan, Pakistan.²³

Ayman al Zawahiri (al Qaeda, Pakistan)

AKA: *Abdul Muaz, Abu Abdullah, Abu Mohamed Nur al Deen, Abu Fatima, Ahmed Fuad Salim*

Emir of al Qaeda. Zawahiri had been the operational and military leader of EIJ. He and bin Laden operated in Sudan at the same time, and Zawahiri began moving his group to Afghanistan under bin Laden in the late 1990s. Zawahiri became the deputy leader of al Qaeda in June 2001, when EIJ and al Qaeda formally merged. Zawahiri renewed his pledge of allegiance to Taliban leader Mullah Mohamed Omar in his June 8, 2011, eulogy for Osama bin Laden.²⁴

Cherif Gousmi (GIA, d. September 26, 1994)

AKA: *Abu Abdallah Ahmed*

Leader of the GIA from March 1994 until his death. He trained in the Sahara camps in 1992 and was head of the GIA's religious committee prior to his leadership position.²⁵

Djafar al Afghani (GIA, d. February 26, 1994)

AKA: *Mourad Si Ahmed, Seif Allah*

Leader of the GIA from August 1993 until his death. Djafar al Afghani spent two years with Hezb-e-Islami in Afghanistan and fought in Khost, Afghanistan in 1991. He was present at the founding meeting of the GIA.²⁶

Faisal Shahzad (Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan–associated, incarcerated in the U.S.)

Times Square bomber. He is incarcerated in the United States after having pled guilty to charges against him. Shahzad received training from TTP-affiliated trainers in Waziristan, Pakistan, before he attempted to detonate a car bomb in Times Square on May 1, 2010.²⁷

Fazul Abdullah Mohamed (al Qaeda in East Africa, d. June 7, 2011)

AKA: *Harun Fazul, Abu Seif al Sudani, Abu Aisha, Abu Luqman, Abu al Fazul al Qamari*

Late senior al Qaeda operative in East Africa. Fazul Abdullah Mohamed joined al Qaeda in 1991 after leaving the Comoros Islands in October 1990 to study in Pakistan. He was active in East Africa by 1996. He was one of the planners of the 1998 East Africa embassy bombings and of the 2002 bombing of the Paradise Hotel in Mombasa, Kenya. He participated in a series of al Qaeda meetings with Somali Islamist leaders in 2006 and, after the formation of al Shabaab, remained in Somalia under the group's protection. He was allegedly planning another series of attacks when he was killed at a Mogadishu checkpoint on June 7, 2011.²⁸

Hamza al Ghamdi (al Qaeda, Pakistan)

Senior facilitator for al Qaeda *emir* Ayman al Zawahiri. He was also named as a member of al Qaeda in a recovered al Qaeda document.²⁹

Ibrahim al Afghani (al Shabaab, d. June 19 or 20, 2013)

AKA: *Abu Bakr al Zayla'i, Ibrahim Haji Jama Mead*

Late senior leader in al Shabaab and one of the original founders of the group. Afghani earned his moniker from experience fighting in Afghanistan against the Soviets in the 1980s and against the Americans in 2001. He published an open letter to al Qaeda *emir* Ayman al Zawahiri in April 2013 criticizing al Shabaab's *emir* Ahmed Abdi Godane, with whom he had previously been closely aligned. He was part of a faction of al Shabaab's senior leadership that sought to protect foreign fighters in Somalia. Afghani was killed in a shootout with al Shabaab militants.³⁰

Ibrahim Suleiman al Rubaish (AQAP, Yemen)

AKA: *Sheikh Ibrahim Suleiman Mohammed al Rubaish*

AQAP's spiritual leader and member of the group's *shari'a* committee. Rubaish had trained at al Qaeda's al Farouq training camp and fought in Tora Bora. He was captured near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and transferred to Guantanamo Bay. Rubaish was transferred to Saudi Arabia on December 13, 2006, and went through the Saudi Arabian rehabilitation program. He escaped to Yemen and reconnected with al Qaeda. Saudi Arabia named him on a list of most-wanted terrorists in February 2009.³¹

Iyad ag Ghali (Ansar al Din, Mali)

AKA: *Sheikh Abu Fadl*

Leader of Ansar al Din, a militant Islamist group in Mali, and associated with AQIM. Ansar al Din has received support from AQIM, and recovered AQIM documents cite directives given to "Sheikh Abu Fadl." He has served as an intermediary for the release of hostages held by AQIM and its predecessor, the Salafist Group for Call and Combat.³²

Jabir Jubran al Fayfi (AQAP, surrendered to Saudi intelligence in October 2010)

AKA: *Abu Ibrahim, Abu Jafer al Ansari*

Former senior commander in AQAP. He fought in Afghanistan in 2001 and met with al Qaeda members in Tora Bora. He was captured leaving Afghanistan and transferred to Guantanamo Bay. Fayfi was transferred to Saudi Arabia on December 13, 2006, and completed the Saudi Arabian rehabilitation program. He was named in the Saudi Arabian February 2009 most-wanted list. He turned himself in to Saudi intelligence in October 2010 and reportedly provided details on the October 2010 parcel plot from AQAP.³³

Mahmud Nidal (d. May 19, 2012)

AKA: *Makhmud Mansur Nidal*

Late fighter in the Chechen insurgency. Nidal joined the insurgency in December 2011. He was killed in a firefight in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan, Russia. He may have been in contact with Tamerlan Tsarnaev, who was involved in the Boston Marathon bombing in April 2013.³⁴

Mohamed Jamal Abu Ahmed (EIJ and the Jamal Network, incarcerated in Egypt)

AKA: *Abu Ahmad al Masri; Mohamed Jamal al Kashaf*

Founder of a network in Egypt (the Jamal Network) and financier of the 2012 Nasr City cell before his detention. Mohamed Jamal traveled to Afghanistan in the late 1980s and then trained there and in Sudan in the 1990s with the Egyptian Islamic Jihad. He was arrested in Egypt in 2002 and then released during the course of 2011. It was after this that Mohamed Jamal reached out to the Yemenis he knew in AQAP (Nasser al Wahayshi, Adil al Abab, and Qasim al Raymi) for support for his group.³⁵

Mohammed Merah (d. March 22, 2012)

French gunman who shot dead seven people, claiming to have ties to al Qaeda. He is known to have traveled to Afghanistan in March 2011, and prior to that, he made hundreds of phone calls to countries that included Egypt, Morocco, Kenya, and Saudi Arabia. Western intelligence also linked two Internet addresses activated in Miramshah, a Taliban and al Qaeda stronghold in North Waziristan, Pakistan, to Merah in September 2011.³⁶

Mohammed Said al Umdah (AQAP, d. April 22, 2012)

AKA: *Abu Gharib al Taizi, Mohammed Said al Umdah al Makkani, Mohamed Sa'd Ali Hazan al Umda*

Late senior commander in AQAP. Mohammed Said al Umdah trained in Afghanistan at the al Qaeda-run al Farouq camp. He was charged in Yemen for his involvement in the 2002 attack on the French oil tanker the *Limburg* in 2005. He escaped from a Sana'a prison in February 2006, along with Nasser al Wahayshi and Qasim al Raymi. He was killed in an airstrike in Ma'rib, Yemen, on April 22, 2012.³⁷

Mohsen al Fadhli (al Qaeda, Iran)

AKA: *Abu Majid Samiyah, Mohsen Fadil Ayid Ashur al Fadhli*

Head of al Qaeda's Iran-based network. Mohsen al Fadhli fought in Chechnya and Afghanistan with al Qaeda, helped finance the October 2002 attack on the *MV Limburg* in Yemen, and supported al Qaeda's operations in Iraq. He is wanted in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United States on terrorism charges. Fadhli was appointed leader of al Qaeda's Iran-based network in late 2011 or early 2012 and has allegedly assisted al Qaeda in moving operatives through Iran and Turkey into Europe, North Africa, and Syria.³⁸

Mohsen Moussa Metwaly Atwa Dewedar (al Qaeda, d. April 2006)

AKA: *Abdel Rahman al Muhajir, Mohammed K.A. al Namer*

Late explosives expert in al Qaeda. Dewedar was a member of al Qaeda from at least 1990 and trained operatives on explosives in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Sudan. He is believed to have been operating in Somalia between 1990 and 1995. He participated in planning the 1998 East Africa embassy bombings. Dewedar was killed by a Pakistani helicopter attack in North Waziristan, Pakistan.³⁹

Mokhtar Belmokhtar (split from AQIM, Sahel region)

AKA: *Khaled Abu el Abbas; Mr. Marlboro, Belaouer the One Eyed*

Leader of the “Signers-in-Blood” Brigade (*katibat al muwaqqi’un biddam*) and senior leader in AQIM before splitting from the group in December 2012. Belmokhtar trained in Afghanistan in the early 1990s and also allegedly spent time in Yemen. He returned to Algeria and joined the Armed Islamic Group in late 1992 and was part of the faction that split to establish the Salafist Group for Call and Combat, which would become AQIM. Belmokhtar has been successively demoted in AQIM following differences with the *emir*, Abdelmalek Droukdel. Since Belmokhtar’s split from AQIM, his group has conducted at least two major attacks, including one on a gas facility in In Amenas, Algeria in January 2013 and a coordinated attack on a French uranium mine and Nigerien military barracks in Niger, conducted with the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa.⁴⁰

Mullah Omar (Quetta Shura Taliban, Pakistan)

Leader of the Quetta Shura Taliban. He fought the Soviets in Afghanistan and then founded a madrassa in Kandahar, Afghanistan, in 1992. He started the Taliban movement in 1994 from there, and in 1996,

he took on the title *emir al mu’mineen* (Commander of the Faithful). Mullah Omar is believed to be directing the insurgency in Afghanistan from Quetta, Pakistan. Osama bin Laden and his successor, Ayman al Zawahiri, have sworn *bayat* to Mullah Omar.⁴¹

Nasser al Wahayshi (AQAP, Yemen)

AKA: *Abu Basir Abdul Karim al Wahayshi; Nasser Abdul Karim Abdullah al Wahayshi*

Emir of AQAP. Wahayshi went to Afghanistan in the late 1990s and then served as a personal secretary for Osama bin Laden until 2001, when he was arrested in Iran fleeing Afghanistan. Iran extradited Wahayshi to Yemen in 2003, and he and 22 other al Qaeda members, including Qasim al Raymi, escaped from a Sana’a prison in February 2006. In June 2007, he was named the head of al Qaeda in Yemen, and in January 2009, he appeared in the video announcing the establishment of AQAP, a merger between the Yemeni and Saudi al Qaeda branches.⁴²

Nidal Hasan (AQAP-associated, incarcerated in the U.S.)

AKA: *AbduWali, Major Nidal Malik Hasan, the “Fort Hood Shooter”*

U.S. army psychiatrist who opened fire on troops in the Fort Hood deployment center on November 5, 2009. Hasan visited Anwar al Awlaki’s website on December 17, 2008, and sent a message to Awlaki, which was the beginning of a series of emails that continued until June 16, 2009. Awlaki responded twice to Hasan.⁴³

Osama bin Laden (al Qaeda, d. May 2, 2011)

AKA: *Abu Abdullah, Zamarai*

Late founder and *emir* of al Qaeda. Bin Laden went to Pakistan in 1979, where he worked with Abdullah Azzam and others to help the *mujahideen* fight the Soviets in Afghanistan. He founded the Maktab

al Khidamat (Office of Services), which helped move Arab fighters and funding into Afghanistan, with Azzam. In 1988, bin Laden founded al Qaeda to promote his vision of bringing about governance by *shari'a* in Muslim lands through *jihad*. Bin Laden refined the strategy to achieve this objective over time, and in 1998, issued a *fatwa*, religious order, calling killing Americans and their allies a religious obligation and individual duty (*fard 'ayn*) for every Muslim. Bin Laden is among those responsible for the 1998 East Africa embassy bombings, the *USS Cole* bombing, and the 9/11 attacks. He continued to plan and facilitate attacks targeting Americans until his death in Abbottabad, Pakistan.⁴⁴

Qari Said al Jazairi (GIA, d. November 1994)

Osama bin Laden's son-in-law who was instrumental in bringing together the Armed Islamic Group in 1992. Qari Said was an Algerian who was in Afghanistan in the late 1980s. He returned to Algeria in 1992 and was arrested shortly thereafter, but escaped two years later. He was present at discussions that merged Algeria's Movement for an Islamic State, a wing of the Islamic Salvation Front, and the GIA. He was killed in November 1994.⁴⁵

Qasim al Raymi (AQAP, Yemen)

AKA: *Abu Hurayrah al Sand'ani, Abu Ammar*

Military commander of AQAP. Raymi trained at al Farouq camp in Afghanistan in the late 1990s and reportedly met Osama bin Laden there. He was arrested in Yemen on terrorism charges in 2002, but escaped on February 3, 2006, along with Nasser al Wahayshi and 21 other al Qaeda members. Raymi was a member of the cell involved in a July 2007 terrorist attack in Yemen and has continued to be operationally involved in attacks, and he appeared in AQAP's founding video in January 2009. Raymi is known for his ability to recruit new operatives and is a member of AQAP's senior leadership.⁴⁶

Richard Reid (al Qaeda, incarcerated in the U.S.)

AKA: *Abdul Ra'uff, Abdel Rahim, the "Shoe Bomber"*

Attempted to detonate an explosive device hidden in his shoe aboard American Airlines Flight 63 on December 22, 2001. It is believed Reid, who is British, spent time at a *madrasa* (religious school) in Pakistan in the late 1990s and that he attended the al Qaeda-run training camp Khalden, outside Kabul, Afghanistan. *Wall Street Journal* reporters in Kabul discovered a cache of files on a laptop detailing the travel accounts of Abdul Ra'uff, which matched trips taken by Reid.⁴⁷

Said al Masri (al Qaeda and former EIJ, d. May 21, 2010)

AKA: *Mustafa Ahmed Mohamed Uthman Abu al Yazid, Sheikh Said*

Al Qaeda's commander in Afghanistan and operative involved in the 9/11 attacks and a member of the EIJ. He went to Afghanistan in 1988 and became one of al Qaeda's founding members. He was al Qaeda's chief financial officer, was a member of the *shura* council, and maintained direct relations with both bin Laden and Zawahiri over the years. He was killed in a drone strike in North Waziristan, Pakistan, on May 21, 2010.⁴⁸

Said al Shihri (AQAP, d. June 2013)

AKA: *Abu Sufyan al Azdi, Abu Osama, Abu Sayyaf, Nuraddin Afghani Azibk, Said Ali Jabir al Kathim al Shihri, Salahuddin, Abu Sufian Kadhdhaab Matrook*

Late deputy leader of AQAP. Shihri left Saudi Arabia for Afghanistan after September 11, 2001, and was captured in Pakistan in December 2001. Shihri trained at the Libyan Camp north of Kabul, Afghanistan, in October of 2001 and also served as a travel facilitator in Mashhad, Iran. He was transferred from Guantanamo to Saudi Arabia on November 9, 2007, and after completing the rehabilitation

program, escaped to Yemen. Shihri appeared on a most-wanted terrorist list from Saudi Arabia in February 2009 shortly after he appeared in the video announcing AQAP's establishment. Shihri was killed in a drone strike in Yemen, likely in June 2013.⁴⁹

Saif al Adel (al Qaeda, Iran)

AKA: *Mohamed Ibrahim Makkawi, Omar al Somali*

Senior leader in al Qaeda and believed to be in Iran. Saif al Adel traveled to Afghanistan in the 1980s to fight the Soviets. He is believed to have trained Somalis in Mogadishu ahead of the 1993 Battle for Mogadishu (Black Hawk Down), is suspected of involvement in the 1998 East Africa embassy bombings, and is linked to the 9/11 attacks. He also served as bin Laden's security chief.⁵⁰

Saifallah ben Hassine (Ansar al Sharia Tunisia, Tunisia)

AKA: *Abu Iyadh al Tunisi*

Leader of Ansar al Sharia in Tunisia. Hassine traveled to Afghanistan, where he met Osama bin Laden near Kandahar and founded the Tunisian Combatant Group with Tunisian Tarek Maaroufi in 2000. He helped organize the assassination of Ahmed Shah Massoud in September 2001. Hassine was arrested in Turkey in 2003 and extradited to Tunisia. He received amnesty in 2011 after the fall of the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia. He then founded Ansar al Sharia Tunisia.⁵¹

Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan (al Qaeda in East Africa, d. September 14, 2009)

AKA: *Abu Yusuf, Yusuf al Tanzani, Said Hassan Hajj*

Late al Qaeda operative in East Africa who received shelter from al Shabaab. Nabhan was wanted by the United States for his planning role in the 2002 Paradise Hotel bombing in Mombasa, Kenya, and for links to the 1998 East Africa embassy bombings. He is believed to have received shelter in Somalia and

was the target of a U.S. cruise missile strike in March 2008. Nabhan was killed outside of Barawe, Somalia, in a U.S. special forces operation.⁵²

Shehzad Tanweer (d. July 7, 2005)

One of the July 7 London bombers. Shehzad Tanweer traveled to Karachi, Pakistan, in November 2004 and may have been in Pakistan at the end of 2003. He may have met with a leader of Jaish-e-Mohammad. He appeared in an al Qaeda video released on the one-year anniversary of the bombings.⁵³

Sulaiman Abu Ghaith (al Qaeda, incarcerated in the U.S.)

AKA: *Suleiman Jassem Suleiman Ali Abu Ghaith*

Al Qaeda spokesman. He is on trial in the U.S. for his role in al Qaeda. Abu Ghaith fought in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the summer of 1994 and was banned from preaching in his mosque in Kuwait because he talked outside of the officially approved themes. He went to Afghanistan in 2000 and is married to Fatima, one of Osama bin Laden's daughters. Abu Ghaith appeared in the video statement with bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri following the 9/11 attacks. He has served as a spokesman for al Qaeda and a recruiter for the group. Abu Ghaith fled to Iran in 2002. He was detained briefly in Turkey after leaving Iran and then was arrested by Jordanian authorities in Amman on a stopover to Kuwait. Jordan transferred custody to the U.S.⁵⁴

Talha al Sudani (al Qaeda in East Africa, d. January 23, 2007)

AKA: *Tariq Abdullah, Abu Talha*

Late al Qaeda operative in East Africa. Sudani reportedly received training on explosives from Lebanese Hezbollah in the early 1990s. He is believed to have operated in Somalia since 1993. He reportedly managed an al Qaeda cell in Mogadishu that had planned to attack the U.S. military base in Djibouti

and also financed al Qaeda operatives in East Africa. Sudani is believed to have provided explosives expertise for the 2002 attack on an Israeli airliner in Kenya and has been linked to the 1998 East Africa embassy bombings. Sudani survived a U.S. airstrike on Ras Kamboni, Somalia, on January 7, 2007, but was killed in an airstrike along the Kenya-Somalia border on January 23.⁵⁵

Tamerlan Tsarnaev (d. April 19, 2013)

One of the individuals behind the April 15, 2013, Boston Marathon bombings. Tsarnaev first entered the U.S. on July 19, 2003. He traveled to Russia in January 2012 and is believed to have traveled to Chechnya and Dagestan before he left in July 2012. He may have connected with William Plotnikov and Mahmud Nidal while in Dagestan. Tsarnaev was killed during a shootout in Watertown, outside Boston, Massachusetts.⁵⁶

Tayyeb al Afghani (d. 1992)

AKA: *Aissa Messaoudi*

Algerian Islamist. Afghani fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan. He led a November 1991 attack that killed three Algerian border guards.⁵⁷

Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab (AQAP, incarcerated in the U.S.)

AKA: *Umar Farooq al Nigeri, the "Underwear Bomber"*

Underwear bomber. He confessed to attempting to detonate an explosive device on Northwest Airlines Flight 253 on December 25, 2009. Abdulmutallab, a Nigerian, traveled to Yemen in August 2009, where he successfully sought out Anwar al Awlaki. Awlaki vetted him, and then introduced him to AQAP bombmaker Ibrahim al Asiri, who helped prepare Abdulmutallab for his suicide mission.⁵⁸

William Plotnikov (d. July 14, 2012)

AKA: *the Canadian*

Late fighter in the Chechen insurgency. Plotnikov moved to Dagestan to join the insurgency and was killed in a firefight near the border between Kayakent and Sergokala districts in Dagestan, Russia. He may have been in contact with Tamerlan Tsarnaev.⁵⁹

Younis al Mauritani (al Qaeda and AQIM-associated, incarcerated)

AKA: *Abd al Rahman Mohamed Hussein Ould Mohamed Salim, Youssef Ould Abdel Jelil, Abdel Khader, Abou Souleimane, Chingheity*

Senior leader in al Qaeda who headed the group's external operations. Mauritani was planning attacks on European targets in 2010. He had been a member of the Salafist Group for Call and Combat, which changed its name to AQIM, and served as the liaison with al Qaeda for the group. He was arrested in Pakistan in September 2011.⁶⁰

Yousef al Shihri (AQAP, d. October 13, 2009)

AKA: *Abu Tamim al Azdi, Abu Hakeem al Shihri, Abu Hilal, Azzam al Taef'fi, Hakeem al Ansari, Hakeem al Tabouki, Yousef Mohamed Mubarak al Jubairi al Shihri, Yusef M Modaray*

Late operative in AQAP and Said al Shihri's brother-in-law. He fought in Afghanistan against the Soviets and during the U.S. invasion. He also trained at the al Qaeda-run al Farouq camp. Shihri was captured and sent to Guantanamo. He was transferred to Saudi Arabia on November 9, 2007. Shihri completed the rehabilitation program and escaped to Yemen. Saudi Arabia listed him as one of its most-wanted terrorists in February 2009. Shihri was killed in clashes at a checkpoint in Jazan, Saudi Arabia, reportedly on his way to Buraydah, Saudi Arabia, on October 13, 2009. Shihri and another operative were said to have been sent by Said al Shihri to escort his second wife to Yemen.⁶¹

Notes

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