

# Al-Qaeda and Its Affiliates: The Failure of the Transnational Network.

A Monograph

by

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This monograph evaluates the tactical actions of al-Qaeda Core and three of its affiliated groups, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Shabaab, and the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus (IEC). The case studies explore the origin, leadership, ideology, and tactical actions of the groups identified in an effort to analyze the relative success, or lack thereof, of "brand" al-Qaeda. The fundamental tension between the transnational aims espoused by al-Qaeda Core and the nationalist agendas which are at the heart of the affiliates actions are blindingly apparent.

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## Abstract

Al-Qaeda and Its Affiliates: The Failure of the Transnational Network, by MAJOR Alex J Hortop, British Army, 57 pages.

When the leading figures of the Middle Eastern and North African mujahedeen left the battlefields of Afghanistan in the late 1980s, fresh from their perceived victory over the Soviet Union, little thought was given to the threat they posed to their home nations and western powers. The emergence of Al-Qaeda Core and Osama bin Laden in the early 1990s, with its hardline Salafist agenda and ideologically motivated volunteers, heralded a new era of globally-orientated terror activity aimed at both the near enemy, the apostate Islamic regimes and the far enemy, the West. This expansive agenda posed a fundamental problem for al-Qaeda Core, which was one of size and scope. Al-Qaeda Core was a small organization, rich in financial and experiential terms but it did not have the volume of operatives required to sate its twin lines of effort against the near *and* far enemies. This led to the formulation and declaration by Osama bin Laden of a global defensive jihad and a fatwa against the apostate Islamic states and their western backers. This declaration was a unifying call-to-arms, and an attempt by al-Qaeda Core to align Islamist terror organizations across the globe under the al-Qaeda banner; Osama bin Laden had attempted to solve his problem of size by syndicating the al-Qaeda brand. In order for this approach to be successful the affiliated groups must be subservient to their master Osama bin Laden, and their activity (tactical actions) must support the clearly-stated strategic aims of the guiding organization, al-Qaeda Core.

This monograph assesses the relative success or failure of this approach by evaluating the tactical actions of al-Qaeda Core and three of its affiliated groups, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Shabaab, and the Islamic Emirate of the Caucuses (IEC). The case studies explore the origin, leadership, ideology, and tactical actions of the groups identified in an effort to analyze the relative success, or lack thereof, of “brand” al-Qaeda. The fundamental tension between the transnational aims espoused by al-Qaeda Core and the nationalist agendas which are at the heart of the affiliates actions are blindingly apparent. It is quite clear that some 16 years after the declaration of the global jihad, al-Qaeda Core is no closer to realizing its strategic aims and has in fact seen its status drastically reduced; syndication has apparently failed.

## Contents

Introduction.....	1
Methodology.....	7
Literature Review.....	11
Case Studies.....	18
Al-Qaeda Core.....	18
Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).....	28
Al Shabaab.....	35
Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus (IEC).....	43
Conclusions.....	51
Bibliography.....	57

## Introduction

*“The purpose of terrorism lies not just in the violent act itself. It is in producing terror. It sets out to inflame, to divide, to produce consequences which they then use to justify further terror”<sup>1</sup>*

Tony Blair

Al-Qaeda Core’s senior leadership promotes its overall strategic intent, ideological underpinning and political aims willingly. Developed by Osama bin Laden in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the fundamental elements of his vision have changed little from their inception. They have been articulated by numerous people from both within and outside the organization itself.

The current figurehead of the organization and one-time second-in-command to Osama Bin Laden, the Egyptian Ayman al Zawahiri, has been particularly clear in his explanation of al-Qaeda’s *ends*. Al Zawahiri released a video message in June 2005<sup>2</sup> detailing the triumvirate of political aims that al-Qaeda was working towards. The “three foundations,” as outlined by al Zawahiri were<sup>3</sup>:

1. “The Quran-Based Authority to Govern.” *Islamic law, drawn from the writings of the prophet Muhammad and the Qu’ran must be the framework for governance, not ‘human’ instigated rules and regulations.*

2. “The Liberation of the Homelands.” *The Islamic homelands must be freed from external ‘occupation’. Effectively the creation of a ‘pious caliphate.’*

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<sup>1</sup> The Right Honourable Tony Blair, MP, House of Commons, March 18, 2003, accessed June 5, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/mar/18/foreignpolicy.iraq1>.

<sup>2</sup> Blanchard, Christopher M. Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology; *Congressional Research Service*; updated 9<sup>th</sup> July 2007; pp.13-14.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

3. “The Liberation of the Human Being.” *The emancipation of the global Muslim population from ‘western’ oppression and influence.*

While this list is not exhaustive, it does contain the central concepts that underpin the idea behind the movement. The vision is transnational in nature, overlapping geographic and ethnic boundaries. It requires concurrence from, and the support of, the *ummah*,<sup>4</sup> the Islamic population *en masse* for two main reasons. Firstly, the overwhelming desire is to unite the *ummah* in a new caliphate where they will be free from Western influence and ruled according to sharia law. This amalgamation of the three aims articulated by al Zawahiri in his 2005 video is, quite clearly, al-Qaeda’s political end state. Secondly, al-Qaeda Core is a small organization which has seen its numbers progressively denuded by military and law enforcement operations around the world. It is simply unable to achieve its political end state alone; The Core needs help.<sup>5</sup>

The desire to syndicate the al-Qaeda *brand* was first (clearly) articulated by Osama Bin Laden in 1998. The announcement of the “World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders” accompanied the declaration of a fatwa by Osama Bin Laden, invoking a defensive jihad against perceived US-led aggression.<sup>6</sup> This heralded a tacit alliance between Osama Bin Laden, his supporters, and regional Islamic militant groups. In its own eyes al-Qaeda Core had begun its journey towards becoming the controlling node of an ideologically compatible network of organizations with fighters keen to prosecute the jihad.

The al-Qaeda organization as envisioned by Osama Bin Laden has failed to realize its global vision. While a network of affiliates controlled both ideologically and militarily by the core

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<sup>4</sup> Ummah is an Arabic word meaning nation or community. It is a synonym for ummat al-Islamiyah (the Islamic Nation), and it is commonly used to mean the collective community of Islamic peoples.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel G. Cox, The Struggle Against Global Insurgency, *Joint Forces Quarterly, Issue 56*, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2010, (2010):135-139, accessed May 28, 2014, <http://www.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA515161>.

<sup>6</sup> Blanchard, Christopher M. Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology; *Congressional Research Service*; updated 9<sup>th</sup> July 2007; pp.2-3.

appeared to be a solution to al-Qaeda's strategic and operational problems, the reality of the result of the relationships has been something entirely different. Almost two decades after the declaration of a fatwa against the West by Osama bin Laden it appears that the principal aims of his organization are no nearer to being achieved; syndication has apparently failed. The aim of this monograph is to research the reasons behind this apparent failure. Specifically, to ascertain what the links are between al-Qaeda Core's strategic aims and the tactical activity conducted by al-Qaeda affiliates. This monograph will contend that there is no coherent linkage between the two ends of the operational spectrum – strategic and tactical – and no operational approach. Simply put the tactical actions of al-Qaeda affiliates do not support the strategic aims of al-Qaeda Core.

In order to fully articulate the scope of my hypothesis – that the tactical actions of al-Qaeda affiliates do not support the strategic aims of al-Qaeda Core - it is necessary to set the context clearly and unequivocally. Two very short vignettes detailing recent terrorist incidents will be used, both of which are examples of tactical actions conducted by *mujahideen*:<sup>7</sup> Islamic fighters waging *jihad*.<sup>8</sup>

On the afternoon of 22 May 2013 Lee Rigby, an off-duty and out of uniform member of the British Army was murdered by two men near Greenwich Barracks in South London. The attack took place in the early afternoon, in broad daylight, and in full view of passers-by. The two attackers, Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale, remained at the scene of the attack, armed with a gun and a meat cleaver, and waited for police to attend. Once armed police had arrived at the scene the two attackers charged at them; both were shot and wounded, received medical

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<sup>7</sup> Mujahideen: Islamic guerilla fighters especially in the Middle East, Arabic *mujahidin*, literally, person who wages jihad, *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mujahideen>.

<sup>8</sup> Jihad: a holy war waged on behalf of Islam as a religious duty, *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/jihad>.

attention and survived. On 13 December 2014 Adebolajo and Adebowale were found guilty of the murder of Lee Rigby and received lengthy prison sentences.

Adebolajo and Adebowale were British-born and of Nigerian descent, had been raised in Christian families and had converted to Islam in their early-twenties. Both had been radicalized.<sup>9</sup> In particular Adebolajo, who converted to Islam in 2003, had been linked<sup>10</sup> to *al-Muhajiroun*, a British-based Islamist<sup>11</sup> group, membership of which is proscribed by the United Kingdom Home Office.<sup>12</sup> In 2010 he was one of a group of five men arrested in Kenya. The head of the Kenyan anti-terrorism unit, Boniface Mwaniki, suspected him of attempting to travel to Somalia in order to train with *al-Shabaab*, the al-Qaeda linked terrorist organization.<sup>13</sup> The immediate aftermath of the attack on Rigby was filmed by members of the public unable to help him. Footage of Adebolajo and Adebowale standing near the body was used as evidence at their trial and shown on several news channels in the days after the murder. In the film Adebolajo can be seen delivering a diatribe justifying the attack, and was quoted as saying, “The only reason we have done this is because Muslims are dying every day...The British soldier is an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. We apologize that women had to see this today but in our lands women have to see the same.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Radicalize: to cause (someone or something) to become more radical especially in politics, *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/radicalize>.

<sup>10</sup>Laville, Sandra, Peter Walker and Vikram Dodd, 2013, “Woolwich attack suspect identified as Michael Adebolajo,” *The Guardian*, 23 May, accessed April 24, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/may/23/woolwich-attack-suspect-michael-adebolajo>.

<sup>11</sup> Islamism: a popular reform movement advocating the reordering of government and society in accordance with prescribed by Islam, *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Islamism>.

<sup>12</sup> United Kingdom Home Office, 2014, *Protecting the UK against terrorism: Proscribed terrorist organisations*, Home Office, April 7, 2014. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/301777/ProscribedOrganisationsApril14.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/301777/ProscribedOrganisationsApril14.pdf), accessed April 24, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Unknown, 2013, “UK murder suspect previously held in Kenya” *Al Jazeera*, May 27, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2013/05/2013526153158500187.html>, accessed April 24, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Unknown. 2013. “A Shocking killing is a reminder that disorganized jihadists are harder to stop than organized ones” *The Economist*, May 25, <http://www.economist.com/news/britain/21578453-shocking-killing-reminder-disorganised-jihadists-are-harder-stop-organised>, accessed April 13, 2014.

In the early morning of January 16, 2013, around 40 armed Islamist terrorists stormed the Tigourantine natural gas facility near In Amenas, Algeria. Once inside the facility the extremists searched for people to take hostage. They went from room to room looking for “foreigners,” specifically western workers. The plant was rigged with explosives in order to guard against any rescue attempt, and a number of the hostages had improvised SEMTEX bombs placed around their necks. The group *Katibat al-Mulathameen* (The Masked Brigade), sometimes referred to as *al-Muwaqqi ‘un-bi-d-Dima’* (Those who Sign with Blood), led by the ex-Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) commander Mokhtar Belmokhtar,<sup>15</sup> claimed responsibility. The group’s demands were straightforward enough and unsurprising: cessation of the French military intervention against Islamists in northern Mali and the release of a number of Islamist prisoners from Algerian detention. These demands were not met and on January 17 Algerian military forces launched a hostage release operation at the facility. The crisis was finally ended on January 19 with a final assault by Algerian forces. 38 hostages were killed in the operation along with most of the terrorists.

In August 2013, Belmokhtar merged *Katibat al-Mulathameen* with the *Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa* (MUJAO). This conjoined organization became the *al- Murabitoun Brigade*. In its initial public statement the *al- Murabitoun Brigade* expressed a deep affinity to the al-Qaeda Core leadership, issuing a greeting to those it called “the leaders of this time,” Mullah Muhammad Omar and Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri.<sup>16</sup> This newly-formed group was added to the US State Department’s Foreign Terrorist Organizations list in December 2013. The statement released by the State Department includes an indication of how serious a threat *al- Murabitoun* is

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<sup>15</sup> Belmokhtar, also known as Khalid Abu al-Abbas, is referred to as “The Uncatchable” by French Intelligence, *BBC News*, June 4, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-21061480>, accessed May 1, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Roggio, Bill, 2013, Al Qaeda group led by Belmokhtar, MUJAO unite to form al-Murabitoun. *Threat Matrix: A Blog of the Long War Journal*, August 22, 2013, accessed May 1, 2014, [http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2013/08/al\\_qaeda\\_groups\\_lead\\_by\\_belmok.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2013/08/al_qaeda_groups_lead_by_belmok.php)

perceived to be. It reads “The newly formed al-Murabitoun extremist group constitutes the greatest near-term threat to U.S. and Western interests in the Sahel.”<sup>17</sup>

Although very different in design, scale, target and perpetrator, these two horrific incidents are typical of the current manifestation of Islamist extremist terrorism. In both instances the link to al-Qaeda Core is unequivocal, yet the details of the attacks are substantially different. Both events drew condemnation from around the world and from across the religious spectrum. The denunciations were accompanied by renewed offers of support from Western leaders to affected nations; the desire to eradicate Islamist terrorism was galvanized, not eroded. These atrocities have apparently served, at least in the short–medium term, to threaten the strategic aims of al-Qaeda Core, not support them.

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<sup>17</sup>US Department of State, 2013, *Terrorist Designation of the al-Mulathamun Battalion*, December 18, 2013, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/218880.html>

## Methodology

This paper will be a qualitative analysis, utilizing a series of case studies in order to provide a rational, accurate, and thought-provoking assessment of the hypothesis. The global phenomenon and security problem that is al-Qaeda, its affiliates, and supporters is, by its very design, divergent, eclectic, and apparently nebulous to Western security professionals. These traits do not necessarily lend themselves to neat, easily bound research projects or to accurate and all-encompassing hypothesis testing and conclusions. This statement is not intended to allow for loose, ill-considered argument. In fact, the contrary is true: The very nature of the al-Qaeda network, its complexity and (at times) chaotic nature, demand further analysis and research. In contemporary U.S. military vernacular the requirement is to understand, visualize, and describe the problem, in order to be able to direct the solution to said problem.<sup>18</sup> This monograph is an attempt to enable this effort, through clear, logical, argumentative reasoning.

Al-Qaeda has developed from a small, leader-centric organization, capable of a limited number of terror attacks, into a large, seemingly amorphous, loosely related group of affiliates. The general rise (either real or perceived) in al-Qaeda-like Islamist sentiment has spawned a plethora of al-Qaeda affiliated groups and followers. This rise has also heralded a commensurately large increase in the prevalence of Islamist-inspired terror events worldwide.

However, it is not immediately clear how the tactical activity executed by the various affiliates and followers is actually helping to achieve al-Qaeda's strategic aims. How did the murder of Lee Rigby help to unite the *ummah*? How did attacking the In Amenas natural gas plant contribute towards the liberation of the Islamic homelands? In an attempt to critically appraise al-Qaeda's apparent rapid increase in size and appetite for terror this study will seek to set the

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<sup>18</sup> U.S. Army, *Army Doctrine Publication 5-0, The Operations Process*, 2012, (Washington: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2012) 1.

tactical actions of a selected sample of al-Qaeda affiliated groups against the political and strategic aims of al-Qaeda Core.

It is important to set the context for this project and, therefore, al-Qaeda Core will be the first group that this paper will consider. This expanded case study will serve as a stage setter and will chronicle al-Qaeda Core's origin and history, leadership, ideology, training, and tactical activity. Critically, this will include an appraisal of al-Qaeda Core's stated strategic aims; the goals to which (theoretically at least) all al-Qaeda affiliates should orientate their efforts.

The reasons for choosing to begin with al-Qaeda Core are twofold. Firstly al-Qaeda Core will act as a reference point for the other case studies: A small organization, well-funded and led, with a set of clear strategic aims, executing well-planned and "nested" tactical actions conducted by loyal *jihadis*. There are numerous clear, concise, and readily available documents which articulate the clear links between the stated strategic aims and the tactical actions conducted by its operatives. Al-Qaeda Core therefore, makes an excellent place to start any academic evaluation. Secondly, it will enable the exploration of the reasoning behind al-Qaeda expansion, syndication of the brand, and control measures (both conceptual and real) applied upon affiliates by their "higher" headquarters.

Once al-Qaeda Core has been appraised, and its strategic aims have been ascertained, the focus will switch to the affiliated groups. Three case studies will be presented which will set affiliate group tactical actions against their stated strategic aims and the overarching goals articulated by al-Qaeda Core. In addition the case studies will allow a wider assessment, through the use of a series of key variables, designed to illustrate the functionality, capability, and performance of each selected affiliate.

The key variables selected for the study demand significant consideration and were chosen because they enable the broadest, comprehensive, and useful assessment possible. The variables

are broadly aligned to those used to examine al-Qaeda Core, for obvious reasons. The variables that will be scrutinized are origin and history, leadership, ideology, training, and tactical activity.

### Case study selection

There are a multitude of organizations connected to al-Qaeda Core, or pursuant of their stated aims, and therefore there are many subjects suitable for study. Not all of these subjects offer the same degree of relevance to the research topic in question though, and it is important to select groups that have a well-defined and validated relationship with al-Qaeda Core. There are a number of international institutions that have defined and delineated between various Islamist terror organizations and sought to organize them accordingly. Case studies will be drawn from an amalgamation of three such organizations. Two of the more reliable and reputable sources from which potential case studies can be drawn are the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Al-Qaeda Sanctions List and the U.S. Department of State Foreign Terrorist Organization list. The third organization to which this monograph will refer is al-Qaeda Core itself, for they have publically declared those groups with whom they have an official affiliated relationship.

The United Nations Security Council Al-Qaeda Sanctions List was established by the Security Council Committee as a result of Resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011). The resolutions call for “three sanctions measures (assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo) imposed by the Security Council on individuals and entities associated with the Al-Qaida (sic) organization.”<sup>19</sup> The committee maintains a list of those “individuals and entities” that are to be subject to these sanctions. The U.S. Department of State maintains the Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) database in accordance with section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). These organizations are nominated by the U.S. Secretary of State, and the nomination of a group as a “FTO” plays “...a critical role in our fight against terrorism and are an effective means of

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<sup>19</sup> United Nations, 2014. *Al Qaeda Sanctions List*, 2014, United Nations, May 14, 2014, [http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/aq\\_sanctions\\_list.shtml](http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/aq_sanctions_list.shtml), accessed May 15, 2014.

curtailing support for terrorist activities and pressuring groups to get out of the terrorism business.”<sup>20</sup>

Al-Qaeda has a history of publicly supporting Islamist terror groups and their actions. Several groups have received ratification of their affiliate nature from the al-Qaeda Core leadership, and who have pledged loyalty to the central cause in return. The three case studies will focus on the following organizations: Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM); Al Shabaab, and; The Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus (IEC). AQIM joined al-Qaeda Core on September 11, 2006,<sup>21</sup> Al Shabaab in 2012,<sup>22</sup> and the IEC in 2008.<sup>23</sup> In each case al Zawahiri declared the arrangement, ratifying the relationship publicly.

The UNSC or the U.S. Department of State recognize all three organizations as being associated with al-Qaeda (UNSC Sanctions List) or a Foreign Terrorist Organization (U.S. Department of State). The case study subjects have multiple sources of official recognition of al-Qaeda affiliate status. This provides relevance, gravitas, and resonance to their selection as case studies.

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<sup>20</sup> United States Department of State, 2014, *Foreign Terrorist Organization*, 2014, U.S. Department of State, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>, accessed May 15, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Zachary Laub, Jonathon Masters. *Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb*, January 8, 2014, Council for Foreign Relations, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/terrorist-organizations-and-networks/al-qaeda-islamic-maghreb-aqim/p12717>, accessed May 15, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Katherine Zimmerman, 2013, *Al Qaeda and its affiliates in 2013*, Critical Threats, April 25, 2013, <http://www.criticalthreats.org/al-qaeda/al-qaeda-affiliates>, accessed May 15, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

## Literature Review

The position, aims, and motivations of al-Qaeda (and its affiliates) have received a great deal of attention and postulation, but there is little that addresses the relative success or failure (as measured against al-Qaeda's stated strategic aims) of the organization as a whole, and of the relationships between its Core and affiliates.

In his book *The Future of Power*, Joseph S. Nye discusses the ability of organizations to project power. This is a fundamental problem that faces al-Qaeda. Nye articulates his vision of what it means to be powerful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nye discusses the nature of what makes an agent powerful, be that a state or non-state actor, and provides some context to the formulation of an explanation of what power is. He begins with the rudimentary vision of power as being based on resource, and argues that this is an overly simplistic method of truly gauging the power that an entity holds. Nye suggests that a more complete appraisal of an entity's power must include an appraisal of its ability to convert that resource power into the intended outcome. He uses a very simple card game analogy to explain this point:

People notice resources. If you show the highest cards in a poker game others may fold their hands rather than challenge you. But power resources that win in one game may not help at all in another. Holding a strong poker hand does not win if the game is bridge. Even if the game is poker, if you play your high hand poorly, or fall victim to bluff and deception, you can still lose. Power conversion – getting from resources to behavioral outcomes – is a crucial intervening variable.<sup>24</sup>

Nye argues that the crux of the issue lies not with the amount of resource power that can be generated but with the strategy devised to use said resources in order to achieve the required goal. The strategy that links the means to the ends within a specific context is the crucial part. This *relational* power is a more holistic description, and enables contextualization.

Three aspects, or faces, of relational power are highlighted by Nye and he describes how they have been developed over time in order to afford a more complete explanation of how power is

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<sup>24</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011) 8.

exerted. The first face describes a simplistic description of force: A uses threats or rewards to change B's behavior against B's initial preferences and strategies. The second face is a less obvious and more tangential use of force: A controls the agenda of actions in a way that limits B's choices of strategy. The third face is the *softest* expression of relational power: A helps to create and shape B's basic beliefs, perceptions, and preferences.

A sound strategy would use all three faces of relational power. Nye suggests that in terms of policy formation, it is useful to think of the application of the faces of power in reverse order; the third face being used to shape the environment before resorting to a *harder* approach with faces two and one. If the aspects are superimposed onto a line, with the first and third faces at opposite ends, a spectrum of relational power can be created, or spectrum of power behaviors. The first face end is that of *hard* power, commanding entities through force or the threat of force, whereas the third face end is that of *soft* power, defined by Nye as "...the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes."

The strategy which appropriately blends these power behaviors will be successful. This nuanced combination of hard and soft power is the most salient aspect of Nye's book. His term for this is *smart power* which he defines as "the ability to combine hard and soft power resources into effective strategies." Nye's logic would dictate that, for it to be successful, Al-Qaeda's strategy to attain its political aims must be a combination of these power behaviors; they must project smart power.

In his book *After Bin Laden*, Abdel Bari Atwen describes the evolving nature of al-Qaeda writ large. Atwen introduces an interesting and useful taxonomy of the various levels and branches of al-Qaeda in an attempt to articulate the expansive nature of the network. Atwen relates how senior al-Qaeda figures, especially al-Zawahiri, have always had an expansionist agenda and have 'doggedly cultivated a complex network of franchises' in order to achieve the group's goals.

Atwen notes that Western intelligence services now refer to this network as “Al-Qaeda and Associated Movements” or AQAM, in order to reflect the subtle yet important shift in design. The main thrust of Atwen’s argument is that the largely successful U.S.-led campaign against al-Qaeda Core has done little to diminish the threat posed by Islamist terror groups operating under the banner and intent of al-Qaeda. The ever-changing, amorphous network survived concerted efforts of the West, and has metamorphosed into a truly transnational group aligned and bound together through a belief in an ideology rather than through the power of a small nucleus (al-Qaeda Core), or even the personality cult of an individual (bin Laden). Atwen describes how al-Qaeda’s ongoing expansionist policy, along with the tumultuous occurrences surrounding the Arab Spring, have provided numerous exploitable seams in Middle Eastern and North African security architecture. Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups have been able to inspire popular revolt, garner unprecedented support, and conduct large-scale military operations in order to further their political aims.

This phase of al-Qaeda activity – al-Qaeda becoming a global network - nests beautifully within the phases articulated in “Al-Qaeda’s Strategy to 2020,” first published in *al-Quds al-Arabi*, subsequently related by Bill Roggio in *The Long War Journal* (amongst others) and described by Atwen. The seven stages of the base is the strategy articulated by al-Qaeda which has the aim of re-establishing the Islamic caliphate.

It is worth highlighting this strategy, as it features in a number of documents and has become a key piece of primary source material. Atwen briefly paraphrases the seven stages and suggests that there are distinct correlations between reality and the strategy. There are obvious flaws with this approach – the strategy’s early stages had already passed for example – but Atwen asserts that this short statement was merely a re-articulation of a long-held al-Qaeda stratagem.

The seven stages as laid out by Atwen<sup>25</sup> can be briefly explained thus:

1. The West invades Muslim lands after being provoked by an al-Qaeda attack on their homeland. This makes it easier for *mujahideen* to fight them.
2. The new “crusaders” enrage the Muslim nation or *umma* and “wake them from their slumbers”. The *ummah* unites, arms itself, and organizes widespread *jihad*.
3. The conflict spreads across the region and the West is drawn into a protracted war of attrition.
4. Al-Qaeda becomes a set of guiding principles and ideology at the center of a global network of affiliates.
5. The US, beleaguered by prolonged conflict and the requirement to support regional partners, is stretched beyond its capabilities.
6. Al-Qaeda overthrow the Arab dictators and establish a Middle Eastern caliphate.
7. A final, apocalyptic battle between the Crusaders and the “Believers”, which is ultimately won by the latter and leads to the creation of a global caliphate.

Whilst an unashamedly simplified version of the original, this breakdown does highlight the sequential nature of al-Qaeda’s strategy and provides an interesting insight into Osams bin Laden’s long term aspirations.

Several authors have attempted to categorize the various elements of AQAM. Atwen describes the network consisting of: Franchises such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM); allies, the most notable being the Taliban; affiliated groups such as the Nigeria-based Boko Haram; sleeper cells like the one which executed the July 2005 London bombings, and; the lone-wolves, such as the pair of radicalized Briton’s who murdered the off-duty soldier in London in 2013.

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<sup>25</sup> Abdel Bari Atwen, *After Bin Laden* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 17.

The taxonomy suggested by Atwen is much more detailed than that proposed by Scott Helfstein and Dominik Wright in their piece *Success, Lethality, and Cell Structure across the Dimensions of Al-Qaeda*. In their paper Helfstein and Wright segregate the various al-Qaeda attack cells into three categories: the Core; periphery, and; movement. These three categories are the result of applying a concept known as the strength of relationships<sup>26</sup> to an articulation of the three-levels of al-Qaeda provided by Marta Crenshaw in her Congressional Testimony.<sup>27</sup> In this testimony Crenshaw identified three levels of al-Qaeda which he described as Al-Qaeda central leadership, second-tier leadership, and individuals or cells.

The core, periphery, or movement categories are most interesting when applied to attack cells. Statistical analysis of Islamist terror attacks can be conducted using this framework. This form of analysis could be used to determine lethality of a particular grouping, be that al-Qaeda Core, or an individual in the movement. Helfstein and Wright define attack cells within this framework thus:

If any member of an operation has a strong connection with Al-Qaeda leadership, it is part of the core. Operations with members that at best share disparate, weak connection to the core are a part of the periphery. Operations whose members share no clear connection to the core are “isolates”, Subject to indirect ideological influence and part of a social movement.<sup>28</sup>

While the categorization may change dependent on the study, one theme does not; namely the actions of what are known as either the periphery or movement (Helfstein & Wright), or franchises, affiliated groups, allies, sleeper-cells, and lone-wolfs (Atwen) have risen to the fore and have overshadowed those of al-Qaeda Core.

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<sup>26</sup> “The strength of a tie is a combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (or mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie,” Mark Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Volume 78, Issue 6, May 1973, <http://www.immorlica.com/socNet/granstrengthweakties.pdf>, accessed May 20, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Marta Crenshaw, “Assessing the Al’Qa’ida Threat to the United States,” *CTC Sentinel*, January 2010, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/assessing-the-al-qaida-threat-to-the-united-states>, accessed May 20, 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Scott Helfstein, Dominick Wright, “Success, Lethality, and Cell Structure across the Dimensions of Al Qaeda,” *Combating Terrorism Centre, West Point*, May 6, 2011, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/success-lethality-and-cell-structure-across-the-dimensions-of-al-qaeda>, accessed May 20, 2014

The manner in which the more radical interpretations of Islam have risen to the world's attention is the theme of *Radical Islam's Rules: The Worldwide Spread of Extreme Shari'a Law* a collection of essays edited by Paul Marshall. Several of the contributors to this tome note the conceptual genesis of the Wahhabi strand of Islam through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This fundamental interpretation of Islam was used as a defining pathway for much of the Arabian Peninsula throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was the spiritual framework of the Saud family in Arabia for much of that time. Wahhabi-ists in Egypt were particularly vocal in their belief that the West was degenerate and materialistic, and that democracy itself was a western ploy to rid the world of Islam. Most notable of these early protestors was Hassan al-Banna who, in 1928, formed the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>29</sup> Al-Banna was killed in 1949 and replaced by Sayyid al-Qutb, a man who Paul Marshall describes as "perhaps the greatest theorist of radical Islam."<sup>30</sup>

The influence of these radical Wahhabi scholars on the founding members of al-Qaeda is noted by several authors, including Marshall, Paul Blanchard in his Congressional Research Service paper "*Statements and Evolving Ideology*,"<sup>31</sup> and Angela Rabasa et al in "*Beyond al-Qaeda: The Global Jihadist Movement*."<sup>32</sup> They all highlight the influence that al-Qutb's brother had on bin Laden while he was a student. This ultra-conservative, ancient, *salafist* interpretation of Islam coupled with increasingly-westernized Saudi Arabia, served to harden bin Laden's ideology and enable the creation of the al-Qaeda narrative that has become so definitive.

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<sup>29</sup> Daniel Benjamin, Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror: Radical Islam's War Against America* (New York: Random House, 2003) 57.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Marshall, *Radical Islam's Rules: The Worldwide Spread of Extreme Shari'a Law* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005) xiii.

<sup>31</sup> Christopher M. Blanchard, *Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology*; *Congressional Research Service*; updated 9<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Angel Rabasa, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, Sara A. Daly, Heather S. Gregg, Theodore W. Karasik, Kevin A. O'Brien and, William Rosenau, *Beyond al-Qaeda, Part 1: The Global Jihadist Movement*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006) 16.

A key enabling operation for al-Qaeda in the 1990s was the continued, secure use of safe havens. Rabasa et al and Hamouda Fathelrahman Bella in his essay “*Shari’a in Sudan*”<sup>33</sup> explore this key facet of al-Qaeda in the 1990s and how these safe havens enabled the organization to continue the work it had begun in the 1980s in Pakistan. Bella in particular provides details of the financial and materiel aspects of the al-Qaeda operation within Sudan, the scale of the investment, and the results of the training undertaken. The tacit support provided by the Sudanese regime enabled a secure base from which to train, equip, and deploy *jihadis* worldwide.

Both Rabasa and Bella agree upon the importance safe havens were to al-Qaeda Core during this period. The training camps formed a focus and were the metaphorical and spiritual heart of the organization. Would-be *jihadis* travelled to these camps, were given training, radicalized, and dispatched back out to the world to take their part in the fight. Without these havens, whether Sudan or Afghanistan, the Core were unable to exert the same amount of control over the *jihadis*. The centralized al-Qaeda camps were gone, replaced by local camps run by affiliates or franchises. This weakened the ability of the Core to exert control, and enabled local ideals to come to the fore.

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<sup>33</sup> Hamouda Fathelrahman Bella, “Shari’a in Sudan,” in *Radical Islam’s Rules: The Worldwide Spread of Extreme Shari’a Law*, edited by Paul Marshall. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005) 87-112.

## **Al-Qaeda Core**

### Introduction

The organization that became al-Qaeda Core is pivotal to the entire Islamist terror network. It was this organization that articulated the ideology underpinning the movement and in doing so incited a generation of would-be Islamist terrorists to join their struggle and take-up arms. The leader of this group – Osama bin Laden – was also the individual who sought the unification of Islamist terror organizations under the al-Qaeda banner. He enabled this in 1998 with the declaration of a *fatwa* against the West and his issuance of the “World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders,” and therefore an analysis of his organization is an excellent place to start.<sup>34</sup> It is vital, therefore, that we examine the organization which forms the underpinning foundations of the global phenomenon that we see today, for it is al-Qaeda Core that set the example for others to follow, and remains the spiritual epicenter of the organization.

It is difficult to overemphasize the central role Osama bin Laden played in the formation of the original al-Qaeda group. While he was eventually joined by many like-minded individuals from across the Middle-East and North Africa the organization was very much his and it reflected his labors and ideology. A unique set of elements coincided to enable the germination of this first al-Qaeda group in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Cold War, the rise in Islamist groups, and the continued Western influence in the Middle East and North Africa combined to set the conditions for Osama bin Laden to further his position.

### Leadership

Osama bin Laden was born in Saudi Arabia in 1959, the 17<sup>th</sup> son of a Yemeni-born, Saudi construction magnate.<sup>35</sup> A conservative Sunni Muslim from early in his life, bin Laden attended

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<sup>34</sup>Christopher M. Blanchard, *Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology*; *Congressional Research Service*; updated 9<sup>th</sup> July 2007; 2-3.

<sup>35</sup> John Rollins, “Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy,” *Congressional Research Service*; 25 January 2011; 5.

the King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, where he attended lectures given by Muhammad Qutb, the brother of Sayyid Qutb, the key ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood, a radical Sunni Muslim movement. Bin Laden also came under the influence of Abdullah al Azzam. Azzam was a leading figure in the Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and is credited with creating the intellectual foundation for the *jihad* against the Soviet Union after their invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

The influence of these two men upon a young bin Laden is fundamental in its significance. Both Azzam and Qutb were accomplished Islamist scholars with radical beliefs. The religious justification that both were able to provide for extreme actions was essential to the relative success of the *jihad* in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Young Muslim men, mainly Arabs, were inspired by the religious fervor whipped up by ideologues such as Qutb, and they volunteered in the thousands in order to protect their fellow Muslims against non-Muslim aggression.

From these men (Azzam and Qutb) Bin Laden learned the validity and utility of ensuring that his actions were firmly set within a well-defined religious justification. This religious justification remains a key facet of the al-Qaeda manifesto and is pivotal to the whole campaign. This is a crusade against *crusaders*, a basic and fundamental struggle about the very existence of a way of life. Somewhat flippantly, how could any good Muslim possibly ignore the call to arms?

Bin Laden first found his way to Afghanistan a few months after the 1979 invasion by Soviet forces. Using some of his own personal fortune, bin Laden established himself as both a recruiter of non-Afghan Islamic fighters for the conflict, and as a financial benefactor to the Afghan *mujahedin*. Azzam and bin Laden formalized these efforts with a network of offices across the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, and the United States. Many notable Islamists used the network known as *Maktab al Khidamat* (Service Office) to support and recruit for the anti-Soviet *jihad*. Amongst these was Umar Abd al Rahman, the “blind shaykh,” the spiritual leader of the

Egyptian Islamist group Al Jihad. Al Rahman was convicted in 1995 for terrorist plots related to the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York.<sup>36</sup>

By the end of the 1980s the fighting in Afghanistan had subsided and a debate ensued among the leadership of the Arab volunteers as to what to do next. Azzam wanted Al-Qaeda (“the base”) as the Arab volunteers were now referred to, to be used as a reaction force ready to intervene in anti-Muslim conflicts wherever they occurred. Bin Laden, supported by the Egyptian Al Rahman, disagreed and was keen on using the volunteers to help oust apostate regimes in their home middle-eastern countries, specifically the pro-western government of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and the Saudi Royal family. An Azzam-bin Laden divide opened, fomented by hardline Egyptian supporters of bin Laden, including Ayman al-Zawahiri, the operational controller of Al Jihad in Egypt.

The radical Egyptian influence on bin Laden endured after Azzam’s assassination in 1989 reinforcing bin Laden’s extreme vision for al-Qaeda. The global network created to enable the anti-Soviet *jihad* - its mechanisms and money - were subsumed entirely by al-Qaeda, bin Laden and his inner circle. Al Zawahiri remained with bin Laden, became his most trusted strategist, and eventually became the head of the organization after bin Laden was killed.

The 1990s saw bin Laden and al Zawahiri transform al-Qaeda into an anti-Western global terrorist organization of real capability and desire. Bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia in 1989, where he lobbied the Saudi government heavily on an anti-U.S. agenda. Bin Laden offered to raise a *mujahideen* for Saudi Arabia in order to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait in 1990/1991 rather than have U.S. and other western forces on Saudi soil. The Saudi government rejected bin Laden’s idea and half a million U.S. troops for Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM moved into the region temporarily, with 6000 U.S. troops forming an enduring presence

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<sup>36</sup> John Rollins, “Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy,” *Congressional Research Service*; 25 January 2011; 6.

immediately after. Al-Qaeda portrayed this as a U.S. occupation of sacred Islamic ground, and alleged the Saudi government was being idly complicit.

With a very real rift between him and the Saudi government bin Laden felt it necessary to relocate to Sudan in 1991. He bought property there and set up training camps for would-be *jihadis*, this time under the al-Qaeda moniker, and with the express purpose of attacking U.S. and western targets of interest. The Sudanese al-Qaeda effort was drawn to a close after international pressure on the Sudanese authorities succeeded in forcing them to expel bin Laden in 1996, whereupon he moved the entire operation to Afghanistan. He quickly formed an alliance with the Taliban and helped them gain and maintain control of Afghanistan in late 1996.<sup>37</sup>

#### Ideological manifesto

At the very center of the al-Qaeda organization is the ideological foundation for the movement. This underpinning generated, developed, and articulated very carefully by Osama bin Laden himself and those closest to him. For clarity the ideology and the principles surrounding it will be described using the *Ends, Ways, and Means* taxonomy.

The political aims (or ends) of al-Qaeda have been little changed from the inception of the anti-Western version of the organization were formed in the early 1990s. Perhaps the clearest articulation of these aims was provided by al-Zawahiri in a video message released in 2005. The goals are clearly expressed and offer a stark contrast to the geopolitical status quo. In the footage al-Zawahiri describes the “three foundations.” These are:

1. “The Quran-Based Authority to Govern,” this means Islamic law, drawn from the writings of the prophet Muhammad and the Qu’ran must be the framework for governance, not ‘human’ instigated rules and regulations.

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<sup>37</sup> John Rollins, “Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy,” *Congressional Research Service*; 25 January 2011; p7.

2. “The Liberation of the Homelands,” which means the Islamic homelands must be freed from external ‘occupation.’”

3. “The Liberation of the Human Being,” which is the emancipation of the global Muslim population from ‘western’ oppression and influence.

The “pious caliphate” referred to above would be run by an Islamic government adherent to the ultra-orthodox interpretation of Hanbali Sunni Islam at the exclusion of other Sunni factions, not to mention Shi’ites; a point which will be explored later in this paper.

Throughout his education and time supporting *jihadis* in Afghanistan and elsewhere, bin Laden became convinced of the requirement for, and utility of, a puritanical salafist uprising. The ultra-conservative “jihadist-salafism” influenced bin Laden’s ideological concepts heavily, a phrase described by Gilles Kepel, the French political scientist and Islam specialist, as “respect for the sacred texts in their literal form (combined with) an absolute commitment to jihad.”<sup>38</sup>

The concept of *jihad*, specifically the interpretation of *defensive jihad* as articulated by bin Laden, is at the very center of the al-Qaeda ideology and is the main theme that is returned to time and again in their propaganda. The very clear religious justification for *jihad* has been repeated, and the language used carefully selected. From the early 1990s, bin Laden has referred to western “occupations,” anti-Islamic sentiment, “Jews and Crusaders” and other such terminology to insinuate religious conflict and invoke images of an Islamic faith under attack. This rhetoric serves to justify the *defensive jihad*, incite anti-Western sentiment, and rally would-be *jihadis*.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Gilles Kepel, 2002. *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) 220.

<sup>39</sup> Angel Rabasa, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, Sara A. Daly, Heather S. Gregg, Theodore W. Karasik, Kevin A. O’Brien and, William Rosenau, *Beyond al-Qaeda, Part 1: The Global Jihadist Movement*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006) 4.

Al Zawahiri and others of power and influence within al-Qaeda have offered plans and frameworks for the successful attainment of the stated ends. A 2007 statement from al Zawahiri outlined “a near-term and long-term plan” for achieving al-Qaeda objectives:

The near-term plan consists of targeting Crusader-Jewish interests, as everyone who attacks the Muslim Ummah must pay the price, in our country and theirs, in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine and Somalia, and everywhere we are able to strike their interests...And the long-term plan is divided into two halves: The first half consists of earnest, diligent work, to change these corrupt and corruptive regimes...As for the second half of the long-term plan, it consists of hurrying to the fields of jihad like Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia, for jihad preparation and training. Thus, it is a must to hurry to the fields of jihad for two reasons: The first is to defeat the enemies of the Ummah and repel the Zionist Crusade, and the second is for jihadi preparation and training to prepare for the next stage of the jihad<sup>40</sup>

There is heavy emphasis on the offensive nature of western military forces and the effect that they are having on the *ummah*. A military response to this oppression is clearly articulated, and effectively forms an intermediate strategic objective for al-Qaeda. In addition, this statement is an excellent illustration of the constant information operations campaign. The language is carefully chosen and designed to generate a specific effect: vindication of the *defensive jihad*. The narrative of *jihadis* fighting to avenge the aggression of the “Zionist-Crusaders” is clear to see.

Critical to this entire effort are the *mujahedeen* themselves, those who are enticed into participating in the *jihad* and who serve as the main means of promoting jihad. The conflict is, quite obviously, entirely asymmetric. When the number of fighters on each side is considered, this is quite evident. This is of critical concern to al-Qaeda and is an area that is repeatedly addressed by its hierarchy. The requirement to continually recruit fighters to the cause is one of the major reasons behind the frequent press releases and very sophisticated information operations campaign that is being conducted. The incitement of young Muslim males to commit to the *jihad* is crucial. Without combat power – fighters – al-Qaeda is not able to conduct its *defensive jihad* and achieve its tactical objectives, let alone its strategic aims. Size or lack thereof,

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<sup>40</sup> Christopher M. Blanchard, Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology; *Congressional Research Service*; updated 9<sup>th</sup> July 2007; pp.13-14.

is a real constraint imposed upon al-Qaeda's operations. This fact alone sheds a good deal of light on al-Qaeda Core's decision to syndicate the organization in the late 1990s. This decision will be discussed later in this monograph.

The Ends, Ways, and Means analysis of al-Qaeda's ideology delivers a clearer view of their foundational principles and highlights the manner in which Islamic scripture is used to anchor the entire organization and the theory of *defensive jihad*. However, there are more radical, violent characteristics at play, which are not obviously drawn from Islam. As John Gray notes, the fact that "the world can be transformed by terror is not a peculiarly Islamic aberration." Gray goes onto suggest the following:

From the Jacobins through...the Baader-Meinhof gang, the modern West has spawned ideologies and movements that sanction the use of terror to make a better world. Even the Nazis...believed that they were creating a new and superior type of human being. However horrible the utopian vision, all these movements believed they could create a future better than anything that had existed in the past by the systematic use of violence. Al-Qa'ida has more in common with these modern Western experiments in terror than it does with anything in Islamic traditions.<sup>41</sup>

Al-Qaeda could therefore, be described as a very modern phenomenon: a mixture of Islamist ideology and contemporary terror techniques, ideologically driven operatives with the desire, financing, and technology required to conduct a global campaign.

### Training

In order to fully realize the potential of the Salafist ideology espoused by al-Qaeda Core, it was necessary to have a body of operatives capable of prosecuting the doctrine of defensive jihad; this required training. Along with the network of connections, financial support, and recruiting mechanisms that al-Qaeda Core maintained into the 1990s and beyond was the dedicated, professional, and focused series of training camps that enabled the training of several thousand volunteer *mujahedeen* in the 1980s. These camps were no longer readying volunteers to fight alongside Afghans against Soviet forces, rather they were preparing would-be *jihadis* to attack

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<sup>41</sup> John Gray, 2003, "Living with Bin Laden," *The Independent*, May 18 2003, p25.

Western targets as part of the *defensive jihad*. Irrespective of the intended target, or the fundamental pivot in the organization's goals, volunteers from across the globe were trained very effectively and professionally.

Proof of the care and attention paid by al-Qaeda to the selection and training of its fighters is evident from the emphasis placed upon it by the higher echelons of the organization. The Military Committee of al-Qaeda is

...entrusted with the responsibility for the preparation of the freedom fighting young men, their training, organizing them for combat, organizing their jihad participation on the battlefield and its likewise responsible for developing combat skills, military technical skills and composing programs and procedures for a disciplined military in Quranic law of Islam and other matters of preparation.<sup>42</sup>

This mission statement illustrates an understanding of the importance of the selection of individuals, their initial indoctrination, subsequent operational employment, and continuation training. It suggests a very professional understanding of how to generate and maintain combat power; in effect an al-Qaeda version of United States Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) and United States Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) rolled into one.

#### Tactical action

To achieve its strategic goals al-Qaeda Core believed that it had to isolate the secular-leaning, Middle Eastern and North African regimes from their backer:<sup>43</sup> the United States. Bin Laden and al Zawahiri thought that attacks on the U.S. and their interests worldwide would force them to withdraw support from certain regimes, which would then be ripe for overhauling. This supposition led al-Qaeda into a series of attacks on U.S. interests around the globe throughout the 1990s, and saw the group become a very real threat to U.S. national security.

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<sup>42</sup> Untitled document, AFGP-2002-000078, Combating Terrorism Center, West Point, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/AFGP-2002-000078-Trans.pdf>, accessed May 16, 2014.

<sup>43</sup> Angel Rabasa, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, Sara A. Daly, Heather S. Gregg, Theodore W. Karasik, Kevin A. O'Brien and, William Rosenau, *Beyond al-Qaeda, Part 1: The Global Jihadist Movement*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006) 24.

Several high-profile attacks were claimed by al-Qaeda between 1992 and the tumultuous events of September 11, 2001, which sought to achieve the desired effect: the withdrawal of U.S. support for those secular-leaning Middle Eastern regimes. Attacks were conducted in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, East Africa, and the United States. The 1998 al-Qaeda bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, which killed almost 300 people, were immediately followed by cruise missile strikes at al-Qaeda training camps inside Afghanistan. Likewise the October 2000 suicide attack on the U.S.S. *Cole*, in which 17 sailors were killed, served to incite anger in the United States and focus U.S. military efforts towards al-Qaeda.

Superficially therefore, it would appear that the al-Qaeda attacks on the United States appeared to be ill - advised and entirely counter-productive, with the actual effect being to anger the most capable military on the planet and afford them an excuse to attack, and eventually destroy, the small group responsible. Al-Qaeda has, retrospectively, offered a solid motive for this seemingly suicidal campaign, and its capstone achievement, the horror of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center.

In May 2005, Sayf al Adl, al-Qaeda's military commander, released a statement articulating three primary objectives for the September 11 attacks. The primary objective according to al Adl was punitive in nature; the attack was retaliation against the United States for its aggression in the Islamic world. The second objective was to identify the "emergence of a new virtuous leadership" dedicated to opposing "the Zionist-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant coalition." The third and "ultimate" objective was to "prompt (the United States) to come out of its hole." Any retaliatory attack conducted by the United States against any areas within the Islamic world, in an attempt to effect retribution against al-Qaeda or its affiliates would, al-Qaeda thought, serve to unite the *ummah*

against the “crusaders”, adding credibility to their cause and making it easier to attack the United States.<sup>44</sup>

Set against the objectives claimed by al Adl, the September 11 attacks can be seen as being partially successful. They were incontrovertibly destructive and horrific, and did incite the United States, supported by a coalition, to begin the process of attacking al-Qaeda and its affiliates inside the Islamic world. The United States did come out of its hole, and did attack. However, the *ummah* did not rise up in unison and unite and Islamic nations generally came out in support of the United States, not al-Qaeda.

The group found itself at the epicenter of a U.S.-led targeting effort without precedent. The Core’s leaders were hunted men, forced to evade detection and attempt to disappear from the limelight that was so important to their operations. Al-Qaeda Core operatives were killed or captured with an alarming frequency, denuding its already fragile operational capability. Al-Qaeda Core desperately wanted to continue the fight, but was surrounded, metaphorically if not literally. It was time for the affiliates to take the campaign in a different direction.

#### Affiliates

Al-Qaeda has always had an expansionist approach to its strategy. At the center of their aspirations are the unification of the *ummah* and the creation of the single Islamic caliphate. These are very internationalist in nature and require the unification of large numbers of people, territory, and beliefs. Al-Qaeda has carefully created a narrative which suggests a rationale for this unification. The details may change but the central themes of the narrative remain constant, that is the Islamic peoples’ subjection at the hands of the United States and the West, and Apostatic regimes ruling Islamic nations at the behest of the “infidel.”

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<sup>44</sup> Unknown, “*Detained Al-Qa’ida Leader Sayf al-Adl Chronciles Al-Zarqawi’s Rise in Organization*”, OSC Report GMP2005060637100, May 21, 2005.

The genius of the narratives is the manner in which particularly localized issues are given wider context. Brutality meted out by a U.S. friendly, secular regime in the Middle East is set within the wider framework of apostasy and the modern-day Zionist/Christian crusades. Local struggle is set within regional conflict, the disjointed *ummah* are encouraged to unite to fight the common enemy, bound and inspired by the jihadist-salafism, as described by Gilles Kepel, and defend Islam in the clash of civilizations.

The declaration of the ‘World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders’ by bin Laden in 1998, accompanied by the declaration of a *fatwa* invoking and rationalizing the *defensive jihad*, is a public call for al-Qaeda affiliates to unite against the perceived U.S. aggression and a rallying cry to would-be *jihadis*. Al-Qaeda needs affiliates (it is a small group and its vision is expansionist in nature), united under a central governing authority, and driven by the extreme jihadist-salafist sentiment. The post-September 11 attempt to eradicate al-Qaeda Core has forced these affiliates to become the vanguard of the *jihad* and it is to them that this paper will now turn.

### **Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb**

#### Origins, leadership, and ideology

The evolutionary tale of North African based Islamist terror groups is complex, fractious, and anchored in anti-colonial movements of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>45</sup> Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the most internationally recognizable of these groups, has grown to become a significant threat to regional stability, and the focus of an increasingly sophisticated military campaign being conducted by Western powers with and through indigenous forces from the area.

The Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) fought against French colonial rule throughout the period 1954-1962. Although the movement was nationalistic in nature the FLN used religious

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<sup>45</sup> Angel Rabasa et al., *Beyond al-Qaeda: The Outer Rings of the Terrorist Universe* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2006), 25.

ideology to garner support among the Algerian people.<sup>46</sup> Once the FLN obtained power within Algeria they repressed the use of political Islam, to the dislike of many. In 1982 the Mouvement islamique armée (MIA)<sup>47</sup> was formed. The MIA all but ceased to exist after their leader was killed in 1987, but the FLN leadership had ceded to the pressure for (partial) reform, and a year later allowed a series of political initiatives, including multi-party elections. The Front Islamique du salut (FIS), an Islamic political party, emerged in 1989. It won the municipal elections in 1990 and the first round of legislative elections in 1991.<sup>48</sup> Instead of dealing with an FIS government, a military junta took power in early 1992 and quashed the election results.

By the beginning of the 1990s a number of Algerian “Afghan” *jihadis* returned from Afghanistan flush with pride and full of belief in the utility of armed campaigns and formed the MIA. They joined with the more militant members of FIS who were keen to start an armed insurgency and who had begun to refute the idea of political negotiation and reform. These two increasingly hardline groups joined together and formed the Armed Islamic Group (GIA).

The GIA leaders were heavily influenced by various Egyptian Islamist preachers including Sayyid Qutb, the inspirational founder of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>49</sup> A large number of them had recently returned from Afghanistan where they had received military training and been radicalized. Notable amongst the Algerian “Afghans” that formed GIA was Qari Said, a son-in-law of Bin Laden, who was a veteran of the Afghanistan conflict. The GIA’s goal was to create an Islamic government within Algeria.<sup>50</sup> It was quite clear to them that since the repression of the

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<sup>46</sup> Angel Rabasa et al., *Beyond al-Qaeda: The Outer Rings of the Terrorist Universe* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2006), 25.

<sup>47</sup> Stephen Harmon, “From GSPC to AQIM: The evolution of an Algerian Islamist terrorist group into an Al-Qa’ida Affiliate and its implications for the Sahara-Sahel region,” *Concerned Africa Scholars, Bulletin No. 85*, (Spring 2010):13, accessed May 28, 2014, <http://concernedafricascholars.org/docs/bulletin85harmon.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> John Rollins, “Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy,” *Congressional Research Service*; 25 January 2011; p5.

<sup>50</sup> Stephen Harmon, “From GSPC to AQIM: The evolution of an Algerian Islamist terrorist group into an Al-Qa’ida Affiliate and its implications for the Sahara-Sahel region,” *Concerned Africa Scholars*,

FIS, the reinstatement of the justly elected Islamic government had to be completed through violent insurrection. They had witnessed the Islamification in Afghanistan and the GIA felt they would simply repeat the achievement at home.

The GIA campaign of violence of the 1990s, symbolized by horrific massacres<sup>51</sup> and large numbers of civilian casualties, was the result of this escalation of hatred and nationalism. The incredibly hardline leadership of the GIA proposed a large scale terror campaign with a wide ranging target set. The GIA added foreigners, politicians, teachers, intellectuals, and journalists to military and police targets. The civilian terror campaign was designed to force acquiescence for the campaign from the population. In 1996 Antar Zouabri became the national emir of GIA and he immediately set about widening the scope of the attacks. Zouabri condemned the Algerian population for not supporting the cause and issued a *fatwa* entitled “The Great Demarcation,” in which he label the entire Algerian population as *kufir* (impious), and calls for the terror attacks to be focused on civilian “collaborators.”<sup>52</sup> The subsequent blood-letting conducted by GIA members was to have a profoundly negative effect on its national and international standing, eventually leading to its marginalization.

Influential Islamist groups withdrew their support for GIA as a result of the seemingly-indiscriminate targeting of civilians, including Ayman al-Zawahiri’s Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ).<sup>53</sup> In addition to this external pressure a fracture was occurring inside the organization itself. In late 1996 a small group split from the GIA, citing the targeting of civilians as the reason; this

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*Bulletin No. 85*, (Spring 2010):14, accessed May 28, 2014, <http://concernedafricascholars.org/docs/bulletin85harmon.pdf>.

<sup>51</sup> One such massacre, the murder of a group of French trappist monks, was dramatized in the award-winning film “Of Gods and Men,” “*Des hommes et des dieux*” (“*Of Gods and Men*”), directed by Xavier Beauvois (Why Not productions/Armada Films, 2010), viewed 23 May, 2014, <http://www.apple.com/films/sony/ofgodsandmen.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Stephen Harmon, “From GSPC to AQIM: The evolution of an Algerian islamist terrorist group into an Al-Qa’ida Afilliate and its implications for the Sahara-Sahel region,” *Concerned Africa Scholars, Bulletin No. 85*, (Spring 2010):14, accessed May 28, 2014, <http://concernedafricascholars.org/docs/bulletin85harmon.pdf>.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

splinter-group promised to attack only military targets. In 1998 this splinter group became the Group Salafiste pour le Prédication et le Combat (GSPC, Salafist Group for Call/Preaching and Combat). GSPC was ostensibly after the same goal as GIA, an Islamic state in Algeria, but by the start of the new millennium it had also verbally embraced the wider al-Qaeda goal of a global jihad.<sup>54</sup> In return for this open display of support Al-Qaeda and bin Laden hailed this new group having previously openly berated GIA for its civilian attacks.

The first leader of GSPC, Hassan Hattab, was focused on the Algerian jihad during his time as emir, but came increasingly under pressure from those within his own group who had a more expansionist agenda. This internationalist movement nested well within the ideas extolled by al-Qaeda and Hattab was eventually replaced by Nabil Sahraoui, an internationalist, in 2003.<sup>55</sup> Sahraoui declared his support for his brother jihadis around the world and, under his leadership, GSPC exerted more and more influence in the largely-ungoverned Sahara-Sahel region. Sahraoui was killed by Algerian government forces in 2004, and was replaced by Abdelmalek Droukdel. Droukdel continued the expansionist strategy and the outward support of global jihadi efforts and al-Qaeda.<sup>56</sup>

On the domestic front Droukdel supported increasing levels of activity in southern Algeria and the Sahara-Sahel regions. This activity was conducted largely by a commander called Mokhtar Belmokhtar, and enabled GSPC access to lucrative smuggling routes (both contraband and human) and helped to spread the reputation of GSPC and its notoriety. The GSPC were fundamental with the recruitment, training, and transport of *jihadis* to Iraq to support the campaign against Coalition forces, an effort that helped them to recruit fighters for their own

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<sup>54</sup> Stephen Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM: The evolution of an Algerian Islamist terrorist group into an Al-Qaeda Affiliate and its implications for the Sahara-Sahel region," *Concerned Africa Scholars, Bulletin No. 85*, (Spring 2010):15, accessed May 28, 2014, <http://concernedafricascholars.org/docs/bulletin85harmon.pdf>.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

cause (the Algerian jihad) and further their position with al-Qaeda Core. The relative success of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), the key role that GSPC played in producing foreign fighters for them, and the continued verbal support for the global jihad eventually led to this group being subsumed into al-Qaeda.<sup>57</sup> On September 11, 2006 al Zawahiri released a statement proclaiming the merger of al-Qaeda and GSPC, the latter's title changing in January 2007 to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.<sup>58</sup>

AQIM however, is a far from harmonious group. A conflict between Droukdel and Belmokhtar, which has led to a split in the AQIM organization, is threatening to jeopardize the group's ability to function. Belmokhtar has been at the very heart of the exploitation of the largely-ungoverned Sahara-Sahel region that straddles Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Nigeria and it has largely been his efforts which have enabled the rise in global credibility of AQIM. He was afforded his own "brigade" with which to execute operations and has been largely successful in contributing to AQIM's vast wealth and international credibility.<sup>59</sup>

Belmokhtar's reputation has grown significantly due to this rapid expansion into the Sahara-Sahel. From kidnapping ransoms through to contraband and human trafficking Belmokhtar's activities provided a great deal of hard currency for his organization, which is of critical importance to it. With the rise in popularity Belmokhtar became a direct competitor for the leadership of AQIM and therefore a threat to Droukdel, especially when set within the context of the history of in-fighting that symbolizes much of Algerian Islamist groups throughout the last 30 years. However, Belmokhtar generated a vast amount of income for AQIM through his activities,

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<sup>57</sup> Stephen Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM: The evolution of an Algerian Islamist terrorist group into an Al-Qa'ida Affiliate and its implications for the Sahara-Sahel region," *Concerned Africa Scholars, Bulletin No. 85*, (Spring 2010):16, accessed May 28, 2014, <http://concernedafricascholars.org/docs/bulletin85harmon.pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> Abdel Bari Atwen, *After Bin Laden* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 183.

<sup>59</sup> Stephen Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM: The evolution of an Algerian Islamist terrorist group into an Al-Qa'ida Affiliate and its implications for the Sahara-Sahel region," *Concerned Africa Scholars, Bulletin No. 85*, (Spring 2010):19, accessed May 28, 2014, <http://concernedafricascholars.org/docs/bulletin85harmon.pdf>.

both terror-related and trafficking-related. Without this revenue stream AQIM would struggle to operate at the level and tempo it currently achieves, and would be increasingly reliant on others (AQ Core) for financial assistance. This tension put Droukdel in an invidious position and led to a split in the group.<sup>60</sup>

Belmokhtar announced his decision to leave AQIM in December 2012; he took his “brigade” with him, formed the *Katibat al-Mulathameen* (The Masked Brigade), and pledged allegiance not to AQIM, but to al-Qaeda Core and al-Zawahiri.<sup>61</sup> This move infuriated the AQIM senior leadership who reportedly sent Belmokhtar a letter berating him for his operational failures, squandering of resources, and lack of loyalty.<sup>62</sup> In this pledge of loyalty to al-Zawahiri, Belmokhtar is truly aligning himself with the global rather than the Algerian jihad; he has eschewed any subservience to the national cause in favor of the global campaign, and has further added to his notoriety.

#### Tactical actions

What follows is a brief description of just three examples of tactical actions conducted by AQIM and its fighters. The first is an illustration of AQIM as a newly-affiliated al-Qaeda group, keen to show commitment to the global jihad. The second is a brief explanation of a *type* of operation conducted numerous times by AQIM which has come to define them as an organization. The last example was highlighted in the introduction to this monograph and was actually conducted by a splinter group from AQIM. However, it achieved such notoriety worldwide, and is so illuminating, that it would be remiss not to include it. They are significant as

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<sup>60</sup> J.P. Pham, “The Dangerous “Pragmatism” of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb,” *Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 2(2011):15-19, accessed May 28, 2014, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/21520844.2011.567445#.U4aLjE9OXIU.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Christopher S. Chivvis, Andrew Liepman, “North Africa’s Menace: AQIM’s Evolution and the U.S. Policy Response,” RAND Corporation, 2013, accessed May 28, 2014, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR415.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR415.html).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

they illustrate the development of AQIM as an organization and the influence of al-Qaeda Core on their actions.

The Vehicle Born Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) attack on the UN headquarters in Algiers in December 2007, which killed 37 people, was a very obvious attempt at displaying the “new” AQIM as a worthy member of the al-Qaeda fraternity. A technically challenging, AQI-like attack on a Western target was the perfect opportunity to showcase the group’s new status. The attack, although conducted on Algerian soil, was very much designed to complement the global jihad efforts and nested perfectly within the wider al-Qaeda Core strategy described in the “Al-Qaeda’s strategy to 2020” statement referred to previously in this monograph.<sup>63</sup> It is an excellent illustration of the development of AQIM as a terror organization and its subservience to al-Qaeda Core. Firstly, the target selection itself is indicative of al-Qaeda Core’s stated desire to attack the “far enemy”, in this case in the guise of the United Nations, and was notable as a shift away from the largely domestic blood-letting for which the Algerian campaign was infamous. This is hugely illustrative of AQIM’s desire to be seen as a loyal affiliate and part of the global cause. Secondly, the type of attack – a large VBIED against a significant target – is hugely symbolic, signifying as it does the spread of al-Qaeda’s influence and penchant for devastation.

Secondly, kidnapping for ransom rather than kidnapping for the purposes of conducting a spectacular, media-savvy execution *a la* al-Qaeda in Iraq, has become a recurring theme in AQIM’s operational back catalogue. While it is not averse to conducting purely punitive kidnappings (of either foreigners or local employees of foreign corporations) AQIM quite obviously prefers this form of operation as a reliable and exploitable method of revenue generation.<sup>64</sup> The kidnap and subsequent negotiated-release of three Spanish aid workers from the Catalan nongovernmental organization Barcelona Accio in 2009 reportedly earned AQIM

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<sup>63</sup> Abdel Bari Atwen, *After Bin Laden* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 16.

<sup>64</sup> Abdel Bari Atwen, *After Bin Laden* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 171.

between 5 and 10 million Euros in ransom.<sup>65</sup> Another kidnap-ransom operation in 2009 involving the negotiated release of the Canadian diplomats Robert Fowler and Louis Gray purportedly earned the organization \$8 million some reports claim.<sup>66</sup> AQIM's financial standing has improved substantially with this line of effort. When combined with the relative lawlessness of the Sahel region, numerous and well established transnational smuggling routes, and regional availability of weaponry due to the after-effects of the Arab Spring, one can see the potential for an increased capacity for terrorist activity.

In January 2013 the AQIM splinter group *Katibat al-Mulathameen*, led by the former AQIM senior leader Mokhtar Belmokhtar, attacked the In Amenas oil facility.<sup>67</sup> Not only was the attack a stunning example of the sophistication of Islamist terror groups in the Sahel region, but it underlined the transnational agenda being pursued by those organizations. Audacious and well executed, the raid involved around 40 fighters who systematically searched for the plant's western workers, rigged the plant with explosives, and forced hostages to wear SEMTEX necklaces. The group's demands were "far-enemy" orientated, with the withdrawal of French troops from Mali one of the two aims. The three day stand-off, partly-successful rescue attempt, and escape of some of the perpetrators. Belmokhtar's role in this raid is telling in itself. He is a man who personifies the nexus between Islamist terror groups and criminal trafficking gangs in the Sahel, and who has seemingly shunned the "national" campaign in favor of the transnational

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<sup>65</sup> J.P. Pham, "The Dangerous "Pragmatism" of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," *Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 2(2011):22, accessed May 28, 2014, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/21520844.2011.567445#.U4aLjE9OXIU.html>.

<sup>66</sup> J.P. Pham, "The Dangerous "Pragmatism" of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," *Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 2(2011):23, accessed May 28, 2014, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/21520844.2011.567445#.U4aLjE9OXIU.html>.

<sup>67</sup> Christopher S. Chivvis, Andrew Liepman, "North Africa's Menace: AQIM's Evolution and the U.S. Policy Response," RAND Corporation, 2013, accessed May 28, 2014, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR415.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR415.html).

cause.<sup>68</sup> He pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda Core and chose this spectacular attack against a Western interest within Algeria to announce his intent.

While al-Qaeda Core was attempted to exert and export its influence across North Africa, it was also actively courting extremist organizations in East Africa, attempting exploit the fractious socio-political environment in Somalia. This provides the setting for analyzing the third al-Qaeda affiliate case study.

### **Al Shabaab**

*“If Afghanistan was too far away, or if the way to Iraq was closed to you, if the doors to Algeria were locked...here is Somalia, just beginning...so hurry with the lightness of a bird without making excuses or procrastinating.”<sup>69</sup>*

Abu Yahya al-Libi, September 14, 2011

#### Leadership, ideology, and origins

Al-Shabaab, the al-Qaeda affiliate based in the fractured and failing state of Somalia, evolved from the tumultuous geopolitical conflicts experienced by the countries that make up the Horn of Africa (HoA) over the last 40 years or so. The complex tribal relationships, transnational disputes, and extraneous super-power meddling conspired to generate a power vacuum and ground-swell of opinion which enabled the rise of this particular Islamist terror group.

In the 1880s Britain, Italy, and France split the lands of the HoA along clan and tribal lines under the auspices of colonial expansion. These protectorates (less the French-administered Djibouti) gained their independence in 1960 and amalgamated to form the United Republic of Somalia. This arrangement did not last long as Mohammad Siad Barre staged a coup in 1969, establishing a Marxist-leaning dictatorship. In 1977 long running tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia exploded into fighting, with the Soviet Union choosing to arm both protagonists.

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<sup>68</sup> Christopher S. Chivvis, Andrew Liepman, “North Africa’s Menace: AQIM’s Evolution and the U.S. Policy Response,” RAND Corporation, 2013, accessed May 28, 2014, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR415.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR415.html).

<sup>69</sup> Abdel Bari Atwan, *After Bin Laden* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 106.

In the late 1970s Somali dissidents living in London formed the Somali National Movement (SNM). In 1981 opponents in northern Somali rose up against Barre, with the SNM joining the effort in 1982, launching attacks from safe havens inside Ethiopia. Barre managed to hang on to power until 1991, but was eventually forced to flee for his life. The fact that he was able to remain in power for so long is largely due to his reliance upon members of his own clan to fill key positions of power; this point is incredibly illuminating for any study of regional power struggles within Somalia and its neighboring states. A dependence upon tribes or clans to maintain a power-base is a recurrent theme in the HoA, and Somalia in particular. This case study will explore fracture lines along tribal/clan lines and the dangers they pose within al-Shabaab later on.

A power-struggle ensued in the late 1980s, with a large number of warring groups attempting to gain overall control. It was during this period of huge instability that President George H.W. Bush, looking to gain a foothold in the region, launched Operation RESTORE HOPE. While it is not within the bailiwick of this monograph to digest the reasoning behind or detail the entire operation, it is prescient to discuss – albeit briefly – one tactical action: the operation to capture the leaders of the Habr Gadr clan,<sup>70</sup> led by Mohamad Farah Aideed, popularized by the book and film “*Black Hawk Down*.” This operation was not conducted as part of Operation RESTORE HOPE but later, during the time of United Nations Operations in Somali (UNSOM) II. The tactical action in question, was one of many conducted as a response to the murder of 24 Pakistani peace-keepers on June 5, 1993.<sup>71</sup>

The releasable details of this particular operation are well documented, as are the casualty figures on both sides: Eighteen U.S. troops were killed and over seventy were wounded, while approximately 700 Somalis lost their lives. In an interview with Abdel Ari Atwan in 1996, bin

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<sup>70</sup> Abdel Bari Atwan, *After Bin Laden* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 111.

<sup>71</sup> Completed Peacekeeping Operations: United Nations Operations in Somalia II, 2003, accessed Aug 27, 2014, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/unosom2.html>.

Laden claimed al-Qaeda fighters were fighting alongside the tribal and clan warriors during this battle (including the actions which led to the downing of two Black Hawk helicopters) and others. In fact when the U.S. finally withdrew from Somalia in early 1994, Aideed and al-Qaeda claimed it as their first victory.<sup>72</sup>

The remaining UN peacekeepers were unable to successfully fulfill their mission and were withdrawn in 1995; Aideed took control of the capital, Mogadishu, and declared himself President. His presidency was short-lived however, as he was murdered by militiamen commanded by his brother in August 1996. A further period of instability and bitter fighting ensued, compounded by a series of natural disasters including massive floods in 1997 and 2000. Abdiqasim Salad Hassan was sworn in as President in 2000, but was eventually deposed in 2006 by a coalition of hardline Islamist groups under the moniker of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU).<sup>73</sup>

Ethiopia once again intervened in Somalia, dislodged the ICU, and put the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in its place. The ICU split with the more moderate members forming the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) while others moved into exile. Importantly, the ICU's militant youth wing continued to fight the Ethiopians and the TFG. This organization was called *Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen*, or al-Shabaab: "The youth."<sup>74</sup>

Several of al-Shabaab's members had *jihadi* experience from Afghanistan, including one of its leaders Ahmed Abdi Godane. The group formally pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2007 and Godane threatened to attack the United States in 2008. This threat was an explicit articulation of

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<sup>72</sup> Completed Peacekeeping Operations: United Nations Operations in Somalia II, 2003, accessed Aug 27, 2014, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/unosom2.html>.

<sup>73</sup> Lorenzo Vidino, Raffaello Pantucci, Evan Kohlman, Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa: al-Shabaab, Western Fighters, and the Sacralization of the Somali Conflict, *African Security*, 3, 2010, accessed June 2, 2014, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19392206.2010.533071#.U42ugU9OXIU>, 220-221.

<sup>74</sup> Lorenzo Vidino, Raffaello Pantucci, Evan Kohlman, Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa: al-Shabaab, Western Fighters, and the Sacralization of the Somali Conflict, *African Security*, 3, 2010, accessed June 2, 2014, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19392206.2010.533071#.U42ugU9OXIU>, 221.

an expansionist intent and desire to be part of the global jihad, and proved to be a very clear expression of support to al-Qaeda Core. With hindsight it can also be seen as an early step in the formal al-Qaeda affiliation process. In 2008 al-Qaeda acknowledged al-Shabaab as the “champions’ of a perceived Somali ambition to become an Islamic state.<sup>75</sup>

Sheikh Sharif Ahmed was elected as President of the TFG in 2009 and al-Shabaab immediately declared war on the government. When the Ethiopian military withdrew in early 2009, the TFG’s position became increasingly untenable, with al-Shabaab eventually gaining control of most of the capital and vast swathes of southern Somalia.<sup>76</sup> Not content with this vast seizure of territory al-Shabaab declared their desire to expand into Somali-majority areas outside of Somalia in order to establish an Islamic Emirate, further evidence of al-Shabaab’s expansionist agenda.

Throughout 2009, and in response to al-Shabaab overtures, senior al-Qaeda leaders (including bin Laden) released a series of statements pledging support for their Somali brothers.<sup>77</sup> This ratification of al-Shabaab served to further legitimize the group, increase its profile, raise its recruiting capacity, and was accompanied by materiel and financial support. The links between al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab were, and continue to be, deftly publicized through the increasingly-sophisticated al Kata’ib Foundation, the media wing of al-Shabaab.<sup>78</sup>

Throughout 2009 al-Shabaab’s senior leadership continued the pro-al-Qaeda rhetoric, which included several statements referring to its expansionist agenda and support for the fight against the “far enemy.” One such statement, referring to the first al-Shabaab attack outside Somalia, delivered by Ali Mohamud Rage, an al-Shabaab spokesman, said “we are sending a message to

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<sup>75</sup> Abdel Bari Atwan, *After Bin Laden* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 115.

<sup>76</sup> Novanti Group, Somalia’s Al-Shabaab: Down but not out, *Homeland Security Policy Institute Brief 22*, August 27, 2013, accessed June 2, 2014, <http://d383x9er2dcb4o.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/HSPI-Issue-Brief-22-Somalia-Al-Shabaab.pdf>, 9.

<sup>77</sup> Abdel Bari Atwan, *After Bin Laden* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 115.

<sup>78</sup> Rob Wise, Al Shabaab, *Center for Strategic & International Studies, Case Study No.2*, July 2011, accessed June 2, 2014, [http://csis.org/files/publication/110715\\_Wise\\_AlShabaab\\_AQAM%20Futures%20Case%20Study\\_WEB.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/110715_Wise_AlShabaab_AQAM%20Futures%20Case%20Study_WEB.pdf), 7.

Uganda and Burundi...if they do not withdraw their AMISOM troops from Somalia, there will be more blasts and it will happen in Bujumbura (the Burundi capital) too.”<sup>79</sup> In a February 2012 Godane appeared with al-Zawahiri in a video announcing the formal merger of al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab. This very public display of affinity suggested unity of effort and harmony but it belied the bitter inter-clan disputes and power struggles that continue to shape al-Shabaab, its leadership, and direction.

As previously mentioned clan and tribal affinities are at the very heart of the various groups within Somalia and al-Shabaab itself. Fracture lines exist within al-Shabaab due to conflicting agendas between various tribes who have pledged allegiance to the group. Particularly contentious is the shifting ideology – from national/HoA *jihād* to the global *jihād* and the far enemy – and this has been central to a number of the leadership crises within the group. Adding to the fundamental disagreement over ideology and political aims are the internal leadership struggles which exacerbate the disunity.

A particularly fascinating story which underlines al-Shabaab’s internal political machinations was an attempt by al-Qaeda to impose a leader on its – theoretically subservient – partner. In December 2010, al-Qaeda attempted to impose a man called Ibrahim al-Afghani as the leader of al-Shabaab, in order to solve a conflict at the very top of the organization between Godane and Mukhtar Robow. Al-Shabaab rejected the imposition of al-Afghani, instead installing Godane as leader with Robow as his deputy.<sup>80</sup> This is hugely illustrative of the level of control that al-Qaeda is able to exert over its affiliates, and is an effective measure of which agenda (national or global) has primacy within the organization.

In 2013 further evidence of internal strife became evident with the discovery of letters to al-Zawahiri from two senior al-Shabaab leaders requesting his intervention in the ongoing dispute.

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<sup>79</sup> Abdel Bari Atwan, *After Bin Laden* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 116.

<sup>80</sup> Abdel Bari Atwan, *After Bin Laden* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 120.

At the center of the crisis is the dispute between those that adhere to the nationalist agenda and those that are aligned to al-Qaeda and their global campaign. Godane is a protagonist of the global insurgency whilst Robow and al-Afghani believed in the nationalist approach. Robow fled for his life while al-Afghani was executed by Godane.

#### Tactical action

The tactical actions described in the following paragraphs illustrate both the expansionist element of al-Shabaab's strategy – those actions which support the global *jihād* – and the nationalist inspired violence aimed at furthering the Somali *jihād*. Finally, the infamous al-Shabaab-supported Somali pirate activity will be evaluated.

The al-Qaeda influence within al-Shabaab began to emerge in 2006, aligned with the rise in power of ICU. Two suicide bombs against TFG facilities and statements of support from al-Qaeda Core leaders served to raise the profile of the Somali *jihād* and ICU (including al-Shabaab).<sup>81</sup> Thousands of would-be *jihadis* flooded into Somalia (along with donations from groups in the Gulf) who bolstered ICU ranks and engendered the organization with an international flavor which inevitably led to a more expansionist vision.

In addition to this influx of foreign fighters was a desire to actually take part in the global *jihād*. The ICU sent 700 specially selected fighters to support Hizbullah after the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon in July 2006.<sup>82</sup> This is a key, and pre-al-Qaeda affiliation, example of the changing ideology within al-Shabaab. It was a very visible sign of affinity to the idea of global *jihād* and desire to fight the far enemy. As such it was a vital step in the affiliation process.

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<sup>81</sup> Rob Wise, Al Shabaab, *Center for Strategic & International Studies, Case Study No.2*, July 2011, accessed June 2, 2014, [http://csis.org/files/publication/110715\\_Wise\\_AlShabaab\\_AQAM%20Futures%20Case%20Study\\_WEB.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/110715_Wise_AlShabaab_AQAM%20Futures%20Case%20Study_WEB.pdf), 7-8.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

Al Shabaab's first attack outside of Somalia was an operationalization of the systemic (ideology, finance, membership, and propaganda) change in the group, and a spectacular attack in both action and effect. A rugby club and restaurant in Kampala, Uganda was the target of a coordinated suicide attack on July 11, 2010.<sup>83</sup> Al Shabaab claimed that the attack was in response to Uganda's involvement in African Union's Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) operations against al-Shabaab. 74 people were killed from a myriad of nations.<sup>84</sup> While it was very much an expansion of al-Shabaab's operations and therefore aligned with the global *jihad* it also served the nationalist agenda; it was a response to perceived Ugandan interference in Somalian internal affairs.

Al-Shabaab is engaged in an insurgency within the confines of Somalia, partly by design and partly due to the influx and influence of conventional military forces aligned to the AMISOM mission. This insurgency, characterized by small scale attacks – car bombs, shootings, raids, and (increasingly) IEDs – has two major effects. Firstly it appeals to the nationalist sentiment congruent with ousting a foreign power meddling with the internal affairs of Somalia. Secondly, it aligns with the unashamedly expansionist global *jihad* approach. The bleeding of a Western-backed power (Kenya/Ethiopia) which is repressing the true desires of the *ummah* ties in beautifully to the defensive jihad rhetoric of bin Laden et al and aligns with “Al-Qaeda's Strategy to 2020.”<sup>85</sup>

The final series of actions that deserve mention is the al-Shabaab-enabled piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. While these are not necessarily conducted by al-Shabaab they have become inextricably linked with the organization and are a prime source of revenue for it. The pirates

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<sup>83</sup> Rob Wise, Al Shabaab, *Center for Strategic & International Studies, Case Study No.2*, July 2011, accessed June 2, 2014, [http://csis.org/files/publication/110715\\_Wise\\_AlShabaab\\_AQAM%20Futures%20Case%20Study\\_WEB.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/110715_Wise_AlShabaab_AQAM%20Futures%20Case%20Study_WEB.pdf), 4.

<sup>84</sup> Rob Wise, Al Shabaab, *Center for Strategic & International Studies, Case Study No.2*, July 2011, accessed June 2, 2014, [http://csis.org/files/publication/110715\\_Wise\\_AlShabaab\\_AQAM%20Futures%20Case%20Study\\_WEB.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/110715_Wise_AlShabaab_AQAM%20Futures%20Case%20Study_WEB.pdf), 4.

<sup>85</sup> Abdel Bari Atwen, *After Bin Laden* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 17.

themselves – Somali fishermen – are not necessarily ideologically aligned to al-Shabaab. Piracy is a lucrative business and, in the face of huge pollution and oppressive fishing conducted by non-Somalis, small-boat fishermen from southern-Somali ports took to piracy to earn a living.

Piracy in the region is an extremely lucrative business. In 2011 there were 327 incidents involving Somali pirates with 28 vessels hijacked and 470 people taken hostage (15 of whom were killed). Each of those hijacked vessels and crew are releasable for a ransom which can run to several million dollars; the record being the \$12 million paid for the safe return of the MT *Zirku* and her 29 crew members in June 2011.<sup>86</sup>

Al-Shabaab took control of the southern Somali ports in 2010, including the pirate havens of Harardhere and Kismayo. Deals were struck between the pirates and al-Shabaab leaders (enabled by former al-Shabaab pirates gangs) which have led to formal, mutually beneficial agreements. Reuters confirmed stories in 2011 that al-Shabaab were allowing the pirates to continue to use their traditional port bases in return for 20% of any earnings.<sup>87</sup> This taxation provides al-Shabaab with a very lucrative revenue stream. This novel approach to income generation continues to provide al-Shabaab with the financial means required to continue their operations.

Up to this point, this monograph focused on al-Qaeda affiliated groups on the African continent. In order to broaden the analysis the fourth case study will be drawn from another region, the Caucasus. The geo-political environments which spawned AQIM and al-Shabaab are very different from which the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus.

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<sup>86</sup> Abdel Bari Atwen, *After Bin Laden* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 124.

<sup>87</sup> Abdel Bari Atwen, *After Bin Laden* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 125.

## Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus

*“A foreign ideology cannot be introduced into Chechnya - were it through an Arab or al-Qaeda. Our experience is rich and long enough for us to be Muslims and know what jihad is.”*<sup>88</sup>

Aslan Maskhadov

### Leadership, ideology, and origins

The North-Caucasus region – Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Blakaria - has seen centuries of ethnic, religious, and political conflict; the Persian, Ottoman, and Russian empires have, through time, all exerted their considerable influence over the region.<sup>89</sup> The idea of violent struggle to assert ones’ independence is ingrained in the psyche of the inhabitants of the region and therefore it is little surprise that violence remains a feature of the modern-day Caucasus. However, it is perhaps the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century repression of the North-Caucasus peoples by Stalin that served to cement the distrust and underlying hatred of Russia: their far enemy.<sup>90</sup>

Islam has very deep roots in the north Caucasus. It was introduced to the area in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and quickly adopted by the majority of the population.<sup>91</sup> This remained so until the late-18<sup>th</sup> century when the Russian Empire began to make significant inroads into the region, brutally suppressing the indigenous population in the process. As the Czarist Empire imploded in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the North Caucasian Muslims sensed an opportunity to regain control of their homelands. In actual fact the Red Army violently repressed them, a move that was continued by

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<sup>88</sup> Aslan Maskhadov, accessed 30 May, 2014, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-108shrg93316/html/CHRG-108shrg93316.htm>

<sup>89</sup> Dr. Anna Münster, “Growing Islamic Extremism in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Situation and Outlook”, *World Watch Monitor*, accessed May 30, 2014, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/research/reportcentralasiaislamicextremism.pdf>. 2.

<sup>90</sup> Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., “A Threat to the West: The Rise of Islamist Insurgency in the Northern Caucasus and Russia’s Inadequate Response”, *Backgrounder*, No. 2643, March 26, 2012, accessed May 30, 2014, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/03/a-threat-to-the-west-the-rise-of-islamist-insurgency-in-the-northern-caucasus>, 5.

<sup>91</sup> Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., A Threat to the West: The Rise of Islamist Insurgency in the Northern Caucasus and Russia’s Inadequate Response, *Backgrounder*, No. 2643, March 26, 2012, accessed May 30, 2014, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/03/a-threat-to-the-west-the-rise-of-islamist-insurgency-in-the-northern-caucasus>, 4.

Stalin at the end of World War II. In 1944 Stalin ordered the deportation of hundreds of thousands of Chechen and Ingush people to Central Asia.<sup>92</sup>

The Soviet regime, under the leadership of Nikita Krushchev, eventually allowed these displaced people to return to their homelands. However, the unrelenting program of Russification and its secular agenda forced Islam out of the mainstream. This institutionalized marginalization led to a lack of educated, moderate Imams within the Soviet Union generally, but more specifically in the North-Caucasus region. This paucity of “homegrown” spiritual leaders led to the importation of more radical imams and terrorist emissaries, who served to introduce the disaffected youth of the region to a much more radical and extremist interpretation of Islam.<sup>93</sup>

The break-up of the Soviet Union, and subsequent declarations of independence from several former-Soviet republics, spurred Chechnya on to do the same. In 1994, in an attempt to quickly put-down the separatist movement in Chechnya, President Boris Yeltsin authorized Russian military forces into action. In an incredibly naïve statement (with the benefit of hindsight) the Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev promised “to take Grozny with a paratroop regiment in four hours.”<sup>94</sup> This turned out to be a dangerously optimistic and wholly inaccurate prediction; the reality was a brutal, debilitating, and costly insurgency.

Chechen forces eventually defeated Russia, who’s forces withdrew from Chechnya in 1996. Both sides signed the Khasavyurt Accord in the same year which effectively established the

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<sup>92</sup> Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., “A Threat to the West: The Rise of Islamist Insurgency in the Northern Caucasus and Russia’s Inadequate Response”, *Backgrounders*, No. 2643, March 26, 2012, accessed May 30, 2014, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/03/a-threat-to-the-west-the-rise-of-islamist-insurgency-in-the-northern-caucasus>, 5.

<sup>93</sup> Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., “A Threat to the West: The Rise of Islamist Insurgency in the Northern Caucasus and Russia’s Inadequate Response”, *Backgrounders*, No. 2643, March 26, 2012, accessed May 30, 2014, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/03/a-threat-to-the-west-the-rise-of-islamist-insurgency-in-the-northern-caucasus>, 5.

<sup>94</sup> “Grachev Opravdyvaetsya,” *Argumenty i Fakty*, May 5, 2000, accessed May 30, 2014, [http://www.flb.ru/?path=3&info\\_id=5111&text\\_version=10](http://www.flb.ru/?path=3&info_id=5111&text_version=10).

independent country of Chechnya.<sup>95</sup> Of particular interest during this first war was the complementary manner in which Chechen nationalism and Islam were entwined to generate support for the campaign. The Chechen president, Dzhokhar Dudayev, repeatedly used Islamic rhetoric, as did a notable rebel leader, Shamil Basayev. As Michail Logvinov writes “Through their actions both men succeeded in squaring the circle: nationalist propaganda and Islamist agenda were united in the battle against the Moscow army.”<sup>96</sup> Critically, this relationship was not to last.

Independence brought widespread turmoil. Indigenous governance was woefully ineffective, the economy collapsed, and unemployment rose rapidly. There was a rise in criminal activity and radical groups. A rivalry began between the former comrades-in-arms Dudayev (and his successor Maskhadov) and Basayev. Dudayev and Maskhadov supported a largely nationalist agenda while Basayev (and his Arab supporters) pushed an increasingly extreme Salafist approach. The nationalists power all-but disappeared and the hardline Salafists came to the fore.<sup>97</sup> Key to this more extreme direction was the emergence of certain foreign Islamists. Al-Moganned and Ibn Al Khattab, Saudi-born al-Qaeda emissaries, both served to further the radicalization of the Chechen Islamic movement.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., “A Threat to the West: The Rise of Islamist Insurgency in the Northern Caucasus and Russia’s Inadequate Response”, *Backgrounders*, No. 2643, March 26, 2012, accessed May 30, 2014, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/03/a-threat-to-the-west-the-rise-of-islamist-insurgency-in-the-northern-caucasus>, 5.

<sup>96</sup> Michail Logvinov, “The Caucasus Emirate: Origins, Ideological orientation and risk status”, *KAS International Reports*, 3, 2012, accessed on 30 May, 2014, [http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_30492-544-2-30.pdf?130828111605](http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_30492-544-2-30.pdf?130828111605)

<sup>97</sup> Michail Logvinov, “The Caucasus Emirate: Origins, Ideological orientation and risk status”, *KAS International Reports*, 3, 2012, accessed on 30 May, 2014, [http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_30492-544-2-30.pdf?130828111605](http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_30492-544-2-30.pdf?130828111605). 83-84.

<sup>98</sup> Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., A Threat to the West: The Rise of Islamist Insurgency in the Northern Caucasus and Russia’s Inadequate Response, *Backgrounders*, No. 2643, March 26, 2012, accessed May 30, 2014, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/03/a-threat-to-the-west-the-rise-of-islamist-insurgency-in-the-northern-caucasus>, 5.

In 1999 Basayev, now the *amir* or military leader of the Chechen Islamists attacked the neighboring country of Dagestan.<sup>99</sup> This perceived spread of extremist activity was enough for Russia to re-invest Chechnya and deploy forces there once more. Russian forces captured Grozny and reestablished Russian control over the area, ending Chechen independence, driving the Islamists into the North-Caucasus hinterland. Thus began a new phase in this vicious insurgency, perpetrated by increasingly-hardline Islamists, directed at their far enemy: Russia.

Basayev and his followers conducted a wide ranging and ultra-violent terror campaign before his death (as a result of a Russian Special Forces operation) in 2006. The Salafi/Wahabbi agenda in the region became much stronger under his leadership, a trend that was continued by Basayev's replacement, Doku Umarov. Umarov quickly sought to strengthen ties to the local radical Salafi Islamic communities, the *jamaats*, before declaring the Caucasus Emirate (*Immarat Kavkaz*) in 2007, a pan-Caucasus terrorist group with the objective of establishing an Islamic Emirate across the North-Caucasus.<sup>100</sup> This declaration is telling in itself; it is a fundamentally expansionist or internationalist agenda which displays the strength of the extremist, global-jihad inspired, Islamist element within the group.

The al-Qaeda connections have been in place for many years, and the level of support provided has generally increased over that time with the effect of drawing the two organizations into a close relationship. Al-Zawahiri visited the region in the mid-1990s and has repeatedly referred to the struggle in his statements, referring to the Caucasus as one of the three primary fronts in the war against the West.<sup>101</sup> As previously mentioned notable al-Qaeda leaders arrived in

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<sup>99</sup> Dr. Anna Münster, Growing Islamic Extremism in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Situation and Outlook, *World Watch Monitor*, accessed May 30, 2014, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/research/reportcentralasiaislamicextremism.pdf>. 8.

<sup>100</sup> Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., A Threat to the West: The Rise of Islamist Insurgency in the Northern Caucasus and Russia's Inadequate Response, *Backgrounder*, No. 2643, March 26, 2012, accessed May 30, 2014, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/03/a-threat-to-the-west-the-rise-of-islamist-insurgency-in-the-northern-caucasus>, 5-6.

<sup>101</sup> Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., A Threat to the West: The Rise of Islamist Insurgency in the Northern Caucasus and Russia's Inadequate Response, *Backgrounder*, No. 2643, March 26, 2012, accessed May 30,

Chechnya in the late 1990s. In addition to Yusuf Muhammad al'Emirati ("Moganned") from Saudi Arabia, was Abdulla Kurd, al-Qaeda's international coordinator of terrorist cells.

Moganned was the leader of Arab and foreign fighters in the insurgency up until his death in April 2011.<sup>102</sup>

These links are reinforced by explicit statements of support for the global jihad delivered by the organization's leadership. Umarov in particular has been vociferous in his support for his *jihadi* brothers and the Caucasus Emirate's place within the global jihad. In his statement of 2007, concerning the declaration of the Caucasus Emirate, Umarov said "after expelling the kuffar we must reconquer all historical lands of Muslims, and these borders are beyond the boundaries of Caucasus...everyone who attacked Muslims wherever they are are our enemies, common enemies."<sup>103</sup> More recently, and seemingly in a response to the deaths of Moganned and Kurd, Umarov reiterated his global vision, "many of the emirs and leaders (have been killed) Jihad did not stop, but vice versa, it expanded and strengthened...the death of the leaders of the jihad cannot stop the process of the revival of Islam."<sup>104</sup>

The statement of 2007 - detailing the reasoning behind the declaration of the Caucasus Emirate - is particularly explicit with regard to the pivot from nationalism to global *jihad*. There is reference to the near enemy, but the focus is very much placed on the far enemies, and the

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2014, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/03/a-threat-to-the-west-the-rise-of-islamist-insurgency-in-the-northern-caucasus>, 7.

<sup>102</sup> Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., A Threat to the West: The Rise of Islamist Insurgency in the Northern Caucasus and Russia's Inadequate Response, *Backgrounders*, No. 2643, March 26, 2012, accessed May 30, 2014, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/03/a-threat-to-the-west-the-rise-of-islamist-insurgency-in-the-northern-caucasus>, 7.

<sup>103</sup> Dokku Umarov, "The official version of Amir Dokka's Statement of declaration of the Caucasus Emirate," Kavkaz Center, November 22, 2007, accessed May 30, 2014, <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2007/11/22/9107.shtml>.

<sup>104</sup> Dokku Umarov, "Emir Dokku Abu Usman About Bin Laden, the Caucasus Emirate and Casualties Among Mujahideen," Kavkaz Center, May 17, 2011, accessed May 30, 2014, <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2011/05/17/14313.shtml>.

global cause.<sup>105</sup> This agenda survived despite a further challenge to Umarov in 2010/11 which included a somewhat bizarre video release detailing his resignation as leader.<sup>106</sup> The challenge was driven by the fundamental split in ideology between nationalism and transnationalism, with the latter winning through yet again. Umarov has the support of young, radicalized Islamists, driven by religious fervor.

In March 2011, the U.N. Security Council formally declared that Umarov was associated with “al-Qaeda, Usama bin Laden or the Taliban” and was placed on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Al-Qaeda Sanctions List.<sup>107</sup> In addition the United States has designated Umarov and the Caucasus Emirate as being involved in terrorism and placed on the U.S. Department of State Foreign Terrorist Organization list.<sup>108</sup> Some of the tactical actions which led to the group being placed on these lists will be discussed next with a delineation being made between those actions that have been directed against the “near” and “far” enemies.

#### Tactical action

Attacks against the near enemy have been a persistent and vital element of the Caucasus Emirate’s strategy. The near-continual Russian presence within (or occupation of) Chechnya has provided *jihadis* with a very visible and obvious series of targets to attack. Similarly the largely-secular Chechen government and bureaucracy has become an ideologically-driven target of the increasingly radicalized members of the Caucasus Emirate. In fact, across the republics of the North Caucasus the jihad has been steadily increasing. The attack on the home village of Ramsan

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<sup>105</sup> Dokku Umarov, “The official version of Amir Dokka’s Statement of declaration of the Caucasus Emirate,” Kavkaz Center, November 22, 2007, accessed May 30, 2014, <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2007/11/22/9107.shtml>.

<sup>106</sup> Michail Logvinov, The Caucasus Emirate: Origins, Ideological orientation and risk status, KAS International Reports, 3, 2012, accessed on 30 May, 2014, [http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_30492-544-2-30.pdf?130828111605](http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_30492-544-2-30.pdf?130828111605). 86.

<sup>107</sup> U.N. Security Council Committee, “QI.U.290.11. Doku Khamatovich Umarov,” March 10, 2011, accessed May 30, 2014, <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQI29011E.shtml>.

<sup>108</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Designation of Caucasus Emirate,” May 26, 2011, accessed May 30, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/05/164312.html>.

Kadyrov, the president of the sub-republic of Chechnya, in August 2010 and the bombing of the Chechen parliament in October of the same year are just two examples of this nationalist line of operation aimed at undermining the Russian-supported Chechen regime.<sup>109</sup>

In stark contrast to the relatively unknown domestic attacks is the infamous series of terror attacks conducted against the Caucasus Emirate's far enemy: the Russians. Seemingly indiscriminate targeting of civilians, suicide bombers, and extreme brutality characterize the campaign. The attacks on the Dubrovka Theater in Moscow and the horrific massacre of the Beslan school hostage takings are excellent illustrations of the savagery of this campaign.<sup>110</sup> While these attacks pre-date the official formation of the Caucasus Emirate, those responsible for the attacks were from the group which metamorphosed into it. The more recent attacks on the *Nevsky Express* (the Moscow-St. Petersburg train) in 2007 and 2009, the double suicide attack on the Moscow metro system in 2010, and the suicide bombing at the Domodedovo Airport in 2011, are evidence of the Caucasus Emirates strategy of attacking high-value civilian targets.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Michail Logvinov, The Caucasus Emirate: Origins, Ideological orientation and risk status, *KAS International Reports*, 3, 2012, accessed on 30 May, 2014, [http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_30492-544-2-30.pdf?130828111605](http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_30492-544-2-30.pdf?130828111605). 86.

<sup>110</sup> Abdel Bari Atwen, *After Bin Laden* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 233.

<sup>111</sup> Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., A Threat to the West: The Rise of Islamist Insurgency in the Northern Caucasus and Russia's Inadequate Response, *Backgrounders*, No. 2643, March 26, 2012, accessed May 30, 2014, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/03/a-threat-to-the-west-the-rise-of-islamist-insurgency-in-the-northern-caucasus>, 7.

## Conclusions

*“Let me say this loud and clear. There is a world of difference between terrorist acts and the Islamic Shari’a. Islam is not only a religion, but a way of life. And at its heart lie the sacred principles of tolerance and dialogue.”<sup>112</sup>*

Hussein Bin Talal

The four case studies outlined within this monograph provide evidence which supports the paper’s central hypothesis: that the tactical actions of al-Qaeda affiliates do not support the strategic aims of al-Qaeda Core. The case studies were chosen to provide an accurate and balanced approach which would allow overarching conclusions regarding the nebula that is al-Qaeda. They were not intended to enable intricate and all-encompassing critiques of the affiliates’ tactical actions. As such there are a number of conclusions that can be drawn from the studies. These conclusions fall into two major categories: Al-Qaeda Core assumptions, aspirations, and mistakes, and; the real motivations of al-Qaeda affiliates.

### Al-Qaeda core assumptions, aspirations, and mistakes

The central political aims of al-Qaeda Core are well-known: “The Quran-based authority to govern,” “the liberation of the homelands,” and “the liberation of the human being.”<sup>113</sup> The aggregate of these aims is the unification of the *ummah*, ruled according to *shari’a* law, in a single caliphate, and free from Western influence.<sup>114</sup> This is a clearly articulated vision shared by those – mainly Sunni Muslims - who ascribe to this Salafi/Wahabbist variant of Islam. It is a very compelling ideal for many, formulated by a collection of articulate and very learned ideologues, most notable of which was the Egyptian Sayyid al-Qutb, a founder member of the Muslim

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<sup>112</sup> Hussein bin Talal, King of Jordon, accessed June 1, 2014, [http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/views\\_faith1.html](http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/views_faith1.html)

<sup>113</sup> Christopher M. Blanchard Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology; *Congressional Research Service*; updated 9<sup>th</sup> July 2007; pp.13-14.

<sup>114</sup> Christopher M. Blanchard Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology; *Congressional Research Service*; updated 9<sup>th</sup> July 2007; pp.13-14.

Brotherhood.<sup>115</sup> However, there are a number of other, equally compelling counters to this radical interpretation of Islam.

Most obvious of these differing views is the fundamentally different interpretation of Islam taken by the Shi'a. The differences of opinion between Sunni and Shi'a are grounded in centuries old interpretation of fundamental Islamic beliefs, such as the succession of prophets.<sup>116</sup> The differences are numerous but across the ages there has been a general acceptance of the differences between the two elements, as there has been with many other religions around the world. Tensions have arisen when the hardline elements of each section remonstrate about the lack of piety of the other. These complaints generally come from the more radical fringes of the populace; those that have hardline views such as the Salafis/Wahabbis.<sup>117</sup>

Therein lays the problem for al-Qaeda Core, its members and ideology are drawn from the “extreme” end of the Sunni section of the Islamic spectrum. The overwhelming majority of Muslims do not hold to the same radical interpretation of Islam, irrespective of how much the “infidels” are loathed in the Islamic heartland. Unification of the *ummah*, in the manner which is suggested by al-Qaeda is, therefore, a vainglorious aspiration. The political and strategic *ends* are unachievable, which links neatly to the next point for critique: “Al-Qaeda’s Strategy to 2020.”<sup>118</sup>

The strategy appears to be a coherent and well thought out plan for the attainment of al-Qaeda’s strategic and political goals. However, it is underpinned by a number of assumptions that are demonstrably flawed. Firstly, al-Qaeda expected the *ummah* to unite and rise up against the “crusaders,” once the West had been provoked into a war against Muslims in an Islamic nation. This simply didn’t happen, with bin-Laden himself openly berating Muslims for not rising up in

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<sup>115</sup> Paul Marshall, *Radical Islam’s Rules: The Worldwide Spread of Extreme Shari’a Law* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005) xiii.

<sup>116</sup> Sunni and Shia, last updated August 19, 2008, accessed June 1, 2014, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/subdivisions/sunnishia\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/subdivisions/sunnishia_1.shtml)

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Abdel Bari Atwen, *After Bin Laden* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 17.

the face of Western aggression.<sup>119</sup> Secondly, it would appear that in order to rid the Islamic world of apostate regimes, al-Qaeda needed to eradicate Western influence over those regimes. This required the provocation of the West into an armed conflict within the Middle East, hence the series of attacks against Western targets up to, and including, those carried out on September 11, 2001. This indirect approach appears to be deeply flawed and a fundamental threat to al-Qaeda's continued existence. Inciting the most powerful militaries in the world to war is a – potentially – foolhardy course of action which is yet to achieve its purpose. The radical overhaul of several “apostate” regimes in the Middle East and North Africa, and the rise in prominence of Islamist parties as a result of the Arab Spring has arguably achieved more in terms of de-coupling the West from Islamic nations than the efforts of al-Qaeda has.

It is easy – and possibly dangerous – to dismiss “Al-Qaeda's Strategy to 2020.” It clearly defines the vision of the al-Qaeda leadership and as such is a useful document to examine. However, the largely unachievable and lofty aspiration at the heart of al-Qaeda's campaign – the creation of the caliphate for the *ummah* - causes the strategy to be inherently flawed and doomed to failure.<sup>120</sup> Simply put, *no* tactical action *could ever* hope to achieve the strategic aims of al-Qaeda Core.

#### The real motivations of al-Qaeda affiliates

Al-Qaeda affiliated groups tend to be derivatives of older organizations with firmly held beliefs and ideology. These groups have an historic cause to fight for which is, more often than not, of nationalist design. The groups used in the case studies have anti-colonial (AQIM), anti-Empirical (IEC), and pro-nationalist (al-Shabaab) origins. These are the essential motivations for the groups, which have been long-supported and are deeply entrenched into the psyche of those

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<sup>119</sup> Christopher M. Blanchard, Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology; *Congressional Research Service*; updated 9<sup>th</sup> July 2007;

<sup>120</sup> Christopher M. Blanchard, Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology; *Congressional Research Service*; updated 9<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

participating. These are campaigns that have been conducted by Muslims, but not in the name of Islam. Instead, faith has been historically used to incite the masses to participate in the struggle and for the groups involved to achieve nationalist objectives, not religious ones.

What drives a previously nationalistic group to assimilate with the transnational agenda of al-Qaeda? Unification behind a transnational cause can be incredibly lucrative to a group which is committed to a campaign against a ruling government. Money, materiel, and manpower flow such a network of like-minded affiliates. “Brand” al-Qaeda brings kudos, infamy, and notoriety. Affiliates benefit from being part of the “brand” and al-Qaeda Core benefit from the perception of its seemingly unstoppable growth. Affiliation however, only goes so far: The groups studied appear only transnational up to a point.

Each has seen its own internal power struggles, all of which have revolved around the nationalist/transnationalist split within their respective groups. The “old guard”<sup>121</sup> reveres the nationalist origins of the organizations while the more radical, younger members have the more transnational agenda. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Chechnya. The question remains as to who will prevail and whether the radical elements will implode in a similar manner to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi elements within Iraq.<sup>122</sup>

The well-documented and open-source ideological statements of the affiliate groups, and the relatively infrequent terrorist attacks against the “far enemy” are very obvious methods of showing support to al-Qaeda Core and the global *jihad*. However, they are also a relatively cheap method of maintaining the façade of support to the global *jihadi* brotherhood without jeopardizing the more important national objectives.

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<sup>121</sup> Michail Logvinov, *The Caucasus Emirate: Origins, Ideological orientation and risk status*, *KAS International Reports*, 3, 2012, accessed on 30 May, 2014, [http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_30492-544-2-30.pdf?130828111605](http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_30492-544-2-30.pdf?130828111605). 86-88.

<sup>122</sup> Abdel Bari Atwen, *After Bin Laden* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 66-67.

### Western benefit

One final thought on this topic which is worthy of a brief mention is the benefit to Western nations of the taxonomy applied to terrorist groups, in this case al-Qaeda. While there is danger in accepting the existence of a terrorist group – credence, publicity, infamy, and credibility are all negative byproducts of this process – there is also a lot of benefit. Naming a group as an affiliate of al-Qaeda, or as having links with al-Qaeda, brings with it a whole host of possibilities. The placement of an organization on either the United Nations Security Council Al-Qaeda Sanctions List or the U.S. Department of State’s Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) database denies it the freedom to which it has become accustomed and in which it has been able to develop. The implementation of sanctions delivers an unenviable focus on the freshly-recognized organization; a focus which brings with it sophisticated military forces with an internationally recognized justification to target terrorist elements.

The kidnap of 200 high school girls from a northern-Nigerian school by the Boko Haram group has led to them being recognized as an al-Qaeda associated organization, with a commensurate increase in commitment of western military equipment and expertise to the efforts to defeat the group.<sup>123</sup> It would appear that Boko Haram might have misjudged the cost/benefit analysis of al-Qaeda affiliation, and their success in achieving it may also be their undoing.

Fault for the lack of unity of effort – between al-Qaeda Core and its affiliates - lies at both the strategic and tactical levels. This incongruence generates inefficiency within the organization at best, and allows entirely counter-productive actions at worst: the Sunni-Shi’a sectarian fighting in Iraq, fomented by al-Qaeda Iraq and its leader al-Zaqarwi, is an excellent example of this. However, despite this lack of assimilation, the threat from al-Qaeda inspired, Islamist terror

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<sup>123</sup> UNSC, accessed June 1, 2014, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2014/sc11410.doc.htm>

groups remains very real at the local (intra-country) and regional (Sahel, HoA) levels, but not transnationally. The al-Qaeda ideal – however unattainable – remains a significant motivator to fresh generations who flock to the cause, and will continue to generate security challenges worldwide for the foreseeable future.

*“From the deepest desires often come the deadliest hate.”<sup>124</sup>*

Socrates

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<sup>124</sup> Socrates, accessed on June 2, 2014, <http://www.philosophyparadise.com/quotes/socrates.html>

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