



Beyond Counterterrorism

DEFEATING THE SALAFI-JIHADI MOVEMENT

Katherine Zimmerman



OCTOBER 2019



CRITICAL THREATS

A M E R I C A N E N T E R P R I S E I N S T I T U T E

Contents

Executive Summary 1

Introduction..... 5

The Challenge7

The Enemy: The Salafi-Jihadi Movement10

The Strategy22

Implementation Issues34

Initial Recommendations for the Way Forward43

Appendix A. Al Qaeda’s and the Islamic State’s Global Networks.....47

Appendix B. Identifying the Salafi-Jihadi Vanguard 49

Glossary of Terms..... 51

Notes52

About the Author65

Note from the Author65

Acknowledgments 66

About the Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute..... 67

About Our Technology Partners 67

Cover image: Residents hold up Nusra Front flags during a demonstration celebrating their takeover of Idlib about a month ago and calling for the implementation of the Islamic Sharia law, in Al-Sakhour neighborhood of Aleppo, April 24, 2015. REUTERS/Hosam Katan.

© 2019 by the American Enterprise Institute. All rights reserved.

The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) educational organization and does not take institutional positions on any issues. The views expressed here are those of the author(s).

Executive Summary

The United States has misdefined and misunderstood the nature of the enemy in the fight against terrorism. Washington has consistently fixated on specific groups and individuals that appeared most threatening to American interests: first with al Qaeda “core” in Afghanistan and Pakistan under Osama bin Laden, then al Qaeda in Iraq under Abu Musab al Zarqawi, then al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen and Anwar al Awlaki, and now the Islamic State under Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. American efforts have largely focused on retaking territory from these groups, denying them the sanctuary from which to plot terror attacks, and eliminating leadership and others involved in attack planning. The result has been a series of military victories on the battlefield that have not generated a decisive and lasting effect in reducing the threat of terrorism.

The real enemy is the Salafi-jihadi movement of which al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and other such groups are part. This movement includes the collection of individuals, groups, and organizations that adhere to the Salafi-jihadi ideology. They believe that the practice of Islam must return to that of the early days of Islam and that armed force is an individual obligation to achieve this, first within Muslim lands and then globally. The Salafi-jihadi ideology serves as a source of resilience and strength for the movement, enabling groups to reconstitute even after suffering terrible military defeats and unifying the efforts of adherents under a shared purpose. The ideology also defines the set of expansive strategic objectives that extends beyond the terror attacks that threaten US national security.

The Salafi-jihadi ideology itself cannot be destroyed, however. A strategy focused on attacking and discrediting this ideology to weaken the movement assumes it has mass appeal, which history proves false. Muslims have rejected Salafi-jihadism for centuries and relegated the modern Salafi-jihadi movement to the fringes

of society until the past decade. It also assumes that the US and its partners could eliminate all or most adherents, which has been impossible even in specific theaters such as Iraq. The ideology instead pulls together a self-defined Salafi-jihadi vanguard—a collection of core believers—that leads the broader movement’s efforts to impose its vision on the world. This vanguard understands that it cannot achieve its goals alone and therefore has sought to build popular support among Sunni Muslims.

The Salafi-jihadi movement has transformed over the past decade, adapting to conditions and cultivating relationships with local Sunni communities to strengthen on the ground. Exogenous factors such as the collapse of governance and the breakdown of security after the 2011 Arab Spring created opportunities for the movement to exploit. Salafi-jihadi groups have rebranded and reorganized to retain local support and obscure their connections to groups targeted by US counterterrorism actions. In doing so, they separated their global jihad effort from their local efforts, making the group more acceptable to communities and protecting the local vanguard from global counterterrorism efforts. Local conflicts in places such as Mali, Somalia, and Syria provided the opportunity for the Salafi-jihadi vanguard to insinuate itself into insurgencies and intermix, generating local support as it fights on behalf of local communities.

Finally, the vanguard has penetrated local governance and institutions in some communities by backfilling gaps. The Salafi-jihadi problem set in northwestern Syria, a confusing assortment of groups that includes al Qaeda members, epitomizes these transformations. In these ways, the Salafi-jihadi vanguard has strengthened ties to local communities and expanded significantly across Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

The vanguard has identified its relationships with Sunni Muslim communities as its source of strength.

These relationships and its influence within local communities enable the Salafi-jihadi movement to achieve its strategic objectives of transforming the Muslim world through imposing its governance. The Salafi-jihadi vanguard has built these relationships through delivering basic goods or services, including defending the community.

Al Qaeda fixed sewers and delivered water and fuel in Yemen. Its courts in Somalia and Mali offer the fair resolution of local disputes. Its operatives dispatched to Syria to organize against the Assad regime. The Salafi-jihadi vanguard then uses its local ties to communities to start shaping them in its image and to strengthen itself by securing resources and sanctuary and building a position from which to eventually overthrow Muslim governments. The vanguard does not require that the community share its ideological conviction but seeks to expand its adherents over time.

The point of attack for a successful strategy against the Salafi-jihadi movement is its relationships with local communities. The Salafi-jihadi movement is vulnerable to the community's own decision to accept it. Conditions have weakened communities and made them vulnerable to the Salafi-jihadi vanguard's predatory efforts. The requirement is not to resolve all local conflicts or strengthen governance globally but to target the approach where the Salafi-jihadi vanguard is operating. Competing with the Salafi-jihadi movement by offering communities a viable alternative to the vanguard empowers the community to reject them. The US should attack the means by which the vanguard has built its relationships with communities, which will weaken the movement and relegate it again to the fringes of society.

Summary of Approach. The Trump administration's strategic rebalancing toward great-power competition presents an opportunity for the US to also reframe its approach against the Salafi-jihadi movement. Countering Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea will draw on many of the same intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets that support the current counterterrorism strategy and raises the question of that strategy's viability with reduced resources even outside its effectiveness. US

reorientation against state actors provides an opportunity for the US to counter particularly those Russian and Iranian efforts that have facilitated the expansion of the Salafi-jihadi movement and to reframe its approach against the Salafi-jihadi movement to draw on different resources. The US must develop and execute a strategy to defeat the Salafi-jihadi movement that extends beyond pure counterterrorism.

The new approach must (1) destroy the global Salafi-jihadi movement by isolating it from the population, (2) support and legitimize governance that is representative and responsive, and (3) support establishing security conditions such that local forces will prevent the return of the Salafi-jihadi vanguard. These strategic objectives will be achieved by accomplishing several key tasks: (1) severing the relationships between communities and the Salafi-jihadi vanguard through supporting the resolution of local conflicts and redress of grievances, strengthening acceptable local and national governance, and providing communities with an alternative to the Salafi-jihadi vanguard's goods or services; (2) blocking the vanguard's efforts to penetrate communities and build new relationships; (3) supporting or enabling acceptable forms of governance; and (4) enabling the development of security structures that can operate with limited external support and do not alienate the population or drive further conflict.

The overall concept is to attack Salafi-jihadi influence within Sunni communities by restoring the communities' ability to reject the Salafi-jihadi vanguard's efforts to penetrate them. Deteriorating local conditions made communities vulnerable to Salafi-jihadi influence, which had been limited to the margins of society previously. The intent is to isolate the Salafi-jihadi vanguard and eliminate its influence in communities, reducing its threat to terrorism. The approach's main effort is non-kinetic and intended to exploit the vanguard's vulnerabilities, primarily its ability to gain initial entry into communities and the absence of other viable alternatives for the community. The approach is global but limited to the specific communities where Salafi-jihadi vanguard members are present. It will be iterative, adaptive, sustainable, and multigenerational.

The civilian-led approach must be coordinated under a State Department lead to achieve alignment of purpose across US foreign engagements. The State Department must identify and socialize the minimum essential political conditions within the areas of interest that satisfy US national security interests. These conditions must inform the sequencing and prioritization of efforts and shape US foreign and security assistance programming. US ambassadors as chiefs of mission must be stakeholders in the success of this approach. They must ensure that US partners and host nations accept and support the overall approach and that their country teams support the implementation of it.

Current US authorities and capabilities exist to support the implementation of this approach. The primary change is the reorientation of US foreign and security assistance programming into a strategic framework aimed at reducing the Salafi-jihadi movement's influence. The US has already conducted versions of this approach, though on a more limited scale. Expertise and experience therefore already exist within the US civilian agencies and military on how to plan and implement programs that will bolster local governance and security structures and reduce the space for Salafi-jihadi groups to operate. A strategic messaging campaign should also reinforce the approach, though counter-messaging of the Salafi-jihadi ideology should be only a supporting part of the messaging campaign.

Success for this approach will require that the US work with local, regional, and global partners. The US must set the global framework within which its partners act and ensure that partners are bought in to the premises behind the approach—namely, that continued counterterrorism activities are insufficient in reducing the threat from the Salafi-jihadi vanguard and that shifting the effort to a civilian-led strategy will yield more durable long-term results. Yet working with partners does not mean that the US subcontracts to partners; it must instead support, enable, and leverage partners to do what they must and to backfill where partners are unable to execute. The US must also ensure that its partners cohere around a single definition of the enemy that is not as limited as

it is today—in which Salafi-jihadi vanguard members operate in the counterterrorism gray space—and that is not so expansive that it creates new supporters for the vanguard.

Key Recommendations. The US needs to reframe its approach to the Salafi-jihadi movement from counterterrorism, which addresses only the terrorism threat from the movement, to one that will weaken and eventually enable the defeat of the movement entirely. The new approach must orient around breaking the relationships that members of the Salafi-jihadi vanguard have built within local Sunni communities through a civilian-led strategy. Impediments to this approach are in the mindset of decision makers, the muscle memory of US departments and agencies, and the absence of a unified effort to develop and implement the approach.

The following initial steps should be taken to implement this new approach.

- US administration officials, Congress, and other policymakers must advocate for developing and implementing a comprehensive strategy to counter the Salafi-jihadi movement. The US government must break from the counterterrorism mindset that has colored its prioritization of resources, efforts, and engagements with foreign partners. It must also adopt a long-term planning cycle. Congress should appropriate multiyear and predictable funding to facilitate planning. Foreign and security assistance programming must also shift away from countering the Salafi-jihadi vanguard to shaping conditions on the ground and eliminating the vanguard's means of support.
- The State Department's strategic planning and coordination role must be strengthened to ensure that the activities of US functional bureaus and agencies abroad are aligned in support of this effort. The State Department should own the coordination responsibilities for the development and implementation of this new approach. Additionally, the State Department

should seek to develop and cultivate more strategic thinkers within its diplomatic corps.

- The US government must increase its tolerance for select calculated risks. Congress must support funding new programming concepts on a small scale and accept the failure of a percentage of these programs. The State Department and US Agency for International Development (USAID) should be willing to repurpose funds from steady, but not strategic, programs to new initiatives. They must also take more risk by working in the competitive space where the Salafi-jihadi vanguard is, which means risk to personnel and possible diversion of marginal funding. The Defense Department must push back on political pressure to reduce calculated risks to its personnel and allow US soldiers to do their jobs in the field.
- The US and its partners must actively compete with the Salafi-jihadi vanguard within local Sunni communities to prevent the vanguard from gaining influence. The US therefore needs to unite its partners around a sufficient minimal common definition of the enemy to bring international pressure against the Salafi-jihadi vanguard. The US, among other partners, also needs to operate in the contested space where the Salafi-jihadi vanguard is and not in secure spaces. The US will need to continue to invest in expeditionary civilian capacities, which would better enable the US to counter Salafi-jihadi efforts.

- Finally, US policymakers and decision makers must lead the effort to transform the approach against the Salafi-jihadi movement on the global stage. They should seize the opportunities presented by this period of rebalancing toward competition with Russia and China to also redefine US priorities, including for its partners, to counter the Salafi-jihadi movement. The harmful convergence of great-power and Salafi-jihadi interests in attacking the international system necessitates a new approach. US leadership should reframe the global approach to ensure American interests are secured.

Any analogy between the Salafi-jihadi threat and the Cold War has its limits, but the US devoted substantial resources to countering the spread of Soviet allies and Soviet influence during that period of competition between the US and the Soviet Union. The US invested resources in vulnerable communities in Latin American and southern Africa to contest Soviet influence. It not only supported armed opponents of Soviet proxies but also developed those communities and pursued soft-power investments in shaping the international order in support of American interests.

The challenge for the modern era is not in finding armed proxies—or counterterrorism partners—but in identifying those areas at risk of Salafi-jihadi exploitation and tailoring soft-power interventions to head these groups off at a pass. Doing so requires a transformed mindset within the US government about the national security imperative. Only then will the US begin to attack the roots and sustenance of the Salafi-jihadi movement that spawns the terrorist threat to the homeland. This is the only long-term strategy that will work.

Beyond Counterterrorism

DEFEATING THE SALAFI-JIHADI MOVEMENT

Katherine Zimmerman

The divergence between American counterterrorism strategy and reality is growing rapidly wider and will soon reach a critical point. The Islamic State is reconstituting a vibrant insurgency in Iraq and Syria, its threat is rising across Africa, and it is increasingly active in South Asia, including its most deadly branch in Afghanistan.¹ Returning Islamic State fighters to their home countries in Europe, North Africa, and elsewhere poses a growing threat as they surge battlefield expertise and connections into the Islamic State's transnational networks. Al Qaeda, meanwhile, has insinuated itself into local and regional groups globally, strengthening particularly in the Sahel as its presence in Somalia, Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere remains strong.² Both the Islamic State and al Qaeda share the same vision, and both benefit from shared resources and capabilities as they pursue their global goals. The threat of terrorism to the US remains active even as more local groups proliferate.

The current counterterrorism strategy is effective at what it sets out to do: prevent massive terror attacks against Americans and US interests. The strategic objectives listed in US policy documents do not include the defeat of terrorist groups, and the end states identified focus on the terrorism threat and the security of the US and its people.³ Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and other like-minded groups use terrorism as a tactic in support of a larger strategy. Current US counterterrorism strategy can disrupt their efforts to harm American interests using this tactic as long as certain conditions continue to hold. But the strategy does not purport to attempt to defeat either

group and will not do so. It is, therefore, the archetype of a forever war; it does not envisage any actual end state.

Most concerning, the strategy relies on the assumption that perpetually targeting the attack cells and not the local base that supports these cells will permanently disrupt the threat to the homeland. That assumption has largely held thus far, but it will not likely continue to hold indefinitely. As al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and other such groups continue to expand locally, so too do their capabilities to prepare and conduct more frequent and damaging attacks on the US than the US approach can disrupt or defend against.

The absence of a comprehensive strategy against al Qaeda and the Islamic State has created the endless cycle of war about which both the Trump and Obama administrations have complained. The US invaded Afghanistan in 2001 as part of the war on terror to defeat al Qaeda and the Taliban and invaded Iraq in 2003, sparking an insurgency that al Qaeda would come to dominate. The US missed when al Qaeda transformed from a loose network of cells into the transnational organization that it has become today.

Counterterrorism efforts globally pressured al Qaeda, specifically the cells plotting attacks against the US and Europe, but defeating al Qaeda was left to the efforts of local partners with US and European support. The Islamic State's meteoric rise in Iraq and Syria, which prompted the redeployment of US military forces to prevent the collapse of the Iraqi government, did not spur the development of a global

strategy. Rather, the US and coalition sought to defeat the physical caliphate in Iraq and Syria while retaining pressure on the global branches using the same means they had been using since 2001. Neither transnational network withered away when the “core” was decimated. Both organizations instead adapted and became more resilient, strengthening globally.

The US is now rebalancing its efforts toward countering Russian and Chinese global influence even as the threat from al Qaeda and the Islamic State grows. This rebalancing shifts resources away from the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia—from the counterterrorism effort, in other words—toward the Pacific and European theaters. It guarantees adopting an even more limited version of the current counterterrorism approach in these theaters to focus pressure—drone strikes primarily—on active terrorist cells. The availability of intelligence assets to support even a limited counterterrorism effort in this context is unclear, however, as such resources must also shift to support the focus on state competition. Downsizing counterterrorism to an economy-of-force effort to shift resources to compete with Russia and China opens the door for al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and others to expand their influence on the ground even more than they have already done.

Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and others will strengthen within the local contexts and pose greater threats to the US if they face only counterterrorism pressure. Many local counterterrorism partners, including those in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, do not have the means or the ability to sustain long-term pressure on al Qaeda, the Islamic State, or Taliban militants.⁴ These groups and their local branches may gain sufficient strength to collapse or seriously weaken African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian states, the consequences of which would ripple through the US national security architecture that relies so heavily on partners abroad.

The US intelligence community has warned of the increasingly improvised terrorism threat from the Islamic State in particular, and from others, as they experiment with and learn to weaponize cheap, commercially available drone technology.⁵

Their cyberattack capabilities remain below those of state-based actors, but groups may also acquire sufficient expertise to conduct large-scale and damaging cyberattacks on Western infrastructure.

The US must not sacrifice protecting its interests from one adversary to combat another. The security the US has achieved through its counterterrorism effort will erode without the resources to support even a minimized version of it. Moreover, the gains that the Islamic State, al Qaeda, and other like-minded groups have made globally are already chipping away at the ability of the US and its partners to defend themselves against terror attacks.

Instead, the US must finally develop an approach that will counter the Salafi-jihadi movement—the movement of which al Qaeda and the Islamic State are part—to eventually defeat this enemy and win the war. Changing the approach may require a higher investment upfront, especially in terms of strategic planning resources, but it will end the resource drain from counterterrorism. As the US reorients toward competing with Russia and China, it should reorient in such a way as to also focus on countering their actions, and those of Iran, that strengthen al Qaeda and the Islamic State.

A strategy to counter the Salafi-jihadi movement requires the US and its partners to shift the focus of their attacks from the leaders and cells that threaten terror attacks to the strength of this movement, which is its relationship with Sunni communities. This report seeks to present a definition and understanding of the Salafi-jihadi enemy that the US faces and how this enemy has strengthened. It then follows a modified implementation of the military decision-making process to develop a conceptual approach to countering the Salafi-jihadi movement, recommending a civilian-led effort to isolate Salafi-jihadis from communities and reduce their influence. The report identifies significant challenges to implementing the approach, especially an engrained counterterrorism mindset and an aversion to certain types of risk. The initial recommendations put forward seek to better posture the US government to implement a strategy to counter the Salafi-jihadi movement.

The Challenge

The US, Europe, and other partners are doubling down on an approach to counter al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and other like-minded Salafi-jihadi groups that has yielded limited results against the groups at high cost. A broad consensus is emerging among nations engaged in the global counterterrorism efforts that they are wasting resources and that they can protect themselves by focusing more directly on attacking terror cells and preventing future radicalization.

European countries have thus concentrated on preventing attacks at home and on the foreign terrorist fighter problem that the collapse of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria has spewed. The US is increasingly drawing down military resources allocated to the counterterrorism fight—including negotiating with the Afghan Taliban—and reverting to a targeting posture to stamp out potential terror attack cells as they surface. Both the US and Europe are assisting other states with managing the flows of returning foreign fighters, improving security infrastructure, and expanding global intelligence cooperation to facilitate targeting efforts against specific groups with ties to al Qaeda and the Islamic State. This narrow approach misses the long-term threat from the Salafi-jihadi movement, which continues to strengthen globally.⁶

Salafi-jihadi groups worldwide challenge local authorities more significantly than they did two decades ago. These groups, which are active from the Sahel to Southeast Asia, expanded in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab Spring and the rise of conflicts that have spiraled through the Muslim world. They are more than just al Qaeda and the Islamic State. Terrorism is a tactic that many now use selectively in support of strategic or operational objectives. The Salafi-jihadi threat has transformed from solely being a terrorist one against US and other Western targets to also threatening local states by operating within the contexts of local conflicts.⁷

The approach that the US and Europe favor distinguishes between the terrorist threat and the local threat—a distinction that belies a decided naivete among Western policymakers about the scope of the Salafi-jihadi threat. Terror attacks at home in the US

might be what draws the public's attention, but the changes that the Salafi-jihadi groups are creating on the ground, within local conflicts, threaten Western interests over the long term.⁸

Today, Salafi-jihadi efforts to shape the local contexts converge with those of Russia, China, and Iran to weaken the international liberal order. Russian and Iranian support in particular in the Middle East has contributed to the prolonged conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. For example, Russian efforts in Syria restricted US and coalition activities to counter the Islamic State, provided cover for the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons, and decimated the non-Salafi-jihadi Syrian armed opposition, leaving Salafi-jihadi groups dominant in the fight against the Assad regime.⁹ Russian, Iranian, and Salafi-jihadi interests aligned in Syria where all sought to eliminate the moderate middle of the Syrian opposition from the conflict.¹⁰

Iran's efforts to empower its Iraqi proxies, and their incorporation into components of the Iraqi security forces, further alienate Iraq's Sunnis from the central government and the state—creating ripe conditions for another Salafi-jihadi-led insurgency.¹¹ Continued pressure on weak states has degraded the strength of the international states system and created opportunities for Salafi-jihadi groups to expand.

Current Counterterrorism Strategy. Continuity rather than change has defined the US approach to counterterrorism. The Trump administration published its counterterrorism strategy in October 2018.¹² The new strategy document claimed a “shift in America's approach to countering and preventing terrorism,” which might be mostly in its recognition that terrorism will persist as a tactic to threaten the US. The adversaries—the terrorist groups identified in the strategy—have changed, as the terrorist landscape has become increasingly complex.

The new strategy names “radical Islamist terrorists” as the primary terrorist threat to the US, including the Islamic State and al Qaeda, and outlines how the threat has morphed from a 9/11-style centrally coordinated attack to the diffuse and dispersed terrorists networks of today. It also identifies

Iranian-sponsored terrorism and a range of overseas movements and domestic extremism. The lines of effort and priorities identified in the document more notably marked a continuation of the Obama administration's counterterrorism strategy, which built on and refined the strategy put forward under the Bush administration.¹³

The current counterterrorism strategy calls for a whole-of-government approach to achieve its aims. These are to:

1. Pursue terrorist threats to their sources by targeting key individuals and groups, improving reach to denied areas, detaining individuals to collect intelligence, integrating further US intelligence information sharing, and integrating strategic communications related to counterterrorism operations;
2. Isolate terrorists from sources of support by disrupting travel, countering terrorist financial networks, preventing development of attack capabilities, and countering state support to terrorism;
3. Modernize and integrate US tools and authorities to protect the homeland by securing US borders, deploying counterterrorism officials to the local levels, adopting new technology for intelligence analysis, building terrorist identity profiles, integrating threat information on domestic terrorists, and updating counterterrorism policies;
4. Protect the US infrastructure and enhance preparedness by improving defensive measures, broadening awareness of the threat, promoting readiness, and developing a public communications strategy;
5. Counter radicalization and recruitment by institutionalizing a prevention architecture, combating violent extremist ideology including influence online, increasing the role of civil society in preventing terrorism, supporting

early interventions and reintegration, and countering radicalization with strategic communications; and

6. Strengthen partners' counterterrorism abilities by establishing a broader range of partners, supporting counterterrorism capabilities of key partners; improving information sharing among partners, and supporting locally driven terrorism prevention efforts.

These lines of efforts translate to sustained military and intelligence efforts to identify, target, and disrupt ongoing operations and the global networks of al Qaeda and the Islamic State, a civilian-led effort to prevent terrorism through counter and de-radicalization programming, and the improvement of the intelligence picture and law enforcement and border security capabilities to prevent future attacks.

The US will continue to prioritize its resources against terrorism threats based on the assessed intent of individuals and groups and their capabilities, and the US military and intelligence community remains in the lead for execution. The US has sustained the prioritization of its counter-Islamic State efforts in Iraq and Syria under Operation Inherent Resolve and the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. The fight has shifted from a military effort to recapture terrain to law enforcement, border security, and counter-financing and counter-messaging efforts.¹⁴

Outside of Iraq and Syria, the US and European partners have conducted targeted military operations and supported local partners against Islamic State branches, such as in Libya, Niger, or Somalia. The US continues to target top al Qaeda leadership and cells with the intent and capability of striking Western targets.¹⁵ The US military also directly supports partners in Somalia and Yemen against al Qaeda.

The Trump administration has sought to define the nonmilitary aspects of US counterterrorism activities more concretely under "terrorism prevention" (TP). The Obama administration had pushed a "countering violent extremism" (CVE) concept to align the preventative aspects of counterterrorism such as disrupting radicalization and recruitment processes and

addressing local drivers that contributed to radicalization.¹⁶ However, the administration did not clearly define CVE.

The prioritization of CVE as a counterterrorism line of effort had led many US foreign assistance programs and US-funded programs to be relabeled as CVE for funding purposes, further diluting the concept. The idea of prevention, rather than countering, began to surface at the end of the Obama administration, and the terminology changed to “preventing violent extremism” (PVE). The Trump administration has narrowed the preventative and countering effort to focus on the act of radicalization and mobilization to violence, moving away to some degree from a focus on the local conditions. These CVE/TP efforts remain ill-defined and poorly coordinated across the US government, though efforts are underway to change this.¹⁷

US Strategic Shift to Great-Power Competition. The Trump administration’s National Security Strategy outlined a strategic shift to compete with growing Russian and Chinese challenges to American influence and interests globally and the destabilizing regional influences of Iran and Korea.¹⁸ The shift therefore prioritizes US resources against Russia and China globally, Iran in the Middle East, and North Korea in Asia over other efforts. Recognizing the requirement for the US to secure its interests against these state adversaries, in addition to the nonstate Salafi-jihadi enemies, is welcome. The US should also ensure it addresses those actions from these state actors that facilitate Salafi-jihadi groups. However, the rebalancing of efforts to compete more directly, particularly with Russia and China, raises key questions about the sustainability and viability of the current counterterrorism approach.

The resources available to support US counterterrorism efforts are being reduced. Critically, while US military dominance and show of force can and should be a deterrent threat against Russia and China, the competition is occurring in the gray zone, at the threshold below war. Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) systems and other intelligence assets will need to shift from supporting the

counterterrorism effort to this effort, reducing US visibility on the global terrorism problem set.

US military forces, likely special operations forces (SOF), will also be responsible for training, advising, and developing key partners. SOF have led the counterterrorism efforts. Improved counterterrorism capabilities have reduced the resources required to prosecute the US strategy. However, the threat has also changed and grown, expanding the focus of US counterterrorism efforts from small threat cells in a handful of countries to complex networks that span continents.

American adversaries—state and nonstate—have also moved dangerously into the cyber realm and pose different threats to the US that will tax available resources to counter efforts on this front. The viability of the current counterterrorism strategy under more resource-constrained conditions is far from certain.

What Does Losing Look Like?¹⁹ No one supports endless war. The question policymakers face is whether the US is winning the war on terror and when, therefore, this war will end—along with the large budget line accompanying it. Some argue that the US is winning or has won: The number of attacks that trace back to al Qaeda, the Islamic State, or some other like-minded group in the US has approached zero in recent years, and since 9/11, attacks linked to jihadist ideology have killed only 104 people in the US.²⁰ In fact, far-right extremists threaten American lives more directly today.²¹

Yet others counter with the strengthening of al Qaeda and the Islamic State globally despite the resources the United States has invested in combating these groups.²² The question is not *if* there will be another mass-casualty attack driven by the ideology of al Qaeda or the Islamic State, but *when* that attack will be attempted.²³ Al Qaeda and the Islamic State have a clear definition of what their victory is. They will not stop trying until they have achieved it. Whether the US has succeeded in countering past terror attacks to date does not change whether these groups will continue trying.²⁴ This war is not yet won.

Losing resembles the position the US is in today: a home front safe for the time being but an enemy

that has strengthened globally and is innovating to break through the defenses, all at significant cost. The Trump administration is actively seeking to negotiate a settlement with the Taliban to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan.²⁵ The hope is that the Taliban, on which al Qaeda relies for its safe havens in Afghanistan, would stop providing support to al Qaeda and would be able to manage the threat from the Islamic State Khorasan.

Recent events call that hope seriously into question: Al Qaeda began rebuilding training camps in Afghanistan by the end of 2015 and continues to run these camps.²⁶ The US has supported African Union peacekeepers and the government in Somalia against al Shabaab for over 10 years but has little progress to show.²⁷ The rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria was a massive strategic setback for the US and its partners in this fight as Islamic State branches proliferate and Islamic State-inspired terror attacks hit the West. The defeat of the physical caliphate in Iraq and Syria has been expensive—and will not prevent the group's return or mute its global call.

Elsewhere—the Sahel and Southeast Asia—US and partner efforts have little to show in terms of permanently defeating these groups. Retrenchment from the counterterrorism effort is occurring both within the US and Europe. These groups will seize the opportunity to expand further should the US and its partners lift pressure from them.

A new approach to combating the Salafi-jihadi threat to break the US free from its losing cycle should be considered. Cutting losses and exiting the war against al Qaeda and the Islamic State is not an option. America's enemies have a say in the fight, and they define themselves to be at war with the US and the West. Those enemies have morphed from the terrorist groups that they were at the start of the war and embedded into local insurgencies, transforming the challenge.³¹

Americans may perceive success against both with military gains on the battlefields where the US has selected to fight and with a sense of safety from the terror threat at home, but the enemy itself has strengthened abroad. Counterterrorism alone will not bring victory to the US. The only way to end the forever war is actually winning it.

Losing Support from European Counterterrorism Partners

America's partners are following its lead and actively looking for the way out of the perceived counterterrorism quagmire. Even without a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan, NATO allies have signaled they might reduce their military commitments to the US-led training operation in Afghanistan, Resolute Support, as domestic priorities shift.²⁸ The US does not yet have firm commitments from European partners to contribute troops for the training, equipping, and accompanying missions in Syria and Iraq as the US draws down its own commitments.²⁹

The United Kingdom's exit from the EU could also affect EU and UK efforts in stabilizing places such as Somalia, which reduces crucial support for the Somali government and the African Union mission.³⁰ France, which leads the counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel, has raised its defense spending, and French officials reiterate their commitment to the counterterrorism operations, but how reductions in US support will affect this commitment is not clear.

The Enemy: The Salafi-Jihadi Movement

The US faces an enemy today that operates largely in a policy gray area. The groups and individuals that have plotted against or attacked Americans or American interests are easily identified as enemies of the US—as terrorists. Yet the Salafi-jihadi movement extends far beyond those whom the US would label terrorists. Most members of the movement are not involved directly in plotting terrorist attacks against the US, though some encourage attacks, and others help facilitate them. Defining the fight down to only those who have taken up arms directly against the US misses not only the broader threat to American interests that an illiberal movement poses but also the critical relationship between the pool of terrorists the US

seeks to eliminate and the mass movement's ability to replace these individuals. The Salafi-jihadi movement is the real enemy.³²

The Salafi-jihadi movement is the collection of individuals, groups, and organizations that adhere to the Salafi-jihadi ideology, forming a self-defined vanguard, and the broader expanse of fellow travelers that have joined in support of the ideological vanguard. Salafism is the belief in the requirement to return the practice of Islam to the days of the followers of the Prophet Mohammed by ridding Islam of innovation and secular practices. The belief that all Muslims have an individual obligation to use armed force to cause this change and restore Islam to the Muslim world separates an extremist Salafi minority from others and makes them Salafi-jihadis.

Salafi-jihadis seek to transform the Muslim world under their interpretation of Islam, removing today's Muslim governments and replacing them with their interpretation of an Islamic polity to reestablish a caliphate. Modern-day Salafi-jihadism stems from the works of founders Abdullah Azzam and Osama bin Laden, among others, during the Afghan jihad in the late 1980s. The movement's evolution over the past three decades has refined its ideological arguments and overall strategic approach.

The Salafi-jihadi vanguard³³ has focused its energy on developing support among the Sunni masses as a strategic objective to accomplish its overarching goals. The ideology has not been the primary means of developing this support. In fact, Sunni Muslims have continued to reject the extremist and fringe Salafi-jihadi ideology since the birth of the modern Salafi-jihadi movement in the 1980s and since the ideology's earliest appearance centuries ago. Rather, Sunni communities made vulnerable by deteriorating conditions have traded tolerance of Salafi-jihadis and their groups for survival or a better future.

The outbreak of conflicts that have spiraled outward in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere since 2011 have set conditions that enabled the Salafi-jihadi vanguard's effort to build support. The vanguard has provided pragmatic benefits to stressed communities from security and defense to dispute resolution or basic goods and services to create a relationship

with the community, preying on the community's vulnerabilities. This relationship is the means by which the vanguard penetrates a community and over time insinuates itself more fully into society. The vanguard has also sought to co-opt local insurgencies, changing their nature, in pursuit of its own objective in replacing so-called "apostate" Muslim government. The Salafi-jihadi movement's expansion and insinuation into communities has advanced it toward achieving its objectives.

The Salafi-jihadi movement's successes over the past decade increase its threat to the US even though the expansion has been primarily among locally and regionally focused groups. Transnational Salafi-jihadi organizations such as the Islamic State and al Qaeda conduct external attacks generally with small-footprint attack cells that deploy forward (to the US, Europe, or other targeted region), relying on strategic infrastructure in sanctuaries in the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and elsewhere.³⁴ These transnational organizations rely in part on the local Salafi-jihadi vanguard for new recruits, facilitation and resources, and sanctuary.

Local groups aligned with a transnational group help form a global network that extends the reach of transnational groups farther than the extent of the formally recognized affiliates. (See Appendix A.) Shared Salafi-jihadi ideology predisposes locally focused members of the Salafi-jihadi movement to support attacks against the West and other states as enemies of Islam, even when members do not themselves pursue such attacks.³⁵ US intelligence has missed the decisions of locally focused groups to attack Americans in the past.³⁶

The threat to American interests from the Salafi-jihadi movement is not just terror attacks. The Salafi-jihadi movement's expanded areas of influence in the Middle East and Africa have reduced the space in which American and European commercial, development, and humanitarian organizations are able to operate securely. The rise of no-go spaces for Westerners could affect economic interests and finds synergy with efforts by Russia, China, and Iran to reduce the American sphere of influence. The Salafi-jihadi movement also threatens local regimes, including key

Table 1. Key Salafi-Jihadi Adaptations

Adaptation	Effect on the Ground	Policy Challenge
Rebranding and reorganization of local groups obfuscate ties to transnational groups	Creates deniability about relationship to global group, easing local acceptance and support	US counterterrorism authorities tied to specific group names; population more open to working with the rebranded groups
Separation of cells aimed at global jihad from locally focused groups	Generates local support base by focusing on local and regional objectives	US efforts oriented primarily against the global threat nodes, leaving local support base to local partners
Intermingling of Salafi-jihadi groups into local insurgencies	Creates confusion over group membership and provides cover from Western targeting for Salafi-jihadis	US policy predicated on identifying and attacking Salafi-jihadi groups and members
Insinuating into local institutions and governance	Grants Salafi-jihadi groups indirect control over legitimate local governance institutions	No overarching policy in place to contest Salafi-jihadi governance structures
Creating plausible deniability for terrorist attack responsibility	Creates ambiguity as to whether a specific terrorist group is responsible for an attack	US response to terrorist attacks not aimed beyond individuals directly responsible
Decentralization and decision-making delegation	Disperses leadership globally and decreases communication requirements	Increases resilience against US decapitation strategy and limits digital footprint

Source: Katherine Zimmerman, *Terrorism, Tactics, and Transformation: The West vs the Salafi-Jihadi Movement*, Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, November 15, 2018, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/reports/terrorism-tactics-and-transformation-the-west-vs-the-salafi-jihadi-movement>.

American partners, and has generally driven destabilization of states to expand farther.

The Enemy's Transformations. The Salafi-jihadi movement has evolved and adapted to US strategy and conditions on the ground enough that the current US approach will have little strategic effect.³⁷ Groups such as the Islamic State and al Qaeda have observed the strategy's focus on kinetic operations to either reclaim terrain or eliminate Salafi-jihadi leaders and operatives from the battlefield. They recognize that the US focuses on the subset of the Salafi-jihadi movement involved in imminent threats to the US. Al Qaeda has therefore de-emphasized such attacks while the Islamic State has

worked to inspire people already in Western states to conduct attacks where they live.³⁸

The groups have observed that there is no robust approach to countering those members of the Salafi-jihadi movement that fall below this threshold and have focused on insinuating themselves into local fights and communities partly to insulate themselves from this kind of American attack. The spread of conflict and insecurity has also created opportunities that the movement has seized to further this effort. The movement has specifically benefited from the complexification of the battlefield that challenges the clear-cut definition of an enemy operative in the current strategy. Four key adaptations have enabled the

Salafi-jihadi movement to strengthen even under US counterterrorism pressure.

Rebranding and Reorganization. Identifying the groups and organizations that are part of the Salafi-jihadi vanguard is an increasingly difficult task as they have rebranded and reorganized to retain local support. The composition of the vanguard and its organization was fairly stable through the mid-2000s. Al Qaeda affiliates—and even non-al Qaeda groups—sought to publicize their ties to Osama bin Laden’s core group. Al Qaeda leadership began trying to moderate this desire by the late 2000s, ordering al Shabaab not to reveal its true relationship and discussing internally whether the al Qaeda brand name was too tarnished to continue using it.³⁹ During the Arab Spring, al Qaeda affiliates helped establish local associated groups, such as Ansar al Sharia, but hid their relationship to the new local groups to build legitimacy.⁴⁰

The Syrian Salafi-jihadi vanguard, which includes al Qaeda and the Islamic State, has gone through multiple permutations of its efforts to retain local influence, though the ideological foundation of the groups has not changed as they reorganized and rebranded. These concerted efforts to hide relationships and rapid evolutions in organizational composition of Salafi-jihadi groups test both the intelligence community’s and the local community’s ability to understand the nature of local groups. These evolutions of the Salafi-jihadi vanguard also deliberately challenge existing US counterterrorism authorities, which are tied to specific group names and membership.

Separation of Global Jihad from Local Efforts. The Salafi-jihadi vanguard sought to consolidate its global attack cells and externally oriented groups outside of its local base. This removal of the more radical and clearly terrorist elements from the local context has the dual effect of making the remaining groups more acceptable to communities and protecting the local vanguard from US-driven counterterrorism pressure. The Salafi-jihadi vanguard’s excision of its globally focused elements coupled with efforts to rebrand and

to hide transnational ties with local groups creates an ostensibly local or regional group that builds and acts in support of local narratives.

The US interest in countering these groups is less obvious than in countering the likes of al Qaeda or the Islamic State, both of which have sought to conduct or inspire attacks that harm American interests. The fundamentally defensive nature of the US counterterrorism strategy—which is to prevent attacks against the homeland and American interests by targeting those who might perpetrate them—creates space for the Salafi-jihadi vanguard to expand and strengthen locally or regionally without drawing significant US counterterrorism pressure onto it.

Intermingling into Local Insurgencies. The Salafi-jihadi vanguard has “localized” by intermixing in insurgencies and embedding into the local conflicts and contexts. This effort has blurred the line between the vanguard itself and those whose short-term interests align and has helped build a broader base of support for the overall Salafi-jihadi movement. The vanguard’s incorporation into non-Salafi-jihadi groups introduces additional uncertainty about the threat those groups pose and the strength of the vanguard overall.

A targeted or primarily military approach to countering these groups because of the Salafi-jihadi presence conflates counterterrorism objectives with the local conflict. It wrongly enlarges the enemy to include local insurgents who had mobilized due to local grievances instead of seeking to separate the vanguard from the insurgency. The increasing emphasis within the Salafi-jihadi vanguard on pursuing local objectives over global ambitions has sought to take advantage of conditions on the ground conducive to Salafi-jihadi operations. These local undertakings reinforce adaptations elsewhere, de-emphasizing global jihad and finding shared interests among Sunni Muslims in improving their immediate conditions.

Penetrating Institutions and Governance. The Salafi-jihadi vanguard has sought to influence local institutions and governance to bring them more in line with enforcing its version of shari’a-based governance. This transformation of governance starts

to accomplish a core objective for the vanguard. Salafi-jihadi groups have thus empowered local Salafis as administrators or local power brokers to shape how a community functions.

Al Qaeda in Yemen backed a council of Salafi sheikhs in al Mukalla, a port city in Yemen's east, to govern and begin enforcing shari'a.⁴¹ Likewise, al Qaeda in Syria shaped the local councils in Idlib province in the northwest to such a degree that Salafis dominate governance with a significant degree of Salafi-jihadi penetration.⁴² There is no overarching US policy to contest Salafi-jihadi penetration of governance structures, which creates a challenge for the US in post-conflict scenarios when the governance structures and communities that remain are Salafi-jihadi leaning.

The Enemy Today. The Salafi-jihadi movement has strengthened globally since its near defeat in the late 2000s. (See Figure 1.) Its membership has grown especially in the years following the 2011 Arab Spring and with the declaration of the Islamic State's caliphate in Iraq and Syria.⁴³ Deteriorating conditions in the Muslim world enable Salafi-jihadi groups to expand their influence within local Sunni communities. Al Qaeda in particular has focused its transnational network on building relationships within these communities, deliberately localizing and insinuating itself into the local contexts. The Islamic State has also expanded by recognizing new branches in Africa and Asia and sending members from Iraq and Syria into new theaters.

The competition between al Qaeda and the Islamic State to lead the Salafi-jihadi movement is unlikely to end in the near term. Al Qaeda received some reprieve since 2014 when counterterrorism pressure shifted to the Islamic State. No core al Qaeda affiliate defected to the Islamic State, and splits from the al Qaeda network occurred among groups that were more loosely associated. Splinters from al Qaeda groups fell along fissures already existent in the group and outside of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria and have not caused significant infighting.⁴⁴

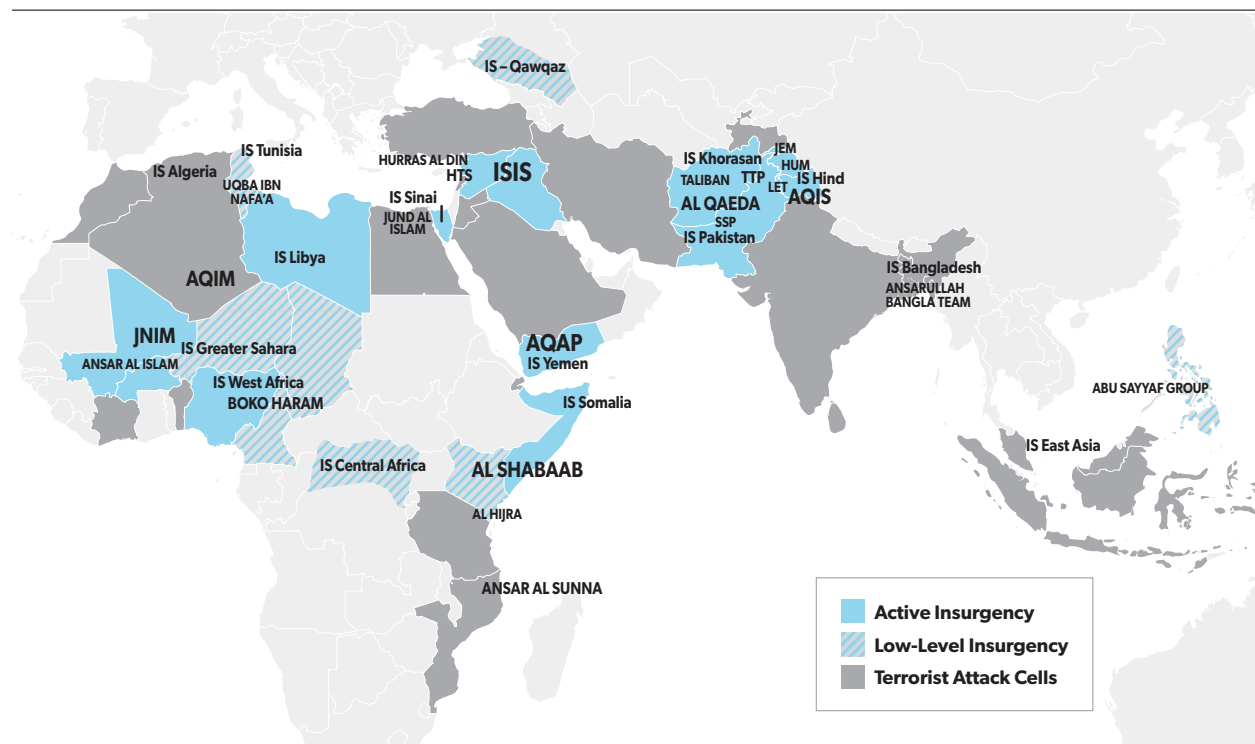
The Islamic State's branches strengthened even as it lost terrain in Iraq and Syria. The rise of a second

transnational Salafi-jihadi network has diversified the lines of support to local and regional groups rather than split them. A group's formal alignment with the Islamic State or al Qaeda provides some insight into its operational patterns, though not consistently.⁴⁵

Iraq and Sham (Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey). The Islamic State is reviving its insurgency across Iraq and Syria after losing its physical caliphate.⁴⁶ The Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) remains stronger today than its predecessor was when the US withdrew all its forces from Iraq in 2011 and will reconstitute more rapidly than al Qaeda in Iraq did.⁴⁷ ISIS endures as the core node of the Islamic State's transnational organization; however, pressure on the senior leadership has caused the group to delegate authorities to its various provinces around the world.⁴⁸ Islamic State followers are also exerting influence in internally displaced persons camps in Iraq and Syria.

Salafi-jihadi groups exert considerable influence in northwest Syria, especially in Idlib province, and provide sanctuary to al Qaeda senior operatives. Hay'at Tahrir al Sham, the successor organization to al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, Jabhat al Nusra, dominates Idlib governance through its "Salvation Government."⁴⁹ Ahrar al Sham, Jaish al Islam, and Hurras al Din, which is closely linked to the al Qaeda network, are among the Syrian Salafi-jihadi groups.⁵⁰ Al Qaeda in Syria is actively coordinating activities and planning attacks in the region and in the West.⁵¹ Salafi-jihadi cells are present in Jordan and Turkey.

Khorasan (Afghanistan and Pashto Pakistan⁵²). Salafi-jihadis perceive the Khorasan region as critical terrain due to apocalyptic prophecies in the *hadith*, sayings of the Prophet Mohammed, mentioning Khorasan and the victory against the Soviets in Afghanistan in 1989. The Afghan Taliban, a Deobandi extremist group that provides a support base for other Salafi-jihadi groups, considers itself to be the government of Afghanistan, and al Qaeda recognizes the Taliban leader as the commander of the faithful (*emir al mumineen*). The Afghan Taliban retains significant influence, controlling or contesting over half of Afghanistan's districts.⁵³

Figure 1. Map of the Salafi-Jihadi Movement

Note: Not all groups are represented in this figure. Figure created in September 2019.

Source: Author.

The Taliban provides al Qaeda sanctuary. Factions within the Taliban will probably reject any negotiated settlement with the US and splinter.⁵⁴ Sirajuddin Haqqani, a deputy leader of the Afghan Taliban, leads the Haqqani Network, which conducts cross-border activities between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan sustains an active insurgency against the Pakistani government and supports al Qaeda. Another Pashtun-dominant group, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, has focused on attacking Pakistani Shi'a. The Islamic State Khorasan, which splintered from the Taliban, is now one of the Islamic State's strongest branches and operates from eastern Afghanistan.⁵⁵ The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which has a decades-old relationship with the Afghan Taliban and al Qaeda, splintered with the stronger faction supporting the Islamic State over al Qaeda.⁵⁶ The Islamic State has claimed attacks in Pakistan under the name of Islamic State Pakistan.⁵⁷

Indian Subcontinent (Bangladesh, India-Kashmir, Myanmar, Punjabi Pakistan, and Sri Lanka). A mature Salafi-jihadi insurgency operates from a base in Punjabi Pakistan, including a strong network into extremist Deobandi organizations.⁵⁸ Groups include Harkat ul Jihad al Islami (HuJI) in Bangladesh and Pakistan; Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) in the disputed Kashmir region and its splinter, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen al Almi; Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) in Pakistan; Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) in Pakistan; and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) in Pakistan. Al Qaeda announced a new affiliate in 2014, al Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent.⁵⁹ The al Qaeda affiliate coordinates closely with other groups throughout the subcontinent, including Ansar ul Bangla Team and LeJ.⁶⁰ The Islamic State announced a new faction, Islamic State Hind, in May 2019, with attacks in the Kashmir region.⁶¹ The Islamic State claimed a mass-casualty attack in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday, April 21, 2019, conducted by the Sri Lankan groups

National Thowheed Jamath and Jammiyathul Mil-lathu Ibrahim.⁶² Both al Qaeda and the Islamic State are committing resources to strengthening their presence in the subcontinent.

Southeast Asia. The Abu Sayyaf Group, founded in the Philippines in 1991, splintered. One faction is now affiliated with the Islamic State and has conducted mass-casualty attacks against Christians. Ansar Khalifa Philippines, which pledged to the Islamic State with the Maute group, has conducted multiple attacks and supported the Maute group when it seized control of Marawi in 2016. Jamaah Ansharut Daulah, an Islamic State-affiliated group, operates terrorist cells in Indonesia and Malaysia.⁶³

Arabian Peninsula. Salafi-jihadism has long roots in the Arabian Peninsula because of the Peninsula's religious significance in Islam and the centuries-old alliance between the Saudi royal family and the Wahhabi movement. The Salafi-jihadi movement in Yemen has evolved during the country's civil war.⁶⁴ Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) dominates the movement in Yemen as one of al Qaeda's most developed and virulent affiliates, though counterterrorism operations have weakened it since 2016. The group has also increasingly focused on Yemen while under pressure there, reducing its role within the global al Qaeda network for the moment.

The Islamic State in Yemen drew a small number of members from al Qaeda but has not yet established itself beyond a network of attack cells and is unlikely to be able to do so.⁶⁵ New Salafi-jihadi groups have gained influence in Yemen fighting in the civil war independent of al Qaeda's support. US and United Arab Emirates (UAE) counterterrorism operations against al Qaeda and the Islamic State have significantly degraded leadership and disrupted operations, though counterterrorism pressure has not been applied to other Salafi-jihadi groups. Counterterrorism gains could be reversed in the short to medium term outside of a political resolution to the multiple conflicts in the country, especially given the growing conflict in southern Yemen.

Sahel. Salafi-jihadi groups have grown rapidly in the Sahel, exploiting poor security conditions and stoking intra-communal conflict to expand their influence. Al Qaeda's Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wa al Muslimeen dominates from its base in Mali, where it has unified a collection of local groups including Ansar al Din, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb's Saharan group, the Macina Liberation Front, and al Murabitoun.⁶⁶ This Salafi-jihadi network contests the Malian government's sovereignty in central and northern Mali and has proved to be resilient against French-led counterterrorism operations. It has also been able to expand its influence from Mali into neighboring Burkina Faso, where a small Salafi-jihadi group, Ansar al Islam, has been gaining support.⁶⁷

The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, which still cooperates with al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wa al Muslimeen after splintering from them, is also strong in Mali and Niger. Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger established the G5 Sahel Joint Force to combat the Salafi-jihadi threat. These Salafi-jihadi groups have also begun to pressure Benin, Ghana, the Ivory Coast, and Togo. The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara may also be cooperating with Islamic State West Africa Province, which operates in the Lake Chad basin area in Nigeria. Boko Haram, from which Islamic State West Africa Province splintered, remains a threat in Nigeria.

Central Africa. The Islamic State recognized a branch, Islamic State Central Africa Province, in April 2019, which operates along a key east-west smuggling corridor in central Africa. The Allied Democratic Forces in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo may have rebranded as the Islamic State.⁶⁸ The Islamic State Central Africa Province claimed a June 2019 attack in Mozambique, where an insurgent group, Ansar al Sunna, operates.⁶⁹ The Islamic State branch in Somalia provided financial support for the group.⁷⁰

East Africa. Al Shabaab, al Qaeda's affiliate based in Somalia, wields significant influence in south-central Somalia, including the capital, Mogadishu. Al Shabaab still administers territory and has a secure revenue

base through areas and commercial sectors under its control.⁷¹ Al Shabaab's network extends south into Tanzania and into Kenya, where it conducts an active low-level insurgency in the northeast.⁷² Al Hijra, the successor organization to the Muslim Youth Center, is a Kenyan group associated with al Shabaab.⁷³ A faction based in northern Somalia splintered from al Shabaab in 2015 and aligned with the Islamic State. It retains some operational basing in northern Somalia and has limited attack capabilities.⁷⁴ The US has targeted both al Shabaab and Islamic State leaders and bases and supports Somali special forces units as part of its counterterrorism strategy in East Africa.

Egypt and the Maghreb. Salafi-jihadi groups are active in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria with small cells present in Morocco.⁷⁵ The Islamic State in Sinai continues to destabilize the Sinai Peninsula with local attacks and conducts attacks against Copts in Cairo and the Nile delta.⁷⁶ Al Qaeda-affiliated groups are also present in the Sinai and Egypt.⁷⁷ Both al Qaeda and the Islamic State have established support zones inside Libya, and the Islamic State has gained momentum in Libya as counterterrorism pressure has lifted.⁷⁸ The Islamic State's Libyan branch has substantial financial resources remaining from its control of the port city, Sirte, in 2016. These resources might support Islamic State branches elsewhere in Africa.

Returning Islamic State fighters from Iraq and Syria have entered Libya and Algeria, though Algerian security services have sustained pressure on Salafi-jihadi cells in the country.⁷⁹ Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb's leadership remains intact in Algeria.⁸⁰ The Uqba ibn Nafaa Brigade, which has links to al Qaeda, and Islamic State attack cells operate in Tunisia.⁸¹

Defining the Enemy. The enemy is the Salafi-jihadi movement. That movement, as described above, is the collection of individuals, groups, and organizations unified by the Salafi-jihadi ideology. It includes the Salafi-jihadi groups and individuals determined to weaken the US through terror attacks and those Salafi-jihadis focused on their local efforts as part of the global movement. Part of the movement includes

fellow travelers or local communities and groups that derive benefits from the Salafi-jihadi efforts whose actions support the enemy, but are not themselves the enemy.

This definition expands the size of the enemy from a discrete set of individuals and groups to a much larger movement that includes individuals and groups on the margins whose actual threat to the US is negligible. Expanding the definition of the enemy does not necessarily require kinetic action against all parts, but rather enables the development of a strategy that accounts for the full scope of the enemy's capabilities.

Defining the enemy as the Salafi-jihadi movement creates challenges. How does defining adherents to a religious ideology relate to US constitutional protections? How will the US identify members of the Salafi-jihadi movement? How will this translate into a global effort to counter the movement? Answering these questions is no trivial task.

The first challenge comes from First Amendment protections for freedom of speech and the free exercise of religion in the US. First Amendment protections rightly prevent the US government from prohibiting religious beliefs or restricting speech except in cases in which such practices harm other individuals or the state itself. The US government distinguishes carefully between belief and practice, and at some level within the US, Salafi-jihadism is no different from anarchism or other extremist beliefs. The practice of these beliefs crosses into the criminal domain when they advocate the imminent use of violence or directly support terror attacks or seditious activity.

Salafi-jihadism extends beyond observance of a Salafi interpretation of Islam to the advocacy for and use of armed force to bring about change. The material support statute, which criminalizes the provision of any "property, tangible or intangible, or service" and includes explicitly training (the "instruction or teaching designed to impart a specific skill") and "expert advice or assistance," criminalizes support for Salafi-jihadi groups that have been designated as foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs).⁸² Anti-terrorism and seditious conspiracy statutes criminalize the activities of individuals

within the US pursuing terror attacks or other violent means for change. The practice of the parts of Salafi-jihadism that advocate using violence thus falls under criminal behavior within the US.

US law thus creates clear legal space to operate against members of the Salafi-jihadi movement beyond those directly involved with current attack plots that nevertheless gives American Muslims and even quietist Salafis the same constitutional and legal protections accorded any other religion or belief. The legal regime becomes fuzzy at the margins, of course. Courts will likely have to resolve that fuzziness over time, but federal and local authorities can and should do much more to clarify the points at which constitutionally protected beliefs cross into criminally prosecutable practice.

The second challenge is identifying who is part of this movement beyond the members of the Islamic State and al Qaeda. Adherence to an ideology is not a definition that planners and operators can implement to assess where and against whom to act. Defining membership in the full movement is not necessarily a requirement because the movement also includes those whose interests align with the Salafi-jihadi vanguard but on whom US policy should likely not focus. Defining who is part of this vanguard—and then understanding the relationships within the vanguard and external to it—creates enough of an understanding of the movement to develop a strategy and concept for operations.

This effort differs in subtle but important ways from the current approach to terrorist network mapping. It must focus not only on building out specific group leadership, attack cells, and so on but also on understanding how those networks fit into the larger but still limited Salafi-jihadi vanguard. Adopting this approach would likely change even targeting priorities: Targets should be selected for the effects removing them would generate on the vanguard as a whole and not simply to disrupt specific groups or active plots (although such narrow targeting should, of course, continue). Moreover, it would also require changing the overall focus of US strategy away from pure targeting since it is neither possible nor desirable to target every single member of the Salafi-jihadi vanguard.

Members of the movement do not always self-identify for fear of Western retribution or local rejection. The nature of the ideology and its belief in the requirement on individuals to actively support Salafi-jihadi groups' efforts do create a set of observable characteristics that help develop an assessment as to whether an individual or a group is a member of the Salafi-jihadi vanguard. (See Appendix B.)

The ideological positions and religious beliefs of an individual or group are observable in statements or other disseminated information and actions. The clearest indicators are rhetorical or practical support for the global jihad (the conflict with the US and the West, Russia, China, and so-called "apostate" governments) and the use of or support for armed force to impose a Salafi interpretation of Islamic governance on Muslims, including violence against non-Muslim actors such as the US, the West, or other nongovernment organizations for their support of a so-called apostate regime or the advocacy for this.

Other indicators include the argument that violent jihad for the cause of Islam is a *fard 'ayn* (individual religious obligation) for Muslims based on today's conditions; the act of *takfir* (declaring another Muslim to be apostate), especially when labeling whole sects or groups; the praise for or emulation of Salafi-jihadi ideologues;⁸³ and the appearance of Salafi-jihadi imagery or motifs in media. Additional indicators include the linking of Sunni Muslim groups' role in a local or regional conflict to the global armed struggle for Islam and the mapping of local issues within a Sunni Muslim community onto the global cause for Muslims that requires an armed response.

Connectivity to the Salafi-jihadi vanguard serves as another useful metric. The transnational and overlapping networks of al Qaeda and the Islamic State are an organizing backbone for the global Salafi-jihadi movement and will probably continue to function as such. Ties to other Salafi-jihadi leaders and senior operatives are strong indicators of this connectivity, especially given the reclusive nature of top leaders over the past two decades.

Salafi-jihadi groups tend to share fighter recruitment networks. The foreign fighter pipelines that supported al Qaeda in Iraq also helped feed recruits

to al Qaeda's Jabhat al Nusra in Syria and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria almost a decade later.⁸⁴ Support from terrorist financing networks or especially from al Qaeda or Islamic State affiliates shows an alignment of interests.

The appearance of common Salafi-jihadi signature tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) such as suicide attacks or sophisticated vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices and the kidnapping of Westerners or other foreigners for political and propaganda purposes rather than purely financial reasons point toward possible sharing of Salafi-jihadi expertise and strategic guidance. In the same vein, the logistical alignment of a group with other Salafi-jihadi groups in sharing resources, improved media production, or other forms of support indicates an external investment in a local group's development. Finally, those groups that are willing to incur costs for their support of Salafi-jihadi actors may be doing so for ideological reasons that merit careful examination.

Using observable indicators to assess membership of the Salafi-jihadi vanguard is imperfect but will provide a working approximation of the enemy. Any successful strategy against the Salafi-jihadi movement must take into account the possibility and desirability of cleaving those who have aligned with the Salafi-jihadi movement for nonideological reasons from the true ideologues—the reconcilable ones from the irreconcilables. Observable changes from an actor—either increasing alignment with the vanguard or distancing from the vanguard—should be incorporated as feedback into the understanding of the enemy and evaluation of the success of US strategy.

The final challenge is building a common understanding of this enemy as defined above among US allies and partners. No consensus exists, limiting any ability to organize globally against the enemy outside of select military coalitions. The range of partners' definitions of the enemy runs from too narrow—identifying only the Islamic State and the global jihad faction of al Qaeda as enemy—to too broad—identifying political Salafis as part of the enemy. This range in definitions paralyzes a global effort to counter the Salafi-jihadi movement and creates instances in which the US is working at odds with its allies and partners.

Saudi Arabia has a complicated relationship with Salafi-jihadis. The Saudi state has labeled those who conduct global terror attacks in the name of Islam as terrorists; the Islamic State is an uncontroversial actor for Saudi Arabia to denounce because it is so radical and extreme that even some Salafi-jihadis condemn it.⁸⁵ Under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, NATO ally Turkey has actively supported Syrian Salafi-jihadi groups that the US has designated as FTOs.⁸⁶ Likewise in Yemen, the UAE has backed Salafi-jihadi groups about which the US has raised concerns and whose leaders the US has designated.⁸⁷

Similarly, Pakistan's military has historically carved out exceptions for Salafi-jihadi groups whose actions benefited the Pakistani state in either Afghanistan or India. Some partners such as Egypt, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE define the enemy too broadly by including political Salafist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood as designated terrorist organizations.⁸⁸ The Muslim Brotherhood's position on using violence differs significantly from other Salafi-jihadis, and banning political Islam could drive support to Salafi-jihadis rather than reduce the problem.⁸⁹ Providing a clear definition and reinforcing it in partner engagements should help lay out the US understanding of the enemy.

The Enemy's Strength. The Salafi-jihadi movement's strengthening over the past decade despite an expansion of US and partners' counterterrorism pressure demonstrates the ineffectiveness of the current strategy to defeat al Qaeda or the Islamic State, let alone the movement. The kinetic-heavy approach, enhanced in more recent years with a nonmilitary emphasis on countering or PVE, has not halted the spread of Salafi-jihadi groups into new regions. Groups have begun to reconstitute in places where the current approach had reduced the security and terrorist threat from the groups because the strategy did not set the conditions to prevent their return.⁹⁴

The US strategy has been attacking the Salafi-jihadi vanguard to eliminate it, which has proved to be impossible globally and even in specific theaters where the US sustained a high tempo of operations against the vanguard. The proper point of attack is

the Salafi-jihadi movement's relationship with Sunni communities, which is dependent on local conditions and decisions of the community itself.⁹⁵

Know Your Enemy

"If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle."

—Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

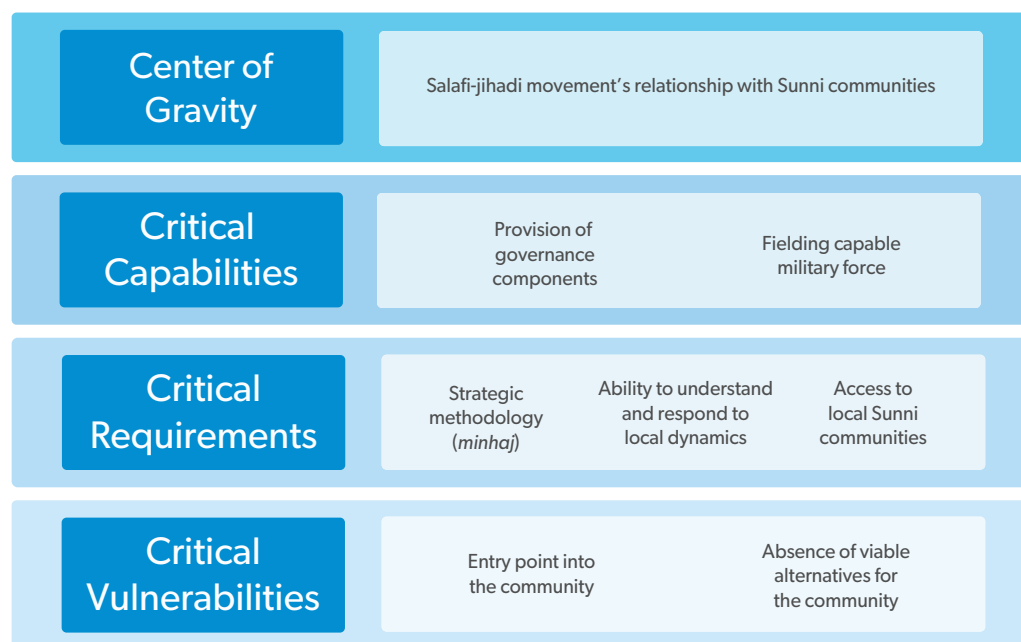
Salafi-jihadis have gone to great lengths to define their enemies precisely and to understand them, though imperfectly. For Salafi-jihadis, ensuring that they have properly classified groups of people is a religious imperative. The long justifications of various targets explain why the killing of certain groups—the members of Muslim governments and militaries, American and Western soldiers and government officials, American and Western civilians, and Muslim bystanders, among others—is not a sin that will send the perpetrator to hell.

For example, Osama bin Laden justified the targeting of American civilians by arguing for their complicity with the government and its actions through the democratic process.⁹⁰ Salafi-jihadi groups warn Muslim civilians away from potential targets in Muslim-majority countries such as military or government sites, and some groups take extra measures to limit civilian casualties (though not always effectively).⁹¹ Al Qaeda senior leadership has studied the US and its approach to counterterrorism extensively, as seen in the large cache of documents uncovered in Osama bin Laden's compound in May 2011.⁹² It is not clear to what lengths local leaders have studied Western governments, though they engage in discussions on the local dynamics, indicating an effort to understand their own contexts.⁹³

The Salafi-jihadi ideology is the source of strength for the movement at the grand strategic level. (See Figure 2.) The ideology coheres a global and self-defined vanguard of adherents. Members of the Salafi-jihadi vanguard follow a strategic doctrine and methodology informed by their ideology.⁹⁶ The vanguard itself might not even be vulnerable to defeat in the doctrinal military sense; it is not clear what actions the US and its partners could take to deprive the vanguard of its will or ability to continue to fight.

The vanguard sees itself as building a broader movement to achieve its strategic objectives not through the ideological conversion of the masses but through the co-option and coercion of Sunnis to align with the vanguard over time. The existence of the vanguard and its ability to regenerate enables it to persist under significant pressure from the US and partners. The ideology is crucial to the Salafi-jihadi movement's success, and recruitment into the ranks serves to ensure the vanguard's strength. Focusing on the ideology and the vanguard itself as the point of attack, however, has not significantly weakened the Salafi-jihadi movement.

Strategic Center of Gravity. The vanguard has come to understand the importance of maintaining and expanding its connections to the Sunni masses. The relationship between the vanguard and Sunni communities is the center of gravity at the strategic level for the Salafi-jihadi movement. This relationship empowers the vanguard to achieve its strategic objectives. The vanguard actively builds ties to communities and groups with the intention of unifying the *umma*, the Muslim community, and penetrating the communities and groups to begin transforming them into its image. The vanguard then begins to impose its version of Islamic governance on these communities with the intention of eventually overthrowing the governments in the Muslim world and replacing them. Salafi-jihadi leaders have thus identified that their power comes from the strength of their relationships with local Sunni communities and not solely from the size, capabilities, or ideological conviction of the vanguard itself.⁹⁷

Figure 2. Salafi-Jihadi Movement's Strategic Sources of Strength

Source: Katherine Zimmerman, *Road to the Caliphate: The Salafi-Jihadi Movement's Strengths*, Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, June 6, 2019, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/road-to-the-caliphate-the-salafi-jihadi-movements-strengths>.

Critical Capabilities. The set of capabilities essential to accomplishing the Salafi-jihadi movement's strategic objectives and enabling it to expand its relationships with Sunni communities includes providing governance components and fielding a military force for security. The vanguard relies on transactional relationships with Sunni communities, such as providing goods or services, for the ability to operate in an area, rather than on ideological appeals. Changing conditions create opportunities for the vanguard to build initial ties to communities as governance and security deteriorate. The vanguard then preys on weakened communities—offering to meet the basic needs such as dispute resolution or justice, basic goods or other services, security, or community defense—and creates incremental leverage points over the community. Over time, the vanguard pursues a phased expansion of its influence within the community to enforce its will either through direct governance or indirect influence over the legitimate local governance.

Critical Requirements. The Salafi-jihadi vanguard must have its strategic methodology, access to Sunni communities, and an ability to understand and respond to local dynamics for it to be able to build relationships using its critical capabilities. The vanguard's *minhaj* (methodology) prescribes strategic phased approaches based on the local conditions, identifies operational objectives for the vanguard in theaters, and provides the religious argumentation behind the vanguard's actions (rightly or wrongly).⁹⁸

The vanguard cannot begin building its relationships without access to a community. Healthy communities have historically rejected the vanguard and what it stands for, but when conditions degrade to a certain point, communities have tolerated the vanguard's presence in exchange for support. Finally, the vanguard must understand and react to local developments to identify and address a community's needs and to shape the conditions to retain (sometimes to gain) access to communities.

Critical Vulnerabilities. The Salafi-jihadi movement's strategic strength, its relationship with Sunni communities, depends on the local conditions that create opportunities for the vanguard to act and the communities' own decisions regarding the vanguard. Specifically, denying the vanguard access or an entry point to the community by addressing those conditions that make communities more susceptible to the vanguard's penetration prevents the community from accepting the Salafi-jihadi presence. Additionally, for those communities that have been penetrated already, providing a viable alternative for the community to what the Salafi-jihadi vanguard is offering could cause the community to begin rejecting the vanguard. Both actions will directly affect the Salafi-jihadi movement's ability to strengthen its relationship with the local Sunni communities.

Center-of-Gravity Analysis Implications. A successful strategy to counter the Salafi-jihadi movement must seek to sever the ties between the Salafi-jihadi vanguard and Sunni communities. The focus should be on addressing those community grievances or requirements that the Salafi-jihadi vanguard uses to gain entry to the community. Improving the local conditions has a direct effect on the strength of the Salafi-jihadi movement, especially when coupled with an effort to eliminate a community's dependence on the vanguard for governance components, defense, or another key local requirement.

The Strategy

The US must develop a new strategic approach to countering the Salafi-jihadi movement that targets the relationship between the vanguard and Sunni communities. This strategy is not a replacement for a counterterrorism strategy, but rather an effort to defeat the source of the primary terror threat to the US: the Salafi-jihadi movement. Defeating the Salafi-jihadi ideology is impossible, but reducing and nearly eliminating the threat from that ideology's adherents is possible.

US National Security Priorities. The American government's most fundamental duty is to ensure the safety of the American people and homeland. The threat of Salafi-jihadi terror attacks against Americans was the most imminent threat to the US in 2001 and therefore drove the US government's orientation against this threat. The US recognized belatedly the shift in global power dynamics as adversaries such as Russia and China began testing their returned strengths in the late 2000s and early 2010s. They have each pursued strategies to reduce American influence globally. Iran and North Korea, too, have risen to contest American influence.

These multiple threats to American interests converge in a shared interest of restructuring the international order in a way that reduces America's influence, security, and prosperity. The intersection of these threats means that each actor—the Salafi-jihadi movement, Russia, China, Iran, and others—can no longer be understood separately from one another, nor can the US design an approach against the Salafi-jihadi movement without also considering Iran and Russia.

Any strategy to counter the global Salafi-jihadi movement must advance American national security objectives beyond the counterterrorism fight.⁹⁹ It must be part of a comprehensive grand strategy that also secures American national security interests against Russian and Chinese actions globally and Iranian actions in the Middle East and parts of South Asia and Africa. A core component of this strategy will necessarily be to defend the liberal international order, which is under attack. Preserving and strengthening this global order will assist in defending the American people's security, protect American commercial interests in a free-market international economic system, and promote liberal systems of government. This strategy need not promote democracy or American values or recommend humanitarian activities except as needed to advance core US national security interests.

Minimum Essential Conditions. US national security requires that the Salafi-jihadi movement does not threaten the US homeland, allies and partners, or Americans abroad. The strategy should

work to achieve the following conditions, as outlined in the October 2018 US National Strategy for Counterterrorism.

1. The Salafi-jihadi terrorist threat to the US is eliminated.
2. US borders and entry ports are secured against terrorist threats.
3. Terrorism and Salafi-jihadism do not undermine the American way of life.
4. Foreign partners are able to address the Salafi-jihadi threats to secure the collective interests of the US and its partners.¹⁰⁰

In sum, the required condition is reducing the Salafi-jihadi movement's threat to the US and its interests to a level against which normal American and partners' law enforcement means will be able to defend.

Possible Ways Forward. The US has not sought to defeat the Salafi-jihadi movement. It has instead focused on the direct threats that specific groups and individuals in the movement pose to Americans at home and abroad. The 9/11 attacks shifted the US emphasis from anti-terrorism measures—defensive in nature—to an increasingly offensive posture focused on counterterrorism measures—offensive activities to neutralize terrorist threats. The counterterrorism efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan specifically became intertwined with local insurgencies, leading to the adoption of population-centric counterinsurgency (COIN) strategies rather than enemy-centric strategies. Elsewhere, the US has relied on counterterrorism actions and countering violent extremism and terrorism prevention (CVE/TP) to disrupt active terrorist attack plots and recruitment and mobilization of fighters.

The COIN approach adopted in Iraq and Afghanistan involved a heavy military footprint and the mobilization of significant foreign assistance, associating a high price tag with a counterinsurgency effort in

the minds of US congressmen and politicians. The framing of the public debate over the way forward has therefore presented a stark dichotomy between a light-footprint counterterrorism approach (with or without a complementary CVE/TP effort)—effectively droning attack cells and supporting local security force efforts to disrupt terrorist activities—and an intervention on the scales of Iraq in 2003 and Afghanistan in 2009–14. The exception has been the support for the coalition efforts in Iraq and Syria, which maintained a minimal US deployment in support of ground partners. Yet even this model may prove problematic as those gains against the Islamic State erode.

American counterterrorism efforts have been largely successful at keeping Americans safe, with a few notable exceptions.¹⁰¹ They have not prevented the rise of new groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria in 2013, or the evolution of existing groups into critical threats, such as al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in 2009. The risk of a Salafi-jihadi terror attack will persist, though it is tied to the strength of the Salafi-jihadi movement overall. The acceptability of that level of risk and future risk to Americans and American interests is a political decision because reducing that risk requires resources. The possible ways forward then include (1) maintaining the status quo, (2) scaling back counterterrorism and CVE/TP operations to shift resources toward other priorities, or (3) adopting an approach outside of the counterterrorism framework.

1. Sustained Counterterrorism. The US could continue its current approach to countering the threat from Salafi-jihadi groups. This approach is defensive. It focuses on eliminating the threats to the US and its citizens from these groups and radicalized individuals. US-led kinetic actions—drone strikes and special operations forces raids—target specific cells posing imminent threats while US-backed local or regional partners pursue the military defeat of the rest of the organization.

A US ground presence has served as an enabling force to provide close air support and build capacity in cases in which partners are unable to counter the organization on the ground. Nonmilitary efforts

Definitions

Terrorism. The unlawful use of violence or threat of violence, often motivated by religious, political, or other ideological beliefs, to instill fear and coerce governments or societies in pursuit of goals that are usually political.

Anti-Terrorism. Defensive measures used to reduce the vulnerability of individuals and property to terrorist acts to include rapid containment by local military and civilian forces.

Counterterrorism. Activities and operations taken to neutralize terrorists and their organizations and networks to render them incapable of using violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies to achieve their goals.

Combating Terrorism. Actions, including anti-terrorism and counterterrorism, taken to oppose terrorism throughout the entire threat spectrum.

Countering Violent Extremism/Terrorism Prevention. Proactive actions intended to reduce the ability of violent extremists to radicalize, recruit, and mobilize followers to violence and to change the conditions that facilitate violent extremists' recruitment and radicalization of individuals.

Source: Department of Defense, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, May 2019, <https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/dictionary.pdf>; and Department of Homeland Security, "What Is CVE?," <https://www.dhs.gov/cve/what-is-cve>, accessed June 24, 2019.

center on preventing the recruitment and radicalization process, especially within the West, through CVE or TP programming. Additional foreign assistance supports the improvement of local law enforcement and border security capabilities and shapes some of the conditions that led to the growth of the group initially.

This current approach seems desirable because of its light footprint and perceived low cost. It has been largely effective at preventing a mass-casualty directed terrorist attack within the US. It has also delivered the military defeat of the Islamic State's territorial caliphate in Iraq and Syria. The US infrastructure to support the approach has matured significantly over the past 18 years to the point where the US military and intelligence community is highly effective at identifying and eliminating elements of selected terrorist networks globally. Additionally, US investments in counterterrorism partners such as the UAE have begun to yield dividends as partners are increasingly capable of filling the role that the US military and intelligence community has played in limited areas. CVE/TP programming lessens the reliance on military action to counter these groups and has disrupted some of their recruitment.

The costs of the approach are hidden in the risk of strategic surprise as an adaptive enemy innovates new attack capabilities and in the probability that the US will need to reengage militarily repeatedly as groups such as the Islamic State periodically establish sanctuaries on an unacceptable scale. American security rests on the ability of the US intelligence community to identify active threat streams and on border security elements to disrupt attempts to penetrate the US borders.

Meanwhile, the enemy has proved adept at exploiting security and intelligence gaps and continues to probe US defenses for weaknesses. The expansion of the Salafi-jihadi movement abroad, including the rise in the number of foreign terrorist fighters, has also increased the number of possible attack vectors and strained law enforcement and intelligence capabilities. The rapid rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria from the remnants of al Qaeda in Iraq is replicable, especially as an insurgency begins to re-form in parts of those countries. Finally, multiple cases in Iraq, Mali, and Yemen show that this approach will not deliver a durable outcome without a complementary political strategy.

2. *Scaled-Back Counterterrorism.* A branch to the above approach would be a scaled-back option in

which the US restricted its external activities related to terrorism to executable operations against known and imminent terrorism threats. The US military and intelligence community would retain visibility on the global terrorist networks but would intervene only when direct threats were forming. US foreign assistance would be heavily reduced, and the US would move to the background in shaping the dynamics in many countries that are of core national interests only because of the terrorism threat.

This option seemingly removes the US from fighting the forever war in combating terrorism and restricts the use of US resources in the fight against terrorism. It also removes the US from soft spending on CVE/TP programs that are difficult to prove to be effective. The US would be able to draw down its investments abroad in certain countries, freeing up those resources.

This option creates considerable risk for the US. It assumes the US will be able to continue to monitor attack cells globally even as the American footprint is reduced—an assumption against which there is considerable evidence. This approach will thus likely reduce visibility on the threats, increase the risk of strategic surprise, and damage American leverage over current and future counterterrorism partners. Its focus on the military solution will almost certainly allow for the enemy's expansion into local power dynamics outside of the group's immediate military threat, allowing the enemy to build capacity for much more serious attacks in the longer term. The US could well be caught flat-footed when a serious threat reemerges.

It is by no means clear that the sustained and scaled-back counterterrorism models can succeed against an innovative and adaptive enemy. Salafi-jihadi groups have adopted tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) that give them an asymmetrical attack capability at a fraction of the price of defending against this threat. Local partners, in some cases, inadvertently drive recruitment toward Salafi-jihadi groups rather than away from them because of their actions or the perception that they are occupying forces. Global trends are headed toward a rise in conflict, rather than stability, which will create

additional opportunities for the Salafi-jihadi vanguard to entrench itself in local contexts, driving up the demand for a security response and creating a cycle of conflict. Additionally, US or foreign support for counterterrorism operations has also played poorly within local conflicts and furthered a narrative of attacks against the community into which the Salafi-jihadi movement seeks to insinuate itself.¹⁰²

3. *Beyond Counterterrorism.* An alternative approach would focus efforts on attacking the strength of the Salafi-jihadi movement rather than the threat that it poses. The objective of expanding beyond counterterrorism would be to more permanently reduce the Salafi-jihadi terror threat and to recognize the threat to American interests the Salafi-jihadi movement poses outside of terror attacks. This approach would retain a counterterrorism component and a CVE/TP component. However, the emphasis would shift from targeting and disrupting identified Salafi-jihadi individuals and groups to destroying the relationships with Sunni communities that they have formed to isolate the vanguard and reduce its influence.

Improving local conditions to strengthen vulnerable communities would underpin this effort, which has ramifications for national-level strategy, for local foreign assistance programming, and for how to conduct counterterrorism operations. Addressing governance gaps, or at least competing with the rudimentary capabilities of the Salafi-jihadi vanguard to do so, and resolving key popular grievances would be part of the main effort in this approach. The popular grievances to resolve are not those that lead to individuals' radicalization into the vanguard, but rather those that the vanguard uses as a means to expand influence into a community.

This approach requires developing a new strategy to counter the Salafi-jihadi movement outside of a combating terrorism or counterterrorism paradigm. It would break significantly from how the US has framed and pursued the threat from al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and other groups and would require significant political leadership and diplomacy to work with partners to correct course, especially those that have followed the American lead.

It would also be an attempt to try to scale some of the COIN successes from Afghanistan and Iraq globally without also generating a massive requirement for resources or a significant military deployment into theaters. The intent is to transform the strategy to yield more permanent results against the Salafi-jihadi movement at an acceptable level of effort and expense.

Nesting counterterrorism efforts as part of a broader strategy to counter the Salafi-jihadi movement might require a higher investment in resources upfront to yield security dividends down the line as the Salafi-jihadi movement is weakened on the ground. Success will not be as readily measurable as the number of disrupted terror attacks, leaders killed, or recruits off-ramped from radicalization. It will also require a more significant diplomatic investment and engagement, as addressing the local conditions, governance issues, and related grievances will involve shaping environments within other states.

Recommended Approach. The US should adopt an approach to counter the Salafi-jihadi movement that will continue to keep Americans safe both at home and abroad and that will weaken the movement overall, eventually reducing the global terror threat. This approach must go beyond counterterrorism, which to date has effectively kept Americans safe but has not eliminated the source of the threat. The US must prioritize attacking the strategic strength of the Salafi-jihadi movement—the relationship with local Sunni communities—while retaining a counterterrorism and CVE/TP component to eliminate any imminent terror threat.

The local contexts therefore are of utmost importance to this strategy's success. Focusing on resolving those underlying conflicts and grievances that enabled the Salafi-jihadi vanguard to build new ties within communities and eventually penetrate them fully is vital. Breaking the bonds the vanguard has formed and preventing it from building new ones isolates the vanguard, reducing it to a terrorism threat. Such an approach also helps advance other American interests by strengthening communities and reducing conflict.

Such an approach inverts much of the emphasis that the US has placed on its efforts over the past two decades and shifts counterterrorism operations to be a supporting rather than main effort. It does not wholly abandon the current counterterrorism approach. Rather, it identifies the counterterrorism line of effort as part of the overall effort to defeat the global Salafi-jihadi movement, an effort that the US has not actually sought to undertake. The concept for this approach is outlined below, though the breadth and scope of developing the specific objectives, key tasks, and lines of effort for a global strategy against this type of enemy actor serves as a planning constraint.

The strategic objectives include:

1. Destroying the global Salafi-jihadi movement by isolating it from the population;
2. Supporting and legitimizing governance that is representative and responsive to the population, permanent, sovereign, and acceptable to the US; and
3. Supporting the establishment of security conditions such that local forces can prevent the return of Salafi-jihadi groups.

The mission to keep Americans safe is enduring. The US should take more risk on securing the American people and the homeland against terror attacks to pursue this approach. Counterterrorism actions should be taken only in extreme cases in which the risk to American life or national interests is high. The initial response to developing threats should be addressing their source in the expansion of the Salafi-jihadi movement rather than through direct action operations.

The new strategic objectives yield the following key tasks.

1. Sever the relationships between local communities and the Salafi-jihadi vanguard by supporting the resolution of local conflicts and redress of grievances that provide the Salafi-jihadi

vanguard with the opportunities to penetrate local communities, strengthening acceptable governance at the local and national levels to block or disrupt Salafi-jihadi efforts, and providing communities with an acceptable alternative to what the Salafi-jihadi vanguard offers in terms of provision of goods or services.

2. Prevent the Salafi-jihadi vanguard from building new relationships by blocking efforts to penetrate new communities, including through nonideological means.
3. Support or enable acceptable governance at the local and national levels that is enduring.
4. Enable the development of national and local security structures that can accomplish key objectives with limited external support and that do not alienate the population or drive further conflict.

The sequencing and phasing of these tasks depends on local conditions. Some should be executed simultaneously. Few are achievable in the near term, and in some places where the Salafi-jihadi vanguard has fully penetrated communities, the timeline is generational or more. The US will rely heavily on local, regional, and global partners throughout, as discussed further below.

The overall intent is to restore communities' ability to reject the Salafi-jihadi vanguard, which will weaken the global movement as its support base falls away. Over the long term, removing the relationships between the vanguard and local communities should also eliminate its support base and any shared interests between the vanguard and the communities. The strengthening of communities and shaping of durable outcomes to local conflicts in this approach will create local resistance to the vanguard, and the resources required to support this effort will diminish. The Salafi-jihadi vanguard will again be isolated from communities, unable to achieve operational objectives within Sunni Muslim areas, and relegated to a terrorism threat that counterterrorism tactics can address.

The main effort in this approach is non-kinetic and seeks to separate the Salafi-jihadi vanguard from communities. It focuses on governance and grievances. The intent is to exploit the Salafi-jihadi vanguard's vulnerabilities: its ability to gain initial entry into a community and the absence of viable alternatives to the vanguard for a community.¹⁰³

The vanguard's requirement to retain its connection to local communities to strengthen the Salafi-jihadi movement makes it dependent on communities' own conditions and decisions. The local conditions—the surrounding political, economic, and security environments—shape how communities might respond to the vanguard's efforts and therefore cannot be ignored in any counterstrategy. The conditions in the communities themselves, the resiliency of those communities, and the potential options the communities have for securing their futures all affect the communities' calculations when deciding whether to tolerate Salafi-jihadis.

The US must first identify the full extent of the Salafi-jihadi movement to define the area of interest and then the specific means and methods that the Salafi-jihadi vanguard uses to build popular support in communities. The US intelligence community should already have assessments of where members of the Salafi-jihadi vanguard are operating as part of the current US counterterrorism effort. The intelligence community probably also has the intelligence required to assess how the Salafi-jihadi vanguard is engaging with priority communities but must shift from focusing on producing targeting intelligence to developing assessments focused on this question.

Publicly available analysis from regional experts and nongovernment analysts builds a sufficient baseline estimate to fill the initial gaps on those communities for which the intelligence community has little-to-no intelligence to refine and prioritize the actual intelligence requirements to support this effort. The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) under the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) is the probable lead coordinator to develop these assessments.

Next, the US, in consultation with its partners, must develop an integrated phased plan to first compete

with and then block the vanguard's efforts in the identified communities. The actual local efforts will vary in scale, duration, and resources required based on the local environment. How the community-based efforts nest under a state- and regional-level effort will also vary significantly based on the maturity of the Salafi-jihadi movement, the types of partners on the ground and especially the host nation, and the characteristics of the local conflict itself.

Communities deemed at risk or targeted by the Salafi-jihadi vanguard such as ones in Kenya, Burkina Faso, or even Mozambique might benefit from rapid, small-scale interventions that seek to close off the opportunities to the vanguard within the community. Penetrated communities at the other end of the spectrum, like those in northwest Syria, require a longer-term phased series of interventions for the community to recalibrate and then break from the Salafi-jihadi vanguard. The plan must also seek to resolve simmering or active conflicts that create opportunities for the Salafi-jihadi movement to expand.

The initial planning phase should be completed without resource constraints to identify the full scope and scale of what could be done to combat the Salafi-jihadi movement. Such a planning environment will also facilitate coordination in the interagency and with partners who may be able to implement components of the plan to minimize the possibility of US efforts abroad working at cross-purposes.

The US must then prioritize the theaters of engagement, taking into account the significance of certain regions to the Salafi-jihadi movement¹⁰⁴ and the threat posed to specific US interests. This prioritization should also account for other US objectives abroad, including blocking Russian, Chinese, and Iranian advances; preventing the spread of illiberalism; promoting the security of US allies; and reducing or preventing humanitarian crises. The most effective organization of theaters is unlikely to align with international borders, the current US geographic combatant command, or regional bureau structures but will orient on the human terrain systems and how the Salafi-jihadi vanguard organizes its theaters.¹⁰⁵ Developed theater campaign plans will identify the

minimum required resources to achieve the objective of severing the Salafi-jihadi vanguard's relationship with communities, which then informs the minimum resource requirements for the full implementation of the approach.

This main effort is not nation building or development work. The US should not be in the business of constructing a national identity or state institutions, nor should it spend taxpayer dollars on development programming that is not tied directly to securing American national security interests. Many of the states where the Salafi-jihadi movement has sanctuary are weak. Weak or even fragile states do not necessarily lead to a Salafi-jihadi problem, however, especially when the communities within the state remain healthy and reject the Salafi-jihadi presence.

The same can be said of underdeveloped areas. Poverty, poor employment prospects, and other so-called "root causes" of extremism exist in Sunni communities that continue to reject the Salafi-jihadi vanguard. Solving poverty or bringing about universal education are unlikely to affect the strength of the Salafi-jihadi movement; they are certainly not required for this strategy's success.

Nor is the effort to provide redress for all grievances and build governance everywhere. The US must dedicate its limited resources to only the areas where American interests are at risk. Clear limits exist to the expanse of this effort. It will be in Sunni Muslim areas. These are the communities that the Salafi-jihadi vanguard targets and seeks to transform. Refining further, it will be in those communities that have weakened due to local conflict or other changes in conditions. These communities overlap with many communities considered to be fragile, but fragility is not a sufficient indicator. The Salafi-jihadi vanguard has notably been constrained in its ability to expand in "normal," but fragile, conditions.

Finally, members of the vanguard need to be present—further reducing the areas of interest. Moreover, the effort does not require full stabilization of these areas. The US and partners are not fixing society in full, but are denying the vanguard the means to penetrate communities. For example, illicit markets might remain so long as they do not benefit Salafi-jihadis.

Lastly, neither of the US efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq are the blueprints for this approach. The US invasions of both countries deposed the standing governments and created national insurgencies that required an intensive counterinsurgency strategy to install or support a new, stable government. This approach does not advocate for or support regime change operations, but rather focuses on stabilization operations and a foreign assistance-based strategy that targets particular communities at risk of penetration or already penetrated by the Salafi-jihadi vanguard.

The approach commits US resources early to conflicts or trouble spots, which has the benefit of enabling the US to adopt a patient and phased plan that meters the commitment of US resources. The earlier intervention should preclude the requirement for the US to confront suddenly massive emergencies that demand matching resource commitments, such as the rise of the Islamic State in 2013–14 in Iraq and Syria.

State Department Lead Coordinator. The scale and complexity of this approach demands the alignment of purpose across US foreign engagements to achieve the desired political and security effects. The State Department should take the lead in coordinating the interagency effort, especially given the political and diplomatic requirements of this approach. Such coordination might include ensuring that efforts are prioritized across countries and regions and that US activities external to this approach do not work at cross-purposes. The State Department should ensure that interventions are nested within their respective country and regional strategies and remain coordinated and synchronized globally.

In the State Department, the regional bureaus and relevant functional bureaus and offices must coordinate to develop the minimum required political conditions for the various identified communities, their countries, and the regions that satisfy US national security interests. These minimum required conditions must be shared across the interagency to assist in developing foreign and security assistance programming that blocks and rolls back the expansion of the Salafi-jihadi movement without destabilizing states or harming other US interests. US diplomats

must then ensure that US partners and host nations accept and support the vision. US ambassadors as chiefs of mission must also be stakeholders in the success of this approach and ensure that their country teams support the implementation of the plan.

Drawing on Current Authorities and Capabilities. The US government should be able to implement this approach based on current authorities and capabilities. The primary shift is reorienting US foreign assistance programming into a strategic framework aimed at achieving specific political results in addition to programmatic outcomes, which has implications for aligning funding as well. The US already conducts or has conducted many of the types of programs that would support this approach, though on a more limited scale or in support of different objectives.

Under the rubric of CVE, certain US development assistance has targeted communities to prevent them from developing a reliance on Salafi-jihadis or remove the means for the Salafi-jihadis to hold leverage over the community.¹⁰⁶ Violence and conflict prevention programs and stabilization operations and programs contribute in part to providing redress for grievances or building or strengthening local governance. Even simple development or humanitarian assistance—the building of wells, livelihood training, or education or health programs—are capabilities to bring to bear.

The US government and former US government employees have expertise and experience on how to develop community-based programs that reduce Salafi-jihadi influence. The recommended approach bears some similarity to the SOF-led Village Stability Operations (VSO) and partnered Afghan Local Police (ALP) program in Afghanistan, which sought to reduce Taliban influence in an area by strengthening local governance and security, though the Defense Department led the VSO/ALP effort.

It also has some parallels with programs run through USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives and programs through the State Department's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, which have sought to deny space to Salafi-jihadi groups in Libya, Nigeria, Syria, Yemen, and other active hot spots

Village Stability Operations in Afghanistan

Village Stability Operations (VSO) were a bottom-up effort in support of the counterinsurgency campaign that began in 2009 in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁷ They sought to shape local conditions in a village in critical terrain, hold the village against the Taliban, build local governance and security capabilities, and then expand and transition, connecting the village to a local security structure.¹⁰⁸ The Afghan Local Police (ALP) program provided the framework in which to build the local self-defense forces with a vision to eventually incorporate these forces into the national police. SOF teams conducted the VSO with a mandate to promote governance, development, and security. VSO secured the community, restored or reinvigorated local governance and security structures, and provided access to future opportunities.¹⁰⁹

The success of the VSO and ALP program was mixed. But the threat that it posed to the Afghan Taliban was clear in the Taliban's reaction. Taliban communications included directives to kill ALP commanders over coalition troops and spread reports of ALP abuses.¹¹⁰ The Taliban targeted the ALP to intimidate other Afghans from joining the program.¹¹¹

worldwide. SOF lessons learned from Afghanistan, Iraq, and other theaters where Civil Affairs teams have sought to combat the influence of Salafi-jihadi groups combined with the lessons learned on the civilian side at USAID provide a wealth of examples and best practices from which to draw in designing future interventions.

The characteristics of the interventions will vary considerably across communities, countries, and regions. Understanding the local context to plan successful interventions takes time, especially when initially mapping the human terrain and assessing

how the Salafi-jihadi vanguard is gaining influence. These interventions may draw on multiple types of programming, from stabilization to conflict prevention to CVE/TP. They may be small in scale to contest Salafi-jihadi activities directly or more complex to resolve multiple interacting problem sets. Foreign assistance programming should not default to strengthening the influence of the central government, especially when that influence is destabilizing to areas on the periphery that have historically had relative autonomy.

The challenge will be in scaling US targeted engagements to a global level. The intensive VSO/ALP program was possible only in the context of a US military deployment to an active theater of war. It relied on a SOF team to embed in a village to first understand the human terrain and local dynamics and then to identify and assist in implementing assistance programs. This is not feasible, nor desirable, to have SOF implement globally. Civilian-led efforts have occurred on a smaller scale due in part to resource constraints and limited access.

USAID- and State Department-led efforts have been limited in scope, seeking to achieve certain outcomes within isolated contexts. Security conditions served as a constraint on some of these programs or prevented program access entirely. Aligning US foreign assistance for countries to support this effort should position USAID and the State Department to implement a global campaign, though they will need sufficient funds appropriated. Functional expertise in the US government may be a limiting factor.

A strategic messaging campaign and information operations will reinforce the main effort. The Global Engagement Center (GEC) at the State Department should continue to expose state and nonstate disinformation campaigns. The GEC should also launch a strategic messaging campaign to communicate the US reframing of the counterterrorism problem set to reinforce diplomatic efforts to develop foreign partners. It should also conduct information operation campaigns to bolster acceptable and legitimate forms of governance within local contexts. This includes those forms of governance that are outside the recognized central government, so long as the sovereignty

of the state remains accepted. Counter-messaging campaigns to contest the Salafi-jihadi ideology should continue as part of a nested CVE/TP effort in the overall approach.

Counterterrorism and CVE/TP as a Nested Effort. The current counterterrorism effort will continue under this approach, though as a nested effort. Some components will be reduced because they run counter to the main effort's focus on non-kinetic means to sever Salafi-jihadi relationships with local communities or prevent them from forming. Direct action operations will necessarily be more limited as the US and partners pursue alternatives to a kinetic response to the threat.

The requirement to eliminate imminent threats to the US or its partners will persist as the main effort will weaken the overall strength of, but not eliminate, the Salafi-jihadi vanguard. This vanguard will continue to pursue a terror attack campaign against the US and other states. The Treasury Department will sustain counter threat finance efforts and sanctions targeting members of the vanguard. Anti-terrorism activities, such as securing the US border and improving partners' border security, will remain unaffected. Targeted de-radicalization programs, including focusing on prisons and legal reforms, will also continue. Ongoing reforms within the CVE/TP sector should continue to better develop a targeted approach at preventing the recruitment efforts from within communities.¹¹³

The US military will need to adapt its approach to refocus on capabilities outside of counterterrorism operations. US military engagements with partners and the assistance provided will need to shift from developing partners' counterterrorism capabilities to support a local response capacity toward professionalizing partner security forces and building operational- and strategic-level planning capabilities. Key military assistance programs to continue include international military education and training (IMET), foreign internal defense (FID), and defense institutional capacity building.

Iterating and Adapting the Approach. The US and partners must be responsive and agile in implementing this approach. Complexity on the ground requires

Foreign Assistance Tool Kit

The State Department and USAID have a large tool kit of programs and programming expertise developed in the field that seek outcomes in support of the overall objectives of this approach. These programs range in nature from stabilization to prevention to CVE and vary significantly in terms of the expertise required. USAID's activities in Libya during a protracted civil war with both an al Qaeda and Islamic State presence extends beyond development assistance and aims to stabilize and strengthen governance through a community-focused approach.¹¹²

flexibility in programming and effort. Other actors will have agency in effecting progress, including the host nation-state, substate actors, extra-regional actors, and nonstate actors. Salafi-jihadi, Russian, Iranian, Chinese, and others' interests converge in blocking US efforts to shape local dynamics. Exogenous events may ripple through local systems, requiring the US and partners to adjust their efforts in recognition of reality. Additionally, regular evaluations of effectiveness should feed into real-time decision-making processes on how to proceed.

Multigenerational Timeline and Sustainability. The US must commit to this approach over at least a generation, probably more, to succeed against the Salafi-jihadi movement. Accomplishing the key tasks within communities is almost impossible in the short term, and progress will probably reverse rapidly without a sustained effort. The US must recognize that the Salafi-jihadi vanguard is implementing a generational strategy, and therefore the changes that it has wrought on certain communities cannot be undone in a year or three. Isolating the Salafi-jihadi vanguard from certain communities—in Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, Syria, Yemen, and even Somalia—will prove difficult and will require sophisticated engagements to alter communities' perceptions of vanguard members. Over

time, the resources required to support this effort should decrease.

Any long-term commitment of resources from the US must be sustainable. A core concept in this approach is not only aligning future foreign assistance programs with strategic objectives and nesting them in a strategic framework but also shifting the balance of resource requirements from the Defense Department to the State Department. An inclination toward inaction under the current counterterrorism strategy has raised the cost of intervention, which currently occurs when the Salafi-jihadi movement and conflict has matured to a certain threshold.

Instead, early interventions through lower-cost foreign assistance programs to prevent the rise of conditions conducive to the expansion of the Salafi-jihadi vanguard will replace costlier, later interventions. However, the pursuit of sustainability must not prevent the US from surging resources in the short term to achieve strategic effects should opportunities arise.

Partners Needed. The US cannot succeed against the Salafi-jihadi movement without partners. The scale of the problem is simply too large. The Salafi-jihadi movement has roots across the Muslim world today, and radicalized individuals threaten Europe, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, among others. The US does not have the resources or the human capital to address this problem alone, nor will unilateral efforts likely be effective. Local, regional, and global partners will be crucial, though the US should not partner exclusively with host-nation governments and international organizations. The US should consider substate actors as partners as well, especially those with local capabilities and legitimacy among the targeted communities. Engaging with substate actors must be done carefully to avoid second-order effects in the balance of power in the state.¹¹⁴

Current counterterrorism partnerships focus on intelligence and security cooperation to identify terrorist networks and to disrupt them or involve military partnerships to combat Salafi-jihadi groups on the ground. These partnerships are insufficient to achieve the global strategic effects against the Salafi-jihadi movement. They must instead extend into the

governance domain and be aligned in effort. Gaining partner buy-in to the correct approach to counter the Salafi-jihadi movement is a much more challenging task than intelligence and security cooperation, though a necessary one. However, the US must not outsource efforts to its partners. The US must prioritize highly supporting, enabling, encouraging, and cajoling partners to do what they need to do and, at times, what they do not want to do.

The US must therefore lead its partners by setting the global framework for partner efforts. The US and partners must agree on the key terrain to block the Salafi-jihadi vanguard's efforts through strengthening governance and community resilience and resolving underlying conflicts creating the conditions the vanguard seeks to exploit. American officials must convince their counterparts that the new US approach will generate the most durable results and address the current and future threats from the Salafi-jihadi movement. They then should coordinate efforts among partners.

The US could lead from the head of an international coalition, though the political cost of such a coalition might be higher than a bilateral or regional coordination. Bringing partners into a coalition cohered around political objectives rather than military ones, such as the defeat of the Islamic State, will be challenging. Moreover, an international coalition risks marginalizing smaller states' roles and contributions or focusing attention on more influential states' priorities.

The US must not compromise on its definition of the enemy to secure partnerships. The ease with which the international community cohered around the Islamic State as an enemy in 2014 and the al Qaeda organization under Osama bin Laden in 2001 is unlikely to be replicated. Acts of international terror and sheer barbarity are a galvanizing force. Salafi-jihadi soft-power activities and involvement in local insurgencies or conflicts are much less so.

Divergent definitions of al Qaeda today have led some counterterrorism partners to support groups that the US defines as an enemy, as noted previously. Certain states that base their legitimacy in Islam, such as Saudi Arabia, have found it difficult to define Salafi-jihadism as enemy. Other states, such as the

UAE, define the enemy too broadly to include political Islamists.¹¹⁵ The lowest common denominator of transnational terrorist organizations such as al Qaeda and the Islamic State is not acceptable, nor is a maximalist position, especially when it encroaches on political liberties.

The relationship with the host nation is crucial. The host-nation government's own actions and interests will be the primary factor in the success or failure of any intervention efforts. Introducing foreign assistance resources changes calculations and could provide a perverse incentive for certain governments to avoid resolving the problem in full.

Certain governments will derive more benefits from perpetuating a Salafi-jihadi presence than if they were to eliminate it. The US and other states providing assistance must be sensitive to such incentive structures and seek to mitigate their effects. The US might not always be a preferred lead international partner, and in such cases, the US should ensure that it coordinates with the preferred partner.

The host nation's willingness and ability to combat the Salafi-jihadi vanguard varies. Host nations where the Salafi-jihadi vanguard has made headway in communities have chosen to look the other way so long as the vanguard does not threaten their interests, have been incapable of resolving the problems without foreign assistance, or have been contributing to the problem itself. Those governments that have ignored the problem must be incentivized to commit resources to address it, including those governments that might preserve a certain level of Salafi-jihadi presence to continue receiving assistance. Those that are incapable must receive support, but that support must primarily be in addressing governance gaps and resolving grievances, not only in the security sector.

Finally, those that contribute to the problem must be leveraged to stop their harmful actions and accept an approach congruent with the global effort. Difficult cases exist wherein the regime's core interests are tied to the structures that drive popular grievances and therefore create the opportunities for the Salafi-jihadi vanguard to recruit. In these cases, US and international pressure should seek to change

these structures over the long term while assisting with mitigation efforts in the near term.

Risks and Consequences. This approach bears possible risks for the US homeland, the American people, and US interests abroad. Reframing the Salafi-jihadi problem away from just a terrorism threat and refocusing on the relationships that the vanguard has built in Sunni communities globally will shift resources away from targeting terrorists and pressuring them militarily, probably in concert with the US strategic rebalancing to address great-power competition. The US must not deprive the counterterrorism mission, which is crucial to US national security, of the resources needed to identify and disrupt imminent and operationalized terror attack threats.

A new level of comfort in US policy for instability under this approach increases uncertainty abroad and may increase volatility, especially over the short term. Situations could develop that are harmful to US interests. Such a development should not cause the US to abandon the approach entirely but may cause a temporary reprioritization of efforts to ensure that core US interests are secured.

Measuring Success.¹¹⁶ The US government must be able to answer whether this approach to countering the Salafi-jihadi movement is effective. The success of the approach is inherently difficult to gauge at any one time as no direct hard or quantitative metrics serve to evaluate strategic progress globally. Progress may seem absent or limited in the near term, may suffer initial setbacks as the enemy or others engage in countering US and partner actions, and is unlikely to be the same across communities. Sustaining the US and partners' commitment to this approach over a multigenerational timeline is crucial to generating the intended effects. Policymakers and US national security leaders must therefore be prepared to respond to public and partner pressure in the short term to demonstrate the success of the approach and avoid compromising for short-term wins on the ground.

Baseline Assessments and Indicators. The US intelligence community must generate baseline assessments of

local Sunni communities that are at risk of Salafi-jihadi penetration or that have already been penetrated to understand the initial situation and an assessment of the local Salafi-jihadi vanguard and how it interacts with the community and the broader Salafi-jihadi movement. These assessments will assist in identifying the tailored approach for a community, which must also be integrated into the national, regional, and global approach and in developing the specific community-level indicators to evaluate progress within the community.

Community-based indicators could include the level of resistance to Salafi-jihadi efforts, number of local institutions and governance mechanisms independent from Salafi-jihadi influence, level of tolerance for Salafi-jihadi presence, volume of community members in Salafi-jihadi groups, and the choice of community members to inform US personnel or other partners on Salafi-jihadi activities. Measures of violence are not universal indicators of success because violence is most likely during a contested phase for a community and unlikely in fully penetrated communities except for coercive actions by the Salafi-jihadi vanguard to retain influence. Measures of control may be weak indicators as Salafi-jihadi groups are able to shape governance indirectly through other influence mechanisms, such as dominating critical infrastructure or resource flows.

Trending Positive. The strategic-level metric for evaluating progress is the number of communities where the Salafi-jihadi movement is present. However, this metric measures ultimate success and does not offer insights into whether the approach is succeeding or failing. A separate set of measurements is required to monitor progress and provide warning indicators of failure. Formal intelligence estimates and forecasts should be produced over a series of set time intervals with probabilities attached to identified most likely and most dangerous scenarios. A separate analysis should identify whether these scenarios are acceptable to the US in that they actively advance or do not harm US national security interests or whether they are dangerous to the US. A successful approach should generally yield an increasing probability of

scenarios acceptable to the US while the probability of the most dangerous scenarios decreases over time. In the best cases, the most dangerous scenario should also decrease the threat to US interests.

Assumptions. The recommended approach would be invalidated if any key underlying assumptions prove false.

Continued Safety of the American People. The recommended approach assumes that Salafi-jihadi groups such as the Islamic State, al Qaeda, and others do not conduct a mass-casualty terror attack in the US on the scale of the 9/11 attacks. Such a mass-casualty attack requires a fundamental reassessment of how the Salafi-jihadi vanguard has organized against the US and how the US should defend itself. The generational timeline over which the US will implement this approach and the sustainable commitment of resources over that timeline is acceptable under the current threat conditions, but it will not suffice should the risk to Americans increase significantly.

Support from Partners. This approach is not feasible without strong support from allies and partners. A rejection of the framework behind the approach from US allies and partners would render US efforts unviable. The absence of commitments from key partners, especially the Five Eyes partners (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, and the US), Arab Gulf states, France, and Germany, would be significant. The approach assumes that the US would be able to build an informal coalition among its partners and that, at minimum, would-be partners are not actively undermining the approach through their actions.

Implementation Issues

Identifying a new US approach to counter the Salafi-jihadi movement is not the same as implementing it in full. The complexity of the approach and structural impediments within the US government are hurdles to its implementation. Additionally, selective understanding of the recommended approach

and incomplete implementation will undermine its efficacy, and the risk of this occurring is high. Special interest groups will understand the approach in support of their own efforts—be it reducing the US military footprint abroad, focusing on stabilization efforts or addressing fragility, identifying new arguments for an expanded CVE approach, or justifying other causes. Humanitarians and members of the development community might support this approach because it shifts the focus from counterterrorism operations, but it requires all assistance to be strategic and targeted to achieve specific effects.

The US government is not prepared to implement the recommended approach. Significant hurdles exist in breaking a counterterrorism mindset in the US government and among US partners, changing how the US government handles risk; removing biases for short-term stability, easy wins, and short timelines; and navigating the legal and institutional frameworks. Many of the ideas and concepts articulated above have surfaced previously in some form but have failed to take root because of institutional and structural challenges in how the US government organizes and operates.

US policymakers and principals will therefore need to lead the effort of internal reforms to institutionalize a new way of thinking about the Salafi-jihadi terrorist threat and how to respond to it. Leading voices outside of government must also continue to press for change to drive internal efforts and shift the public debate away from measuring success based on military gains. The approach, which reframes how the US seeks to counter the Salafi-jihadi movement, will not survive contact with reality without champions for it both inside and outside government.

The Counterterrorism Mindset. Nearly 20 years of building, refining, and perfecting the means to implement today's counterterrorism strategy shape the US government's approach. The emphasis on combating terrorism and those groups that engage in terrorist activities created the mechanisms in the US government to pursue this strategy. The institutional structures in the US bureaucracy and military reward a certain mindset that defines how to fight

groups such as al Qaeda and the Islamic State. Moreover, the current counterterrorism strategy actively seeks partners who will replicate US activities, multiplying the effect of the American counterterrorism mindset globally. This mindset must change to prioritize delivering lasting results against the Salafi-jihadi movement.

In the US Government and Military. The counterterrorism framework has become synonymous in the US government with how to counter al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and other groups. This understanding has confused defeating the immediate terrorist or security threat with defeating the groups themselves. The new US-led campaign to defeat the Islamic State exemplifies this understanding.

Its four focus areas are on prosecuting Islamic State members for their crimes, securing international borders, securing international financial flows from terrorist use, and denying the ability to radicalize and recruit new members.¹¹⁷ These counterterrorism actions are unlikely to defeat the Islamic State without a complementary effort to block the Islamic State from co-opting or coercing community support. The whole-of-government approach is now fully aligned on counterterrorism, rather than on countering the Salafi-jihadi movement itself. Such an approach extends throughout the US government and military.

The current US government efforts are necessary but not sufficient against the Salafi-jihadi movement. These efforts are based on an understanding of the Salafi-jihadi threat in terms of terrorism and violence. The advances in the 1990s and early 2000s in how the US government treated terrorism cases, especially in the US judicial system under the material support statute, stagnated with respect to the Salafi-jihadi movement when the US government focused on defeating the terrorism threat individuals and groups in the movement posed, rather than on defeating the movement itself.

US foreign assistance programming to counter Salafi-jihadi groups includes building local law enforcement capabilities to identify, detain, and gather evidence against individual members; creating

legal reforms to improve counterterrorism laws (e.g., criminalizing material support); and improving partners' capabilities to enforce terrorism sanctions. Programming focused on countering the Salafi-jihadi movement outside of the security space—in terms of building community resilience or stabilization—does not receive enough support. Monitoring and evaluating these programs' success is more difficult and weakening the argument for their continuation or prioritization. Additionally, many of those in decision-making positions today have experiences within the counterterrorism framework that shape their current understanding of the issues.

Muscle memory within the US government of how to combat Salafi-jihadi groups influences the response to new Salafi-jihadi threats. These off-the-shelf strategies create a disincentive to develop new approaches incorporating the more refined understanding of the Salafi-jihadi movement and groups on the ground that the US intelligence community now has and the lessons learned from past experiences. Instead, the focus remains on using a military or security main effort to recapture or stabilize terrain and degrade the group's leadership and terrorist capabilities with almost an afterthought to setting the political conditions for an enduring outcome.

The US military has proved that it can succeed against Salafi-jihadi groups—and in many cases, that that success does not translate to winning.¹¹⁸ Meanwhile, US policymakers are unwilling to expend political and diplomatic capital necessary to shape the local dynamics to reduce support for Salafi-jihadi groups and prevent their reconstitution. The allure of the quick military fix over a messy political and socioeconomic effort, which has few immediate pay-offs, prevails.

How the US government has organized around counterterrorism reinforces the mindset. The post-9/11 era reforms within the US government focused on improving the intelligence community's ability to identify terrorist threats and the US military's and government's ability to respond to these threats. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) began operating in early 2005 to lead the intelligence integration effort.¹¹⁹ The National

Counterterrorism Partners in US Strategy

The US has invested in its counterterrorism partners and shaped the global approach to countering al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and other like-minded groups.

2003 National Strategy for Combating Terrorism. “The United States, with its unique ability to build partnerships and project power, will lead the fight against terrorist organizations of global reach.”¹²²

2011 National Strategy for Counterterrorism. “This National Strategy for Counterterrorism maintains our focus on pressuring al-Qa‘ida’s core while emphasizing the need to build foreign partnerships and capacity and to strengthen our resilience.”¹²³

2018 National Strategy for Counterterrorism. “Central to this approach is the adoption of proactive diplomatic engagement, development assistance, and security assistance to help our partners act independently and, ultimately, invest more of their own capital in bolstering counterterrorism efforts.”¹²⁴

Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) is under the ODNI and has the mission to fuse foreign and domestic intelligence related to counterterrorism, provide terrorism analysis, share information across the counterterrorism enterprise, and drive the whole-of-government action to secure US national counterterrorism objectives.¹²⁰ Within NCTC, the directorate of strategic operational planning (NCTC/DSOP) is responsible for providing strategic operational counterterrorism plans for the US government to ensure a unity of effort across the government.¹²¹

No such strategic planning or coordination office or even responsibility to integrate the approach to

countering the Salafi-jihadi movement beyond counterterrorism exists in the US government. For foreign assistance program managers in State Department regional and functional bureaus and at USAID, strategic clarity on how to align these programs with an effort to counter the Salafi-jihadi movement is therefore absent.

Made in America. US leadership of the global counterterrorism effort has replicated America's flawed framing and partially successful strategy among its global partners. The American approach has been to build partners' anti- and counterterrorism capabilities in the near to medium term and to diminish the underlying conditions that enable terrorist groups to recruit and establish safe havens over the long term. The approach assumes partners are both willing and able to conduct counterterrorism operations, which is not always the case, and ignores the often intimate relationship between central government's interests and the very conditions that need to change. It also encourages partners to reproduce a security-focused approach to terrorist threats rather than prioritize the harder and more long-term approach of addressing governance gaps and grievances.

The global development of partners able to address terrorism threats locally with minimal American investment over time has been a US objective in support of its counterterrorism strategy. To this effect, American foreign assistance has sought to reinforce partners' counterterrorism efforts, invest in partners' security infrastructure from ports to prisons, improve local law enforcement capabilities, and build specialized security forces that are equipped to conduct counterterrorism operations. Defense Department foreign assistance has built, trained, and equipped specialized counterterrorism units and spending on security cooperation, and assistance programs have expanded in the wake of 9/11 with the emphasis on developing counterterrorism partners, which reinforces a security-based approach to counterterrorism.

State Department reporting on the accounts funding its counterterrorism assistance indicates how much counterterrorism influenced programs. These accounts include peacekeeping operations; foreign

military financing (FMF); international military education and training (IMET); nonproliferation, anti-terrorism, demining, and related programs (NADR); international narcotics control and law enforcement program; economic support fund (ESF); and public diplomacy.¹²⁵ US foreign assistance has largely shifted to support counterterrorism efforts overall, a shift that has created an incentive for states to maintain a certain level of insecurity or terrorism threat to retain American foreign assistance.

The problem is that the US has created conditions under which the central government can opt for a more expedient counterterrorism solution to a Salafi-jihadi presence over the more challenging governance-based solution. Central governments receive the tools to perpetuate poor governance or ignore grievances in US security-sector assistance programs. Many of the underlying conditions that serve as a means for Salafi-jihadi recruitment and expansion persist because they touch on core interests of the central government or ruling party.¹²⁶ The incentive structure for US partners to do the work necessary to address long-standing grievances and governance gaps is reversed and therefore likely to preserve or worsen the underlying conditions rather than diminish them.

Indeed, local security forces' interventions and missteps have mobilized populations in support of Salafi-jihadi groups rather than against them, the exact opposite of the intended effect.¹²⁷ These cases create a cycle of insurgency that could strengthen the Salafi-jihadi movement over time rather than lead to its weakening and eventual defeat. Reversing the mindset among these partner governments will be difficult, especially after having built their capabilities to address the threat in a certain way.

The US has sought for its counterterrorism partners to begin owning the problem in their own areas of interest. The Obama administration accelerated a trend underway from the Bush administration, which the Trump administration has only reinforced. This trend is the encouragement of US counterterrorism partners to take the lead in the local fight with the US providing resources—intelligence, logistics, or otherwise—that only the US can provide. Since 2013, the US

has supported and encouraged those counterterrorism partners who have led military interventions with counterterrorism objectives in the Sahel and Yemen.

The French military began Operation Serval in January 2013 at the request of the Malian government to eliminate the al Qaeda-linked Islamist insurgency that had spread from northern Mali to central Mali. The French operation rapidly resecured populated centers in central and northern Mali and degraded the Salafi-jihadi threat.¹²⁸ In August 2014, the French reorganized military operations in the Sahel under Operation Barkhane, a counterterrorism mission with French forces in support of African partners. The US supported Operation Serval and continues support to Operation Barkhane—providing intelligence support and critical logistical support, including airlifts for French troops.¹²⁹

An underlying assumption in French operations is that the instability in the Sahel and rise of Salafi-jihadi groups is due to the inability of weak states to control their territories.¹³⁰ Yet strengthening the Sahelian states has bolstered the authoritarian governments and prolonged or even fed the cycle of anti-government grievances that enable Salafi-jihadi expansion. Instead of trying to extend the reach of the central government to the peripheries, an approach that addressed the conditions that enabled the Salafi-jihadi vanguard to expand its influence may have been more effective.

The UAE counterterrorism mission in Yemen launched in earnest in 2016. Emirati special forces had previously conducted counterterrorism raids, such as the rescue of a British hostage from Aden in 2015.¹³¹ In April 2016, UAE-backed Yemeni forces along with an Emirati battalion recaptured Yemen's third-largest port city, al Mukalla, from al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which had held it for a year.¹³²

The UAE has trained and equipped Yemeni "Elite" (*al Nukhba*) forces in Hadramawt and Shabwah and "Security Belt" (*al Hizam*) forces in Abyan, Aden, and Lahij to secure the roads and checkpoints and conduct ground operations against AQAP with Emirati special forces in support. Of these, the UAE has also trained special Yemeni units to conduct counterterrorism raids. The US has supported the UAE efforts

in Yemen: advising and assisting its counterterrorism partner in operational planning, providing intelligence and some logistical support, and conducting joint counterterrorism raids.¹³³

The Emirati counterterrorism effort in Yemen has pushed AQAP from population centers back to its 2009 sanctuaries and has significantly degraded AQAP leadership and disrupted AQAP operations.¹³⁴ Emirati counterterrorism efforts in Yemen largely mirror those the US pursued in the early years in Afghanistan and similarly create medium-term risk that competing political interests could upend the temporary stability achieved, re-creating the conditions that enabled AQAP to expand originally. Moreover, other Emirati efforts have empowered a Salafi fighter network that could strengthen Yemen's Salafi-jihadi base outside of AQAP and the Islamic State, leading to the rise of new threats.

The challenges that America's partners face in their own counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel, Yemen, and elsewhere are inherent to the approach that the US has supported and helped re-create. Focusing on a military response to the rise of Salafi-jihadi groups rather than on the source of the problem—the governance and grievances—traces back to the way the US has framed and then coordinated internationally the counterterrorism problem set. US counterterrorism partners remain less effective than the US at executing this flawed approach and miscalculate or make mistakes on the ground, as the US has done, as they implement it. These problems with counterterrorism are made in America.

Acceptance of Risk. US policymakers and decision makers are intolerant of certain types of risk. Specifically, they avoid risking the lives of American personnel and wasting US taxpayer dollars on new but failed programs. This risk intolerance creates a set of policy constraints that limit the ability of the US to act in the competitive space with the Salafi-jihadi vanguard, which is at the local level and often in insecure areas. The accumulating constraints on US action as conflict has spread and areas have destabilized has reduced American visibility on the problems themselves and limited its ability to shape the environment, creating

new risks in each theater to the ability of the US to secure its interests.

Risk to Personnel. Any risk to American lives must be taken knowingly and should be minimized to the greatest degree possible without jeopardizing the success of the mission. American troops, diplomats, and other civil servants are not an expendable resource. However, they cannot do their jobs from the confines of a military base or behind fortified embassy walls. Two defining and highly politicized moments in the past decade have decreased tolerance in the diplomatic corps and the military for taking such risk.

The death of US Amb. to Libya Christopher Stevens and three other Americans during the attack on the US mission in Benghazi and the ensuing political fallout created conditions in which any risk to American embassy personnel was unacceptable. The US turtled. Restrictions fell into place limiting the ability of America's diplomats to engage key leaders or local powerbrokers. These restrictions also affected the identification and management of US foreign assistance programs in less-than-ideal environments.

A public outcry from well-respected top US diplomats over the withdrawal of the US ambassador to Yemen in 2015 went unheeded: "We disagree both that the decision should be made solely on the basis of danger and that it should be made primarily in Washington."¹³⁵ The US no longer has embassies open in the capitals of Libya, Syria, and Yemen.¹³⁶ Escalating tensions with Iran caused the US to evacuate nonemergency government employees from Iraq temporarily in May 2019.¹³⁷ Other embassies, such as in Mali and Somalia, face severe restrictions on travel and even staffing, limiting their ability to engage broadly.¹³⁸

The deaths of four US soldiers in a remote Nigerien village, Tongo Tongo, have resulted in parallel restrictions for US special operators and other military personnel, especially in West Africa. The commanding officer of US Africa Command, Gen. Thomas D. Waldhauser, clarified after the release of the military's investigation to the deadly Islamic State ambush that US forces are "in a supporting role and not . . . participants in direct combat," clarifying that US partners are to conduct tactical operations, not US forces, to

keep Americans out of direct combat.¹³⁹ This clarification effectively restricts special operators' support to partnered military and security forces and probably limits their ability to leave the base.

Risk of Failure. Political reasons have created an unwillingness to tolerate the potential for failure in new foreign assistance programming or other efforts. Congressional oversight, much needed, creates a burden to show that US taxpayer dollars have not been wasted, which disincentivizes many from breaking from the tried-and-true but less effective programs for an unknown. Little tolerance exists for experimentation at the programming level, so those programs do not receive funding.¹⁴⁰ The incentive structure in the US government reinforces this bias by placing weight in promotions on success—and success is measured through successful programs and impact. Taking risk is not rewarded. Yet the rapidly changing and complex environments that the US seeks to influence require adopting much more of a Silicon Valley startup culture mindset of failing fast to identify new approaches.¹⁴¹

Stability Bias. The US government is too comfortable with the idea of "stability," which usually means the imposition of order by force on behalf of a strongman or warlord. Caught up in this comfort is a notion that the known is better than the unknown; strongman states might be authoritarian, but they are a better alternative to a chaotic political system or the rise of something worse. The predictability of stability lessens uncertainty, which in turn allows for a selection from a range of known policy options.

The bias toward stability permeates US policymakers' and officials' decisions. They seek to drive conditions back toward what had been a "stable" system for which there is a known policy playbook. The apparently lowest-risk decisions generally support driving back to this "pre-conflict" era. The conditions that existed in the previous system will continue to drive it back to instability—a reason why the strongman argument for stability will always fall short. From ambassadors as the chiefs of mission to special forces operators, stability has been drilled as good and instability as bad.¹⁴²

The system needs to change for the US to help lead the effort toward new, stable conditions.

Instability is different from destabilized. Instability is the state of being likely to change. In this state, the US and partners have opportunities to shape conditions to secure their interests in the future. US and partner efforts will probably have the expected effect on the local dynamics. Destabilized is the state in which the regular order has collapsed. The expected outcomes of efforts are far less probable as entropy increases. US actions are much less likely to secure US interests in this condition, and this environment is detrimental to US interests. US officials need to grow more comfortable with instability and understand how to maneuver within it to increase the likelihood of coming out of instability with US interests protected.

Some of their actions might add to the instability over the short term, which is not inherently bad. Gaining comfort with instability also means taking risks, as not all efforts will succeed. Safe bets that might not advance American interests fully, but that are general successes, generally receive positive career rewards. Failures from taking a risk, even calculated with proper mitigations, are currently a fast-track way to end a government career. Principals need to create space for an acceptable amount of risk when operating in unstable environments.

The government needs to change its practice of seeking to go back to stability and instead operate increasingly within instability to generate better outcomes. Take the analogy of breaking the sound barrier in an airplane. Approaching the speed of sound, shock waves form on top of the wings that made it difficult for pilots to maintain control and buffeting increases. Many believed that humans were incapable of flying faster than the speed of sound. Breaking through the sound barrier, however, yields a smooth flight at supersonic speeds. US policy seeks to keep the plane under the speed of sound where it is stable. Instead, US officials need to become comfortable with the instability to reach a new, enduring stable state.

Gray-Zone Uncertainty. The gray zone—the contested space between peace and open war—challenges the US government. The rise of competition

among US state adversaries (Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea) and their use of gray-zone operations to advance their own interests without triggering US alarm bells has generated significant discussion among national security thinkers about how the US can better operate in the gray zone.¹⁴³ This challenge exists equally for combating the Salafi-jihadi movement.

The Salafi-jihadi vanguard is operating globally below the threshold of US strategic priorities, which has contributed to its ability to expand the movement in areas like the Sahel. Its incorporation into the local contexts and objectives obscure the extent of its gains within the Muslim world, especially without an accompanying rise in terror threat to the US. Uncertainty in the US government over which department should lead the countereffort—State Department or Defense Department—delays or inhibits a US response until the Salafi-jihadi threat rises to a certain level.

Short Timelines and Easy Wins. US strategy and the adopted policies orient on a short timeline with demonstrable successes. Politics drive much of this. Clear metrics by which to measure progress—from the value of the investment of taxpayer dollars to the success on the ground—are required. Policy planners therefore are prejudiced to a short-term timeline, often less than the four-year term, with measurable change. For the fight against the Islamic State, the metric became the number of square kilometers under Islamic State control in Iraq and Syria. Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump both point to the counter-Islamic State fight in Iraq and Syria and cite their own successes. The US and coalition certainly achieved a military victory against the Islamic State, but the Islamic State has unlikely been defeated permanently.

Easy Wins. The US government tends to double down on successful foreign assistance programs without fully considering whether these programs will generate strategic effects. This tendency has been reinforced by much-needed congressional oversight intended to prevent fraud and waste, by budget

considerations, and by career development in which accomplishments help determine promotions. Foreign assistance programming is complicated, and achieving the desired outcomes and effects is difficult.

Moreover, the management and implementation of programs is incredibly siloed in the State Department and USAID, limiting visibility among bureaus and offices acting on an issue or within a space. A reward system in the US government for doing what works or for not changing what has been in place incentivizes the replication of programs without an overarching strategy. Such a system undermines a strategic alignment and focus for foreign assistance programs, including the adopting programs that might fail to produce the desired effects.

Timelines. Election-cycle and budget-driven timelines are damaging to US strategic interests because they prevent the development of a strategic long-term approach to pursue objectives and create short-term planning cycles. US political leadership needs to first accept that whether the US wants to be engaged or not, the Salafi-jihadi movement will continue to pursue its objectives and therefore continue to attack American interests abroad. Combating the Salafi-jihadi movement is not a matter of choice. For this approach, American politicians must understand that it is a generational effort and must lead in ensuring the American people understand this timeline. Finally, Congress must authorize funding for mid- to long-term efforts for the US government to plan and implement programs in a sustainable and phased campaign. A key danger is the US drawing down resources too early and too quickly, which creates conditions for relapse and erases many of the gains over previous years.

Planning timelines also challenge the US government. Rapid interventions—whether by the military or civilian agencies—might set conditions in the short term (two to three years), and programming to stabilize or reinforce the conditions might be planned out over a 10-year time horizon. In the interim, multiple actors have the opportunity and probably the intent to influence the ground conditions. Any successful long-term programming from the US and partners

must then be flexible and sensitive to shifts in ground conditions to be effective.

Legal and Institutional Framework. The majority of the hurdles to implementing the recommended approach are related to policy decisions and how the US government has organized. A few notable exceptions surround counterterrorism legislation, particularly the material support statute and the US government's ability to engage in the ideological space. Additionally, the manner by which the US federal budget operates limits strategic use of resources.

First Amendment. First Amendment protections for freedom of speech and free exercise of religion, which challenge even defining the enemy, also restrict how the US government engages with the Salafi-jihadi ideology itself. This challenge will permeate any approach that includes CVE/TP efforts because these efforts require the US government to pass judgment on a religious belief, however marginalized, and seek to prevent the spread of this belief.¹⁴⁴ The limitations that the First Amendment place on the US government's ability to engage in this space are for the better. The US government should not be shaping the ideological space for the very reasons the First Amendment exists, nor is it the right space to focus significant government resources since attacking the ideology has not yielded strategic-level results.

Material Support Statute. Strict adherence to the interpretations of the material support statute rather than the intent of the statute inhibits the US government's ability to seize opportunities as they arise against the Salafi-jihadi movement. The statute, which criminalizes the provision of any "property, tangible or intangible, or service," seeks to prevent knowing support to designated terrorist organizations to cut off the organization's ability to operate.¹⁴⁵ The benefits of this statute are multifold in that they create legal basis for US authorities to pursue individuals aiding designated or even undesignated terrorist organizations along with lengthy prison sentences. The issue is that a conservative interpretation of the statute also creates policy constraints for US agencies to operate or fund projects

within Salafi-jihadi-controlled territory and to engage in deradicalization or reintegration programs.

Fear that Salafi-jihadi groups could divert and benefit from a percentage of US foreign assistance or other forms of assistance prevents the US from operating in or funding others who operate in spaces under Salafi-jihadi influence, even outside of security concerns. The absence of assistance—humanitarian or development—in certain spaces effectively cedes it to the manipulation of the Salafi-jihadi vanguard, which faces no competition from a US-backed or other effort.

Special Office of Foreign Assets Control licenses are available for organizations to receive authorization to operate in spaces where designated entities will probably receive some benefit from the assistance. Humanitarian and development organizations that receive these licenses must ensure the conditions are met, particularly in vetting recipients and contractors. The challenge of operating in this contested space is an ongoing issue, particularly for development and humanitarian organizations negotiating the US counterterrorism restrictions.¹⁴⁶ The US needs to be willing to risk some diversion of assistance to compete with the Salafi-jihadi vanguard on the ground, though this risk must be taken knowingly with clear mitigations in place.

US-run programming focused on de-radicalization and reintegration from designated terrorist organizations is also hindered by the material support statute. The de-radicalization space is one in which individuals might still be formal members of a designated organization but need to be peeled away through other incentives. The sequencing creates a gray space, since individuals might receive some benefits before ending their membership, which would be in support of the group, or they might choose to remain with the group itself, which means the effort did provide material support. Reintegration of members into communities bears similar challenges to de-radicalization. The material support statute dissuades well-positioned civil society organizations from engaging in this space.¹⁴⁷ De-radicalization and reintegration programs are important aspects of the CVE/TP line of effort.

Federal Budget and Program Design. The design of the federal budget and the allocation system limits the strategic prioritization of resources for this problem set, especially in the State Department and USAID. The issue is both the willingness of Congress to allocate flexible funding and of the State Department and USAID to make the case for it in their own budgets. The State Department and USAID budget has multiple earmarked funds from those for strategic partnerships, like with Israel, or for global health initiatives.¹⁴⁸

Of the \$40 billion presidential budget request for fiscal year 2020, almost one-third goes toward global health, international organizations (e.g., the UN), humanitarian assistance, and food security programming. Foreign military financing loans and strategic partnership commitments (e.g., to Jordan) account for another third of the budget. From the last third, US border security and overseas protection take up just over \$10 billion, leaving little leftover to allocate toward targeted development programming and interventions. The State Department and USAID have both received some funding from the overseas contingency operations and global war on terror budget, which has enabled additional programs.¹⁴⁹ Planning constraints, including the ability to sequence foreign assistance programs, reflect budget and funding concerns, especially when Congress is not able to pass annual appropriation bills in a timely fashion.

Not every US-funded foreign assistance program nests under strategic priorities and contributes to a strategic- or operational-level impact. Special interest groups and earmarked funds from Congress ensure the continuation of certain programs. Vested bureaucratic and personnel interests in the continuance of certain programs that may have outlived their contributions to US national security serve as a hurdle to reform. The fear of losing future funding compels bureaus and offices to spend their budget, which might inhibit the reallocation of funds within the State Department to support strategic priorities. Annual budgeting cycles also constrain the ability to plan for the medium or long term.

The timeline for foreign assistance program design and implementation is lengthy because of congressional authorization requirements, reducing

the ability to be adaptive and responsive to ground developments. The time gap between identifying a possible opportunity or requirement to intervene and the implementation of a program takes on average between 18 and 24 months. This lag in terms of intervention creates friction with reality as complex environments change rapidly.

The US misses short time windows in which a quick, high-impact intervention could generate outsized effects on the ground. Repurposing appropriated funds can be difficult, creating a situation in which the choice is to either proceed with a foreign assistance program already overtaken by events or end the program without a replacement. The delay also gives an advantage to those ground actors that can address exigent needs more rapidly than the US (or its partners).

Initial Recommendations for the Way Forward

The US government is fully capable of implementing a new approach to combating the Salafi-jihadi movement but must transform its mindset about this national security imperative to do so. Changing the framework from one of targeting terrorism to targeting the ties that the Salafi-jihadi vanguard has built requires investment from policy leaders to align decisions throughout the bureaucracy in support of this effort. Two decades under a regime of understanding the Salafi-jihadi threat within a counterterrorism framework is not readily undone, nor should it be. Nearly all the counterterrorism practices that the US and its partners have developed and refined over the years will continue to play a role in the US national security architecture. Ensuring the US efforts are unified, coordinated, and strategic within this new framework has additional implications.

Current efforts to improve and reform US government strategic engagement for stabilization assistance and preventing conflict in fragile states have started changing how the US invests in foreign assistance programming. The recommended approach reinforces these efforts and provides an additional strategic framework in which they should nest.

Implementation of many of the recommendations contained in the 2018 Stabilization Assistance Review, especially providing consistent and flexible funding for long-term planning and agility on the ground and forward-deploying civilians into key areas, will better position the US government to achieve the strategic objectives identified in this recommended approach.¹⁵⁰ Resourcing the State Department's ongoing efforts to assess the effectiveness of past stabilization programs, coordinate foreign assistance toward specific strategic goals, and measure progress will improve how the US shapes local contexts.¹⁵¹

Reframe the Problem. The first step must be to change the understanding of the Salafi-jihadi threat and break from the counterterrorism mindset that has defined the US approach to date. Reframing the Salafi-jihadi movement and specifically the vanguard such that it is not reduced to simply a terrorist group should underpin this effort, as Salafi-jihadis' activities extend far beyond the acts of terror that bring media and policy attention to them. The change must come from the top and must then be reflected in policy guidance across the departments. Principals in the US administration, the National Security Council, and Congress should advocate for developing a comprehensive strategy to counter the Salafi-jihadi movement that is distinct from the National Strategy for Counterterrorism.

Break the Counterterrorism Mindset. The US government's institutionalized emphasis on metrics measuring success in the counterterrorism paradigm must adjust to the new framing of the problem set and must also be reflected in US engagements with partners in this effort. Metrics for success against the Salafi-jihadi movement do not align with counterterrorism metrics and must be separated, as should the language surrounding combating groups such as al Qaeda and the Islamic State. The composition of foreign assistance programs to counter the Salafi-jihadi movement will include not only CVE/TP programs but also stabilization and conflict prevention efforts, political and diplomatic efforts, and democracy, human rights, and labor programs. US diplomats must take

on the challenge of working with partners to reframe their approach, especially when the partner seeks to default to a security-based approach.

Match US Policy Timelines to Reality, not Political Cycles. US policymakers and decision makers must ensure that the US is not operating on short-term timelines that are detrimental to long-term success. The Salafi-jihadi vanguard's timeline is generational. The US must match this. Congress must therefore appropriate multiyear, predictable funds to facilitate long-term planning and ensure the US remains committed to the effort. Congress must also ensure that the State Department and USAID have the flexibility to respond to emergent developments, which the Global Fragility Act supports.¹⁵² Country-specific budgets too often are earmarked and committed in such a way as to preclude shifting funds as a situation develops.

Orient on Shaping Rather Than Countering. US policy has focused on countering the threat from the Salafi-jihadi movement. Instead, focusing on shaping the ground conditions—eliminating the means by which the Salafi-jihadi vanguard gains popular support—will both serve to counter Salafi-jihadi efforts and help secure additional US national security interests as it touches on great-power and near-peer competition as well. Designing foreign and security assistance programming so that it denies influence to US adversaries—state and nonstate alike—will help secure multiple national security objectives.

Bolster Civilian Strategic Planning and Coordination. The US needs to invest in ensuring that the various components of the US government understand national security priorities and are aligned on the approach to securing them. The State Department, as the lead on US foreign engagements, should play a more central role coordinating and aligning the foreign activities of the US functional bureaus and agencies to US strategy. The National Security Council should ensure that the State Department is fulfilling this role and should provide guidance to the departments and agencies in terms of overall prioritization of resources and efforts.

Establish State Department Coordination Responsibilities. The State Department should own the coordination responsibilities for developing and integrating the US government's approach to countering the Salafi-jihadi movement. This responsibility might fall under the Office of Policy Planning or possibly the Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, though the bureau's emphasis on counterterrorism and CVE/TP activities would need to shift. Key stakeholders that may have better visibility on the local conditions and expertise in implementing assistance programs, including USAID and the Defense Department, should directly inform the formulation of the approach and have freedom to implement. NCTC/DSOP should also be included to ensure that the counterterrorism efforts are properly nested.

Cultivate Strategic Planning in the Diplomatic Corps. US ambassadors are both the lead diplomat and the chief of mission to a particular country. Their background is in public diplomacy and not strategic planning. Developing strategic thinking in the diplomatic corps and incorporating this capability will better enable US ambassadors to lead and oversee the implementation of US strategies in their own countries, align their own missions to US priority lines of effort, and support transnational efforts. Great ambassadors have risen through the ranks. These ambassadors excel at public diplomacy and politics but also at understanding and supporting regional US efforts. More of them are needed.

Reward Calculated Risk. The tolerance for risk must change across the US government. Calculated risks—risks taken understanding the consequences and with mitigations against the worst possible outcomes—must be accepted. The incentives to take such calculated risks need to change, since only successful efforts reap rewards currently. For example, greater tolerance for instability as a means to potentially reach a more durable and favorable outcome should be inculcated throughout the US government.

Congress. Congress must accept trial-and-error foreign assistance programming as the most efficient

use of taxpayer dollars in combating the Salafi-jihadi movement. Investment in new programming concepts on a small scale could yield dividends in terms of advancing US national security once successful interventions are identified. Congress must therefore be prepared to authorize the expenditure of taxpayer dollars on programs that are not guaranteed to succeed. Congress must also encourage a “fail fast” mindset by not disincentivizing agencies or offices to recognize failure early and ensure that it authorizes sufficient funds for the State Department and USAID to plan comprehensively for a foreign assistance intervention at the global scale over multiple years.

State Department and USAID. The State Department and USAID must take more risk. They must take risk to the security of personnel. The competitive space with the Salafi-jihadi vanguard is in front of the front line, where conditions are insecure and the situation can change rapidly. US personnel must be able to leave secure embassy compounds and travel to at-risk communities to conduct key leader engagements and understand specific needs that foreign assistance programs could address.

The State Department and USAID must also take more risk with foreign assistance programming. Reinvesting in proven successful programs may not be the most strategic use of funds, and the money might be better spent in experimental programs. USAID’s New Partnerships Initiative is a positive step in identifying small but successful development partners, many of whom have taken entrepreneurial approaches that are already working toward advancing US strategic interests abroad.¹⁵³

Defense Department. The Defense Department must take less risk to mission and resume taking calculated risks. The political demand to reduce risk to personnel has hamstrung the US military’s ability to operate effectively. Reducing these risks has increased the risk to mission. US soldiers must retain permissions to accompany partnered forces on tactical missions in the field to build the partnership trust and train effectively. Anecdotal evidence also indicates the presence of a US soldier within a foreign unit decreases the risk

of human rights violations by that unit, lessening the likelihood that security force abuses will drive popular grievances.

Compete with the Salafi-Jihadi Vanguard. The US and its partners are in a competition with the Salafi-jihadi vanguard for influence in local Sunni communities, whether recognized or not. The US does not need to win over the communities so that they embrace American values and ideals; it simply requires that the communities reject the vanguard. Current counterterrorism efforts do not engage in this competition in local communities, and the CVE/TP efforts that do remain limited. Moreover, the absence of US or partner efforts in some of the most vulnerable communities, especially those in insecure environments, has created opportunities for the Salafi-jihadi vanguard to succeed. The US must ensure then that it and its partners understand who the enemy is and act in a coordinated manner to counter it.

Cohere Partners Around a Common Framing. The US needs to cohere its partners and allies around a sufficient common minimum definition of the Salafi-jihadi enemy to organize and lead the global effort to counter it. Shifting the effort from counterterrorism to countering Salafi-jihadi influence will address the issues that the US faces with partners who label groups operating in the political space only as “terrorist” and work against them, rather than the violent actors. Removing any gray space surrounding the definition of Salafi-jihadism globally is a political and diplomatic imperative to align international pressure on the vanguard. The US must then use all levers to shift partners’ responses to the Salafi-jihadi vanguard from a security-based response to one focused on denying the vanguard influence through soft-power mechanisms.

Operate in the Contested Space. The US and partners must compete where the Salafi-jihadi vanguard is, which is often in insecure areas. Military and security forces might not be the best face for these activities, nor do they bring the right expertise or capabilities. At times, however, the US military might be best positioned to exploit opportunities in the short term.

Congress should strongly consider granting stabilization authorities to the Defense Department for short-term efforts before a civilian response arrives.¹⁵⁴ The State Department and USAID need to accept additional security risks to operate in this space and should be actively developing the means to act in insecure environments or finding and supporting partners who are able to implement programs under such conditions.¹⁵⁵ They will also need to develop or refine mechanisms for how to understand the local conflicts and identify opportunities for foreign assistance programming to deny the Salafi-jihadi vanguard influence. Developing an expeditionary civilian capacity, as recommended in the Stabilization Assistance Review, would better enable the US to counter the Salafi-jihadi vanguard's efforts.¹⁵⁶

Lead. Uncompromising US leadership, both in the US government and on the world stage, is required. US policymakers and decision makers must seize the opportunity of the US rebalancing toward the competition with Russia and China to also redefine US priorities with the Islamic State and al Qaeda. Changing the understanding from a counterterrorism mission to actively contesting the influence of the Salafi-jihadi movement is crucial, as is ensuring that the US prioritizes countering Russian, Chinese, and Iranian actions that create opportunities for the Salafi-jihadi vanguard to expand its influence.

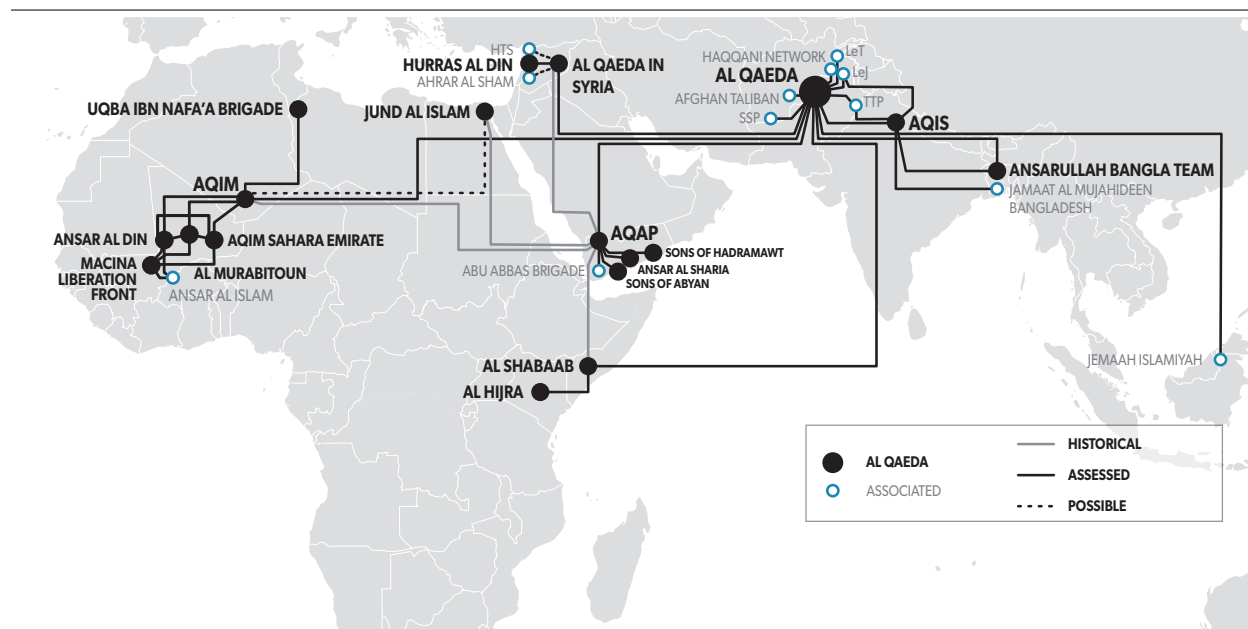
Champions, and particularly support from principals and the administration, are needed to unify US government efforts behind this approach. US leaders and diplomats must also advocate for this approach with America's foreign partners. These partners are necessary for the success of the approach, and they must be convinced to change along with the US government.

US leaders must choose to take on the challenge of improving how the US government functions to implement this recommended approach to combating the Salafi-jihadi movement. Nearly two decades of a counterterrorism approach against al Qaeda and the Islamic State have not defeated their threat. The US could continue this approach indefinitely. The cost of doing so is unlikely to decrease, and the investment in counterterrorism has yielded few strategic gains for the US. Instead, reframing the approach to focus on the Salafi-jihadi movement's relationship with Sunni communities and contesting its influence could turn the tide while also supporting other strategic US initiatives, including countering Russian and Chinese influence.

The US government is not well postured to implement such an approach at a global scale today only because it has remained fixed under the wrong framework. Continuing current counterterrorism efforts is a losing effort. The only way to win the forever war against this enemy is to actually win, and that means the US must transform now so that it can take the right fight to the enemy.

Appendix A. Al Qaeda's and the Islamic State's Global Networks

Figure 3. The al Qaeda Network Tree in 2019

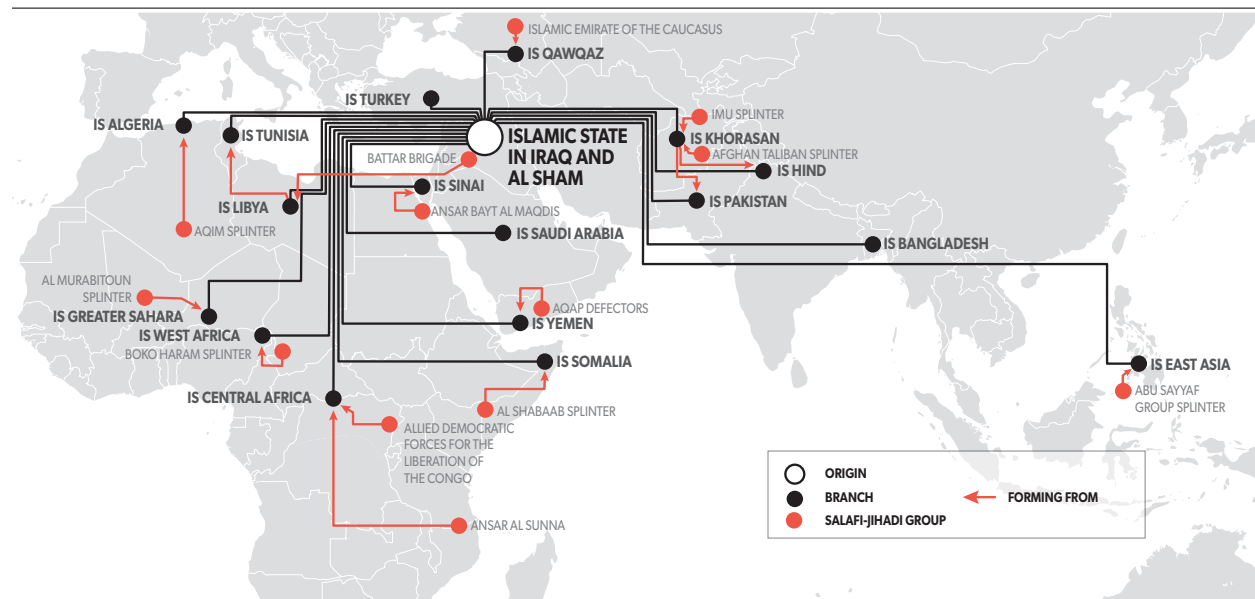


Note: Not all groups are represented in this figure. Figure created in September 2019.

Source: Author.

Al Qaeda and the Islamic State are transnational Salafi-jihadi organizations that seek to lead the global Salafi-jihadi movement. Both of their networks span the Muslim world and extend into the local Salafi-jihadi vanguard. Separately, they have each recognized regional affiliates, which benefit from the brand name, introduction of foreign resources, and shared expertise. The expansion of the networks into the local context enables the globally oriented organizations to strengthen and shape local dynamics in their favor. Al Qaeda developed relationships within the local vanguard over decades. Its affiliates now spawn and support new, more locally oriented Salafi-jihadi groups. The Islamic State expanded through the splintering of factions from al Qaeda groups, the defections of fighters, and the recognition of a non-al Qaeda local Salafi-jihadi groups.

Al Qaeda. The al Qaeda network has rooted itself in the local contexts. Al Qaeda continues to adapt and evolve organizationally in response to counterterrorism pressure and in search of securing local popular support. Al Qaeda senior leadership—members of so-called “core” al Qaeda—provides grand strategic and strategic direction to its adherents.¹⁵⁷ The regional affiliates are replicas of this core group but are responsible for providing strategic and operational guidance within their theaters: the Indian subcontinent, the Arabian Peninsula, East Africa, the Sahel, and the Maghreb.¹⁵⁸ Each regional affiliate has helped establish a local affiliate of its own and has associations with the other local Salafi-jihadi groups. (See Figure 3.) The al Qaeda network also has strong, lateral relationships among affiliates and other associated groups, which make it more resilient.

Figure 4. Islamic State Branches from the Local Salafi-Jihadi Vanguard

Note: Not all groups are represented in this figure. Figure created in September 2019.

Source: Author.

Islamic State. The Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) commands the global Islamic State organization, and its *wilayat* or administrative divisions (frequently translated as provinces) are subordinated fully to the ISIS central leadership. However, ISIS is changing the organization of its *wilayat*, probably in response to the loss of the physical caliphate in Iraq and Syria and global counterterrorism pressures.¹⁵⁹ Its adaptations might also include a shift away from the hub-and-spoke model that it has used, though it is unlikely to fully decentralize its leadership as al

Qaeda has. The Islamic State rapidly expanded since 2014 by recognizing factions of the local Salafi-jihadi vanguard that had bid for membership as *wilayat*.¹⁶⁰ The local Salafi-jihadi vanguard provided the initial numbers and capabilities of Islamic State *wilayat*, many of which then benefited from their relationships back to ISIS. (See Figure 4.) The splits that occurred from groups within the al Qaeda network generally occurred along preexisting fissures within the groups or among the leadership.

Appendix B. Identifying the Salafi-Jihadi Vanguard¹⁶¹

The US and its partners must ensure that they scope the definition of the Salafi-jihadi vanguard as the enemy down to the smallest group possible without excluding those individuals who play critical roles in enabling it. Current US policy definitions of the enemy—a targeted list of individuals and groups—is too narrow because it does not include all the Salafi-jihadi vanguard. But allowing the definition of the vanguard to be expansive rapidly raises the cost of a countereffort over the long term. More importantly, an expansive definition risks making enemies of those who are not already inclined to function as part of the vanguard or actively support it.¹⁶²

The problem with defining the enemy by adherence to the Salafi-jihadi ideology is identifying the enemy. The Salafi-jihadi vanguard is not limited to the members of global Salafi-jihadi groups such as the Islamic State and al Qaeda, nor does it encompass all the individuals whose actions support Salafi-jihadi interests. Some of these individuals and groups have aligned with the vanguard due to secure short-term shared interests. Self-identification as a Salafi-jihadi is also not reliable, as many fear local rejection or a counterterrorism reaction. Developing a set of observable indicators to assess whether an individual is part of the Salafi-jihadi vanguard should assist in identifying the enemy.

The first set of indicators assesses whether an individual adheres to the Salafi-jihadi ideology. These indicators alone are probably insufficient to assess whether an individual is a member of the Salafi-jihadi vanguard because of the close proximity of some of the tenets of Salafi-jihadism to other acceptable forms of Salafism. Moreover, taking up arms within a local conflict or even one of the theaters of jihad, especially Syria, is not an indicator that an individual is a Salafi-jihadi, even if he is a Salafi. Participation in this type of *defensive* jihad—protecting other

Sunni Muslims from an aggressor—is different than the type of jihad for which Salafi-jihadis mobilize. They consider their jihad to be defensive as well, but its objectives are more expansive than local conflict and seek to transform the world order under Islam.

Salafi-jihadi ideological adherence includes:

- Advocating for using armed force to impose an Islamic governance over the Sunni community and eventually the world;
- Engaging in discourse describing contemporary Muslim societies as being in a state of *jahiliyya* or lapsed religious practice and in need of a vanguard to reveal Islam and save them;
- Characterizing local grievances, issues, and events as part of a global cause for Muslims that requires an armed resistance on behalf of Islam, especially contextualizing these events within a global jihad framework;
- Intending to participate in and support the global jihad, especially through terror attacks;
- Defining individuals who identify as Muslims as not being Muslims to justify using violence against them (*takfirism*) and, specifically, the willingness to define whole sects as non-Muslims, especially Shi'a or Ahmadis;
- Rejecting the legitimacy of the state for its engagement in non-Muslim states, especially the US, other Western countries, and Israel;
- Praising references to Salafi-jihadi ideologues and leaders;¹⁶³

- Using Salafi-jihadi imagery and motifs in media, including the black banner; and
- Being willing to incur unreasonable costs to support the Salafi-jihadi vanguard.

The second set of indicators assess whether an individual has connections to the Salafi-jihadi vanguard. These connections, again, are not sufficient to determine membership in the vanguard because of a nexus between criminal and other illicit trafficking networks and the Salafi-jihadi vanguard. Participation in illicit trafficking or other criminal activities is also not a characteristic that would discredit an individual from being a Salafi-jihadi.¹⁶⁴ Pressure on groups or individuals, if applied smartly, should cleave those who are not ideological adherents away from the vanguard.

Salafi-jihadi vanguard connections include:

- Links to the Salafi-jihadi human network at the leadership or operational level;
- A pattern of participation in the theaters of jihad, especially being present for the main effort of the Salafi-jihadi vanguard;

- Access to fighter networks shared with other Salafi-jihadi groups;
- Recruitment of individuals into Salafi-jihadi networks, including through the practice of *da'wa*, or youth indoctrination at the mosque or schools;
- Use of tactics that have common signatures with Salafi-jihadi groups, such as suicide attacks;
- Alignment of activities with other members of the Salafi-jihadi vanguard, including sharing of resources; tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs); media narratives and production; financial support networks; and other forms of support; and
- Swearing of *bayat* or allegiance to a known Salafi-jihadi leader or becoming a member in a Salafi-jihadi group.

The more characteristics that an individual or group shares from this set of indicators, the more likely that the individual or group is part of the Salafi-jihadi vanguard. This set of characteristics starts to provide the groundwork for a methodology to identify the Salafi-jihadi vanguard globally.

Glossary of Terms¹⁶⁵

Caliphate. Islamic polity headed by the leader of the entire Muslim community and the religious successor to the Prophet. The Prophet reportedly prophesied the return of the Caliphate after a period of darkness.

center of gravity. The source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act.

critical capability. A means that is considered a crucial enabler for a center of gravity to function as such and is essential to the accomplishment of the specified or assumed objective(s).

critical requirement. An essential condition, resource, and means for a critical capability to be fully operational.

critical vulnerability. An aspect of a critical requirement that is deficient or vulnerable to direct or indirect attack that will create decisive or significant effects.

da'wa. Preaching and missionary work to share Islam.

jahiliyya. Used here as understood by Sayyid Qutb: the state of ignorance of Allah's divine guidance through man claiming the divine right to legislate;

more commonly, the ignorance of Islam in the world before the Prophet Mohammed.

jihad. Used here to connote violent acts in the way of Allah.

Salafi. An orthodox Sunni Muslim who believes that Muslims must return to the fundamentals of the religion contained entirely and completely within the Quran and the hadith.

Salafi-jihadi base or vanguard. The physical network of people, groups, and organizations who subscribe to Salafi-jihadi ideology and operate in pursuit of shared overall goals.

Salafi-jihadi movement. The ideological movement that holds that it is a religious obligation for individual Muslims to use armed force to cause the establishment of true Muslim state governed under a Salafi interpretation of shari'a.

shari'a. Islamic religious law.

takfir. The practice of labeling other Muslims as apostates.

umma. The Muslim community or nation.

Notes

1. Recent assessments on the Islamic State's strength derived from the Department of Defense Office of the Inspector General's August 2019 report on Operation Inherent Resolve and remarks by the Counterterrorism Coordinator Ambassador Nathan A. Sales. See Office of the Inspector General, "Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress," US Department of Defense, August 2, 2019, <https://www.dodig.mil/Reports/Lead-Inspector-General-Reports/Article/1926689/lead-inspector-general-for-operation-inherent-resolve-quarterly-report-to-the-u/>; and US State Department, "Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS Ambassador James F. Jeffrey and Counterterrorism Coordinator Ambassador Nathan A. Sales," press briefing, August 1, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/special-envoy-for-the-global-coalition-to-defeat-isis-ambassador-james-f-jeffrey-and-counterterrorism-coordinator-ambassador-nathan-a-sales/>.
2. US State Department, "Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS Ambassador James F. Jeffrey and Counterterrorism Coordinator Ambassador Nathan A. Sales"; and Daniel R. Coats, "Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community," statement for the record for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 29, 2019, <https://www.odni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/2019-ATA-SFR--SSCI.pdf>.
3. White House, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, October 4, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/NSCT.pdf>.
4. The Defense Department Office of the Inspector General assessed that the resurgence of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria is in part because the Iraqi Security Forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces "remain unable to sustain long-term operations against ISIS militants." Office of the Inspector General, "Operation Inherent Resolve."
5. Michael K. Nagata, "Taking Stock of U.S. Counterterrorism Efforts Since 9/11" (lecture, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington, DC, July 10, 2018), <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/policy-forum-july-10-2018>.
6. Katherine Zimmerman, "Trump Doubles Down on Failed Counterterror Policy," *Wall Street Journal*, February 18, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-doubles-down-on-failed-counterterror-policy-11550519273>.
7. Katherine Zimmerman, "The Salafi-Jihadist Movement Is Winning," *RealClearWorld*, February 12, 2019, https://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2019/02/12/the_salafi-jihadist_movement_is_winning_112964.html.
8. Katherine Zimmerman, "The Never-Ending War on Terror: Why the U.S. Keeps Fighting the Wrong Battle," *Foreign Affairs*, May 11, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-05-11/never-ending-war-terror>.
9. Frederick W. Kagan, Nataliya Bugayova, and Jennifer Cafarella, *Confronting the Russian Challenge: A New Approach for the U.S.*, Institute for the Study of War and Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, June 19, 2019, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/confronting-the-russian-challenge>; and Genevieve Casagrande, "Russian Airstrikes in Syria: Pre- and Post-Cessation of Hostilities," Institute for the Study of War, September 21, 2016, <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/09/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-pre-and.html>.
10. For a more detailed discussion of the alignment of interests, see Frederick W. Kagan et al., *Competing Visions for Syria and Iraq: The Myth of an Anti-ISIS Grand Coalition*, Institute for the Study of War and Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, January 21, 2016, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/competing-visions-for-syria-and-iraq-the-myth-of-an-anti-isis-grand-coalition>.
11. For an assessment of Iranian-backed actors in Iraqi security structures, see Jessa Rose Dury-Agri, Omer Kassim, and Patrick Martin, *Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Order of Battle*, Institute for the Study of War, December 2017, <http://www.understandingwar.org/report/iraqi-security-forces-and-popular-mobilization-forces-orders-battle-o>.
12. White House, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, 2018.
13. For additional analysis of the Trump administration's counterterrorism strategy, see Stephen Tankel, "Has Trump Read His Own Counterterrorism Strategy?," *Foreign Policy*, October 12, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/12/has-trump-read-his-own-counterterrorism-strategy/>; Soufan Group, "Old Wine in New Bottles': The 2018 National Strategy for Counterterrorism," October 8,

2018, <http://www.soufangroup.com/intelbrief-old-wine-in-new-bottles-the-2018-national-strategy-for-counterterrorism/>; and Dan Byman, “Takeaways from the Trump Administration’s New Counterterrorism Strategy,” Brookings Institution, October 5, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/10/05/takeaways-from-the-trump-administrations-new-counterterrorism-strategy/>.

14. US State Department, “Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS Ambassador James F. Jeffrey and Counterterrorism Coordinator Ambassador Nathan A. Sales.”

15. US forces conducted a strike against an al Qaeda in Syria (AQ-S) leadership training facility in northwest Syria in June 2019. The US Central Command press release described northwest Syria as a “safe haven where AQ-S leaders actively coordinate terrorist activities, to include planning attacks throughout the region and the West.” US Central Command, “Statement from U.S. Central Command on Strike Against al-Qaida in Syria,” June 30, 2019, <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/STATEMENTS/Statements-View/Article/1891697/statement-from-us-central-command-on-strike-against-al-qaida-in-syria/>.

16. The Obama administration hosted a CVE summit in February 2015 that brought together local and federal US officials and international leaders to discuss CVE. The results of this summit are here: Office of the Press Secretary, “FACT SHEET: The White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism,” White House, February 18, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/18/fact-sheet-white-house-summit-countering-violent-extremism>.

17. Departments and agencies have launched efforts to more clearly define what CVE is and distinguish CVE programming from other programming that might affect radicalization, but not as a primary output. USAID, for example, as part of its recent reorganization efforts, has sought to define CVE and re-separate other stabilization and development programming from CVE-specific programming.

18. White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, December 18, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

19. This question comes from a conversation with a US Air Force lieutenant colonel about the current US counterterrorism efforts in Africa. US Air Force lieutenant colonel, in discussion with the author, May 2019.

20. Peter Bergen and David Sterman, *Jihadist Terrorism 17 Years After 9/11*, New American Foundation, September 10, 2018, <https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/reports/jihadist-terrorism-17-years-after-911/>.

21. Anti-Defamation League, “Right-Wing Extremism Linked to Every 2018 Extremist Murder in the U.S., ADL Finds,” January 23, 2019, <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/right-wing-extremism-linked-to-every-2018-extremist-murder-in-the-us-adl-finds>.

22. Seth G. Jones, Danika Newlee, and Nicholas Harrington, *The Evolution of the Salafi-Jihadist Threat*, Center for Strategic International Studies, November 20, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/evolution-salafi-jihadist-threat>.

23. The US intelligence community assessed that the Islamic State seeks to restore its external operations capabilities and remains intent on conducting attacks against the West and the US and that al Qaeda continues to encourage attacks against the US, remaining a counterterrorism challenge. British officials likewise echo concerns over terror threats, especially to airliners. Daniel R. Coats, “Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community,” statement for the record for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 29, 2019, <https://www.odni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/2019-ATA-SFR---SSCI.pdf>; and Rob Merrick, “Al-Qaeda Plotting New Plane Attacks in Europe After ‘Resurgence’ of Terror Group, Security Minister Warns,” *Independent (UK)*, December 23, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/al-qaeda-terrorism-planes-airports-europe-attacks-isis-islamic-state-security-a8696811.html>.

24. Marc Thiessen eloquently argues that the US must remain committed to its counterterrorism fight. Marc A. Thiessen, “Great Nations Don’t Quit Wars Before They Prevail,” *Washington Post*, February 7, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-united-states-cant-stop-fighting-terrorists-in-afghanistan-and-syria-now/2019/02/07/11d35dd6-2b03-11e9-b011-d8500644dc98_story.html.

25. Dan Lamothe, John Hudson, and Pamela Constable, “U.S. Preparing to Withdraw Thousands of Troops from Afghanistan in Initial Deal with Taliban,” *Washington Post*, August 1, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-preparing-to-withdraw-thousands-of-troops-from-afghanistan-in-initial-deal-with-taliban/2019/08/01/01e97126-b3ac-11e9-8f6c-7828e68cb15f_story.html.

26. Eric Schmitt and David E. Sanger, “As U.S. Focuses on ISIS and the Taliban, Al Qaeda Re-Emerges,” *New York Times*, December

29, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/30/us/politics/as-us-focuses-on-isis-and-the-taliban-al-qaeda-re-emerges.html>; and Department of Defense, *Operation Freedom's Sentinel: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, January 1, 2019–March 31, 2019*, May 17, 2019, https://media.defense.gov/2019/May/21/2002134153/-1/-1/1/FY2019_LIG_OCO_REPORT.PDF.

27. James Barnett, "Al Shabaab Area of Operations: October 2018," Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, October 5, 2018, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/al-shabaab-area-of-operations-october-2018>; and Michael M. Phillips, "America's Other Endless War: Battling al Shabaab in Somalia," *Wall Street Journal*, January 17, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/americas-other-endless-war-somalia-11547738433>.

28. Rupam Jain and Rod Nickel, "Left Out of Peace Talks, U.S. Allies Reassess Afghan Support," Reuters, March 15, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-afghanistan-nato-insight/left-out-of-peace-talks-u-s-allies-reassess-afghan-support-idUSKCN1QW1L8>.

29. US State Department, "Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS Ambassador James F. Jeffrey and Counterterrorism Coordinator Ambassador Nathan A. Sales."

30. Alex de Waal, "Brexit Is Bad News for Africa. Period.," *Foreign Policy*, June 27, 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/06/27/brexit-is-bad-news-for-africa-period/>.

31. A RAND study on ending terrorist groups with the aim of informing a US approach against al Qaeda found that once a terrorist group embeds in an insurgency, it will more likely survive. (About half of the data set had not ended.) The study also found that only a third of religious terrorist groups have ended. Seth G. Jones and Martin C. Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering al Qaeda*, RAND Corporation, 2008, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG741-1.html>.

32. Katherine Zimmerman, *America's Real Enemy: The Salafi-Jihadi Movement*, Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, July 18, 2017, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/americas-real-enemy-the-salafi-jihadi-movement>.

33. The author referred to this vanguard previously as the "Salafi-jihadi base," which is also the term used to refer to the vanguard in supporting publications from the Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute.

34. Frederick W. Kagan et al., *Al Qaeda and ISIS: Existential Threats to the U.S. and Europe*, Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War, January 21, 2016, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/al-qaeda-and-isis-existential-threats-to-the-u-s-and-europe>.

35. The argument for the relationship between the transnational groups and the local groups is laid out more extensively in Zimmerman, *America's Real Enemy*; and Kagan et al., *Al Qaeda and ISIS*.

36. A White House-requested review of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab's attempted bombing on December 25, 2009, found that the intelligence community remained focused on al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's threat to American interests in Yemen, rather than on its potential threat to the homeland. White House Office of the Press Secretary, "White House Review Summary Regarding 12/25/2009 Attempted Terrorist Attack," January 7, 2010, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/realitycheck/the-press-office/white-house-review-summary-regarding-12252009-attempted-terrorist-attack>.

37. For an in-depth examination of this transformation, see Katherine Zimmerman, *Terrorism, Tactics, and Transformation: The West vs the Salafi-Jihadi Movement*, Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, November 15, 2018, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/reports/terrorism-tactics-and-transformation-the-west-vs-the-salafi-jihadi-movement>.

38. Al Qaeda sought to inspire Western would-be recruits to conduct attacks in the West, particularly with the launch of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's English-language *Inspire* magazine in July 2010, but was unable to mobilize the same level of response as the Islamic State. For more on al Qaeda's initial efforts, see Katherine Zimmerman, "Expanding the Campaign of Violence: Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's English-Language Magazine," Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, July 13, 2010, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/expanding-the-campaign-of-violence-al-qaeda-in-the-arabian-peninsulas-english-language-magazine>.

39. A declassified letter from Osama bin Laden to the al Shabaab emir Ahmed Abdi Godane (AKA Mukhtar Abu Zubayr) discusses al Shabaab hiding its true relationship with al Qaeda because of the consequences of using the al Qaeda brand name. Osama bin Laden, "Letter from Usama bin Laden to Mukhtar Abu al-Zubayr," August 7, 2010, <https://ctc.usma.edu/harmonyprogram/letter-from-usama-bin-laden-to-mukhtar-abu-al-zubayr-original-language-2/>. A declassified letter possibly to Osama bin Laden discusses the al Qaeda brand name. Combating Terrorism Center, "Letter to Azmarai," <https://ctc.usma.edu/harmony-program/letter-to-azmarai->

original-language-2/.

40. Katherine Zimmerman, *The al Qaeda Network: A New Framework for Defining the Enemy*, Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, September 10, 2013, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/the-al-qaeda-network-a-new-framework-for-defining-the-enemy>; and Aaron Y. Zelin, “Know Your Ansar al-Sharia,” *Foreign Policy*, September 21, 2012, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/09/21/know-your-ansar-al-sharia/>.

41. Katherine Zimmerman, *A New Model for Defeating al Qaeda in Yemen*, Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, September 10, 2015, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/a-new-model-for-defeating-al-qaeda-in-yemen>.

42. The National Liberation Front and Hay’at Tahrir al Sham’s dominance in Idlib province is of concern. See the map of control in Maxwell B. Markusen, “Idlib Province and the Future of Instability in Syria,” Center for Strategic International Studies, September 21, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/idlib-province-and-future-instability-syria>.

43. Seth G. Jones, Danika Newlee, and Nicholas Harrington, *The Evolution of the Salafi-Jihadist Threat*, Center for Strategic International Studies, November 20, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/evolution-salafi-jihadist-threat>.

44. Yemen, arguably, could be added to this list. However, the infighting between al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic State in Yemen occurred years after the splinter, and violations of local tribal norms likely sparked the clashes in 2018–19.

45. For example, al Qaeda’s affiliate in Somalia, al Shabaab, has historically displayed characteristics such as beheadings to coerce the population that today might lead analysts to see reflections of the Islamic State. The Islamic State West Africa Province, which splintered from Boko Haram, follows an operational pattern that much more closely resembles that of al Qaeda.

46. UN Security Council, “Ninth Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of United Nations Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat,” July 31, 2019, <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/news/document/s-2019-612-ninth-report-secretary-general-threat-posed-isil-daesh-international-peace-security-range-united-nations-efforts-support-member-states/>.

47. Jennifer Cafarella, Brandon Wallace, and Jazon Zhou, *ISIS’s Second Comeback: Assessing the Next ISIS Insurgency*, Institute for the Study of War, July 23, 2019, <http://www.understandingwar.org/report/isiss-second-comeback-assessing-next-isis-insurgency>.

48. UN Security Council, “Twenty-Fourth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) Concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities,” July 15, 2019, <https://undocs.org/S/2019/570>.

49. Crisis Group, “The Best of Bad Options for Syria’s Idlib,” March 14, 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/197-best-bad-options-syrias-idlib>.

50. US Central Command targeted al Qaeda leadership at a training facility near Aleppo province in Syria on June 30, 2019. Among those killed in the strike were members of Hurras al Din. US Central Command, “Statement from U.S. Central Command on Strike Against al-Qaida in Syria”; Thomas Joscelyn, “U.S. Military Targets al Qaeda Operatives in Syria,” RealClearDefense, July 3, 2019, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2019/07/03/us_military_targets_al_qaeda_operatives_in_syria_114554.html; and France24, “US Strike Targeted al Qaeda in Northwest Syria,” July 2, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190702-us-strike-al-qaeda-syria-jihadists-killed>.

51. US Central Command, “Statement from U.S. Central Command on Strike Against al-Qaida in Syria.”

52. Al Qaeda and the Islamic State both appear to be dividing Pakistan along the human terrain lines, with Pashtun groups cleaving toward Afghanistan networks and Punjabi groups focusing on the Indian subcontinent. Where Balochi groups such as Jundullah fall is unclear.

53. The Taliban contests 191 districts and controls 66 others. Bill Roggio and Alexandra Gutowski, “Mapping Control in Afghanistan,” Long War Journal, accessed August 12, 2019, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/mapping-taliban-control-in-afghanistan>.

54. Scott DesMarais, “The Flawed U.S. Approach to Afghanistan,” Institute for the Study of War, May 1, 2019, <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2019/05/the-flawed-us-approach-to-afghanistan.html>.

55. UN Security Council, “Ninth Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of United Nations Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat.”

56. US State Department, “Country Reports on Terrorism 2017,” September 19, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports->

on-terrorism-2017/.

57. Ayaz Gul, “Islamic State Announces ‘Pakistan Province,’” Voice of America, May 15, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/islamic-state-announces-pakistan-province>.

58. Al Qaeda’s recognition of the leader of the Taliban as commander of the faithful (*emir al mumineen*) is an example of how inter-related the Salafi-jihadi and Deobandi extremist networks are.

59. Anurag Chandran, “Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent: Almost Forgotten,” Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, September 3, 2015, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/al-qaeda-in-the-indian-subcontinent-almost-forgotten>.

60. Soufan Center, *Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent: The Nucleus of Jihad in South Asia*, January 2019, <https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Al-Qaeda-in-the-Indian-Subcontinent-AQIS.pdf>.

61. Fayaz Bukhari and Alasdair Pal, “Islamic State Claims ‘Province’ in India for First Time After Clash in Kashmir,” Reuters, May 11, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-kashmir-islamic-state/islamic-state-claims-province-in-india-for-first-time-after-clash-in-kashmir-idUSKCN1SHo8J>.

62. UN Security Council, “Twenty-Fourth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) Concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities.”

63. UN Security Council, “Twenty-Fourth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) Concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities.”

64. Katherine Zimmerman, “Taking the Lead Back in Yemen,” testimony before the Subcommittee on Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism, Committee on Foreign Affairs, US House of Representatives, March 6, 2019, <https://www.aei.org/publication/testimony-taking-the-lead-back-in-yemen/>.

65. For more on the Islamic State’s failures in Yemen, see Elisabeth Kendall, “The Failing Islamic State Within the Failed State of Yemen,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13, no. 1 (February 2019).

66. Emily Estelle, “The Salafi-Jihadi Base in the Sahel: December 2018,” Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, December 19, 2018, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/the-salafi-jihadi-base-in-the-sahel-december-2018>; and Katherine Zimmerman and Tom Peters, “The Salafi-Jihadi Base in the Sahel,” Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, November 2, 2017, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/The-Salafi-jihadi-Base-in-the-Sahel>.

67. Emily Estelle, “How Ansar al Islam Gains Popular Support in Burkina Faso,” Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, May 9, 2019, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/how-ansar-al-islam-gains-popular-support-in-burkina-faso>.

68. UN Security Council, “Twenty-Fourth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) Concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities.”

69. Brian M. Perkins, “Mozambique: Exploring Tentative Links Between Islamic State, ADF, and Ansar al-Sunnah,” *Terrorism Monitor* 17, no. 12 (June 14, 2019), <https://jamestown.org/program/briefs-307/>.

70. US Treasury Department, “Treasury Sanctions East African Facilitator of Intricate ISIS Financial Network,” press release, September 7, 2018, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm476>; and UN Security Council, “Ninth Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of United Nations Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat.”

71. UN Security Council, “Twenty-Fourth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) Concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities.”

72. Duncan Miriri, “Spreading the Net: Somali Islamists Now Target Kenyan Recruits,” Reuters, May 17, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kenya-militants/spreading-the-net-somali-islamists-now-target-kenyan-recruits-idUSKCN1SNoOV>.

73. US State Department, “Amendments to the Terrorist Designation of al Shabaab,” press release, July 19, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/amendments-to-the-terrorist-designations-of-al-shabaab/>.

74. UN Security Council, “Ninth Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of United Nations Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat.”

75. UN Security Council, “Ninth Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of United Nations Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat.”

76. Soufan Group, “Islamic State’s Sinai Affiliate Remains a Destabilizing Force in Egypt,” June 12, 2019, <http://www.soufangroup.com/intelbrief-islamic-states-sinai-affiliate-remains-a-destabilizing-force-in-egypt/>

77. Hisham Ali Ashmawy, a former special forces soldier in the Egyptian military with ties to al Qaeda, was arrested in Libya in 2018 and transferred to Egypt for trial. Ashmawy led a group, al Murabitoun, which had ties to al Qaeda. Ramzi Mowafi, a US-designated individual thought to lead al Qaeda in the Sinai, remains at large.

78. Emily Estelle, “Al Qaeda and the Islamic State Will Be the Winners of the Libyan Civil War,” Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, April 10, 2019, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/al-qaeda-and-the-islamic-state-will-be-the-winners-of-the-libyan-civil-war>; and UN Security Council, “Twenty-Fourth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) Concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities.”

79. UN Security Report, “Twenty-Fourth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) Concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities.”

80. UN Security Report, “Twenty-Fourth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) Concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities.”

81. The Islamic State claimed a June 2019 suicide bombing in Tunis, Tunisia. See also Stefano Maria Torelli, “Internal Threat to Tunisian Security—from the Borders to the Cities,” *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor* no. 4 (March 1, 2019), <https://jamestown.org/program/the-terrorist-threat-in-tunisia-from-the-borders-to-the-cities/>.

82. 18 USC § 2339A(b)(2)-(b)(3).

83. The names of many of these Salafi-jihadi ideologues have been compiled in William McCants, Jarret Brachman, and Joseph Felter, *Militant Ideology Atlas: Research Compendium*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, November 2006, <https://ctc.usma.edu/militant-ideology-atlas/>.

84. The networks evolved in response to the local environment with many of the more difficult ones in the 2000s, especially through Turkey, becoming preferable as direct routes through Damascus closes. Brian Fishman, “The Evidence of Jihadist Activity in Syria,” *CTC Sentinel* 5, no. 5 (May 2012), <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-evidence-of-jihadist-activity-in-syria/>; Nick Paton Walsh, “The Secret Jihadist Smuggling Route Through Turkey,” CNN, November 5, 2013, <https://www.cnn.com/2013/11/04/world/europe/isis-gaining-strength-on-syria-turkey-border/index.html>; and Brian Dodwell, Daniel Milton, and Don Rassler, *Then and Now: Comparing the Flow of Foreign Fighters to AQI and the Islamic State*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, December 2016, <https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2016/12/Then-and-Now.pdf>.

85. Al Qaeda, for example, characterizes members of the Islamic State as *kharijites*, referencing a group that Muslims excommunicated for its extremist position in the mid-to-late seventh century. The Kharijites held extremist positions on who is and is not a Muslim. They rejected Ali as caliph because he submitted the decision of his rule to human arbitration, when judgment should belong to Allah alone, and claimed that Muslims who sinned were not Muslim unless they repented. They believed it was forbidden to live among those who did not share their views. See Tamara Sonn and Adam Farrar, “Kharijites,” Oxford Bibliographies, December 14, 2009, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0047.xml?rkey=mrepDU&result=102>; and Hassan Mneimneh, “Takfirism,” Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, October 1, 2009, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/takfirism>.

86. Turkey permitted US-designated al Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al Nusra to operate from its territory in 2014. For example, Aaron Stein, “Turkey’s Evolving Syria Strategy: Why Ankara Backs al-Nusra but Shuns ISIS,” *Foreign Affairs*, February 9, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2015-02-09/turkeys-evolving-syria-strategy>.

87. UAE support had gone to the Abu Abbas Brigade in Yemen, a militia led by Salafi-jihadi commander Adil Abduh Fari Uthman al Dhubhani AKA Abu Abbas, who has ties to both al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic State in Yemen. The Abu Abbas Brigade operates in Taiz, Yemen. Indicators of an al Qaeda presence in parts of the city have surfaced, including street graffiti and anecdotal reporting from humanitarian workers in the city that local fixers will point to figures in a meeting and identify them as “al Qaeda.” While these individuals might not be al Qaeda members, they would unlikely be identified as such if they did not share similar extremist beliefs. US Treasury Department, “Treasury and Terrorist Financing Targeting Center Partners Issue First Joint Sanctions Against Key Terrorists and Supporters,” press release, October 25, 2017, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/>

smo187.aspx; and Sudarsan Raghavan, “The U.S. Put a Yemeni Warlord on a Terrorist List. One of Its Close Allies Is Still Arming Him,” *Washington Post*, December 29, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/the-us-put-a-yemeni-warlord-on-a-terrorist-list-one-of-its-close-allies-is-still-arming-him/2018/12/28/f3c4fb5b-f366-4570-b27b-75a3ed0f52_story.html.

88. Counter Extremism Project, “Muslim Brotherhood,” accessed June 4, 2019, <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/muslim-brotherhood>; and BBC, “Russia Names ‘Terrorist’ Groups,” July 28, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5223458.stm>.

89. For a debate on the role of political Islamists, see Robin Simcox and Katherine Zimmerman, “Are Political Islamists America’s Enemies in the Fight Against Terrorism?” AEIdeas, October 10, 2017, <http://www.aei.org/publication/are-political-islamists-americas-enemies-in-the-fight-against-terrorism/>.

90. Osama bin Laden wrote, “The American people are the ones who choose their own government by way of their own free will. . . . The American people have the ability and choice to refuse the policies of their Government and even to change it if they want. . . . This is why the American people cannot be innocent of all crimes committed by the Americans and the Jews against us.” *Guardian*, “Full Text: Bin Laden’s ‘Letter to America,’” November 24, 2002, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/nov/24/theobserver>.

91. An al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula video of roadside improvised explosive device (IED) attacks showed what could appear to be civilian vehicles being followed by military vehicles. The IED detonates under a military vehicle. Another example is from al Qaeda emir Ayman al Zawahiri’s guidance on jihad, which calls on followers to “refrain from killing and fighting against non-combatant women and children . . . from harming Muslims by explosions, killing kidnapping or destroying their wealth or property . . . from targeting enemies in mosques, markets and gatherings where they mix with Muslims or with those who do not fight us.” SITE Intelligence Group, “AQAP Video Shows Manufacture, Use of IEDs on Yemeni Soldiers in Hadramawt,” July 20, 2015, <https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Multimedia/aqap-video-shows-manufacture-use-of-ieds-on-yemeni-soldiers-in-hadramawt.html>; and SITE Intelligence Group, “Zawahiri Gives General Guidance for Jihad Regarding Military, Propaganda,” September 13, 2013, <https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/zawahiri-gives-general-guidelines-for-jihad-regarding-military-propaganda.html>.

92. Al Qaeda senior leadership’s understanding of US counterterrorism policies surfaces throughout the cache of documents recovered at Osama bin Laden’s compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, in May 2011. These documents include discussions of whether al Shabaab should take the al Qaeda name and a recommendation against, for fear of sanctions that would prevent the flow of Gulf money to Somalia, and multiple warnings regarding US intelligence and targeting procedures. Osama bin Laden, “Letter from Usama bin Laden to Mukhtar Abu al-Zubayr,” August 7, 2010, <https://ctc.usma.edu/harmonyprogram/letter-from-usama-bin-laden-to-mukhtar-abu-al-zubayr-original-language-2/>; and Zimmerman, *Terrorism, Tactics, and Transformation*.

93. Multiple examples in recovered al Qaeda correspondence exist. Osama bin Laden exchanged views on the developments in Yemen with Nasser al Wahayshi (aka Abu Basir), the late leader of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, especially in 2011. Al Qaeda militants documented their experience in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan. Documents recovered by Rukmini Callimachi in Timbuktu also revealed significant discussion about the local context. Osama bin Laden, “Letter to Abu Basir,” Office of the Director of National Intelligence, <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl2017/english/Letter%20to%20Abu%20Basir.pdf>; Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “Report on Our Visit,” June 2008, <https://www.odni.gov/files/documents/ubl2016/english/Report%20on%20our%20visit.pdf>; and Rukmini Callimachi, “In Timbuktu, al-Qaida Left Behind a Manifesto,” *Associated Press*, February 14, 2013, <https://www.pulitzer.org/finalists/rukmini-callimachi-o>.

94. The warnings of the reconstitution of the Islamic State in Iraq are an example of how the kinetic-focused approach does not address the surrounding political and socioeconomic conditions to prevent the group’s return. For example, see Jennifer Cafarella, Brandon Wallace, and Jason Zhou, *ISIS’s Second Comeback: Assessing the Next ISIS Insurgency*, Institute for the Study of War, June 2019, <http://www.understandingwar.org/report/isiss-second-comeback-assessing-next-isis-insurgency>.

95. For a more in-depth center-of-gravity analysis on the Salafi-jihadi movement, see Katherine Zimmerman, *Road to the Caliphate: The Salafi-Jihadi Movement’s Strengths*, Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, June 6, 2019, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/road-to-the-caliphate-the-salafi-jihadi-movements-strengths>.

96. Mary Habeck, “Understanding ISIS and al Qaeda,” Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, September 10, 2018, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/understanding-isis-and-al-qaeda>.

97. Zimmerman, *Road to the Caliphate*. Additional pieces of evidence are found in al Qaeda correspondence. Al Qaeda in the Islamic

Maghreb's emir Abdelmalek Droukdel (aka Abu Musab Abdul Wadud) wrote to local leaders in Mali that the objective is to build relationships in Malian society and that the leaders will have succeeded at achieving these victories even if they lose militarily. "The aim of building these bridges is to make it so that our mujahedeen are no longer isolated in society . . . it will be just enough that we will have planted the first, good seed in this fertile soil." Rukmini Callimachi, "In Timbuktu, al-Qaida Left Behind a Manifesto," *Associated Press*, February 14, 2013, <https://www.pulitzer.org/files/2014/international-reporting/callimachi/04callimachi2014.pdf>.

98. For an exposition of this methodology, see Mary Habeck, "The U.S. Must Identify Jihadi-Salafists Through Their Ideology, Practices, and Methodology—and Isolate Them," Heritage Foundation, July 9, 2018, https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/SR-200_web_o.pdf.

99. American grand strategic objectives are identified as the following: (1) secure the American people and homeland; (2) protect, retain, and promote the American liberal and democratic values; (3) retain and promote a free-market economic system, including the free flow of people and goods; (4) protect and strengthen a rules-based international order; and (5) retain and strengthen US alliances and aid allies in the face of common dangers.

100. White House, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, 2018.

101. Salafi-jihadi terror attacks in the US since 9/11 include Richard Reid's attempted bombing of an airliner in December 2001; Carlos Leon Bledsoe's shooting at a military recruiting office in Little Rock, Arkansas, in June 2009; Nidal Malik Hasan's shooting at Fort Hood in November 2009; Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab's attempted bombing of an airline in December 2009; Faisal Shahzad's attempted car bombing in Times Square in October 2010; al Qaeda in Yemen's mailing of disguised bombs via cargo planes to Chicago in October 2010; Mohamed Osman Mohamud's attempted car bombing in Portland, Oregon, in November 2010; the Tsarnaev brother's bombing of the Boston Marathon in April 2015; Muhammad Youssef Abdulazeez's shooting attack against military installations in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in July 2015; Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik's mass shooting attack in San Bernardino, California, in December 2015; Omar Mateen's mass shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, in June 2016; Ahmad Khan Rahimi's bombings in New York and New Jersey in September 2016; and Sayfullo Saipov's truck attack in New York City in October 2017.

102. US counterterrorism strikes against al Qaeda operatives in Syria drove such a narrative. The al Qaeda members provided expertise and capabilities that members of the Syrian armed opposition perceived to be critical. They were perceived to be supporting the Syrian opposition and not engaged in global jihad. Eliminating them helped further a narrative that the US was working against the opposition.

103. Zimmerman, *Road to the Caliphate*.

104. Iraq-Syria, including neighboring countries, is probably the prioritized theater, with Yemen, Afghanistan-Pakistan, and the Sahel identified as the supporting theaters. Other areas such as Libya and the Maghreb, Somalia and East Africa, Central Africa, the Caucasus, the Indian subcontinent, and Southeast Asia will probably follow.

105. For maps of how the Islamic State and al Qaeda visualize the world as of 2017, see Mary Habeck, "Al Qaeda and ISIS Geographical Organization" in *Understanding ISIS and al Qaeda*, Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, September 10, 2018, <http://longform.aei.org/understanding-isis-and-al-qaeda/post/28/al-qaeda-and-isis-geographical-organization>.

106. USAID's Office of Political Transition Initiatives (USAID/OTI) provides an example in Nigeria in which the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) charged fishermen a fee for access to boats and fishing tools the group appropriated. USAID/OTI partnered with a local fishing cooperative to provide basic equipment and tools to 150 community members, enabling them to earn their livelihoods without paying ISWAP's taxes. The program cost under \$50,000. Office of Political Transition Initiatives, "Nigeria," US Agency for International Development, accessed July 29, 2019, <https://www.usaid.gov/political-transition-initiatives/nigeria>.

107. For an in-depth study of Village Stability Operations, see Mark Moyar, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," Joint Special Operations University, October 2014, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a615729.pdf>.

108. John Friberg, "Village Stability Operations (VSO) in Afghanistan," SOF News, August 21, 2016, <http://www.sof.news/afghanistan/village-stability-operations-vso/>; and Ty Connett and Bob Cassidy, "Village Stability Operations: More Than Village Defense," *Special Warfare* 24, no. 3 (July–September 2011), https://www.soc.mil/SWCS/SWmag/archive/SW2403/SW2403VillageStabilityOperations_MoreThanVillageDefense.html.

109. Robert Hulslander and Jake Spivey, "Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police," *Prism* no. 3 (June 2012), <https://cco>.

ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism_3-3/prism125-138_hulslander-spivey.pdf.

110. Moyar, “Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police.”

111. Moyar, “Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police”; and Austin Scott Miller, “Advanced Policy Questions for Lieutenant General Austin Miller, U.S. Army Nominee for Commander, Resolute Support Mission and Commander, United States Forces-Afghanistan,” prepared for the Senate Armed Services Committee, June 19, 2018, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Miller_APQs_06-19-18.pdf.

112. US Agency for International Development, “USAID’s Libya Program Plan, 2018–2020,” accessed August 8, 2019, <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1883/06-11-19USAIDLbyaProgramPlan.pdf>.

113. See Jessica Trisko Darden, *Development Assistance and Counterterrorism*, American Enterprise Institute, September 12, 2019, <http://www.aei.org/publication/development-assistance-and-counterterrorism/>.

114. Brian Katz’s research on using substate (nonstate) actors for counterterrorism operations draws forward important implications and considerations regarding the use of these partners. Brian Katz, “Imperfect Proxies: The Pros and Perils of Partnering with Non-State Actors for CT,” Center for Strategic International Studies, January 29, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/imperfect-proxies-pros-and-perils-partnering-non-state-actors-ct>.

115. For a debate on the role of political Islamists, see Simcox and Zimmerman, “Are Political Islamists America’s Enemies in the Fight Against Terrorism?”

116. Discussions during the United States Institute for Peace’s Strategic Monitoring and Evaluation of Stabilization Missions Experts Working Group (June 2019) helped inform the approach to measuring effectiveness. Background readings on stabilization mission monitoring and evaluation also assisted. Stabilization Unit, *Monitoring and Evaluation of Conflict and Stabilisation Interventions: What Works*, UK Government, October 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/monitoring-and-evaluation-of-conflict-and-stabilisation-interventions>; Christian van Stolk et al., *Monitoring and Evaluation of Conflict and Stabilisation Interventions: Review the State of the Art and Suggesting Ways Forward*, RAND Europe, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/technical_reports/2011/RAND_TR962.pdf; and Craig Cohen, “Measuring Progress in Stabilization and Reconstruction,” US Institute of Peace, March 1, 2006, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2006/03/measuring-progress-stabilization-and-reconstruction>.

117. Nathan A. Sales, “After the Caliphate: A New Global Approach to Defeating ISIS,” US Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, April 30, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/after-the-caliphate-a-new-global-approach-to-defeating-isis/>.

118. Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal (ret.), who oversaw the transformation of US Joint Special Operations Command in Iraq, has emphasized that the network-centric approach that he and his team developed—find, fix, finish, exploit, and analyze—did not produce success until nested in a broader effort. In an interview he said, “We did an awful lot of capturing and killing in Iraq for several years before it started to have a real effect, and that came only when we were partnered with an effective counterinsurgency approach.” Gideon Rose, “Generation Kill: A Conversation with Stanley McChrystal,” *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2013), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/interviews/2013-02-11/generation-kill>; and Stanley A. McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin Group, 2013).

119. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “Mission, Vision & Values,” accessed July 15, 2019, <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/who-we-are/mission-vision>; and Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “History,” <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/who-we-are/history>.

120. National Counterterrorism Center, “Who We Are: Mission/Vision,” accessed July 15, 2019, <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/nctc-who-we-are/mission-vision>.

121. Michael E. DeVine and Heidi M. Peters, “In Focus: National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC),” Congressional Research Service, July 11, 2018, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/intel/IF10709.pdf>.

122. White House, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, February 2003, https://www.cia.gov/news-information/cia-the-war-on-terrorism/Counter_Terrorism_Strategy.pdf.

123. White House, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, June 28, 2011, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/counterterrorism_strategy.pdf.

124. White House, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, 2018.

125. Amy Belasco et al., *Counterterrorism Spending: Protecting America While Promoting Efficiencies and Accountability*, Stimson Center, May 2018, 27, https://www.stimson.org/sites/default/files/file-attachments/CT_Spending_Report_0.pdf.
126. The challenges that the Malian state face are an example. Bamako has limited resources and has prioritized them—and the delivery of state services—to serve its interests, which have historically been in the southern parts of the country. The insurgencies in northern Mali are driven, in part, by the perceived (and real) marginalization of certain ethnic groups over others. Malian officials make promises of reform, and many might be earnest, but the realities of politics in the capital influence the distribution of state resources. Reform efforts seem to be headed in the direction of increasing Bamako's power, rather than dispersing it. Moreover, progress on justice sector reform and the investigation of human rights abuses, along with the investment in infrastructure in northern Mali for service delivery, has been slow. For some discussion, see International Crisis Group, "Mali: Reform or Relapse," January 10, 2014, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/mali/mali-reform-or-relapse>; Congressional Research Service, "Conflict in Mali," September 19, 2018, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10116.pdf>; and Liesbeth Van Der Heide, "Dumping One Government Won't Fix Mali," *Foreign Policy*, April 20, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/04/20/dumping-one-government-wont-fix-mali-security-west-africa-sahel-ogossagou-fulani-dogon-tuareg-azawad-terrorism/>.
127. Emily Estelle, "How Ansar al Islam Gains Popular Support in Burkina Faso," Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, May 9, 2019, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/how-ansar-al-islam-gains-popular-support-in-burkina-faso>.
128. For a brief overview of Operation Serval, see Sergei Boeke and Bart Schuurman, "Operation 'Serval': A Strategic Analysis of the French Intervention in Mali, 2013–2014," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 6 (July 2015), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01402390.2015.1045494>.
129. James Sheehan, "US Gives Lift to French Forces," US Army, February 13, 2019, https://www.army.mil/article/217360/us_gives_lift_to_french_forces; Reuters, "U.S. to Keep Supporting French Military Effort in Mali: Pentagon Chief," October 2, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/ozatp-us-usa-france-mali-idAFKCN1MC1J4-OZATP>; and Gabe Starosta, "The Role of the US Air Force in the French Mission in Mali," *Air Force Magazine*, November 2013, <http://www.airforcemag.com/MagazineArchive/Pages/2013/November%202013/1113mali.aspx>.
130. Nathaniel K. Powell, "A Flawed Strategy in the Sahel: How French Intervention Contributes to Instability," *Foreign Affairs*, February 1, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/west-africa/2016-02-01/flawed-strategy-sahel>.
131. Emirates News Agency, "British Hostage Rescued by UAE Forces, Mohamed Tells Cameron," August 23, 2015, <https://www.wam.ae/en/details/1395284606262>.
132. Katherine Zimmerman, "Yemen Situation Report," Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, May 2, 2016, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/briefs/yemen-situation-report/2016-yemen-crisis-situation-report-may-2>; Michael Knights, "The U.A.E. Approach to Counterinsurgency in Yemen," *War on the Rocks*, May 23, 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/05/the-u-a-e-approach-to-counterinsurgency-in-yemen/>; and author's interviews with Emirati officials.
133. Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Missy Ryan, "U.S. Forces Now on the Ground Supporting Combat Operations in Yemen, Pentagon Says," *Washington Post*, May 6, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2016/05/06/u-s-forces-now-on-the-grounds-supporting-combat-operations-in-yemen-pentagon-says/>; Frontline, "What the DOD Says About Its Operations in Yemen," January 22, 2019, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/dod-statement-raids-airstrikes-yemen/>; and author's interviews with Emirati officials, March 2018 and June 2019.
134. Maher Farrukh, "Al Qaeda's Base in Yemen," Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, June 20, 2017, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/al-qaedas-base-in-yemen>. Multiple reports have surfaced from Yemen about the UAE paying off members of al Qaeda as part of its counterterrorism effort. The most prominent of these reports is an Associated Press investigation published in August 2018. The AP cited sources that the UAE had paid off members of al Qaeda in eastern Yemen to secure the counterterrorism advances. It is not clear from the reporting how al Qaeda membership was being defined. Maggie Michael, Trish Wilson, and Lee Keath, "AP Investigation: US Allies, al-Qaida Battle Rebels in Yemen," Associated Press, August 6, 2018, <https://apnews.com/f38788a561d74ca78c77cb43612d50da>.
135. Ambs. Ryan Crocker, Robert Ford, James F. Jeffrey, and Ronald Neumann argued powerfully for the role of an ambassador in shaping the political environment: "The issue must not be only one of risk but of whether the risks can be mitigated through

intelligence and security precautions. Mitigation does not mean one is secure but it lowers the level of risk and can include significant reduction of embassy personnel. But the ambassador should be the last, not the first, out.” Ryan Crocker et al., “Why We Need to Keep Our Ambassador in Yemen,” *Hill*, February 6, 2015, <https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/231891-why-we-need-to-keep-our-ambassador-in-yemen>.

136. The US Embassy to Yemen relocated to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in February 2015 and has relocated to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Similarly, the US Embassy to Libya relocated to Tunis, Tunisia, in 2015 as the “Libya External Office.”

137. Edward Wong, “U.S. Orders Partial Evacuation of Embassy in Baghdad,” *New York Times*, May 15, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/15/us/politics/us-iraq-embassy-evacuation.html>.

138. Author’s conversations with individuals familiar with security restrictions for US Embassy Bamako and Mogadishu.

139. Rob Manning et al., “Department of Defense Press Briefing on the Results of the Investigation into the October 4, 2017, Ambush in Niger,” Department of Defense, May 10, 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1518332/departments-of-defense-press-briefing-on-the-results-of-the-investigation-into-t/>.

140. Roundtable discussion held under Chatham House rule at the American Enterprise Institute, August 9, 2018.

141. Lt. Gen. Michael K. Nagata (ret.) was the director of strategic operational planning at the National Counterterrorism Center. He called for additional support to areas where the US has not placed much. In separate comments, he said, “When there’s a setback, when there’s a perception of failure, very often . . . the international community tends to flinch from failure in these non-kinetic arenas. What that tells me is that we’re less willing to accept risks in these arenas than we are in direct combat with the enemy. That’s a decision. That’s a choice. Whether we’re aware we’re making it or not, that is a choice. So I come back to my original answer: It will require us to make different decisions.” He also said, “But they [non-kinetic approaches] do need people and they do need money. That is also a form of policy support. More people and more money. Recognizing that some of this won’t work. Recognizing that if we’re willing to accept fatalities and keep going, we should also be willing to see an effort to counter an ideology, or to prevent the recruitment of an individual or a group that may fail. That may fail very badly. The United States government or our partners could get accused of every sin under the calendar of everything from being foolish to being perverse. But if we’re not willing to accept that, then it begs the question: How serious are we in this arena? Because we don’t know everything that can succeed in these arenas.” See Nagata, “Taking Stock of U.S. Counterterrorism Efforts Since 9/11.”

142. US Special Operations Command lieutenant colonel, in discussion with the author. The lieutenant colonel remarked that for his entire career, he has been trained to stabilize and has been rewarded for succeeding.

143. Lt. Gen. James M. Dubik (ret.) and Nic Vincent’s 2018 report includes discussion of al Qaeda and the Islamic State as “revolutionary powers” waging global insurgencies. Other insightful recent examples focus only on state-based actors such as Russia and China. James M. Dubik and Nic Vincent, *America’s Global Competitions: The Gray Zone in Context*, Institute for the Study of War, February 2018, http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/The%20Gray%20Zone_Dubik_2018.pdf; Kathleen H. Hicks et al., *By Other Means—Part I: Campaigning in the Gray Zone*, Center for Strategic International Studies, July 8, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/other-means-part-i-campaigning-gray-zone>; and Lyle J. Morris et al., *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone: Response Options for Coercive Aggression Below the Threshold of Major War*, RAND Corporation, 2019, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2942.html.

144. For example, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), among others, has filed lawsuits against the US government alleging CVE/TP initiatives pose risks to the freedoms of speech and religion and are discriminatory against American Muslim communities. ACLU District of Columbia, “ACLU v. Department of Homeland Security (Countering Violent Extremism FOIA),” accessed July 25, 2019, <https://www.acludc.org/en/cases/aclu-v-department-homeland-security-countering-violent-extremism-foia>.

145. Providing Material Support to Terrorists, 18 USC § 2339A(b)(1).

146. The enforcement of the material support statute remains an issue for humanitarian organizations that cite the high cost of overhead to ensure compliance, the risk that they continue to take as they seek to provide (especially emergency) humanitarian relief while remaining in compliance with US regulations, and the national security considerations that inform the statute, which seek to prevent terrorist groups from strengthening off the lifeblood of humanitarian assistance. For some discussion, see Sarah Margon, *Unintended Roadblocks: How U.S. Terrorism Restrictions Make It Harder to Save Lives*, Center for American Progress, November 2011, <https://www>.

americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2011/11/pdf/unintended_roadblocks.pdf; Jessica Trisko Darden, “Humanitarian Assistance Has a Terrorism Problem. Can It Be Resolved?,” War on the Rocks, January 3, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/01/humanitarian-assistance-has-a-terrorism-problem-can-it-be-resolved/>; and Ben Parker, “Shutdowns, Suspensions, and Legal Threats Put Relief in World’s Troublespots at Risk,” *New Humanitarian*, September 26, 2018, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2018/09/26/shutdowns-suspensions-and-legal-threats-put-relief-world-s-troublespots-risk>.

147. Prevention Project, “Building Off-Ramps and Reintegrating Foreign Fighters and Terrorist Offenders: Challenges and Opportunities,” June 6, 2016, http://insct.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Building_Off_Ramps_Meeting_Summary_0617.pdf.

148. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, <https://www.pepfar.gov/>. The fiscal year 2020 budget request for the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs is available at Secretary of State, “Appendix 1: Department of State Diplomatic Engagement Fiscal Year 2020,” <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/FY20-CBJ-Appendix-1-FINAL-Apr-11-2019.pdf>.

149. Congress has authorized overseas contingency operations (OCO) and global war on terror funding for emergency requirements annually since the 9/11 attacks. OCO has provided support for counterterrorism-related activities, especially after the 2011 Budget Control Act. The State Department and USAID received \$20.8 and \$12 billion in OCO funding in fiscal year 2017 and fiscal year 2019, respectively. For more on OCO funding, see Brendan W. McGarry and Susan B. Epstein, *Overseas Contingency Operations Funding: Background and Status*, Congressional Research Service, January 15, 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R44519.pdf>.

150. Kristen Cordell et al., *A Framework for Maximizing the Effectiveness of U.S. Government Efforts to Stabilize Conflict-Affected Areas*, US State Department, June 2018, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/283589.pdf>.

151. The US State Department’s Office of US Foreign Assistance Resources has engaged in a study of stabilization programs in certain countries to assess where it has been successful and why. See Office of US Foreign Assistance Resources, “The Strategic Prevention Project: Assessing the Role of Foreign Assistance in Preventing Violent Conflict in Fragile States,” July 23, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/strategic-prevention-project-outlines-targeted-approach-to-foreign-assistance-to-prevent-violent-conflicts-in-fragile-states/>.

152. The Global Fragility Act (H.R. 2116) seeks to appropriate \$200 million for the next five years to the Stabilization and Prevention Fund (SPF), administered by the State Department and USAID in support of stabilization, conflict prevention, and stabilization of areas liberated from Salafi-jihadi influence, and \$30 million for the next five years to the Complex Crises Fund, administered by USAID in support of responding to emergent crises or challenges. The Global Fragility Initiative included within this bill seeks to start an inter-agency initiative that could serve to inform prioritization and planning to counter the Salafi-jihadi movement. Global Fragility Act of 2019, H.R. 2116, 116th Cong. (2019), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/2116/text>.

153. US Agency for International Development, “New Partnerships Initiatives (NPI),” accessed August 6, 2019, <https://www.usaid.gov/npi/fact-sheet>.

154. Many of the recommendations from “Pursuing Effective and Conflict-Aware Stabilization” would directly support the ideas laid forward in this recommended approach to counter the Salafi-jihadi movement. Melissa Dalton et al., “Pursuing Effective and Conflict-Aware Stabilization: Framing and Constructing a Roadmap,” Center for Strategic International Studies, January 22, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/pursuing-effective-and-conflict-aware-stabilization-framing-and-constructing-roadmap>.

155. Initiatives like the Syria Transition Assistance Response Team (START) Forward in Syria, which placed State Department and USAID personnel in northeast Syria, are positive developments in that they brought civilian assistance into an active military theater. START Forward has its drawbacks, however, in that the civilian assistance was militarized, undoing some of the value of placing civilians in the field. It is not clear whether the programs that ran through the START Forward initiative could have been managed from positions in Turkey or Jordan since the civilians’ engagements off the forward operating bases were limited. The program also relied on military personnel for security. Outside of the US government, Nuru International, a self-described social entrepreneurial venture, has sought to strengthen communities through local programs. For an overview of START Forward, see the Office of Inspector General, “Department of State Stabilization Programs in Syria Funded Under the Further Continuing and Security Assistance Appropriations Act, 2017,” September 2018, <https://www.stateoig.gov/system/files/isp-i-18-29.pdf>.

156. The Stabilization Assistance Review (SAR) recommends the State Department, USAID, and the Defense Department work together to build stabilization, transition, and response teams to support the chiefs of mission and Combatant Commands in their efforts. Critically, the recommendation to expand authorities and permissions for civilians to surge into contested spaces should be

followed. Cordell et al., *A Framework for Maximizing the Effectiveness of U.S. Government Efforts to Stabilize Conflict-Affected Areas*.

157. For a historical assessment of the al Qaeda network, see Zimmerman, *The al Qaeda Network*; and Katherine Zimmerman, “Al Qaeda’s Strengthening in the Shadows,” testimony before the Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, Committee on Homeland Security, US House of Representatives, July 13, 2017, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/testimony-al-qaeda-strengthening-in-the-shadows>.

158. References in recovered al Qaeda correspondence indicate that a command for the Afghanistan-Pakistan theater exists, though senior leaders closely monitored developments in this theater, probably due to proximity and self-interest. Whether such a command exists for Iraq and Sham (Syria, Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon) is unclear. Al Qaeda’s affiliate in Syria, Jabhat al Nusra, announced its dissolution and reformed as a new organization. Jabhat al Nusra leader, Abu Muhammad al Julani, almost certainly did not break his oath of *bayat* to al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri. Al Qaeda operatives in Syria now receive sanctuary from Hurras al Din and possibly also from Hay’at Tahrir al Sham. Leaders within Ahrar al Sham might still retain ties to al Qaeda as well.

159. UN Security Council, “Ninth Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of United Nations Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat”; and Brandon Wallace et al., “ISIS Reorganizes for a New Phase of Global Operations,” Institute for the Study of War, forthcoming.

160. Wallace et al., “ISIS Reorganizes for a New Phase of Global Operations.”

161. The research teams at the Institute for the Study of War and the Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute provided valuable feedback to refine these characteristics.

162. Gen. David Petraeus (ret.) describes this challenge in a 2008 interview on the counterinsurgency efforts in Iraq. He poses the question of ensuring that actions lead to *fewer* enemies at the end of each day or week rather than creating *more*. *Frontline*, “Interviews Gen. David Petraeus,” February 19, 2008, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/haditha/interviews/petraeus.html>.

163. The names of many of the key Salafi-jihadi ideologues and leaders are identified in McCants, Brachman, and Felter, *Militant Ideology Atlas*.

164. Iyad ag Ghali, an Ifoghas Tuareg leader in Mali with deep smuggling connections and a former role as a hostage negotiator for al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, functions as a Salafi-jihadi king pin in northern Mali.

165. Definitions of military terms are taken from Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Planning*, GL-6 and GL-7.

About the Author

Katherine Zimmerman is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and an adviser to AEI's Critical Threats Project. As AEI's senior analyst studying terrorist groups, she focuses on the global al Qaeda network and covers the Salafi-jihadi movement and related trends in the Middle East and Africa. She also specializes in al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Yemen, al Shabaab in Somalia, and al Qaeda in the Sahel.

She has testified before Congress about the threats to US national security interests emanating from al Qaeda and its network. She has also briefed members of Congress, their staff, and US military, diplomatic, and intelligence community personnel. Her analyses have been widely published, including in CNN.com, *Foreign Affairs*, FoxNews.com, the *Hill*, Huffington Post, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Washington Post*. She is a term member with the Council on Foreign Relations and a member of the RESOLVE Network Research Advisory Council.

Note from the Author

This report is the beginning, not the end, of an effort to reframe the US approach to counterterrorism and the Salafi-jihadi movement. The critiques that I, among others, have offered of the US counterterrorism strategy's shortcomings focus on the inability of that strategy to defeat the Salafi-jihadi groups. This shortcoming is actually the absence of a strategy to counter the Salafi-jihadi movement itself and not within the US counterterrorism strategy. Separating

out the requirements of retaining a counterterrorism strategy—countering the threat from the Salafi-jihadi movement, the Iranian threat network, and now, increasingly, domestic terrorism threats—from countering the Salafi-jihadi movement is an initial framing requirement.

Please reach out to me at Katherine.Zimmerman@aei.org if you have feedback, comments, or helpful critiques of the recommendations published here.

Acknowledgments

The conclusions and insights in this report would not have been possible without the support of those who generously gave me their time, especially those who waded through earlier drafts and provided comments. I am deeply grateful to all of you. Many have contributed to and bettered my understanding of the challenges related to the Salafi-jihadi movement and US policy, but the opinions, findings, and especially the errors in this report are mine alone.

Special thanks to Col. James “Hawk” Danielik (ret.), Robin Simcox, working group and roundtable participants, and the many others who have contributed to this research effort. Thank you to my research interns over the course of this project—Nathan Bumagny, Joseph Howard, Hailey Kruger, Cole Riggan, and Steven Watts—for their contributions. The work of the research teams at the Critical Threats Project and the

Institute for the Study of War has been invaluable. I am especially indebted to Emily Estelle for all that she does. Thank you to Luke Strange and AEI’s media team for your help.

Lastly, I am incredibly thankful for my past 10 years at the American Enterprise Institute, where I have benefited enormously from my colleagues. Frederick W. Kagan, Danielle Pletka, and Véronique Rodman in particular invested their time and energy in me early in my career and continue to support me. Thank you, Véronique, for helping me distill my work into a message that others might consume. Dany, thank you for your encouragement, giving me the opportunity to pursue this research effort, and for demanding excellence. Fred, thank you for seeing what was possible and for your years of mentorship to help make that a reality.

About AEI's Critical Threats Project

The Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute seeks to inform and educate policymakers, the intelligence and military communities, and all interested citizens who need to understand the nuance and scale of threats to America's security. The project conducts intelligence analysis on unclassified information to produce continuous assessments of threats to the US and our allies. It develops these assessments into concrete plans for action using best practices drawn from the US military, intelligence community, and diplomatic corps. It provides the executive branch, Congress, the media, and the general public its assessments and recommendations on a nonpartisan basis. Like AEI, Critical Threats accepts no money from the American government or any foreign government.

Critical Threats is directed by AEI Resident Scholar Frederick W. Kagan. Its two analytical teams focus on the threats posed by Iran and the global al Qaeda network, especially in Yemen, the Horn of Africa, Libya, and West Africa.

About Our Technology Partners

The conclusions and assessments in this report do not reflect the positions of our technology partners.



Neo4j is a highly scalable native graph database that helps organizations build intelligent applications that meet today's evolving connected data challenges, including fraud detection, tax evasion, situational awareness, real-time recommendations, master data management, network security, and IT operations. Global organizations such as MITRE, Walmart, the World Economic Forum, UBS, Cisco, HP, Adidas, and Lufthansa rely on Neo4j to harness the connections in their data.



Ntrepid enables organizations to safely conduct their online activities. Ntrepid's Passages technology leverages the company's platform and 15-year history, protecting the national security community from the world's most sophisticated opponents. From corporate identity management to secure browsing, Ntrepid products facilitate online research and data collection and eliminate the threats that come with having a workforce connected to the internet.



Linkurious' graph visualization software helps organizations detect and investigate insights hidden in graph data. It is used by government agencies and global companies in anti-money laundering, cybersecurity, or medical research. Linkurious makes today's complex connected data easy to understand for analysts.



BlackSky is a global monitoring and intelligence company delivering timely, relevant, and actionable information through satellite imagery, machine learning, predictive algorithms, and natural language processing. Its global intelligence platform triangulates relevant global events in time and space, analyzes data based on your preferences, alerts you of critical events related to your area of interest, and enables you to directly task and access high-revisit imagery sensors.



Sayari is a search company, not a traditional data vendor. It builds search products that allow users to find corporate, financial, and public records in hard-target countries. Sayari products cover emerging, frontier, and off-shore markets and include corporate registries, official gazettes, litigation, vital records, customs data, and real property. They collect, structure, normalize, enrich, and index these data, often making them searchable for the first time.



Microsoft helps empower defense and intelligence agencies with its deep commitments to national security, trust, innovation, and compliance. With world-class security and a wide array of cloud services designed for mission success, the Microsoft Cloud offers a cloud platform designed for flexibility and scale to strengthen partnerships and alliances, create smart work environments and installations, optimize operations to better meet mission needs, and help foster a safer, more secure world.