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BREAKING THE BONDS BETWEEN
AL-QA'IDA AND ITS AFFILIATE
ORGANIZATIONS

DANIEL L. BYMAN



THE SABAN CENTER
for MIDDLE EAST POLICY
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Al-Qa'ida seems to be on its heels. The death of Osama bin Laden and the fall of Arab dictators have left its leadership in disarray, its narrative confused, and the organization on the defensive. One silver lining for al-Qaida, however, has been its affiliate organizations. In Iraq, the Maghreb, Somalia, Yemen, and elsewhere, al-Qa'ida has used local groups to expand its reach, increase its power, and grow its numbers. This string of mergers is not over. In places as diverse as the Sinai Peninsula and Nigeria, al-Qa'ida-linked organizations are emerging. However, the jihadist world is more fractured than it may appear at first glance. Many Salafi-jihadist groups have not joined with al-Qa'ida, and even if they have, tensions and divisions occur that present the United States and its allies with opportunities for weakening the bond.

AL QA'IDA AND ITS AFFILIATES

Al-Qa'ida has always been both a group with its own agenda and a facilitator of other terrorist groups. This meant that it not only carried out attacks on U.S. targets in Kenya, Tanzania, and Yemen throughout the 1990s, but it helped other jihadist groups with funding, training, and additional logistical essentials. Toward the end of the 1990s, al-Qa'ida incorporated Egyptian Islamic Jihad into its structure. After September 11, 2001, this process of deepening its relationship with outside groups took off, and today a number of regional groups bear the label "al-Qa'ida" in their name, along with a more local designation. Some of the most prominent affiliates include al-Qa'ida of Iraq (AQI), al-Qa'ida of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al-Qa'ida of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and the Shebaab in Somalia. Yet,

at the same time, several Salafi-jihadist groups chose not to affiliate with al-Qa'ida, including Egypt's Gamaat al-Islamiyya and Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), and fighters in Chechnya, Gaza, and Pakistan maintained their distance as well.

MOTIVATIONS TO THE AFFILIATE FOR JOINING

There are a number of reasons why a group may choose to affiliate with al-Qa'ida, some practical, some ideological, and some personal:

- **Failure.** Setback often motivates a group to link with al-Qa'ida. Groups have joined with the core after losing recruits and popular support and otherwise seeing their original goals frustrated.
- **Money.** For much of its history, al-Qa'ida was flush with cash, which made it an attractive partner for other terrorist groups. Aside from direct support, affiliation with, or even an endorsement from, al-Qa'ida is also a way for groups to attract funding from deep-pocket donors, particularly those in the Gulf.
- **A Haven.** One of the most important determinants of a terrorist group's success is whether it has a haven from which to operate. Al-Qa'ida ran training camps, operated safe houses, and otherwise established a large infrastructure in support of terror. These facilities were an attractive resource for groups looking for a safe environment.

- **Training, Recruiting, Publicity, and Military Experience.** Al-Qa'ida historically offered impressive training facilities to various jihadist groups—an attractive service, particularly for groups with inexperienced personnel and no place to conduct these exercises in their home countries.
- **Common Defense.** Because groups share havens, training facilities, and so on with al-Qa'ida, when these locations are targeted by government forces, the groups join al-Qa'ida in fighting back.
- **Branding and Publicity.** At times, groups may seek to replace their more local brand with that of al-Qa'ida, believing the latter is more compelling. Al-Qa'ida can also help ensure publicity for a group beyond the group's borders.
- **Personal Networks.** The fact that jihadists spend time together training or fighting has created numerous overlapping networks. These ties often are an important factor in a group's decision to affiliate.

MOTIVATIONS FOR THE AL-QA'IDA CORE

While there are clear benefits for an affiliate in linking with al-Qa'ida, there are also rewards for the al-Qa'ida core:

- **Mission Fulfillment and Reach.** Having a diverse array of affiliates helps al-Qa'ida extend its reach and fulfill its self-image as the leader of the jihadist community.
- **Relevance.** Especially since 9/11, al-Qa'ida has been on the defensive. Today, amid the U.S. drone campaign in Afghanistan and Pakistan against the group, the actions of al-Qa'ida's affiliates can serve as proof of

the group's continued strength. Some of the most notorious "al-Qa'ida" attacks attempted since 9/11 have in fact been carried out by affiliate groups.

- **Logistics.** Beyond the ability to carry out attacks, affiliates offers al-Qa'ida access to their media resources, recruiters, and other core parts of their organizations.
- **Hardened Fighters.** Since its inception, al-Qa'ida has sought members who are experienced and dedicated. Many of the affiliates who come to al-Qa'ida do so with just such a cadre.

THE DECISION *NOT* TO AFFILIATE

Despite the benefits to joining with al-Qa'ida, not all Salafi-jihadist groups choose to affiliate with it. The jihadist movement as a whole has a wide range of ideological opinions, some of which are quite rigid. This has meant that al-Qa'ida and the many Sunni groups that are not pure Salafis have not linked with each other. There are also divisions in the jihadist community because some groups go so far as to take it on themselves to declare others to be unbelievers, which has tremendous consequences for how a group chooses its targets, and on a group's popularity—the practice often alienates ordinary Muslims. The divide is even greater between al-Qa'ida and a non-Sunni group like Hizballah, even though the latter would offer formidable capabilities in an alliance. In addition, an ideological divide over issues like targeting civilians has caused a rift among jihadists, partly based on disagreement about the appropriateness of doing so, and partly based on the fact that jihadists often disagree on the definition of who is a civilian and who is not. Personal issues and even personalities play a role. Although some groups may want to affiliate with al-Qa'ida, the possibility to do so may be limited because of a lack of personal interaction or due to disputes among leaders.

Local versus global outlooks have also played a role in keeping some groups from linking up with al-Qa'ida. Al-Qa'ida has a global agenda and global adversaries, whereas most of its affiliates formed to address far more limited objectives. Therefore, while working with al-Qa'ida may help an affiliate solve problems relating to logistics and branding, it may threaten to change the nature of the struggle.

Even if a group shares al-Qa'ida's goals and ideology, going global brings a host of downsides, particularly the wrath of the United States and other strong powers. This, in turn, might set back a group's chances of achieving its local objectives. The 9/11 attacks were a disaster for many jihadist groups, as the United States came down on them in full force.

STRAINS IN THE AFFILIATE-CORE RELATIONSHIP

Even if a group makes a decision to affiliate or otherwise move closer to al-Qa'ida, tensions often arise, or existing ones become exacerbated. Different aims and divergent strategies may create strain in the al-Qa'ida-affiliate relationship. Because al-Qa'ida's affiliates started out with local goals, linking with the al-Qa'ida core and expanding attacks to global targets can make it harder for a group to achieve its original aims. On the flip side, the core's anti-Western brand can become hijacked or contaminated by local struggles. Similarly, since the core is less in tune with local conditions and realities, mistakes at the local level are more likely to occur when the core is calling the shots.

Often, local groups have markedly different convictions from al-Qa'ida, particularly when it comes to nationalism and democracy. Nationalism, in particular, is a two-edged sword for al-Qa'ida. While some al-Qa'ida affiliates have at times exploited anti-foreign sentiment, be it in regards to the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq or Ethiopian forces in Somalia, al-Qa'ida itself has a strongly anti-nationalist bent. Al-Qaida criticizes Muslims who it sees

as having excessive devotion to their country, believing nationalism creates a dividing point among the true community—Muslims. At the same time, elections, and political opportunities in general, can create a divide between local fighters and foreign fighters attached to jihad. In essence, local populations see elections as a means of gaining power or otherwise defending their community, whereas for the more globally focused jihadists, elections represent a threat to ideological purity.

Practical matters like finances often get in the way of the relationship. U.S. and allied pressure on al-Qa'ida's finances has reduced the organization's ability to dispense largesse, often to the point where it has sought financial help from affiliates and charged potential recruits for training.

Expansion also creates tensions inside and outside the core. As the number of affiliates increases, the overall security of the al-Qa'ida network decreases. An influx of outsiders creates stresses by challenging al-Qa'ida's insularity and making it harder to protect itself from possible infiltrators. At the same time, in cases where al-Qa'ida sends its own operatives and other non-locals to join an affiliate, these foreign fighters may alienate locals through their personal behavior or attempts to alter local traditions.

These issues, and others, may not only create tension between the core and its affiliates, they may be cause for like-minded groups or prominent jihadists to publicly condemn al-Qa'ida—something that costs al-Qa'ida heavily in terms of prestige, and possibly recruitment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FIGHTING AL-QA'IDA AFFILIATES

It is vital to distinguish between those groups that are full-fledged affiliates and those groups where there is just limited interaction with al-Qa'ida. By lumping an unaffiliated group with al-Qa'ida, the

United States can drive it into *Zawahiri's* arms. Often only a small portion of an affiliate's organization focuses on Western targets and an even smaller portion focuses on operations against Western targets outside the local theater of operations. In addition, while many members of affiliate groups are combat-hardened, and some have received al-Qa'ida training, relatively few are truly elites. It is also important to consider how some Sunni groups that act against U.S. interests can still serve to weaken al-Qa'ida.

With these understandings in mind, the United States and its allies should take a number of steps that capitalize on the differences in interests between al-Qa'ida on the one hand and its affiliates and local populations on the other. Because members of the global jihadist movement hold markedly different views on theological issues and the nature of the struggle, an information operations campaign can try to widen these gaps, highlighting differences and thus encouraging them. In addition, whenever possible, the foreign nature of al-Qa'ida should be emphasized. Many of the most important jihadist-linked struggles, such as those in Chechnya, Kashmir, and Iraq, began with a more straightforward nationalist struggle against a perceived foreign invader. And even in cases where the struggle did not begin for nationalistic reasons, such as Somalia and Yemen, nationalism remains high among locals and many within the jihadist community.

Because there is also a wedge between the way al-Qa'ida and many others in the Muslim world approach the issue of democracy, the United States and its allies should call attention to this, and contrast it with statements by peaceful Salafi leaders in support of elections.

Aside from capitalizing on the differences between the core and its affiliates, there are additional steps

the United States and its allies can take. Intelligence services can monitor radicals within diaspora communities and work with law enforcement officials to curtail fundraising for affiliate groups. Washington should also continue to disrupt al-Qa'ida's financing, which is also a blow to the group's affiliate strategy. If the core's money diminishes, the core will be less likely to be able to attract new affiliates to its banner. Moreover, depriving affiliate groups of revenue often leads them to undertake illicit activities, such as kidnapping and theft as a means to make up the funding shortfall. These actions paint the group as more criminal than heroic, further damaging its brand.

It is also important for Washington to understand how actions it takes in the region may influence the al-Qa'ida-affiliate dynamic. In deciding whether to intervene abroad, for instance, U.S. policymakers should consider, along with other more obvious costs and benefits, how doing so may impact al-Qa'ida affiliation.

Ultimately, there are no simple choices when confronting al-Qa'ida affiliates. On the one hand, ignoring groups until they become affiliates, or ignoring affiliates until they strike at U.S. targets, risks leaving U.S. intelligence and security officials in a defensive and reactive mode and vulnerable to a surprise attack. On the other hand, too aggressive an approach can create a self-fulfilling prophecy, strengthening bonds between al-Qa'ida and other jihadist groups by validating the al-Qa'ida narrative and leading groups to cooperate for self-defense and organizational advancement. So, as with most difficult counterterrorism issues, judgment and prudence are essential.

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INTRODUCTION

The death of Osama bin Laden and the onset of the Arab Spring hit al-Qa'ida hard, leaving its leadership in disarray and putting the organization on the defensive. One silver lining for al-Qa'ida, however, is its affiliate organizations. In Iraq, the Maghreb, Somalia, Yemen, and Egypt, al-Qa'ida has won over formidable local allies to its cause, expanding its reach, power, and numbers in the process. This string of mergers is not over. In places as diverse as the Sinai Peninsula and Nigeria, al-Qa'ida-linked organizations are emerging. Some analyses paint these organizations as even more dangerous than the al-Qa'ida core, which has been weakened by the death of bin Laden and other losses. Indeed, the importance of these organizations may grow under bin Laden's successor, Ayman al-Zawahiri, because of his focus on territorial gains and establishing emirates across Muslim lands.¹

Yet the jihadist world is far from unified. Other Sunni jihadist organizations have not joined with al-Qa'ida, and some have moved away from it. These dissenters include important groups like Hamas and various Egyptian and Libyan Salafi-jihadist organizations that have splintered, with the bulk of fighters focusing primarily on local causes

rather than embracing al-Qa'ida's global agenda. In addition, the al-Qa'ida core and its affiliates compete for money and recruits and often differ in their priorities. A report by West Point's Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) based on documents captured during the raid that killed bin Laden found that the relationship between the al-Qa'ida core and the affiliates is contested and that the core's control of the groups is limited at best.²

This paper examines two overlapping issues. First, why do some jihadist groups with ideologies that are similar to al-Qa'ida's *not* join with Zawahiri's organization? Second, why might existing organizations "drop out" of the fold? Answering this second question requires examining potential cleavages between the al-Qa'ida core and affiliate organizations, divergences between local and global agendas, and leverage points that the United States or other outside powers might exercise to make a split more likely.

Al-Qa'ida always aspired to unite different Salafi-jihadist organizations, but it was, and remains, opportunistic in how it has done so. From its beginning, it has used financial incentives to try to foster

¹ Leah Farrall, "Will Al-Qa'ida and Al-Shabab Formally Merge?" *CTC Sentinel* 4, no. 7 (July 2011), available at: <<http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/will-al-qaida-and-al-shabab-formally-merge>>; "Letter from Ayman Al-Zawahiri to Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi," July 2005, available at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter_9jul2005.htm>.

² See Nelly Lahoud, Stuart Caudill, Liam Collins, Gabriel Koehler-Derrick, Don Rassler, and Muhammad al-'Ubaydi, "Letters from Abbottabad: Bin Ladin Sidelined?" Harmony Program, The Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, May 3, 2012.

cooperation, and as its training facilities and brand name became more attractive, it has used these assets to attract new groups to its banner. Yet the nature of each affiliation varies, and there does not appear to be a master plan. At times, the gaining of affiliates has reflected the group's strength and appeal, but in other instances it has reflected the opposite—al-Qa'ida has sought affiliates because of its own weakness and operational limits.

This paper argues that while there are many attractions to linking with al-Qa'ida, the price of affiliation is considerable. Affiliation is often an admission of failure at the local level. In addition, affiliation can inflame local nationalism, bring on new enemies, and otherwise leave a group more isolated and farther from its original goals. There is a price for the al-Qa'ida core as well—affiliated groups can damage the al-Qa'ida brand through the actions and ideological stances of local fighters. The United States can play on these tensions, stressing ideological and strategic differences within the

movement and emphasizing local identities and nationalism, both of which can be mobilized against al-Qa'ida. Continuing U.S. pressure on al-Qa'ida's haven, communications, and finances is also vital to disrupting the core-affiliate relationship.

This paper first details the Salafi-jihadist universe, identifying a range of important groups that have affiliated with al-Qa'ida as well as others of a similar mindset that have chosen not to do so. Section two then briefly describes the degrees of affiliation, as no two relationships between al-Qa'ida and its affiliates are identical. The third section assesses the range of reasons why groups affiliate, and section four describes the benefits of affiliation from al-Qa'ida's point of view. In section five the decision of several Salafi-jihadist groups not to affiliate is examined, and section six describes tensions that have emerged in the relationship between al-Qa'ida and many of its affiliates. The paper concludes by examining how to exploit potential cleavages between al-Qa'ida and its affiliate organizations.

THE JIHADIST UNIVERSE

Al-Qa'ida has been an active organization for over twenty years. When it was founded in 1988, it was simply one of many jihadist organizations, and by no means the most important.³ From the start, however, al-Qa'ida was unusual: it was both a group with its own agenda and operations, as well as a facilitator for other terrorist groups. So al-Qa'ida in the 1990s carried out attacks on U.S. targets in Kenya, Tanzania, and Yemen and, at the same time, acted as “quartermaster for jihad,” to use Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon’s arresting phrase. This meant that al-Qa'ida helped other jihadist groups with funding, training, and additional logistical essentials.⁴ Al-Qa'ida’s third role was proselytizing and indoctrination, spreading a gospel to other Muslims that they should take up jihad against the West and other perceived oppressors.

Thus, from its inception, al-Qa'ida was immensely concerned with its relationship with outside groups. While, traditionally, groups with a similar

mindset who operate in the same theater as one another compete fiercely for money and recruits,⁵ for al-Qa'ida, the attitude was different. Al-Qa'ida did still compete with other Salafi-jihadist groups, but at the same time, it believed that its own mission entailed furthering their aims. In order to fulfill this mission, it trained fighters from these other groups and undertook propaganda efforts on behalf of their causes.

Beginning in the late 1990s, al-Qa'ida’s relationship with outside groups deepened, and it began to incorporate other groups into its structure. After September 11, 2001, this process took off, and today a number of regional groups bear the label “al-Qa'ida” in their name, along with a more local designation to show that they are focused on the Arabian Peninsula, the Islamic Maghreb, or other parts of the Muslim world. According to one estimate, al-Qa'ida has used mergers in nineteen countries to increase its influence.⁶ While this paper takes a more conservative view of what constitutes

³ See R. Kim Cragin, “Early History of Al-Qa'ida,” *The Historical Journal* 51, no. 4 (2008).

⁴ Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror* (New York: Random House, 2002), p. 113.

⁵ On terrorist organizational competition, see for example: Gordon H. McCormick, “Terrorist Decision Making,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, no. 6, pp. 473–507 and Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

⁶ “Al-Qa'ida’s Five Aspects of Power,” *CTC Sentinel* 2, no. 1 (January 2009): p. 4.

a merger and excludes smaller groups, it is clear that al-Qa'ida has made several major acquisitions since 9/11.⁷

KEY AL-QA'IDA AFFILIATES

Before 9/11, al-Qa'ida supported a wide range of Salafi-jihadist groups, but it only integrated one of them—Egyptian Islamic Jihad—into its overall organization. After 9/11, however, al-Qa'ida developed partnerships with several other organizations, extending the group's reach in the Maghreb, Iraq, and the Arabian Peninsula, among other areas. The following is a brief overview of key affiliate groups.

EGYPTIAN ISLAMIC JIHAD (EIJ)

The first, and perhaps most important, independent organization that joined al-Qa'ida was Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ). EIJ emerged during the explosive growth of Islamism in Egypt in the 1970s. Members of EIJ assassinated Egyptian president Anwar Sadat in 1981, and the group carried out an underground struggle against the Egyptian regime in the years that followed. In the 1990s, EIJ was beset from all sides. Massive arrests in Egypt devastated the group's ranks there, and Zawahiri's failed efforts to establish a base in Chechnya in 1996–97 caused further damage to the group. Financially, the group was low on funds and unable to sustain its operations or support the families of its fighters.⁸

Because of these problems, EIJ increasingly turned to al-Qa'ida for help and, as it did so, embraced a more global agenda. In 1997, EIJ's bulletins began to call for attacks on the United States. The following year, Zawahiri, who then led EIJ, signed on to the al-Qa'ida-backed declaration of the “World Islamic Front for Combat against Jews and Crusaders,” marking what the U.S. government argued was effectively a merger between EIJ and al-Qa'ida.⁹ Zawahiri rationalized this union, and the shift of focus to the United States, in part by claiming the United States was at war with the group, the United States backed the Egyptian government, and the Jews controlled America.¹⁰ The movement formally merged with al-Qa'ida in 2001, but there was de facto integration between the two in 1998, and considerable cooperation and interaction by senior individual members in the years before then.

Before 9/11, the EIJ-al-Qa'ida merger appeared to be a one-off. Al-Qa'ida did not seem to be actively looking for other groups to take on the al-Qa'ida label, and was willing to cooperate with a wide range of organizations that retained a high level of autonomy.

AL-QA'IDA OF IRAQ (AQI)/THE ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ (ISI)

Foreign fighters flocked to Iraq after the 2003 U.S. invasion, and al-Qa'ida propaganda encouraged this. A number of groups and individuals fighting

⁷ This paper does not examine potential emerging al-Qa'ida affiliates like “al-Qa'ida of the Sinai Peninsula” or Boko Haram in Nigeria. The groups have al-Qa'ida-like tendencies, but unclassified data are still not clear on the degree of affiliation at this point. See, for example, Katherine Zimmerman, “From Somalia to Nigeria: Jihad,” *Weekly Standard*, June 18, 2011, available at: <http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/somalia-nigeria-jihad_574838.html>. Al-Qa'ida is also tied to an array of groups with which it has numerous personal and organizational ties. These groups, however, are not formal affiliates as are groups like AQAP. Al-Qa'ida, of course, also has long-standing ties to the Taliban and at different periods has worked closely with Jemaah Islamiya in Indonesia and the Islamic Jihad Union in Uzbekistan, but these organizations are now gravely weakened, and none formally merged with al-Qa'ida. Seth Nye, “Al-Qa'ida's Key Operative: A Profile of Mohammed Ilyas Kashmiri,” *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 9 (September 2010), p. 15; Sebastian Rotella, “An Intricate Plot Unleashed in Mumbai,” *Washington Post*, November 15, 2010; John D. Negroponte, “Annual Threat Assessment of the Director of National Intelligence for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence,” February 2, 2006, p. 5.

⁸ Andrew Higgins and Alan Cullison, “Terrorist's Odyssey,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 2, 2002.

⁹ United States of America v. Usama bin Laden *et al.*, S(9) 98 Cr. 1023, p. 6.

¹⁰ Lawrence Wright, “The Man Behind Bin Laden,” *The New Yorker*, September 16, 2002.

U.S. forces in Iraq had trained in Afghanistan in al-Qa'ida-run camps or otherwise had links with the core organization. The core movement tried to publicize the struggle in Iraq and facilitate the flow of fighters there. As the insurgency spread, so did the Salafi-jihadist ideology al-Qa'ida championed, which numerous groups in heretofore secular (or at least mainstream Islamist) Iraq embraced.

The Jordanian-born Abu Musab al-Zarqawi entered Iraq in 2002, as the head of the Salafi-jihadist, but non-al-Qa'ida affiliate, group Tawhid wal Jihad. He became the leading foreign fighter figure in Iraq, and after several years of negotiations, eventually pledged his loyalty to bin Laden in 2004. The organization went through several names, including al-Qa'ida of Iraq (AQI), the Mujahedin Shura Council, and the Islamic State of Iraq (this paper will use "AQI" to refer to the group).¹¹ Although foreigners have played an important role in AQI, Iraqis make up the core of its membership, and its focus is on Iraq.¹² The vast majority of AQI attacks are in Iraq itself, though the organization or its predecessors did conduct bloody attacks in Jordan in 2005, were implicated in the June 2007 plots in London and Glasgow, and considered attacks in 2008 in Denmark.¹³

AL-QA'IDA OF THE ARABIAN PENINSULA (AQAP)

Al-Qa'ida and the broader jihadist movement have long had a presence in both Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Throughout the 1990s, and even today, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states were an important fundraising source for al-Qa'ida and for other jihadist

causes.¹⁴ Yemen was a logistical hub for operations like the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings as well as the location of the 2000 attack on the *USS Cole*. In addition, both countries were important sources of al-Qa'ida recruits.

In the early 1990s, Yemenis who had fought in Afghanistan returned to form local jihadist organizations that had loose links to al-Qa'ida (however, these organizations were not under al-Qa'ida's command and did not use the al-Qa'ida label).¹⁵ After 9/11, many members of these groups were arrested, and by 2005, the groups themselves seemed devastated.¹⁶ Similarly, Saudi Arabia was largely quiet between the 1995 attack on a U.S.-Saudi military facility by jihadists with loose links to al-Qa'ida, and the resumption of attacks in the Kingdom in 2003.

The original, Saudi-based al-Qa'ida of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was set up by bin Laden after 9/11 and instructed in 2002 to prepare for a campaign in the Kingdom—unlike other affiliates, it did not have a strong independent existence before linking with the al-Qa'ida core but rather was a direct spinoff of the core. The top al-Qa'ida leadership established parallel networks in the Kingdom and decided the timing of each branch's campaign. Nevertheless, the Saudi AQAP was also the first affiliate organization to make "al-Qa'ida" part of its official name.

After a series of attacks on Western and Saudi targets that began in earnest in 2003, the group collapsed, with effective operations ending in 2006.¹⁷ The Saudi government launched a devastating campaign on the group, arresting or killing many of its

¹¹ For the sake of readability, I at times use AQI in my descriptions of different historical periods even if the group was another predecessor that was still an al-Qa'ida affiliate.

¹² Bruce Hoffman, "The 'Cult of the Insurgent': Its Tactical and Strategic Implications," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 61, no. 3 (September 2007): p. 324.

¹³ Leah Farrall, "How al Qaeda Works," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2011.

¹⁴ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks on the United States, "Monograph on Terrorism Financing," available at: < http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff_statements/index.htm#monographs>.

¹⁵ Barak Barfi, "Yemen on the Brink? The Resurgence of al Qaeda in Yemen," *New America Foundation* (January 2010): p. 2.

¹⁶ See Greg Johnsen, Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, January 20, 2010, pp. 6-11.

¹⁷ Thomas Hegghammer, "The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point Occasional Paper*, February 25, 2010, pp. 12-17.

members. The Saudi religious establishment and many religious leaders who in the past had seemed favorable to the Salafi-jihadist cause also denounced the movement, and this along with the killing of Muslim civilians tarnished its appeal. Some group members fled to Yemen, where they joined with local jihadists who had rebounded after setbacks earlier in the decade. They quickly rebuilt their organization in 2006–2007 and began a terrorist and insurgent campaign in 2008. Also in 2008, the group took on the name “al-Qa’ida Organization of Jihad in the South of the Arabian Peninsula,” and in 2009, the group declared itself to be AQAP, joining with the remnant of the Saudi organization.¹⁸ Although it is tempting to see AQAP as a continuation of the Saudi AQAP and of past Yemeni and Saudi groups, its personnel and organization are quite distinct.¹⁹ Many of them fought with other groups, but AQAP is far more linked to the al-Qa’ida core, more global in outlook, and more professional than its Yemeni predecessors.²⁰ However, documents found during the raid that killed bin Laden showed that he saw AQAP as inexperienced, prone to mistakes, and too focused on Yemen.²¹

AL-QA’IDA OF THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB (AQIM)

As the Algerian jihad raged in the 1990s, sowing death and destruction on a scale that made even hardened jihadists blanch, numerous organizations (and factions within them) emerged, disappeared, or split from established groups. One such group, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat

(GSPC), formed in the 1990s as a splinter of the brutal Armed Islamic Group (GIA)—a group that had conducted numerous atrocities against ordinary Algerians as well as waged war on the government.

Beginning in 2003, the GSPC started a process that would eventually make it the core of AQIM. This process began in part when a key commander pledged loyalty to bin Laden. It continued in a desultory way for several years until September 2006, when Zawahiri declared a “blessed union” with GSPC, emphasizing France as a shared enemy and urging the group to become “a bone in the throat of the American and French crusaders.”²² In January 2007, GSPC declared it was formally changing its name to AQIM.

THE SHEBAAB

In February 2012, the Somali-based Shebaab formally declared its loyalty to al-Qa’ida, a move that capped the transformation of al-Qa’ida’s on-again, off-again relationship with Somali militants into a more substantial partnership.²³ In the early 1990s, al-Qa’ida tried to work in the collapsed Somali state, but often found the violent civil war there overwhelming, so much so that its operatives were unable to make significant inroads. It did, however, use Somalia as part of a regional base for attacks against U.S. and UN peacekeepers and strikes in Kenya against U.S. and Israeli targets.²⁴

During that decade, al-Qa’ida worked with al-Itihaad al-Islami (AIAI), a Somali militant group that

¹⁸ Johnsen, Testimony Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, pp. 12–15.

¹⁹ As Hegghammer notes, “There is little if any continuity of personnel between the Yemeni AQAP of 2009 and its Saudi predecessor.” The few Saudis who did join the group often were latecomers to the Saudi fight or joined after being in Guantanamo. Hegghammer, “The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia,” p. 26.

²⁰ Christopher Swift, “From Periphery to Core: Foreign Fighters and the Evolution of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula,” in Michael P. Noonan, ed., *The Foreign Fighters Problem, Recent Trends and Case Studies: Selected Essays*, Foreign Policy Research Institute (April 2011), p. 62.

²¹ Lahoud et al., “Letters from Abbottabad,” p. 29.

²² “Al-Qaeda Issue France Threat,” *BBC News*, September 14, 2006.

²³ See Nelly Lahoud, “The Merger of Al-Shabab and Qaidat-al-Jihad,” *CTC Sentinel*, February 16, 2012, available at: <<http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-merger-of-al-shabab-and-qaidat-al-jihad>>.

²⁴ Clint Watts, Jacob Shapiro, and Vahid Brown, *Al-Qa’ida’s (Mis)Adventures in the Horn of Africa*, West Point Combating Terrorism Center, July 2, 2007, pp. 14–43.

wanted to make Somalia an Islamic state. Other foreign jihadists also helped train members of AIAI, and wealthy donors from the Persian Gulf states, along with al-Qa'ida, played a key role in funding the group. In the late 1990s, however, AIAI collapsed. Several years later, in 2003, a small al-Qa'ida-linked network emerged in Mogadishu, and after only a couple of years began to gain strength.²⁵

Beginning in 2005, the al-Qa'ida core started to make considerable gains in Somalia, and by 2007, the Shebaab, which had split from other Islamist groups, was trying to establish closer links to it. In 2008, both al-Qa'ida and the Shebaab used their respective websites to praise each other, and in September 2009, the Shebaab made a public declaration of allegiance to Osama bin Laden.²⁶ The love fest continued in the years that followed, with the Shebaab pledging support for Zawahiri after bin Laden's death and then in 2012 more formally joining al-Qa'ida by declaring Shebaab members "will march with you as loyal soldiers."²⁷ Some fighters who had trained in al-Qa'ida camps in Afghanistan moved to Somalia to train members of the Shebaab, and the two groups currently cooperate closely on everything from indoctrination and basic infantry skills to advanced training in explosives and assassination.²⁸

Al-Qa'ida members now also reportedly play important roles in the Shebaab leadership—by one

count, over half of the Shebaab's executive council are foreigners,²⁹ and the organization in turn has embraced more global rhetoric and propaganda.³⁰ Out of a total of 3,000 to 7,000 fighters, perhaps 200 to 300 are non-Somalis, and a number of others are Somalis from the diaspora.³¹ As the International Crisis Group concluded, "The hardliners, led by the foreign jihadis, wield enormous influence and have access to resources and the means to dictate their wishes to the less powerful factions."³²

SALAFIST GROUPS THAT HAVE NOT JOINED

Although the label "Salafi-jihadist" and "al-Qa'ida" are often used interchangeably, there have been and are important Salafi-jihadist groups that have not affiliated with al-Qa'ida. The following are several of the most prominent Salafist groups that have maintained their distance from al-Qa'ida.

GAMAAT AL-ISLAMIYYA (GI)

Gamaat al-Islamiyya, also known as the Islamic Group, is a Salafist organization that in the 1990s waged a low-level insurgent and terrorist campaign to overthrow the government of Egypt. Prior to this, during the 1980s, many GI members trained and fought in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the group based itself out of Peshawar, where al-Qa'ida

²⁵ International Crisis Group, "Counter-Terrorism in Somalia: Losing Hearts and Minds?" July 11, 2005, pp. 1-2; David Shinn, "Al Shebaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia," in Michael P. Noonan, ed., *The Foreign Fighters Problem, Recent Trends and Case Studies: Selected Essays*, Foreign Policy Research Institute (April 2011), p. 26.

²⁶ Leah Farrall, "Will Al-Qaeda and Al-Shebaab Formally Merge?"

²⁷ Shinn, "Al Shebaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia," p. 29; Adam Kahan, "Al Shebaab's Rise in the Al Qaeda Network," August 9, 2011, available at: <<http://www.criticalthreats.org/somalia/kahan-shabaab-rise-qaeda-network-august-9-2011>>; "Al-Shebaab Joining Al Qaeda," *CNN.com*, February 9, 2012, available at: <http://articles.cnn.com/2012-02-09/africa/world_africa_somalia-shabaab-qaeda_1_al-zawahiri-qaeda-somali-americans?_s=PM:AFRICA>.

²⁸ "Al Qaeda in Yemen and Somalia: A Ticking Time Bomb," Report to the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, January 21, 2010, p. 15.

²⁹ Remarks by Ambassador David Shinn in Michael P. Noonan, ed., *The Foreign Fighters Problem, Recent Trends and Case Studies: Selected Essays*, Foreign Policy Research Institute (April 2011), p. 4; Shinn, "Al Shebaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia," pp. 31–32. According to Shinn, the non-Somalis are primarily from Kenya, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Afghanistan, Yemen, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Saudi Arabia.

³⁰ Rob Wise, "Al Shebaab," Center for Strategic and International Studies AQAM Futures Project, July 2011, pp. 7–8, available at: <http://csis.org/files/publication/110715_Wise_AlShebaab_AQAM%20Futures%20Case%20Study_WEB.pdf>.

³¹ David Shinn, "Al Shebaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia," p. 203.

³² International Crisis Group, "Somalia's Divided Islamists," Africa Briefing No. 74, May 18, 2010, pp. 7–9.

was founded.³³ While EIJ and the Islamic Group themselves were distinct, many of their members had ties to both groups, and the two cooperated even as they competed with each other.³⁴

Elements of GI flirted with al-Qa'ida in the 1990s, conducting operations that either followed al-Qa'ida's targeting logic or involved support from al-Qa'ida itself. In 1995, a GI operative conducted a revenge-motivated suicide bombing in Croatia and the group planned attacks on NATO forces, which were ultimately disrupted.³⁵ Two years later, the group suffered devastating setbacks—the GI's campaign of terror against the Egyptian government and the country's Coptic Christian community was flailing, with the Egyptian population turning against the group and many of its cadre dead or in prison. When the Islamic Group's leaders in prison called for a ceasefire in 1997—in part due to the group's setbacks and because popular opinion had turned against them—other members of the group attacked tourists at a temple at Luxor and killed fifty-eight foreigners and four Egyptians, the bloodiest terrorism attack against the Egyptian regime conducted in Egypt during this period.³⁶ Some of the victims were beheaded, adding a further chilling note to a crime that had already horrified most Egyptians.

Rifa'i Taha, who at the time headed the GI's Shura Council, had opposed the ceasefire and claimed credit for the 1997 attack (some sources reported

that EIJ collaborated in the attacks).³⁷ The following year, Taha signed the al-Qa'ida-backed World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Crusaders and the Jews, even though most of the Islamic Group leadership had accepted the ceasefire. As such, Taha spoke more for himself than for the GI, and for taking this stance he was eventually removed from his leadership position. He later recanted.³⁸

On August 5, 2006, Zawahiri announced that the GI had joined with al-Qa'ida,³⁹ with GI leader Muhammad Hakaima⁴⁰ standing beside him. At the time, another exiled leader Sheikh Abdel-Akher Hammad stated, "If [some] brothers ... have joined, then this is their personal view and I don't think that most Gamaa Islamiyya members share that same opinion."⁴¹ Yet, as discussed further below, imprisoned GI members eventually condemned bin Laden and recanted their jihadist views.

ARABS IN CHECHNYA

The anti-Russian struggle in Chechnya, which began in the 1990s, attracted foreign fighters who were appalled by the slaughter of Muslims and eager to defeat (in their eyes, defeat again) the hated Russians. The Saudi-born Amir Khattab emerged as head of this group, forging close relations with several Chechen leaders and gaining admiration from many jihadist supporters in the Arab world. Although Khattab and bin Laden discussed closer cooperation in 1997–98, Khattab rejected a partnership.⁴²

³³ Y. Carmon, Y. Feldner, and D. Lav, "The Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiyya Cessation of Violence: An Ideological Reversal," Middle East Media Research Institute, December 22, 2006.

³⁴ Hamdi Rizq, "Egyptian Jihad Case Highlights Afghan Links," *Al-Wasat*, June 22–28, 1998.

³⁵ For a review, see Evan Kohlmann, *Al-Qa'ida's Jihad in Europe: The Afghan-Bosnian Network* (New York: Berg, 2004), pp. 127–53.

³⁶ Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*; Lawrence Wright, "The Rebellion Within," *The New Yorker*, June 2, 2008.

³⁷ Carmon *et al.*, "The Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiyya Cessation of Violence"; Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), pp. 256–57.

³⁸ Omar Ashour, "Lions Tamed? An Inquiry into the Causes of De-Radicalization of Armed Islamic Movements: The Case of the Egyptian Islamic Group," *Middle East Journal* 61 (Autumn 2007): pp. 613 and 617.

³⁹ "Al-Zawahiri: Egyptian militant group joins al Qaeda," *CNN.com*, August 5, 2006, available at: <http://articles.cnn.com/2006-08-05/world/zawahiri.tape_1_zawahiri-al-jazeera-al-qaeda-terrorist-network?_s=PM:WORLD>.

⁴⁰ "Al Qaeda Wins Converts from Egyptian Group," *The Daily Star* (Lebanon), August 7, 2006, available at: <<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/Aug/07/Al-Qaeda-wins-converts-from-Egyptian-group.ashx#axzz1ZFpixRV3>>.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 57.

While Khattab and bin Laden shared similar outlooks, enough differences remained to prevent an affiliation between their groups. Khattab, like bin Laden, endorsed a Salafi-jihadist worldview. He also claimed that Muslims had a duty to fight Americans for their presence in Saudi Arabia, just as he was fighting Russians in Chechnya. “There is no difference between the American Army and the Russian Army. They seized our territory, and Muslims have the right to seek such a solution,” he stated.⁴³ However, he did not go beyond rhetoric. He never tangibly supported attacks on Americans and was careful to focus his struggle exclusively on Chechnya and neighboring Muslim populations. Khattab was ultimately killed by the Russians in 2002.

LIBYAN ISLAMIC FIGHTING GROUP (LIFG)

The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) was founded in Pakistan in 1990 by Libyans who had fought the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Intellectually, GI and EIJ influenced the LIFG tremendously, with one scholar arguing that the LIFG’s religious references are “recycled” from the literature of these groups.⁴⁴ The LIFG moved to Sudan in 1993, following al-Qa’ida there. In the 1990s, LIFG members outside of Libya, particularly those enjoying support from al-Qa’ida’s ally the Taliban, collaborated with al-Qa’ida but retained full independence.⁴⁵

While the LIFG did not formally become part of al-Qa’ida, refusing to join the 1998 World Islamic Front or otherwise affiliate, some LIFG members in Afghanistan and elsewhere trained and worked with al-Qa’ida, and the LIFG issued statements of support for al-Qa’ida attacks on the United States.⁴⁶ As one LIFG statement put it: “By declaring war against the Muslims and occupying their countries, the United States of America has made all of its worldwide interests into legitimate targets for the mujahideen. They [the mujahideen] shall bomb and demolish them by any means necessary.”⁴⁷

Yet, in November 2007, LIFG member Abu Laith al-Libi (now deceased) and Ayman al-Zawahiri announced that the LIFG had affiliated with al-Qa’ida. Several other senior al-Qa’ida members were of Libyan origins, lending credence to views that the groups had merged.⁴⁸ Group members in Libya, however, rejected talk of a merger. Similarly, group members in exile in London announced in 2009 that Abu Laith’s claim was “a personal decision that is at variance with the basic status of the group.” They sought to “clearly emphasize that the group is not, has never been, and will never be, linked to the Al-Qa’ida organization.”⁴⁹ Conversely, when LIFG members in Libya called for a cease-fire and rejected violence, the twenty to forty LIFG members in the Afghanistan-Pakistan area connected with al-Qa’ida rejected the main branch of the

⁴³ Carlotta Gall, “Muslim Fighter Embraces Warrior Mystique,” *New York Times*, October 17, 1999.

⁴⁴ Omar Ashour, “Post-Jihadism: Libya and the Global Transformations of Armed Islamist Movements,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23 (2011): p. 381.

⁴⁵ Brian Fishman, “Counting Al Qaeda,” *ForeignPolicy.com*, July 1, 2010, available at: <http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/07/01/how_many_members_does_al_qaeda_have>.

⁴⁶ LIFG in the 1990 supported al-Qa’ida attacks on the United States, noting “America is the country whose warplanes attacked Libya, not in order to get rid of Qadhafi, but rather in order to destroy Muslim homes in Libya. It imposed an oppressive embargo on the Libyan people, and the Muslims are the ones who suffer from its rancor.... In face of this American tyranny, the Islamic nation in general—and this Islamic movement in particular—have no choice but to seek confrontation in defense of their religion, their land, and their dignity.” Evan Kohlmann, “Dossier: Libyan Islamic Fighting Group,” NEFA Foundation, October 2007, p. 13, available at: <<http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/nefalifg1007.pdf>>.

⁴⁷ Kohlmann, NEFA Foundation Dossier, pp. 16–17.

⁴⁸ Ashour, “Post-Jihadism,” p. 385. See also for example, Evan Kohlmann, “Who is the Legitimate Voice for LIFG?” Counterterrorism Blog, July 18, 2009, available at: <http://counterterrorismblog.org/2009/07/who_is_the_legitimate_voice_fo.php>.

⁴⁹ Christopher Blanchard and Jim Zanotti, “Libya: Background and U.S. Relations,” CRS Report RL33142, February 18, 2011, p. 21, available at: <<http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/157348.pdf>>.

LIFG's negotiations with the Libyan government.⁵⁰ This division reflects a decade of schism between Europe-based political dissidents and jihadist commanders in Afghanistan.⁵¹

Today, the LIFG itself is formally defunct, but former members, particularly those outside Libya who are based in Afghanistan and Pakistan, are part of al-Qa'ida while those in Libya—newly freed in the wake of Qadhafi's demise—claim to reject the al-Qa'ida core.⁵²

PALESTINIAN SALAFI-JIHADISTS

Salafi-jihadist groups—including Jaysh al-Islam, Jund Ansar Allah, Jaysh al-Umma, and Tawhid wal-Jihad—have emerged in Gaza. But with total membership numbering perhaps 500 (about fifty of whom are foreign fighters), they are still a shadow of Hamas.⁵³ Because these groups are so fluid, often forming, merging, dividing, and becoming defunct in a relatively brief period, it is easier to talk about a Salafi-jihadist “trend” or “movement” rather than focus on particularly groups.

The groups in Gaza are disorganized, divided, and for now not operationally linked to the al-Qa'ida core, in part because they are not able to communicate with core members or easily travel to and from core facilities in Pakistan. However, they often mimic al-Qa'ida fashion by wearing the *shalwar kameez*—traditional Afghan loose-fitting outfits—and have taken the vehement anti-Shi'ah attitudes of some Iraqi groups, criticizing Hamas for cooperating with Iran. Most Salafis in Gaza, from which these groups draw, are apolitical and reject both al-Qa'ida and Hamas for their political agendas.⁵⁴

A PAKISTAN EXCEPTION?

Given the prevalence of Salafi-jihadist groups in Pakistan that oppose the United States, India, and other al-Qa'ida foes, and the wide range of actors there that support these groups, the lack of an “al-Qa'ida of Pakistan” or similar organization may at first seem surprising. More so, since bin Laden and other al-Qa'ida leaders were in regular contact with a wide range of groups in Pakistan and al-Qa'ida figures cooperate in ways large and small with them. For instance, members from Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and al-Qa'ida have at times worked together, conducting joint operations in Afghanistan. Similarly, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islam worked closely with al-Qa'ida and reportedly even adopted some of its international goals, in part because of the objectives and connections of Mohammaed Ilyas Kashmiri, a key leader. And, while Lashkar-e Tayyiba remains focused on Kashmir and India, it has expanded its targets, carrying out attacks such as the 2008 strike in Mumbai that not only went after the traditional Indian enemy, but Americans, Europeans, and Jews.

Nevertheless, bin Laden and now Zawahiri do not appear to have pushed these organizations to take on an al-Qa'ida label. One explanation for this surprising void in Pakistan is that the sheer number of organizations makes affiliation difficult. Which organization would get the nod? Choosing one risks alienating others. In addition, there is another technical challenge. Mullah Omar and his organization in Pakistan cannot be a franchise of al-Qa'ida, as he technically outranks Zawahiri. Finally, Pakistani intelligence is willing to tolerate jihadist activity to varying degrees, but tolerating an open affiliate would put Pakistan in a precarious position on the international stage.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Kohlmann, “Who is the Legitimate Voice for LIFG?”

⁵² Christopher Anzalone, “Missionaries of Jihad,” *ForeignPolicy.com*, June 3, 2011, available at: <http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/03/missionaries_of_jihad>.

⁵³ For a review, see International Crisis Group, “Radical Islam in Gaza,” Middle East Report no. 104, March 29, 2011. The estimated size of 500 comes from Israel's domestic intelligence service as does the estimate of foreign fighters (see pp. 14 and 18).

⁵⁴ International Crisis Group, “Radical Islam in Gaza,” pp. 5 and 21.

⁵⁵ I would like to thank Bruce Riedel for his thoughts on this section.

DEGREES OF AFFILIATION

When a group begins to cooperate with al-Qa'ida, and even when a group goes so far as to change its name to include the al-Qa'ida label, it does not automatically become a branch of the core organization. Rather, it often retains its own command structure, personnel, and interests, and these coexist with those of al-Qa'ida's senior leadership. In these circumstances, coordination is far from seamless, and the list of whom the organization chooses to target often remains similar to the pre-affiliation era. Part of what makes the merger challenging is that affiliates may have ties to other groups that are as close as those they have with the al-Qa'ida core.

VARIATIONS ON THE AL-QA'IDA AGENDA

When a group affiliates with al-Qa'ida, one key variant is whether or not the group fully embraces al-Qa'ida's global agenda. Algeria's GSPC, for example, first declared loyalty to bin Laden in 2003,⁵⁶ but it took over a year for it to declare that France, rather than the Algerian government, would be its primary target—a more “Western” orientation that is in keeping with al-Qa'ida priorities.⁵⁷ Still, to

the disappointment of al-Qa'ida's core leadership, AQIM leaders (GSPC formally became AQIM in 2007) have not tried hard to mobilize supporters in Europe on behalf of global jihad and have not brought the “war” to the Continent.⁵⁸ Nor has AQIM played a major role in the Maghreb outside Algeria, with the possible exception of Mauritania. Instead, AQIM has focused on neighboring Saharan countries. As Jean-Pierre Filiu comments, AQIM “is the branch of the global jihad that has most clearly failed to follow its founding guidelines.”⁵⁹ Likewise, the overwhelming number of AQI attacks have occurred in Iraq, though there have been important exceptions, including the 2005 strike on Western-owned hotels in Jordan, rocket attacks on Israel, and linkages to several attempted attacks in Europe.⁶⁰ Even AQAP, often touted as the affiliate closest to al-Qa'ida because it has attempted attacks on American civil aviation—perhaps the ultimate target for the al-Qa'ida core—still concentrates primarily on targets within Yemen itself.

Still, a common consequence of the embrace of an al-Qa'ida label is for a group to seek out Western targets within a group's theater of operations. For

⁵⁶ In 2003, Nabil Sahraoui, the GSPC head, declared that his organization “strongly and fully support Osama bin Laden's jihad against the heretic America.”

⁵⁷ Lianne Kennedy Boudali, “The GSPC: Newest Franchise in al-Qa'ida's Global Jihad,” The Combating Terrorism Center, April 2, 2007, pp. 2–3.

⁵⁸ Jason Burke, *The 9/11 Wars* (Allen Lane, 2011), p. 417.

⁵⁹ Jean-Pierre Filiu, “Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb: A Case Study in the Opportunism of Global Jihad,” *CTC Sentinel* 3 (April 2010): p. 14.

⁶⁰ Brian Fishman, “Redefining the Islamic State: The Fall and Rise of Al-Qaeda in Iraq,” New America Foundation (August 2011), pp. 15–16.

instance, on August 8, 2009, three days after Zawahiri had warned that France would “pay for all her crimes,” AQIM executed a suicide bombing of the French embassy in Nouakchott.⁶¹ Such a mix of targets enables the group to straddle the line between local and global missions and thus please multiple sets of constituents.

Within this dynamic, influence does not only flow from al-Qa’ida to the affiliates. While bin Laden pushed Zawahiri and other EIJ members toward a more global agenda, EIJ cadres had an impact on the al-Qa’ida core’s leadership and tactics—so much so that scholar Fawaz Gerges declared the Egyptians to be “the brain trust and nerve center within Al Qaeda.”⁶² For instance, EIJ had conducted suicide operations as early as 1993, and as the organization began to merge with al-Qa’ida in the late 1990s, the organization embraced suicide attacks—as shown by the 1998 embassy bombings.

The highly influential role that the Egyptians played can, perhaps, be chalked up to a historical anomaly. EIJ was the first significant al-Qa’ida “acquisition,” and the nature of affiliation has changed considerably since then. However, affiliates still do have the power to set the agenda. For example, AQI’s attacks on Iraqi Shi’ah and its virulent anti-Shi’i rhetoric and propaganda influenced groups in Gaza, Lebanon, Pakistan, and elsewhere—all despite efforts by the al-Qa’ida core to avoid fanning sectarian flames.⁶³ Tactically, Iraq proved a laboratory for improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and designs first worked out in Iraq are now commonly used in other theaters of jihad.

COMMAND AND CONTROL

Given that there is a great degree of variation among al-Qa’ida affiliates in terms of following the group’s core agenda, it may not be surprising that command and control also varies considerably by group. For instance, the original, Saudi-based AQAP was an arm of the al-Qa’ida core and followed its instructions closely. Similarly, EIJ fully integrated into al-Qa’ida and the Yemen-based AQAP has close operational relations with the al-Qa’ida core. However, the Shebaab is still largely independent,⁶⁴ and while AQI appears to follow the core’s broad strategic guidance, it exercises considerable operational autonomy. As David Kilcullen contends, most Islamist movements function differently in different regional theaters where they “follow general ideological or strategic approaches aligned with Al Qaeda pronouncements, and share a common tactical style and operational lexicon. But there is no clear evidence that Al Qaeda directly controls *jihad* in each theater.”⁶⁵

A few general rules, however, may apply across groups. The West Point CTC study mentioned above found that affiliates often look to the al-Qa’ida core for guidance on strategic issues like whether to declare an Islamic state, but consult much less on operations and often ignore the core’s directives.⁶⁶ Al-Qa’ida appears to devote much of its command and control efforts to attacks outside the local theater in question, while the affiliate group primarily carries out in-country decisions. Similarly, al-Qa’ida encourages suicide bombing and attacks on government and transportation targets,

⁶¹ Filiu, “Al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb,” p. 14.

⁶² Fawaz Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 140. Beyond Zawahiri, key Egyptians included Mohammed Atef, al-Qa’ida’s military commander until his death from a U.S. attack in 2001, his predecessor Abu Ubaidah al-Banshiri who established cells in Africa among other accomplishments until his death in an accident in 1996, and Saif al-Adl, who took over as military commander after Atef’s death, among others.

⁶³ See, for example, the July 2005 letter from Zawahiri to Zarqawi, available at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter_9jul2005.htm>.

⁶⁴ Shinn, “Al Shebaab’s Foreign Threat to Somalia,” p. 203.

⁶⁵ David J. Kilcullen, “Countering Global Insurgency,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 28 (August 2005): p. 598.

⁶⁶ Lahoud *et al.*, “Letters from Abbottabad,” p. 12.

and appears to grant considerable operational freedom in this regard, but it expects groups to consult with the core before conducting large-scale attacks or ones that strike different targets or use new tactics. Al-Qa'ida's goal is to ensure that local group actions do not diminish the al-Qa'ida brand.⁶⁷ However, al-Qa'ida has struggled to exercise influence over affiliates, often to the point of bin Laden and other leader's despair.⁶⁸

It is important to note the central role personalities play in the jihadist universe. As a result, the regular deaths and arrests of key leaders make it difficult to define exact command relationships. Personal ties regularly matter more than organizational ones, and as such the balance between al-Qa'ida and affiliates, and between affiliates themselves, regularly shifts.

AFFILIATE TO AFFILIATES TIES

In addition to working with the al-Qa'ida core, affiliate groups often work directly with one another. The GSPC, for example, trained Algerians and Africans and sent them to Iraq to fight alongside al-Qa'ida-linked groups there.⁶⁹ Zarqawi, in turn, played an important role in convincing the GSPC to join up formally with al-Qa'ida.⁷⁰ Radicals in Yemen and Somalia also trained militants who fought in Afghanistan and Iraq.⁷¹ AQAP and the Shebaab have worked together, cooperation that is facilitated by the nearness of Somalia and Yemen. This has included training and AQAP efforts to expand the Shebaab's targeting beyond Somalia.⁷²

⁶⁷ Farrall, "How al Qaeda Works."

⁶⁸ Lahoud *et al.*, "Letters from Abbottabad," p. 13.

⁶⁹ Nicholas Schmidle, "The Saharan Conundrum," *New York Times*, February 15, 2009.

⁷⁰ Farrall, "How al Qaeda Works."

⁷¹ "Al Qaeda in Yemen and Somalia: A Ticking Time Bomb," p. 3.

⁷² Kahan, "Al Shebaab's Rise in the Al Qaeda Network"; Ahmed Abdulkadir Warsame, allegedly a key liaison between the Shebaab and AQAP, was indicted on charges of supporting the Shebaab with "among other things, property, services, training, expert advice and assistance, communications equipment, facilities, weapons, lethal substances, explosives, and personnel." "United States v. Ahmed Abdulkadir Warsame," United States District Court, Southern District of New York, July 5, 2011, available at: <http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/case_docs/1598.pdf>.

MOTIVATIONS TO THE AFFILIATE FOR JOINING

Groups make common cause with al-Qa'ida for a variety of reasons. Some of these are practical, some are ideological, and others often relate to the network of personal relationships and varied interactions within the jihadist community.

FAILURE

Although rarely mentioned in the rhetorical bursts that accompanied an affiliation decision, setback is often a key driver in linking with al-Qa'ida. Specifically, it is clear that a Salafi-jihadist group's failures against a local regime often forces an internal crisis. Groups adapt in different ways to this crisis, with some, like GI and eventually the bulk of the LIFG, rejecting jihad. Other groups, or elements within them, however, choose to go global and join with al-Qa'ida.

One example of failure being a catalyst for joining al-Qa'ida was the EIJ decision to link with al-Qa'ida a decade ago. In the early 1990s, the Egyptian government arrested EIJ members after a catastrophic

operational security failure. Although EIJ's cell structure was meant to ensure that members could not reveal one another's identities, the Egyptians captured the organization's membership director, along with his computer with various aliases.⁷³ Zawahiri lamented: "The government newspapers were elated about the arrest of 800 members of the Al-Jihad Group without a single shot being fired."⁷⁴ EIJ reacted to these arrests by increasing attacks, which, because they continued for several years, alienated the Egyptian public. EIJ eventually found this, along with the toll of arrests and killings of its members, too much. By 1997, leaders of the like-minded Islamic Group called for a ceasefire, which Zawahiri bitterly denounced. Still, many EIJ members followed suit and complied with the ceasefire.⁷⁵

The organization suffered further blows. In 1998, American agents disrupted an EIJ cell in Azerbaijan.⁷⁶ This operation led to the arrest of Ahmad Salamah Mabruk, the EIJ Azerbaijan cell leader. When he and a colleague were arrested, their computer was taken, with extensive files on the names

⁷³ Wright, *The Looming Tower*, p. 184.

⁷⁴ Zawahiri, *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*.

⁷⁵ Ibid.; By 1995, Zawahiri supposedly instructed fighters in Egypt to suspend operations (Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, p. 129). However, his later criticism of those who call for laying down their arms suggests perhaps that the 1995 instructions were meant to be only temporary. Diaa Rashwan, "The Renunciation of Violence by Egyptian Jihadi Organizations," in Tore Bjorgo and John Horgan, ed., *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 121.

⁷⁶ See Khalid Sharaf al-Din, "Surprises in the Trial of the Largest International Fundamentalist Organization in Egypt," *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 6, 1999.

of donors, members, and targeting information, as well as other valuable intelligence.⁷⁷ As a result, the Egyptian government learned not only about cells in Egypt itself, but also about EIJ networks worldwide.⁷⁸ The consequence of this capture of intelligence was that by 1999, EIJ's network in Egypt was almost gone, according to scholar Fawaz Gerges.⁷⁹ Two years later the decapitated and decimated EIJ merged with al-Qa'ida.

In examining other groups' decisions to affiliate, the impact of failure is apparent as well. Algeria's GIA "angrily rebuffed" bin Laden's overtures in the mid-1990s, when the group's leaders thought they would triumph on their own.⁸⁰ However, a decade later the situation for Algerian jihadists had reversed as the people turned against them, and the Algerian government made steady progress in arresting and killing group members. Where once they had hopes of toppling the regime, now they were reduced to sporadic terrorist operations and banditry. The splinter group that emerged from the GIA after it collapsed, the GSPC, was forced out of Algeria's cities and was losing recruits and popular support. After having failed on the battlefield, many Algerian jihadists turned themselves in under the government's amnesty program.⁸¹ Anthony Celso has noted that it was "the inability of the North African Salafists to overthrow any government in the Maghreb" that led them to embrace al-Qa'ida and a more global agenda.⁸² Lianne Kennedy Boudali contends the GSPC's "decision to join al-Qa'ida's global jihad should be understood as an act of desperation."⁸³

In Libya, while the bulk of the LIFG moved away from al-Qa'ida and terrorism in general, some elements went in the opposite direction in response to failures the group experienced. At the same time that Algerian and Egyptian groups were flailing, so too was the LIFG, with its attempted insurgency being run to the ground by Qadhafi's security forces, and some of its leaders even being killed when they attempted to operate from areas controlled by Algerian jihadists.⁸⁴ The Libyan government not only repressed LIFG members, but also their families, friends, and acquaintances. This involved torture, detention, and other horrors.⁸⁵ In 1996, after security forces had devastated LIFG ranks, senior leaders were ordered to leave the country and,⁸⁶ in so doing, some joined up with al-Qa'ida. One LIFG military commander contended that it was too difficult to wage jihad in Libya but that it could be done in other lands, such as Chechnya.⁸⁷

The setbacks that groups face have one indirect benefit for al-Qa'ida affiliates—they can serve as an example and help affiliates learn from the mistakes and avoid similar fates. In Saudi Arabia, for example, AQAP has refrained from targeting Yemeni civilians and is seeking to avoid the mistakes of its Saudi forerunner branch as well as the missteps of AQI and the predecessors of AQIM.⁸⁸ Similarly, while al-Qa'ida has criticized tribalism and calls for an Islamic order that transcends ethnic and national identity, it has learned the hard way that local identities matter and that alienating them can spell disaster for the organization. The al-Qa'ida

⁷⁷ Wright, *The Looming Tower*, p. 268; "Bin-Laden's Organization, Activities Viewed," *Yedioth Ahronoth*, July 14, 2000.

⁷⁸ "Kuwait Extradited 'Vanguards of Conquest' Leader to Egypt," *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, May 6, 1999; Muhammad Salalh, "Bulgaria Reportedly Handed over Jihad Member to Egypt," *Al-Hayah*, August 25, 1998; Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, p.169.

⁷⁹ Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, p. 169.

⁸⁰ Burke, *The 9/11 Wars*, p. 247.

⁸¹ Remarks by John Entelis in Michael P. Noonan, ed., *The Foreign Fighters Problem, Recent Trends and Case Studies: Selected Essays*, Foreign Policy Research Institute (April 2011), p. 6.

⁸² Anthony Celso, "Al Qaeda in the Maghreb: The 'Newest' Front in the War on Terror," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 19 (Winter 2008): p. 81.

⁸³ Lianne Kennedy Boudali, "The GSPC: Newest Franchise in al-Qa'ida's Global Jihad," The Combating Terrorism Center (April 2007), p. 1.

⁸⁴ Ashour, "Post-Jihadism," p. 383.

⁸⁵ Ashour, "Post-Jihadism," p. 387.

⁸⁶ Camille Tawil, *Brothers in Arms: The Story of Al-Qa'ida and the Arab Jihadists* (London: Saqi, 2010), p. 139.

⁸⁷ Ashour, "Post-Jihadism," p. 383.

⁸⁸ Christopher Boucek, "The Evolving Terrorist Threat in Yemen," *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 9 (September 2010): pp. 5–7.

core pushed for the “Iraqicization” of AQI, and AQAP has been far more sensitive to local grievances and tribal identities, suggesting that al-Qa’ida has learned and transmitted lessons about respecting nationalism to its affiliates.⁸⁹

Failure in one arena might lead survivors to try again elsewhere. For example, the 1990s saw few jihadist operations in Saudi Arabia; in 2003, however, AQAP launched a massive campaign there, enabled in part by the entrance of many al-Qa’ida members who had fled Afghanistan following the fall of the Taliban.⁹⁰

MONEY

A particularly important variant of failure involves access to funds. Terrorist groups, especially those running a large insurgency, need money to buy weapons, support fighters, help families, and otherwise sustain their organizations. For much of its history, al-Qa’ida has been flush with cash by the standards of jihadist groups. Bin Laden used this capital to support like-minded fighters, otherwise assist the overall cause, and forge alliances with different groups. In addition to its own reserves, al-Qa’ida had access to a network of funders, primarily Arabs from the Persian Gulf states, who gave to a variety of jihadist causes. An endorsement from al-Qa’ida helped other groups attract funding from this important set of donors. Bin Laden, for example, called on Muslims to send money to the Shebaab.⁹¹

In Egypt, EIJ’s financial needs were a powerful inducement to join up with al-Qa’ida. At first, Zawahiri

appears to have simply sought to exploit al-Qa’ida financially, using bin Laden’s money to help his cause in Egypt. As EIJ suffered reverses and its fundraising took a hit, its financial woes only deepened. A computer found with documents from this period reveals a series of tense exchanges over small amounts of money, as the organization was losing members and becoming operationally paralyzed due to financial problems.⁹² In particular, Zawahiri was under pressure to pay the salaries of his members and to take care of the families of “martyrs” (whether killed or in jail) in Egypt.⁹³ Over time, EIJ found itself financially dependent on bin Laden: by the mid-1990s, bin Laden was the key financier of the GI and EIJ.⁹⁴

Al-Qa’ida has used financial support to shape an affiliated group’s actions and choice of targets. Former counterterrorism coordinator for the U.S. Department of State Dell Dailey contended that after joining with al-Qa’ida, AQIM members gained “a burst of money, maybe a couple hundred thousand dollars, that allowed them to knock out a few early suicide bombings with a strong Al Qaeda flavor,” notably the bombing of a UN building in Algeria.⁹⁵

While money has encouraged groups to link with al-Qa’ida it has also motivated groups to work with other affiliates. The GSPC, for example, worked with Zarqawi in Iraq because, according to the *New York Times*, he had “a seemingly endless pile of money” due to the popularity of the struggle Iraq in Islamist circles in the mid-2000s.⁹⁶

The Arabs fighting in Chechnya illustrate how independent funding, or a lack of funding, can

⁸⁹ Barak Mendelsohn, “Foreign Fighters—Recent Trends,” in Michael P. Noonan, ed., *The Foreign Fighters Problem, Recent Trends and Case Studies: Selected Essays*, Foreign Policy Research Institute (April 2011), p. 17.

⁹⁰ Hegghammer, “The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia,” p. 4.

⁹¹ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks on the United States, “Monograph on Terrorism Financing,” (Washington, DC: 2004), available at: <http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff_statements/index.htm#monographs>; Christopher Harnisch, “The Terror Threat from Somalia: The Internationalization of Al Shebaab,” American Enterprise Institute Critical Threats, February 12, 2010, p. 13, available at: <http://www.criticalthreats.org/sites/default/files/pdf_upload/analysis/CTP_Terror_Threat_From_Somalia_Shebaab_Internationalization.pdf>.

⁹² Andrew Higgins and Alan Cullison, “Terrorist’s Odyssey,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 2, 2002.

⁹³ Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, p. 121; Wright, *The Looming Tower*, p. 185.

⁹⁴ Cragin, “The Early History of Al Qaeda;” Wright, *The Looming Tower*, pp. 182–85.

⁹⁵ Schmidle, “The Saharan Conundrum.”

⁹⁶ Ibid.

influence a group's willingness to cooperate with al-Qa'ida. Amir Khattab, the former head of the group that waged attacks against the Russians, went to Chechnya in 1995 with a group of Arab guerrillas, funded by money supplied by bin Laden.⁹⁷ Khat-tab, however, was not dependent on bin Laden and was able to draw on foreign funding sources as well, particularly those in Saudi Arabia, and maintained his independence from al-Qa'ida.⁹⁸ After 9/11, however, U.S. pressure on Persian Gulf states to stop funding from their countries began to squeeze the flow of money to the Chechens. Foreign fighters there began to use more global language in an attempt to appeal to funders with a more global agenda—a move made easier with Khattab's death in 2002.⁹⁹

A HAVEN

One of the most important determinants of a terrorist group's success is whether it has a haven from which to operate.¹⁰⁰ Al-Qa'ida, because of its close relationship with the governments of Sudan (until 1996) and the Taliban's Afghanistan (until its overthrow in 2001), ran training camps, operated safe houses, and otherwise established a large infrastructure in support of terror that it also used to host other groups. Al-Qa'ida also had a large presence in Pakistan, which became far more important af-

ter the fall of the Taliban and continues to be vital to al-Qa'ida to this day. Groups that do not enjoy freedom of operations in their own countries or a neighboring sanctuary thus often look to al-Qa'ida and its associated facilities.¹⁰¹ Having a haven facilitated by al-Qa'ida does not require a merger, but it often leads groups, and key individuals within them, to depend more on al-Qa'ida.

EIJ's odyssey, for instance, shows the importance of gaining a haven. Upon their release from prison in the 1980s, and still facing repression and harassment from Egyptian authorities, many Egyptian jihadists went to Pakistan and Afghanistan.¹⁰² There, from 1986 to 1989, EIJ was reborn as Zawahiri organized these strands in exile.¹⁰³ As London School of Economics professor Fawaz Gerges contends, "For Zawahiri and his cohorts, the Afghan jihad was a Godsent opportunity to heal their wounds and replenish their depleted ranks after being hunted down by government security services. They could plot and conspire against their ruling arch-enemies in safety and infiltrated hardened fighters back home to foment instability and disorder."¹⁰⁴ Zawahiri himself later wrote: "A Jihadi movement needs an arena that would act like an incubator where its seeds would grow and where it can acquire practical experience in combat, politics, and organizational matters."¹⁰⁵

⁹⁷ Valery Tishkov, *Chechnya: Life in War-Torn Society* (California: University of California Press, 2004), p. 172; Peter Shearman and Matthew Sussux, "Globalization, 'New Wars,' and the War in Chechnya" in Richard Sakwa, ed., *Chechnya: From Past to Future*, (New York: Anthem Press, 2005), pp. 208–9.

⁹⁸ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, p. 80; "Amir Khattab (Abdullah Al-Suwailem)," Global Jihad website, available at: <http://globaljihad.net/view_page.asp?id=1031>.

⁹⁹ Paul Tumelty, "The Rise and Fall of Foreign Fighters in Chechnya," *Terrorism Monitor* 4 (January 2006).

¹⁰⁰ For more on this, see Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁰¹ A haven can run both ways, though it is rarer for al-Qa'ida to use the haven its affiliates offer. (For al-Qa'ida figures on the run or seeking to conduct attacks outside the haven in Pakistan, the local affiliate can offer protection and sanctuary. The Shebaab sheltered al-Qa'ida leaders in exchange for technical assistance, which al-Qa'ida used also to indoctrinate Shebaab members. Until his death, Fazul Abdullah Mohammad used his ties to Somalia fighters to hide himself in Somalia while assembling recruits to conduct attacks. The Shebaab also provided a refuge for Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, who was tied to several al-Qa'ida attacks in Kenya and was under Shebaab protection until his death in 2009. International Crisis Group, "Counter-Terrorism in Somalia," pp. 8–9.; Kahan, "Al Shebaab's Rise in the Al Qaeda Network.")

¹⁰² Zawahiri went briefly to the Persian Gulf, where he and bin Laden reportedly met for the first time. Cragin, "The Early History of Al-Qaeda," p. 7.

¹⁰³ Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, p. 88.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁰⁵ Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*; Andrew Higgins and Alan Cullison, "Saga of Dr. Zawahiri Sheds Light on Roots of al Qaeda Terror," *Wall Street Journal*, June 2002.

EIJ's turn to bin Laden, as noted above, was a product of the group's failure in Egypt and its inability to find a haven. As he had done in the 1980s, Zawahiri tried to rebuild his organization and protect its leadership with a haven abroad, establishing himself in Sudan, which was particularly convenient due to its location on Egypt's border. By mid-1996, EIJ had lost bases in Sudan and Pakistan and was finding Egypt a difficult operating environment. Many members were arrested, others had left, and Zawahiri's leadership was called into question.¹⁰⁶ Zawahiri went to Europe to raise money and win support for the cause and then traveled to Chechnya to establish a new base.¹⁰⁷ When his attempt failed, he rejoined bin Laden in Afghanistan. "Zawahiri was cornered. He had nowhere to go. He joined with bin Laden because he needed protection," commented one former EIJ member.¹⁰⁸

Similarly, the LIFG needed a refuge after being crushed by Qadhafi regime in 1998. The Taliban, with support from al-Qa'ida, offered bases, indoctrination, and military training from its base in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁹ However, when al-Qa'ida could not protect LIFG members from Sudanese government pressure in Sudan in 1995, many LIFG members turned against bin Laden.

TRAINING, RECRUITING, PUBLICITY, AND MILITARY EXPERIENCE

Al-Qa'ida historically offered impressive training facilities to various jihadist groups—an attractive

service, particularly for groups with inexperienced personnel and no haven in their home countries. The group also took the training on the road, with its personnel at times travelling directly to local countries to instruct fighters. Veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq (some of whom are al-Qa'ida members) taught the Shebaab how to employ suicide bombings, build better IEDs, and use other techniques.¹¹⁰

Al-Qa'ida also can help local fighters gain entrée into a faraway jihad—in Afghanistan, Iraq, or other theaters—and thus gain military experience and learn new tactics. Such actions may encounter less resistance from local regimes, which may perhaps support the fight for strategic reasons, and, in any event, want to placate domestic opinion while diverting a potentially dangerous group of young men. Some Somali fighters fought in Afghanistan, honing their skills in guerrilla insurgency and terrorist tactics that they then brought back to Somalia.¹¹¹ Similarly, after late 2007 AQIM began to use more vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices as well as near-simultaneous suicide bombings, both tactics imported from Iraq and other al-Qa'ida-linked theaters.¹¹²

These training opportunities can fundamentally change the nature of the jihadists who go through them, reshaping local struggles.¹¹³ Al-Qa'ida used its training camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan in the 1990s not only to offer practical guidance, but also to preach its more global view of jihad. In the

¹⁰⁶ Wright, *The Looming Tower*, p. 216.

¹⁰⁷ Wright, "The Man Behind Bin Laden."

¹⁰⁸ As quoted in Higgins and Cullison, "Sagan of Dr. Zawahri."

¹⁰⁹ Kohlmann NEFA Foundation Dossier, p. 11.

¹¹⁰ Remarks by Ambassador David Shinn in Michael P. Noonan, ed., *The Foreign Fighters Problem, Recent Trends and Case Studies: Selected Essays*, p. 4; Mendelsohn, "Foreign Fighters—Recent Trends," p. 19; U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2010," released August 2011, available at: <<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2010/170254.htm>>

¹¹¹ Harnisch, p. 21.

¹¹² J. Peter Pham, "Foreign Influences and Shifting Horizons: The Ongoing Evolution of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," in Michael P. Noonan, ed., *The Foreign Fighters Problem, Recent Trends and Case Studies: Selected Essays*, Foreign Policy Research Institute (April 2011), p. 245.

¹¹³ Libyans and Algerians arrived in Afghanistan with many divisions in their ranks, but while in Afghanistan, hardened jihadists inculcated in them a more virulent ideology. The LIFG was born out of Libyans who voluntarily went to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets, and the GIA was born out of Algerians who had experience in Afghanistan, as was the LIFG. Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, p. 36; International Crisis Group, "Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (V): Making Sense of Libya," Middle East/North Africa Report No. 107, June 6, 2011, p. 20; Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, p. 54.

1980s and early 1990s, the Egyptians who went to Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Sudan focused first and foremost on their struggle back home,¹¹⁴ yet while they were there they acquired a more global outlook.¹¹⁵ Years spent fighting and living together resulted in a cross-fertilization of ideas and organizational links that has in turn fostered affiliation. As one al-Qa'ida member noted, "We realized we were a nation ... otherwise, what would make me leave Saudi Arabia—and I am of Yemeni origin—and go fight in Bosnia."¹¹⁶ A result of this has been that many individuals who entered the camps without a strong anti-American agenda have left with virulent anti-American views.¹¹⁷

The same al-Qa'ida recruitment and travel networks can also serve to attract foreign fighters for al-Qa'ida affiliates. Part of what al-Qa'ida seeks to accomplish is to attract new Muslim males to jihad, making them the foot soldiers of different insurgent and terrorist groups. In addition, al-Qa'ida looks to help them evade their home countries' and others' security services and assist them in going to Pakistan, Yemen, or another country where they can hone their skills and become indoctrinated. While often these groups have enough local personnel, foreign fighters still can be immensely valuable. AQI, for example, uses foreign fighters as suicide bombers—"the backbone of its offensive capability."¹¹⁸

On top of providing training and facilitating recruiting, al-Qa'ida can help play a leading role in ensuring publicity for a group beyond the group's

borders. In part this is because Al-Qa'ida is able to better reach audiences in other countries with its superior knowledge of various cultures. In addition, it may have technical skills that affiliate organizations, which draw less on an elite cadre, may lack.¹¹⁹ Perhaps most important, al-Qa'ida, because of its notoriety, has a big bullhorn. From Somalia to Iraq, bin Laden used the attention he generated, and Zawahiri has used the attention he generates, to praise these local struggles.

COMMON DEFENSE

A number of individuals or cohorts within groups that loosely cooperated with or operated in proximity to al-Qa'ida have chosen to affiliate as a result of being subjected to counterterrorism measures. In other words, because these groups shared havens, training facilities, and so on with al-Qa'ida members, when they were targeted by government forces, they joined al-Qa'ida in fighting back. This phenomenon has played out from Pakistan to Afghanistan to Algeria.

After 9/11, when U.S. forces fought to overthrow the Taliban, foreign militant group leaders who remained in Qandahar submitted to al-Qa'ida's command to defend the city, and members of Libya's LIFG who were in Afghanistan, Abu Laith al-Libi and Sami al-Saadi, led a group of Arabs in battle against the Northern Alliance.¹²⁰ Later, they fled along with members of al-Qa'ida, with some finding refuge in Iran, Pakistan, or elsewhere.¹²¹ Indeed,

¹¹⁴ As one of the anti-Soviet Arab fighters at the time recalled, "We didn't count Zawahiri as a *mujahid*. He was just sitting in Peshawar trying to recruit people to fight against Egypt." See the statement by Abdullah Anas in Peter Bergen, *The Osama Bin Laden I Know*, (New York: Free Press, 2006), p. 69.

¹¹⁵ See the Harmony document, "64 Pages of Historical Overview of the Events in Afghanistan During the Soviet Invasion and the Early Days of Establishing Al Qaeda," "Chat from the Top of the World Number 6: Including Al Qaeda's Ties to Egyptian Jihad." As cited in Cragin, and Hoffman *et al.*, *The Early History of al-Qa'ida*; Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, p. 85.

¹¹⁶ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, p. 61.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

¹¹⁸ Fishman, "Redefining the Islamic State," p. 14.

¹¹⁹ Mendelsohn, "Foreign Fighters—Recent Trends," p. 20.

¹²⁰ Leah Farrall, "How al Qaeda Works," *Foreign Affairs* 90 (March/April 2011); Brian Glyn Williams, "On the Trail of the 'Lions of Islam': Foreign Fighters in Afghanistan and Pakistan, 1980-2010," in Michael Noonan, ed., *The Foreign Fighter Problem, Recent Trends and Case Studies: Selected Essays*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, April 2011, p. 82.

¹²¹ International Crisis Group, "Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (V): Making Sense of Libya," p. 21.

the exile from Afghanistan and the global manhunt made cooperation between LIFG members in the Afghanistan-Pakistan area and al-Qa'ida members a matter of both necessity and shared enmity. Similarly, groups like Algeria's GSPC (particularly its members outside Algeria) developed relationships and networks with al-Qa'ida as part of a shared response to the post-9/11 U.S. military operations.¹²²

A range of Pakistani groups have moved closer to al-Qa'ida in part because of a U.S. and U.S.-backed Pakistani government campaign against them, giving them an incentive to use one another's safe houses, havens, connections, and so on for self-preservation. Similarly, a number of Arab fighters training with al-Qa'ida in Pakistan or under the Taliban's protection also worked with al-Qa'ida against U.S. troops after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks.

BRANDING

Al-Qa'ida offers a distinct brand. This brand carries with it cache in certain circles, particularly where anti-U.S. and anti-Western sentiment is already strong. At times, groups may seek to replace their more local brand with that of al-Qa'ida, believing the latter is more compelling. According to Chris Harnisch, "One of the themes repeatedly echoed throughout al Shebaab's recruiting videos is its shared ideology with al Qaeda. The group goes to great lengths to portray its mission as part of bin Laden's international effort to defeat the 'Crusaders' worldwide and establish a global Caliphate."¹²³

Indeed, the al-Qa'ida brand, and in the past the personal brand of bin Laden, is used to draw recruits

and funders. In Saudi Arabia, AQAP used its leaders' personal ties to bin Laden as a recruiting device, attracting "those who seek to learn more about al Qaeda's founder and emulate his fight against the West."¹²⁴ Similarly, in Somalia, recognition by bin Laden and other al-Qa'ida members "gave credibility to al Shebaab," according to one expert.¹²⁵

Adopting the al-Qa'ida brand can also serve to protect a group's reputation. A terrorist or insurgent group's own legitimacy can be tremendously damaged, either because of its own ineptitude, poor targeting decisions that alienate local populations, or both. By assuming the al-Qa'ida brand, the local group can save its reputation and even give it a much-needed boost. AQIM, for example, valued the al-Qa'ida brand in part because its anti-regime struggle had become associated both with brutal atrocities against ordinary Algerians as well as an overall sense of failure. In addition, the al-Qa'ida name arguably helped AQIM in attracting fighters—it may have found recruiting easier for a global cause than for a failed regional one.¹²⁶

Global causes often enjoy more popular support than local jihads. In Saudi Arabia, AQAP found itself in the difficult position of both wanting to support jihad in Iraq but also fearing it would lose out on Saudi fighters and money that went to support Iraqi groups instead of anti-regime Saudi jihadists. As the insurgency flamed out in the Kingdom, more and more Saudi fighters went to Iraq, which enjoyed broader social support and a consensus from religious scholars that this was a legitimate jihad.¹²⁷

The more global brand, moreover, opens up the struggle to non-nationals in the region. Al-Qa'id has

¹²² Pham, "Foreign Influences and Shifting Horizons: The Ongoing Evolution of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," p. 244.

¹²³ Harnisch, p. 29.

¹²⁴ Barfi, "Yemen on the Brink?" p. 3.

¹²⁵ Shinn, "Al Shebaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia," p. 30.

¹²⁶ Boudali, "The GSPC," p. 6; Pham, "Foreign Influences and Shifting Horizons: The Ongoing Evolution of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," p. 245.

¹²⁷ Swift, "From Periphery to Core: Foreign Fighters and the Evolution of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula," p. 62; Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, pp. 223–25.

used its propaganda and networks to stoke Muslims' sense of brotherhood and solidarity, thus casting a wider net for potential jihadists all over the world. Algeria's GSPC, for example, tried to attract Moroccans, Libyans, Mauritians, Tunisians, Malians, and Nigerians after it took on the AQIM label.¹²⁸

As noted above, groups may also seek al-Qa'ida's brand to become more attractive to international donors. Moreover, once a brand is shared, al-Qa'ida can use its own impressive propaganda apparatus on behalf of affiliates.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL NETWORKS

Members of al-Qa'ida and the broader jihadist movement share a wide range of ties through personal networks. These networks are the result of both the transnational nature of the Salafi-jihadist movement and the deliberate al-Qa'ida policy of supporting jihadist causes around the world. The fact that jihadists spent time together in Pakistan or Sudan, or fought alongside each other in Afghanistan in the 1980s, Chechnya and the Balkans in the 1990s, and Iraq and other theaters after 9/11 has created numerous overlapping ties.¹²⁹ Several thousand Algerians, now members of AQIM, trained in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bosnia, and Chechnya, and this past combat together gave them a powerful bond that helped them forge an organization later in their careers.¹³⁰ AQAP leader Karim al-Wahayshi fought in Afghanistan in the 1990s and had personal ties to bin Laden, having served as his secretary in Pakistan. His two predecessors when the group

was based in Saudi Arabia had fought in Algeria, Bosnia, and Chechnya.¹³¹

Once a connection among jihadists has been forged, it is very challenging for an outside party to break it, so much so that because of the prevalence and breadth of personal networks, it is difficult to truly destroy jihadist organizations. When a group is disrupted in one country and its leaders killed, members will use their personal networks to join existing organizations, form new ones, and reach out to allies outside the country for help.

It is particularly telling, if not surprising, that if a group breaks up or is destroyed, those fragments that have close personal ties to the al-Qa'ida core are the ones most likely to affiliate with al-Qa'ida. Groups like AQIM moved closer to the al-Qa'ida core after having forged close ties to fighters in Iraq—as Iraqi jihadists took up the al-Qa'ida standard, so too did others they fought with.¹³² As J. Peter Pham argues, AQIM did not develop foreign ties because of its relationship with al-Qa'ida, but rather “the affiliation was the result of prior interaction with combatant groups abroad.”¹³³

Close connections, of course, are not always formed. Amir Khattab, the leader of the Chechen rebels, did not have a close personal connection with bin Laden despite chances to develop a bond.¹³⁴ This was due in part to choice; Khattab could have easily expanded his own and his group's personal contacts with al-Qa'ida and forged the relationship, but he did not seek large numbers of Arab recruits to go to Chechnya, which is what Bin Laden would have supported.

¹²⁸ Pham, “Foreign Influences and Shifting Horizons: The Ongoing Evolution of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb,” p. 245.

¹²⁹ Perhaps 1,000 Arabs fought in the Balkans. Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, p. 50. For one argument on their importance for the diffusion of terrorist tactics, see Michael Horowitz, “Nonstate Actors and the Diffusion of Innovations: The Case of Suicide Terrorism,” *International Organizations* 64 (Winter 2010): pp. 33–64. See also Kilcullen, “Countering Global Insurgency,” p. 600.

¹³⁰ Pham, “Foreign Influences and Shifting Horizons: The Ongoing Evolution of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb,” p. 242.

¹³¹ Barfi, “Yemen on the Brink?” p. 3; Christopher Swift, “From Periphery to Core: Foreign Fighters and the Evolution of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula,” p. 55.

¹³² Remarks of J. Peter Pham in Michael P. Noonan, ed., *The Foreign Fighters Problem, Recent Trends and Case Studies: Selected Essays*, Foreign Policy Research Institute (April 2011), p. 5.

¹³³ Pham, “Foreign Influences and Shifting Horizons: The Ongoing Evolution of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb,” p. 241.

¹³⁴ Gall, “Muslim Fighter Embraces Warrior Mystique.”

MOTIVATIONS FOR THE AL-QA'IDA CORE

When a group affiliates itself with al-Qa'ida, it is not the only beneficiary of the relationship. Al-Qa'ida itself often reaps rewards. The al-Qa'ida core seeks affiliates for a wide variety of reasons, both practical and ideological. The reasons vary by affiliate and historical period, but some patterns are common.

MISSION FULFILLMENT

Al-Qa'ida's mission has been to target the United States and other Western countries, as well as regimes it deems "un-Islamic." Therefore, even before it had affiliates, it operated both globally and regionally. Historically, however, the overwhelming majority of Salafi-jihadist groups focused first and foremost on their local governments, rejecting bin Laden's call to strike at America or other "far enemy" targets. Yet, over time, the view that the West is behind the problems of the Muslim world and should be the priority for jihadists has grown, enhancing al-Qa'ida's ability to pursue its goals.

Al-Qa'ida thus seeks affiliates in places where it perceives Muslims are under attack from non-Muslim powers. The Shebaab's experience "was a perfect fit for the al Qaeda meta-narrative," according to one analyst. In particular, the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in

2006 meshed with the group's concept of a Christian war against Islam.¹³⁵ In addition, although al-Qa'ida's historical focus was primarily in the Arab world, ties to the Shebaab and groups in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and South Asia give it a better claim to fighting for all Muslims, not just Arab Muslims, and thus underscore its religious and anti-national stances.

Al-Qa'ida also values unity for tactical reasons. As Barak Mendelsohn argues, al-Qa'ida "attributed failure on the battlefield to dissension and rifts among diverse Muslim groups."¹³⁶ Therefore, even before it began aggressively franchising, al-Qa'ida pushed jihadist groups to work together.

Practically, the benefits and pressure from the al-Qa'ida core can push local groups to adopt a more global agenda in their targeting, furthering al-Qa'ida's strategic objectives. AQAP, for example, went from focusing on Yemen, to going after Western targets in Yemen, to attempting several sophisticated near-miss attacks on civil aviation entering the United States—a classic target of the al-Qa'ida core.

Finally, al-Qa'ida sees itself as a vanguard that will lead the Islamic community. As such, having a diverse array of affiliates that bear a more localized al-Qa'ida name helps it fulfill its self-image as the

¹³⁵ Remarks of Ken Menkhaus, *The Foreign Fighters Problem, Recent Trends and Case Studies: Selected Essays*, Ed. Michael P. Noonan, Foreign Policy Research Institute (April 2011), p. 5.

¹³⁶ Barak Mendelsohn, "Al-Qaeda's Franchising Strategy," *Survival* 53 (June–July 2011): p. 34.

leader of the jihadist community.¹³⁷ For al-Qa'ida, political advantages compliment operational and ideological rewards. Al-Qa'ida seeks to send a message to the broader jihadist and Salafi universes that it is a dynamic, and ascendant, organization. As a result, it has at times announced or hinted at mergers that have not actually taken place or occur with only a small part of an organization.

RELEVANCE

Especially since 9/11, al-Qa'ida has been on the defensive—a problem that has grown worse in recent years as the U.S. drone campaign in Afghanistan and Pakistan has escalated and put pressure on the group. Amid this difficulty, the actions of al-Qa'ida's affiliates can serve as proof of the group's continued strength.¹³⁸ Some of the most notorious “al-Qa'ida” attacks since 9/11 have in fact been carried out by affiliate groups. These include the AQI's 2005 hotel attacks in Jordan, and AQAP's 2009 Christmas Day attempted airplane bombing and 2010 cargo planes plot.

Affiliate groups may offer a form of strategic reach or valuable logistics that the al-Qa'ida core often lacks. In addition, at times the affiliate cause is more popular than that of the core group, with Iraq during the height of the American occupation being the leading example.

REACH

Although historically the al-Qa'ida core has had an impressive global presence on its own, it has still often worked with non-al-Qa'ida members,

including for such important operations as the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania (conducted with EIJ). The reason for this is that affiliates may have an impressive network outside their country, usually for logistical reasons or fundraising purposes. Often this network involves their respective diaspora communities, but it can also involve sympathizers drawn to the country for other reasons. Affiliation thus gives the al-Qa'ida core access to additional resources around the world.

Until recently, the LIFG had its own extensive international network that was the “envy” of al-Qa'ida,¹³⁹ with LIFG personnel in Asia, the Gulf, Africa, and Europe, especially the United Kingdom.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, Algerian groups had an extensive logistical network in Europe, primarily to raise money through the diaspora and otherwise work with North Africans there.¹⁴¹ Al-Qa'ida may have hoped to use these people in Europe as a means of launching attacks of its own.¹⁴² The Shebaab also has an extensive reach because of its ties to the Somali diaspora—a group that numbers at least two million and is found in several European countries, notably the United Kingdom, Denmark, and Sweden as well as the United States. Members of the Somali diaspora from Europe and the United States have gone to fight in Somalia, and Somalis linked to the Shebaab plotted an attack in Australia.¹⁴³

By moving away from a national-based identity, affiliates offer al-Qa'ida access to a broader region. AQIM, for example, is active throughout the Sahel, conducting operations in Niger, Mali, and Mauritania—outside what is typically thought of as

¹³⁷ Mendelsohn, “Al-Qaeda's Franchising Strategy,” p. 37.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 42.

¹³⁹ Paul Cruickshank, “LIFG Revisions Posing Critical Challenge to Al-Qa'ida,” *CTC Sentinel* (December 3, 2009), available at: <<http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/lifg-revisions-posing-critical-challenge-to-al-qaida>>.

¹⁴⁰ “Libyan Islamic Fighting Group,” Investigative Project on Terrorism, August 24, 2007, available at: <<http://www.investigativeproject.org/profile/138>>.

¹⁴¹ Indeed, one of the reasons that al-Qa'ida delayed in making the GSPC a formal affiliate was that the organization's memberships and logistical networks had been devastated due to Algerian and European crackdowns, reducing the number of members from perhaps 4,000 in 2002 to 500 in 2006. Pham, “Foreign Influences and Shifting Horizons: The Ongoing Evolution of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb,” p. 244.

¹⁴² Celso, “Al Qaeda in the Maghreb,” p. 92.

¹⁴³ “Al Qaeda in Yemen and Somalia: A Ticking Time Bomb,” p. 16; Shinn, “Al Shebaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia,” p. 35.

al-Qa'ida's traditional theater.¹⁴⁴ This expansion has benefits for al-Qa'ida's core because the more groups it adds outside established war zones, the more its size is perceived to grow in the eyes of the West. Even when they remained focused on local targets, groups like AQI further al-Qa'ida's goals of hitting U.S. targets simply by conducting operations in Iraq—for many years perhaps the key theater for jihadists, as operations there riveted the attention of the world.

Affiliates can potentially offer al-Qa'ida access to recruits from the United States and to other countries where it does not have a strong set of local sympathizers. For example, a 2010 report found that thirty-six American ex-convicts went to Yemen in the previous year to study Arabic, where some are suspected of having gone to al-Qa'ida training camps.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, the Shebaab has found sympathizers among the Somali-American community—as of April 2011, perhaps twelve Americans have died fighting in Somalia for the Shebaab.¹⁴⁶ Americans can conduct attacks on U.S. soil more easily than a foreign jihadist would be able to.

The need to rely on the operational assistance of affiliates to conduct attacks appears to have grown as the U.S. drone campaign in Pakistan began to escalate in 2008. The deaths of many al-Qa'ida leaders there, and the difficult operating conditions of those who remained, led bin Laden to look for new areas from which to plan and launch attacks upon the United States and other Western targets.¹⁴⁷

LOGISTICS

Al-Qa'ida can directly plan an attack with an affiliate or even use the training it provides as a way

to conduct its own attacks. In 1993, the al-Qa'ida operative Ali Mohammad conducted training in Somalia but also used the opportunity to begin casing targets in Kenya.¹⁴⁸

Beyond the ability to carry out attacks, affiliates offer al-Qa'ida access to their media resources, recruiters, and other core parts of their organizations. After the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings, for instance, al-Qa'ida and EIJ worked together to publicize the operation. Before the attack, the shared EIJ and al-Qa'ida office in Baku received instructions for the communiqué to send to the London-based newspaper *Al Quds al-Arabi*. Al-Qa'ida's London office often served as a conduit for messages and reports to al-Qa'ida's headquarters in Afghanistan, and it in turn publicized bin Laden statements, disbursed funds, and otherwise assisted with the logistics of the group.¹⁴⁹ The Baku-London link was also tight due to a personal connection: Ibrahim Eidaous had organized the Islamic Jihad cell in Baku in 1995 before becoming the London cell head in 1997.¹⁵⁰

HARDENED FIGHTERS

Since its inception, al-Qa'ida has sought members who are experienced and dedicated. Many of the affiliates who come to al-Qa'ida do so with just such a cadre. Algerian jihadists, for example, had been waging a bitter war for over a decade when they formed AQIM. Similarly, EIJ members had been waging jihad for over a decade before they merged with al-Qa'ida. As a result, the practice of affiliation offers al-Qa'ida a stream of trained personnel.

¹⁴⁴ Pham, "Foreign Influences and Shifting Horizons: The Ongoing Evolution of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," p. 247.

¹⁴⁵ "Al Qaeda in Yemen and Somalia: A Ticking Time Bomb," A Report to the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, January 21, 2010, p. 1.

¹⁴⁶ Shinn, "Al Shebaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia," p. 33.

¹⁴⁷ Lahoud *et al.*, "Letters from Abbottabad," p. 20.

¹⁴⁸ *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (New York, 2004), p. 68.

¹⁴⁹ United States of America v. Usama bin Laden *et al.*, Indictment S(9) 98 Cr. 1023 LBS, paragraph 9; David Leppard *et al.*, "The Global Terrorist," *Sunday Times*, February 7, 1999.

¹⁵⁰ United States of America v. Usama bin Laden *et al.*, paragraph 12.

THE DECISION NOT TO AFFILIATE

Not all Salafi-jihadist groups affiliate with al-Qa'ida. As with the decision to affiliate, the decision to remain independent is a mix of factors, involving ideology, strategy, perceived costs, and personal relationships.

IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

The jihadist movement as a whole has a wide range of ideological opinions, some of which are quite hostile to alternative interpretations. Ideals like “*al-Wala wal-Bara*” (being loyal to God and rejecting all that deviates from Islam) permeate the movement. In practice, this has meant that al-Qa'ida has not affiliated with the many Islamist groups that are not pure Salafis. For instance, some Islamist groups embrace armed rebellion but endorse a more traditional Muslim Brotherhood-oriented view of jihad. Others believe there should be more of a focus on fighting apostates or call for using the democratic system when jihadists can gain from it.¹⁵¹

Indeed, the Muslim Brotherhood has spawned a range of organizations in Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere, most notably Hamas in the Palestinian territories but also the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) in Algeria, which was active in the 1990s in the

struggle against the country's regime.¹⁵² Although these groups overlap theologically with al-Qa'ida in many ways, Zawahiri's organization is more likely to see them as bitter rivals than potential allies. Hamas, for example, is regularly excoriated for participating in elections, letting up in its struggle against Israel, failing to fully “Islamicize” Gaza, and other supposed sins. Zawahiri even wrote a book blasting the Muslim Brotherhood for its many compromises with secular authorities.

With an elected Brotherhood government taking power in Egypt, this rift may grow further. The Brotherhood government has already made clear it does not intend to suspend the peace treaty with Israel or terminate relations with the United States, and plans to move slowly on Islamicizing society. Such compromises will infuriate hardliners in al-Qa'ida.

The divide is even greater between al-Qa'ida and a non-Sunni group like Hizballah, even though the latter would offer formidable capabilities in an alliance. Indeed, in the 1990s, al-Qa'ida and Hizballah engaged in limited cooperation, with al-Qa'ida fighters training in Hizballah camps in Lebanon and representatives of the groups meeting in Sudan.¹⁵³ Yet, because of a deep theological rift and

¹⁵¹ See Jarret M. Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 22–40.

¹⁵² See, for example, Jacob Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam* (Oxford University Press, 1994), Graham Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004) and Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers* (Oxford University Press, 1993) for broad reviews of trends within political Islam.

the hostility toward Shi'ah within al-Qa'ida's constituency, the two organizations, despite shared enemies, were not able to form a strategic partnership.

Ideological differences also still matter within the narrower Salafi-jihadist world. Egypt's GI, for example, criticized al-Qa'ida for prioritizing jihad over other forms of Islamicization—one of the group's leaders, Najih Ibrahim, told the London daily *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* that GI had refused to join al-Qa'ida “because their goal is jihad, whereas our goal is Islam.”¹⁵⁴

Nevertheless, within the Salafi world it is easy to overemphasize common ideology as an explanation for cooperation. Many group members are not theologically sophisticated and focus on more practical issues. In Pakistan, the groups that are closest to al-Qa'ida are Deobandi groups—the sectarian Lashkar-e Jhangvi and Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan and so-called “Kashmir” groups like Jaish-e-Mohammad, Hizb-ul-Mujahedin, and the Pakistani Taliban—which often differ theologically from other Salafi groups. In contrast, even though Lashkar-e-Taiba is Salafist and its members have many personal ties to al-Qa'ida, its organizational ties are, so far at least, not extensive. Perhaps Lashkar-e-Taiba is more a competitor to al-Qa'ida with its own infrastructure in Afghanistan, whereas the Deobandi groups, by virtue of being co-located with the Afghan Taliban, came into contact and became close with al-Qa'ida.

THE TAKFIRI QUESTION

One of the biggest ideological dividing points in the Salafi-jihadist community is over the question of the movement's relationship to the rest of the

Muslim world. In particular, who is a “real” Muslim and what are jihadists' obligations to those who are not of the purest faith? Some jihadist groups have arrogated to themselves the power of declaring other Muslims to be unbelievers (*kuffar*) and have thus earned themselves the designation of those who declare others to be unbelievers (*takfiris*).

A willingness to designate other Muslims as unbelievers has tremendous consequences for how a group chooses its targets. It also has an effect on a group's popularity. In both Algeria in the mid to late 1990s and Iraq during the height of the Sunni insurgency, groups there embraced an extreme takfiri ideology that led them to slaughter Muslim civilians. The GIA in 1996 adopted a takfiri philosophy that resulted in collective excommunication (*takfir al-mukjtama*), justifying the killing of ordinary Algerians because they did not practice the form of Islam the GIA endorsed. In 1997, at the height of the violence, there were over 300 massacres in Algeria, violence that alienated ordinary Algerians and many within the jihadist community.¹⁵⁵ In Iraq, members of AQI broke the fingers of cigarette smokers and murdered women who refused to wear the *niqab*.¹⁵⁶ In both countries this violence diminished the groups' popularity, alienating the vast majority of ordinary Muslims at home and abroad.

The way in which the unbeliever designation is applied varies from group to group: during the time it embraced violence, the GI saw Egyptian leaders as takfir but not ordinary soldiers; EIJ, on the other hand, believed soldiers who carried out impious orders (i.e. repression of the jihadists) were also unbelievers.¹⁵⁷ Often the takfiri question itself is a divide

¹⁵³ Thomas H. Kean, Lee H. Hamilton, et al., *9-11 Commission Report* (Washington, D.C.: The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, July 22, 2004), p. 169.

¹⁵⁴ “Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiyya vs. Al-Qaeda,” MEMRI Special Dispatch No. 1301, September 27, 2006, available at: <<http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/1887.htm>>.

¹⁵⁵ Ashour, “Islamist De-Radicalization in Algeria,” p. 7.

¹⁵⁶ Andrew Phillips, “How al Qaeda lost Iraq,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 63 (2009): p. 73.

¹⁵⁷ Omar Ashour, “Lions Tamed? An Inquiry into the Causes of De-Radicalization of Armed Islamic Movements: The Case of the Egyptian Islamic Group,” *Middle East Journal* 61 (Autumn 2007): p. 608.

within the broader Salafi-jihadist community. In Gaza, for example, only some of the Salafi-jihadists regularly use takfiri rhetoric and embrace its principles.¹⁵⁸

The risk that jihad against a defined target, like a government or non-Muslim foreigners, might bleed into an attack against a more amorphous target, like the larger society, is a concern to more pragmatic and moderate jihadist groups. This is based on ideological reasons, as well as practical considerations—the groups fear losing popular support. The GI, for example, endorsed a ceasefire with the Egyptian government in 1997 because it worried that its members might embrace a more takfiri ideology, as was happening concurrently in Algeria, and would thus attack Muslim civilians indiscriminately.¹⁵⁹ Even in Algeria, the takfiri question caused great stress in the jihadist movement. One former leader of the Algerian Islamic Salvation Army claimed his movement laid down its arms “because the jihad was about to be buried by the hands of its own sons.”¹⁶⁰

When it comes to takfir, foreign fighters’ divergent mores can alienate local fighters. Indeed, in Somalia, foreign fighters brought a takfiri approach with them into the country, which has entailed targeting Somali’s Sufi Muslims. This, as well as the efforts of Shebaab’s foreign fighters to impose a strict version of Islam on society, has provoked a backlash.¹⁶¹ In Iraq, one local jihadist shot a foreign fighter who had said that he could not pray at the grave of his ancestors, because doing so would be considered a form of idolatry.¹⁶²

Ironically, al-Qa’ida itself has tried to avoid the most extreme takfiri approach.¹⁶³ In Algeria, for example, it supported the GSPC, which was the core of what became AQIM, because it preached violence against government forces but rejected the idea that Algerian society was kuffar.¹⁶⁴ In Iraq, senior al-Qa’ida leaders warned Zarqawi about the Algerian experience, noting that the militants there destroyed “themselves with their own hands by their alienation of the population with their lack of reason ... oppression, deviance, and ruthlessness.”¹⁶⁵ However, because the takfiri strain is an important one in the overall jihadist movement, al-Qa’ida still works with those who employ the takfiri designation, as they did in Iraq and by providing seed money to the GIA in 1993.¹⁶⁶

TARGETING CIVILIANS

The issue of targeting civilians has caused a rift among jihadis, partly based on disagreement about the appropriateness of doing so, and partly based on the fact that jihadists often disagree on the definition of who is a civilian and who is not. While in general, military forces and government agents are usually considered legitimate targets and non-Muslims are of less concern than Muslims (public opprobrium is worse when fellow believers are killed), for much else there is little agreement. Groups with a strong takfiri slant regularly kill civilians, but a number of groups reject the idea of deliberately targeting civilians and have criticized al-Qa’ida for these actions. At times, group members who had in the past favored killing civilians reject the tactic,

¹⁵⁸ International Crisis Group, “Radical Islam in Gaza,” p. 6.

¹⁵⁹ Ashour, “Lions Tamed?” p. 618.

¹⁶⁰ As quoted in Omar Ashour, “Islamist De-Radicalization in Algeria: Successes and Failures,” The Middle East Institute Policy Brief no. 21 (November 2008), p. 1.

¹⁶¹ International Crisis Group, “Somalia’s Divided Islamists,” p. 9.

¹⁶² Burke, *The 9/11 Wars*, p. 250.

¹⁶³ Michael Scheuer, *Osama Bin Laden* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 88.

¹⁶⁴ Celso, “Al Qaeda in the Maghreb,” p. 90; Boudali, “The GSPC,” p. 2; Pham, “Foreign Influences and Shifting Horizons: The Ongoing Evolution of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb,” p. 243.

¹⁶⁵ As quoted in Burke, *The 9/11 Wars*, p. 252.

¹⁶⁶ Wright, *The Looming Tower*, p. 217. The GIA in 1993, however, did not have the takfiri orientation it would have years later. See Camille Tawil, *Brothers in Arms: The Story of Al-Qa’ida and the Arab Jihadists* (London: Saqi, 2010), p. 13.

most notably in the case of former EIJ leader Sayyid Imam al-Sharif (aka Dr. Fadl).¹⁶⁷ This rejection of killing civilians can be for ideological reasons or because the group recognizes that harming innocents reduces public support and costs the group in the long term.

In Chechnya, Khattab rejected deliberately targeting civilians, which was one of the reasons for his decision to limit cooperation with bin Laden, whom Khattab said was too willing to attack non-military targets.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, LIFG members imprisoned in Libya under Qadhafi renounced ties with al-Qa'ida on these grounds, claiming that “indiscriminate bombings” and the “targeting of civilians” were not in accordance with the group’s objectives.¹⁶⁹ In September 2009, the LIFG issued a massive treatise renouncing al-Qa'ida’s ideology entitled, “Revisionist Studies for the Concepts of Jihad, Hisbah and Takfir,” rejecting idea of offensive jihad. “The aim of fighting is to protect the Islamic project,” the treatise said. “Protection means resistance.... But for jihad to become a military profession—this is a distortion of the concept ... Allah doesn’t like aggressors.”¹⁷⁰ Former LIFG leader Noman Benotman wrote an open letter to Zawahiri, repudiating al-Qa'ida’s targeting, arguing that civilians of the West are blameless and should not be attacked.¹⁷¹ Even among Somali fighters, presumably somewhat hardened to violence against civilians, the Shebaab’s methods drew outrage.¹⁷² Several hundred fighters defected to the TFG government due to Shebaab brutality.¹⁷³

The al-Qa'ida core has learned the lesson about excessive killing of civilians and has urged affiliates like AQI to be discriminate—usually to no avail. A study by West Point found that because of the killing of civilians and other mistakes by affiliates, some within the al-Qa'ida core sought to distance the core from its affiliates.¹⁷⁴ Although bin Laden favored attacks on civilian targets like embassies and the World Trade Center, even he worried that regular and indiscriminate attacks on ordinary civilians like those done by AQI could discredit the movement in the eyes of ordinary Muslims, “distorting the image of the jihadis in the eyes of the *umma’s* [Muslim community’s] general public and separating them from their popular bases.”¹⁷⁵

LOCAL AGENDAS

Al-Qa'ida has a global agenda and global adversaries, whereas most of its affiliates formed to address far more limited objectives. Working with al-Qa'ida therefore may help an affiliate solve problems relating to logistics and branding, but may threaten to change what its struggle is about and the strategy it uses to achieve its goals. Not surprisingly, many members of affiliate groups have preferred to continue their focus on more local objectives.

One example of this local-global divide was in Chechnya. Khattab’s correspondence with bin Laden in the late 1990s was over strategy—both were jihadists, but they interpreted their mission differently. Bin Laden focused on the supposed

¹⁶⁷ Michael Jacobson, “Why Terrorists Quit: Gaining from Al-Qa'ida’s Losses,” *CTC Sentinel* 1, no. 8 (July 2008). Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank, “The Unraveling: Al-Qaeda’s Revolt against Bin Laden,” *The New Republic*, June 2008.

¹⁶⁸ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, p. 57.

¹⁶⁹ Ian Black, “The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group – From Al Qaeda to the Arab Spring,” *The Guardian* (UK), September 5, 2011, available at: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/sep/05/libyan-islamic-fighting-group-leaders>>.

¹⁷⁰ Alison Pargeter, “LIFG Revisions Unlikely to Reduce Jihadist Violence,” *CTC Sentinel* 2, no. 12 (October 2009), available at: <<http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/lifg-revisions-unlikely-to-reduce-jihadist-violence>>.

¹⁷¹ Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank, “The Unraveling: The Jihadist Revolt Against Bin Laden,” *The New Republic*, June 11, 2008.

¹⁷² Jeffrey Gettleman, “Somali Backlash May be Militants’ Worst Foe,” *New York Times*, March 23, 2010.

¹⁷³ Ted Dagne, “Somalia: Current Conditions and Prospects for Lasting Peace,” CRS Report, April 20, 2011, p. 8, available at: <http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/RL33911_20110420.pdf>.

¹⁷⁴ Lahoud *et al.*, “Letters from Abbottabad,” p. 21.

¹⁷⁵ As quoted in Lahoud *et al.*, “Letters from Abbottabad,” p. 13.

Zionist-Crusader alliance and thus the “far enemy,” whereas Khattab wanted to establish an Islamic government in Chechnya that would then be used as a base for expansion into neighboring countries.¹⁷⁶ In the end, this strategic difference (along with differing opinions over targeting civilians) caused Khattab to limit his relationship with al-Qa’ida.

Even EIJ, widely seen as a full part of al-Qa’ida after 1998, split over the decision of whether to embrace bin Laden’s global agenda and put their traditional focus on Egypt behind them. When Zawahiri signed up with bin Laden in 1998, a prominent group member based in Yemen derided the move as “a great illusion.” As the union progressed with little initial progress, one member called for focusing again on Egypt: “Enough pouring musk on barren land!” he declared.¹⁷⁷ In 1999, this disgruntlement, along with the organization’s financial problems, briefly led to Zawahiri being replaced by Tharwat Shehata, a longtime EIJ figure who reportedly headed the security committee and collected intelligence. Zawahiri quickly resumed control as the movement floundered and continued to cement ties to bin Laden, though this move still provoked recriminations among those EIJ members.¹⁷⁸ Many former members interviewed by the scholar Fawaz Gerges claimed that there was little support within the movement to join bin Laden, both because it was seen as the wrong focus and because it was not likely to succeed.¹⁷⁹ Over a decade later, bin Laden would criticize AQAP—the closest of al-Qa’ida’s affiliates—for focusing too much on the local struggle and not enough on attacks on the West.¹⁸⁰

One reason for the local-global divide is that many Salafi-jihadists are motivated primarily by local social issues. In Gaza, for example, in the last five years Salafi-jihadist groups have attacked Internet cafes, video stores, hair salons, and other targets they considered symbols of un-Islamic and Western influence.¹⁸¹ Al-Qa’ida may share these goals in a general sense, but this has not been a priority for the group.

Groups that ultimately decide to go global divert resources from their original goal of defeating a local regime. For this reason, many groups maintain their distance from al-Qa’ida. LIFG members in Libya and GI members in Egypt never abandoned their domestic objectives. According to Noman Benotman, the LIFG was always focused on nationalist concerns and refused absorption into al-Qa’ida because the LIFG wanted to maintain its ability to “move freely and independently in Libya.”¹⁸² Even diverting logistical resources and manpower from Libya to Iraq was met with controversy among LIFG members.¹⁸³

Local groups also often fight “principally to be left alone.”¹⁸⁴ When outside forces, be they government or those of a foreign power like the United States, enter and threaten traditional power structures and ways of life, these groups may ally with al-Qa’ida-linked organizations for perceived self-defense. However, because the foreign jihadists are highly revolutionary in outlook, they too threaten the traditional ways of life.

For the al-Qa’ida core, the local agenda can be a tremendous problem. Al-Qa’ida’s weakness at times pushes the core to tolerate considerable deviance

¹⁷⁶ *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, December 9, 2004 Paul Tumelty, “The Rise and Fall of Foreign Fighters in Chechnya,” *Terrorism Monitor* 4 (January 31, 2006), available at: <<http://www.webcitation.org/5zi1SSXco>>.

¹⁷⁷ Higgins and Cullison, “Saga of Dr. Zawahiri.”

¹⁷⁸ Alan Cullison, “Inside I-Qaeda’s Hard Drive,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 2004, pp. 66–67.

¹⁷⁹ Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, p. 164.

¹⁸⁰ Lahoud *et al.*, “Letters from Abbottabad,” pp. 33–35.

¹⁸¹ Pargeter, “LIFG Revisions Unlikely to Reduce Jihadist Violence.”

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ Brian Fishman and Joseph Felner, “Al Qaida’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records,” Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, January 2, 2007, available at: <<http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/al-qaidas-foreign-fighters-in-iraq-a-first-look-at-the-sinjar-records>>.

¹⁸⁴ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. xiv.

from its objectives. Doing so, threatens the coherence of al-Qa'ida's ideology and risks tarring the core with the affiliates' mistakes.

FEAR OF TAKING ON NEW ENEMIES

Even if a group shares al-Qa'ida's goals and ideology, joining it brings a host of downsides, particularly the wrath of the United States and other foes of Zawahiri's organization. This, in turn, poses an additional risk to group members and might set back their chances of achieving their local objectives.

The 9/11 attacks were a disaster for many jihadist groups, as the United States came down on them in full force. As the jihadist strategist Abu Musab al-Suri lamented, the 9/11 attacks cast "jihadists into a fiery furnace.... A hellfire which consumed most of their leaders, fighters, and bases."¹⁸⁵ After the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, LIFG members working with al-Qa'ida there had to disperse to other Middle Eastern countries or Europe for fear of being arrested, which greatly weakened their organization as an independent entity.¹⁸⁶

LIFG leader Noman Benotman claims that in the wake of 9/11 he recognized the LIFG would be "fighting a losing battle," and quit LIFG out of concern that the United States would respond to 9/11 by targeting the LIFG as well as al-Qa'ida. Benotman was concerned that bin Laden would "sabotage" the jihad against secular dictatorships like Qadhafi's.¹⁸⁷ According to a British media assessment, "The LIFG appear to have judged that the balance of advantage lies with leaving Al Qaeda."¹⁸⁸

The cost of affiliation can be seen with AQIM. The GSPC's name change to AQIM and new choice of targets stimulated U.S.-led regional partnerships and military operations against the group. The United States tried to encourage security cooperation between Algeria and its neighbors and to train allied forces to fight the group. For this reason, other groups have taken heed. Overall, the GI sought to avoid conflicts with Americans, as its leaders felt they would be fighting a powerful adversary that they could not match.¹⁸⁹ One factor that delayed the Shebaab's decision to become a formal al-Qa'ida affiliate, even as it has moved closer to the organization, was its fear of drawing more attention from Western counterterrorism agencies.¹⁹⁰

Even putting the U.S. response aside, the decision to affiliate with al-Qa'ida can generate setbacks for groups. In particular, it can spur local powers or governments to unite against al-Qa'ida affiliates. The decision of Maghrebi jihadists to form AQIM, for example, led to increase security cooperation between Morocco and Algeria, as both feared that the combination of local jihadists with neighboring fighters and al-Qa'ida would be a more formidable adversary.¹⁹¹ Similarly, bin Laden warned AQAP that if it declared an Islamic state, the Saudis would "pump vast amounts of money to mobilize Yemeni tribes to fight against us."¹⁹²

But even more limited ties, like providing funding, entail substantial risks. Arab financial support for Chechen fighters, for instance, allowed the Putin administration to paint the Chechen resistance as being part of al-Qa'ida.¹⁹³ In Somalia, U.S. military

¹⁸⁵ As quoted in Jason Burke, *The 9/11 Wars* (Allen Lane, 2011), p. 156.

¹⁸⁶ Pargeter, "LIFG Revisions Unlikely to Reduce Jihadist Violence."

¹⁸⁷ Black, "The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group—From Al Qaeda to the Arab Spring"; Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank, "The Unraveling: The Jihadist Revolt Against Bin Laden," *The New Republic*, June 11, 2008.

¹⁸⁸ David Blair, "Extremist Group Announces Split from Al-Qaeda," *The Telegraph* (UK), July 9, 2009.

¹⁸⁹ United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, *Egypt: Information on the Islamic Fundamentalist group al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, August 25, 1998, EGY98001.nyc, available at: <<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/publisher/USCIS,EGY,3df09ec64,0.html>>.

¹⁹⁰ Brian Bennett, "Al Qaeda's Yemen branch has aided Somalia militants," *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 2011.

¹⁹¹ Boudali, "The GSPC," p. 6.

¹⁹² As quoted in Lahoud *et al.*, "Letters from Abbottabad," p. 30.

¹⁹³ Tumelty, "The Rise and Fall of Foreign Fighters in Chechnya."

and financial pressure on the Shebaab grew as the organization moved closer to al-Qa'ida.¹⁹⁴ Indeed, bin Laden warned the Shebaab that an affiliation with al-Qa'ida would lead to greater U.S. pressure on the group and could easily overwhelm it.¹⁹⁵

LIMITED CONTACT OR INTERACTION

Although some groups may want to affiliate with al-Qa'ida, the possibility to do so may be limited because of a lack of personal interaction. As noted above, al-Qa'ida has exploited personal networks, shared training facilities, and other face-to-face forms of interaction to bring disparate groups together under its banner. This personal interaction, which varies by group, seems to be critical to the development of affiliations. Palestinian jihadists in particular appear to have less exposure to the al-Qa'ida core and other affiliate groups, which may explain why there is no “al-Qa'ida of Palestine”

(yet). Virtual contact may change this somewhat, but for now at least it appears to offer insufficient interaction to create the trust and sense of shared identity that facilitates affiliation.

PERSONAL RIVALRIES

The last reason groups may not affiliate with al-Qa'ida is personal rivalries. The jihadist movement is both one of different groups and ideologies but also one of charismatic individuals, many of whom compete for stature and resources. Khattab and bin Laden had a personal rivalry, for instance, which grew more intense as Khattab's stature grew within the Islamist community.¹⁹⁶ When there is friction between jihadist leadership personalities, affiliation may be less appealing for one or both sides. Although difficult to predict or manipulate, these rivalries also have the potential to split established groups.

¹⁹⁴ Nick Grace, “Shabaab Leader Sanctioned as Zawahiri Responds to Group's Oath of Loyalty,” *The Long War Journal: A Project of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, November 21, 2008, available at: <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/11/shabaab_leader_sanct.php>.

¹⁹⁵ Lahoud *et al.*, “Letters from Abbottabad,” pp. 38–42.

¹⁹⁶ Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, December 9, 2004; Tumelty, “The Rise and Fall of Foreign Fighters in Chechnya.”

STRAINS IN THE AFFILIATE-CORE RELATIONSHIP

As the previous section makes clear, several important Islamist and Salafi-jihadist groups have limited their relationship with the al-Qa'ida core or have rejected it altogether for a variety of reasons. However, even if a group makes a decision to affiliate or otherwise move closer to al-Qa'ida, tensions often arise, or existing ones become exacerbated. The following is an overview of the factors that may strain the relationship between an affiliate and the al-Qa'ida core.

AGENDA DIVERSION

One issue that can cause friction between affiliates and the al-Qa'ida core is agenda diversion. As noted above, all of al-Qa'ida's affiliates started out with local goals. Linking with the al-Qa'ida core and expanding attacks to global targets, however, can make it harder for a group to achieve its original aims.

Adopting the al-Qa'ida core's global outlook can alienate group members or supporters who retain their local focus. For example, AQI sought to exploit its al-Qa'ida brand and attract foreign fighters but found itself unable to retain support among Iraqi tribal groups, which were focused on secu-

rity and local autonomy.¹⁹⁷ Affiliation can create a dichotomy within a group—Sunni Iraqis often joined jihadist groups to defend Iraq and specifically their communities; the foreigners, in contrast, were fighting for Islam as a whole, not for Sunni Iraqis in particular.¹⁹⁸

Going global represents an opportunity cost—the more a group focuses on the global struggle, the less resources it has to devote to its local struggle. In a rather stunning mistake, the original Saudi AQAP was hurt when the al-Qa'ida core and many sympathetic Saudi clerics began prioritizing the anti-U.S. jihad next door in Iraq in 2003. Many of its potential volunteers preferred to go to the more popular and religiously justified fight against U.S. forces than to fight the Saudi regime, so AQAP lost money, personnel, and legitimacy.¹⁹⁹ Thus, ironically, al-Qa'ida's "global" goal thwarted its affiliate's local ambitions in Saudi Arabia.

For the al-Qa'ida core, there are drawbacks to affiliation as well. Allowing a group to affiliate risks having the core's anti-Western brand become hijacked or contaminated by local struggles. One example of this was the Iraqi civil war. During the height of the war, sectarianism—not an al-Qa'ida priority—

¹⁹⁷ Fishman, "Redefining the Islamic State," p. 9.

¹⁹⁸ Burke, *The 9/11 Wars*, p. 250.

¹⁹⁹ Hegghammer, "The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia," pp. 22–25.

dominated the jihadist discourse rather than the anti-Western struggle espoused by bin Laden. AQI's openly sectarian agenda furthered this diversion, but given the popularity of the Iraq struggle, it was impossible for al-Qa'ida to openly denounce AQI even though AQI actions tarnished the al-Qa'ida brand.

A further problem for the core is that this type of agenda diversion would not likely end even if an affiliate group gains victory in its local struggle. The Shebaab, for example, has sought to topple Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which is backed by the United Nations and several important African and Arab states. Should it do so and seize power, it will pursue its primarily regional goal of seeking to establish an Islamic state in Somalia and Somali-populated parts of Kenya and Ethiopia.²⁰⁰

Bin Laden and other al-Qa'ida core members worried, with good reason, that affiliate activities would discredit the core and hijack its agenda. One such instance occurred because of killings in Iraq. A planned olive branch to Arab Christians had to be discarded after AQI attacked a church in Baghdad—an attack that made a mockery of the core's appeal to the traditional tolerance of Islam.²⁰¹ As such, bin Laden pushed for affiliate groups to centralize their media operations, with the al-Qa'ida core at the helm. Ironically, core members felt that the affiliates were too extreme. Media spokesman Adam Gadahn wrote bin Laden that many jihadi forums were “repulsive to most Muslims” and that their participants were ignorant fanatics.²⁰²

STRATEGIC MISDIRECTION

Another cause for tension between affiliates and the core is the fact that the latter has its own agenda and

operational biases that often go against local needs. As a result, what is good for the core is not always good for the affiliate.

The core is less in tune with local conditions and realities, causing mistakes at the local level more likely to occur when the core is calling the shots. Zawahiri, for example, pushed hard for al-Qa'ida of Iraq to declare an Islamic emirate; Zawahiri had always recognized the value of having an Islamic state, even if it did not have full territorial control or recognition. While this shift marked a step away from Zarqawi's destructive purges of Muslims he deemed insufficiently devout, the declaration alienated many Iraqis.²⁰³ In addition, by declaring an Islamic state, AQI now had to answer to theologians, strategists, and activists about the nature of its governance. It also had to respond to other difficult questions instead of being able to focus on the simple rhetoric of fighting foreign forces and unbelievers.²⁰⁴

In Saudi Arabia, the core's control led to disaster. The al-Qa'ida high command pushed Yousef Saleh al-Ayiri, a leader of the Saudi AQAP, to launch an insurgency in 2003. Ayiri argued (correctly in hindsight) that the group was not ready, but Zawahiri insisted.²⁰⁵ Ayiri relented and led an insurgency that eventually failed due to an effective crackdown by the Saudi government and jihadist mistakes (the latter turned Saudi society against AQAP).

The danger also goes the other way—the al-Qa'ida core regularly gets tarred with the brush of its affiliates. For example, though al-Qa'ida in general did not encourage sectarianism or the massacres of Muslim civilians in Iraq, its brand was damaged by the actions of AQI. This brand damage is why when Zarqawi's fighters struck hotels in Jordan in 2005—and in so doing alienated Jordanian public

²⁰⁰ Shinn, “Al Shebaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia,” p. 26.

²⁰¹ Lahoud *et al.*, “Letters from Abbottabad,” p. 27.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁰³ Fishman, “Redefining the Islamic State,” pp. 7–8.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁰⁵ Brachman, *Global Jihadism*, p. 141.

opinion from the jihadist cause—the al-Qa’ida core gave them a strong rebuke.²⁰⁶ Similarly, al-Qa’ida has been critical of AQAP and other groups for their focus on local targets.

WHEN MONEY (AND OTHER RESOURCES) GET TIGHT

Money has at times been the cause of strain in the al-Qa’ida-affiliate relationship. Not surprisingly, cooperation motivated by money can diminish when money dries up. U.S. and allied pressure on al-Qa’ida’s finances has reduced the organization’s ability to dispense largesse, often to the point where it has sought financial help from affiliates, charged potential recruits for training, or otherwise has reversed its historic role of a relatively wealthy organization that provides resources to other groups.

Without sustained financial resources, groups may revert to criminal activity. For instance, after AQIM spent the money it had received for affiliating with al-Qa’ida and did not receive another burst, it primarily (though not entirely) focused, as before, on low-level crime and kidnapping more than on attacking global targets.²⁰⁷

A pinch in funding has meant that al-Qa’ida-linked groups have had to compete with locals for resources. This, not surprisingly, has created tensions with local populations and has reduced support within these communities. In Iraq, AQI tried to take control of lucrative smuggling routes from area tribes, further alienating them.²⁰⁸ Therefore, when an affiliate depends on “earning” its money on its own, rather than on receiving funding from the core, it often has to pay the price of local support.

As money tightens, al-Qa’ida’s ability to offer training may also diminish. Al-Qa’ida still maintains training facilities in Pakistan and can help send volunteers to fight in Afghanistan and elsewhere, but the drone campaign has put pressure on its infrastructure and made it harder and more dangerous for it to bring in large numbers of fighters.

This weak financial picture has meant that the al-Qa’ida core’s dispersal of funds has been fickle, as the group seeks to use its limited resources where they have the greatest impact. For example, when Zarqawi first joined up with al-Qa’ida, the Iraq cause received tremendous attention in al-Qa’ida propaganda. By 2009, however, “al-Qaeda Central’s *as-Sahab* media organization had virtually abandoned discussion of Iraq,”²⁰⁹ probably because as the brutality of the struggle there alienated many potential supporters limited resources were better used for propaganda elsewhere.

NATIONALISM AND LOCAL PRIDE

Al-Qa’ida affiliates have at times exploited anti-foreign sentiment, be it in regards to the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq or Ethiopian forces in Somalia. Nationalism, however, is a two-edged sword for al-Qa’ida. Somalis, for example, do not want foreigners dictating politics, and the presence of foreigners in the senior ranks of the Shebaab is a liability for the group.²¹⁰ An analysis by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace found that “most Somalis see al-Qaeda as indifferent to the interests of Somalia—its agenda is not their own. The propaganda doesn’t have much resonance inside Somalia and there is residual bitterness between Somalis and the Arab world that further compromises

²⁰⁶ Farrall, “How al Qaeda Works.”

²⁰⁷ Schmidle, “The Saharan Conundrum.”

²⁰⁸ See David Kilcullen, “Anatomy of a Tribal Revolt,” *Small Wars Journal Blog*, August 29, 2007, available at: <<http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/anatomy-of-a-tribal-revolt>>; Austin Long, “The Anbar Awakening,” *Survival* 50, no. 2 (April–May 2008): pp. 67–94.

²⁰⁹ Fishman, “Redefining the Islamic State,” p. 12.

²¹⁰ Shinn, “Al Shebaab’s Foreign Threat to Somalia,” p. 36.

²¹¹ Ken Menkhaus and Christopher Boucek, “Terrorism Out of Somalia: Q&A,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, September 23, 2010, available at: <<http://carnegieendowment.org/2010/09/23/terrorism-out-of-somalia/591#foothold>>.

al-Qaeda's messaging."²¹² Similarly, according to John Entelis, some Algerian jihadists "resent having been reduced to mere agents of al Qaeda."²¹³

This deeply felt nationalism can be a problem for Zawahiri and his followers as al-Qa'ida has a strongly anti-nationalist bent. Jihadist ideologues criticize Muslims who have excessive love for and devotion to their country, believing nationalism creates a dividing point among the true community—Muslims.²¹⁴ One AQI leader, for instance, condemned "anyone who tries to distinguish between Iraqis and non-Iraqis."²¹⁵ Jihadists in Iraq, however, grew frustrated when AQI tried to focus on international concerns, such as the Danish cartoon that mocked the Prophet Mohammad, which did not hold the same level of importance for them as local Iraq-related issues. When AQI members fought against fellow Muslims, including fellow jihadists, it led to claims within the Salafi community that Iraq was following the path of Algeria. Fearing takfiri extremists were taking charge, other groups mocked AQI and siphoned off support from more traditional Iraqi religious and national figures.²¹⁶

Because al-Qa'ida often uses its own religious rationalizations or those of clerics from outside the immediate theater, it can come into conflict with local religious establishments. AQI, for example, appointed a "commander of the faithful" whom all Iraqi Sunnis were supposed to obey, even though most Iraqis did not know this leader.²¹⁷

PERSONAL BEHAVIOR AND OUTSIDERS

Related to the issue of nationalism is the fact that when al-Qa'ida sends its own operatives and other non-locals to join an affiliate, these foreign fighters may alienate locals through their personal behavior or attempts to alter local traditions. AQI members, for example, tried to forcibly marry into prominent tribal families in Iraq, violating tribal customs that forbid women from marrying outside the overall tribal confederation. (In Yemen, in contrast, marriage outside the tribe is a common method of forging alliances, whereas in Somalia, marriages are insular and intermarriage with foreign-born fighters alienates locals.²¹⁸) In addition, complaints about AQI violence and thievery grew common in Iraq.²¹⁹ Similarly, one AQIM commander fought with local Touarag tribes over smuggling routes.²²⁰

OPERATIONAL SECURITY

As the number of affiliates increases, the overall security of the al-Qa'ida network decreases. In other words, outsiders represent a risk to operational security. The reason for this is that terrorist groups often "vet" recruits simply because they are related to or grew up with an existing member. An influx of outsiders challenges this insularity and makes it harder to maintain this operational security. Some foreign volunteers may be infiltrators.²²¹

²¹² Ken Menkhaus and Christopher Boucek, "Terrorism Out of Somalia: Q&A," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 23, 2010, available at: <<http://carnegieendowment.org/2010/09/23/terrorism-out-of-somalia/591#foothold>>.

²¹³ Remarks by John Entelis, in Michael P. Noonan, ed., *The Foreign Fighters Problem, Recent Trends and Case Studies: Selected Essays*, p. 6.

²¹⁴ Brachman, *Global Jihadism*, p. 44.

²¹⁵ As quoted in Kohlmann, "State of the Sunni Insurgency in Iraq," p. 3.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 12–16.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²¹⁸ "Al Qaeda in Yemen and Somalia: A Ticking Time Bomb," p. 4.

²¹⁹ Fishman, "Redefining the Islamic State," p. 10.

²²⁰ Boudali, "The GSPC," p. 5.

²²¹ Mendelsohn, "Foreign Fighters—Recent Trends," p. 201.

DEMOCRACY

Elections, and political opportunities in general, can create a divide between local fighters and foreign fighters attached to jihad. In Iraq, the al-Qa'ida-linked leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi fiercely denounced the December 2005 U.S.-sponsored elections. Local Sunni religious leaders, however, warned that Zarqawi “damaged the image of jihad” with his threats.²²² In essence, local populations see elections as a means of gaining power or otherwise defending their community, whereas for the more globally focused jihadists, elections represent a threat to ideological purity because by its nature democratic governance requires compromise and conciliation.

In Iraq, AQI appeared to have learned from these mistakes. In the March 2010 parliamentary elections, it condemned the elections but did not launch major attacks or otherwise tie violence to voting.²²³

THE COSTS OF REJECTION

Al-Qa'ida suffers heavily in terms of prestige, and possibly recruitment, when like-minded organizations criticize it. Perhaps the most important instance of this was the decision by leaders of Egypt's jihadist organizations to reject violence and in 2004 begin to publish a lengthy critique—two dozen volumes in all—of their own activities and those of al-Qa'ida. The series of books, known as the “Concept Correction Series,” renounced indiscriminate violence and extremist interpretations of Islam. Two of the volumes directly critiqued al-Qa'ida, with one bearing the title, *Al-Qaeda's Strategy and Bombings*—

Errors and Dangers.²²⁴ Al-Qa'ida was forced to respond with repeated defenses that failed to satisfy its critics.

In Saudi Arabia, AQAP lost legitimacy when, after the 2003 attacks in the Kingdom, so-called “*sahwa*” clerics—whom bin Laden had praised in the 1990s—condemned the group, and were soon followed by other religious heavyweights. This left AQAP with few serious religious leaders to back its war. Thomas Hegghammer judges that “this was a serious disadvantage in the Saudi arena where political legitimacy is intimately tied to scholarly credibility.”²²⁵ Al-Qa'ida relearned this bitter lesson in 2006, when it courted the LIFG. Rather than embrace it, LIFG members blasted al-Qa'ida and, like GI, published several important tracts denouncing the organization. This failed bid left the al-Qa'ida core wary about wooing more groups.²²⁶

The biggest blow, though, was when a former EIJ leader and theologian, Dr. Sayyid Imam al-Sharif (“Dr. Fadl”), vehemently critiqued al-Qa'ida. Fadl was not only a leader of EIJ, but two of his works are considered “bibles” in jihadist circles and were taught in al-Qa'ida camps in Afghanistan. Because of the strength of EIJ's links to al-Qa'ida, the criticism was a particularly harsh blow. Although few senior leaders or active militants will likely defect as a result of these criticisms, the condemnations will decrease support from those with looser ties who are often radicalized indirectly, at times via the Internet.²²⁷ As Abu Qatada, a leading jihadist ideologue, lamented, “The impact of these retreats on us is worse than 100,000 American soldiers.”²²⁸

²²² Kohlman, “State of the Sunni Insurgency in Iraq,” p. 2.

²²³ Fishman, “Redefining the Islamic State,” p. 13.

²²⁴ “Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiyya vs. Al-Qaeda,” MEMRI Special Dispatch no. 1301, September 27, 2006; See Omar Ashour, “De-Radicalization of Jihad? The Impact of Egyptian Islamist Revisions on Al-Qaeda,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* II (March 2008): pp. 11–14.

²²⁵ Hegghammer, “The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia,” p. 22.

²²⁶ Leah Farrall, “How Al Qaeda Works,” *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2011), available at: <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67467/leah-farrall/how-al-qaeda-works>>.

²²⁷ Ashour, “De-Radicalization of Jihad?” p. 12.

²²⁸ As quoted in Omar Ashour, “Post-Jihadism: Libya and the Global Transformations of Armed Islamist Movements,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23 (2011): pp. 379.

Indeed, support from religious authorities is a two-edged sword for al-Qa'ida. On the one hand, support grants them legitimacy and credibility with key funders and many recruits. On the other hand, truly independent scholars criticize al-Qa'ida excesses and often share only part of their agenda. Once al-Qa'ida embraces these authorities, it becomes vulnerable should they turn on the organization in particular or the jihadist movement in general.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FIGHTING AL-QA'IDA AFFILIATES

The above analysis suggests numerous ways to encourage groups to leave the al-Qa'ida fold. None of these options are easy, and any successes are likely to be partial. Nevertheless, there are opportunities to decrease the intensity and value of affiliation, and perhaps even end it. This final section offers proposals for how to think about the issue of affiliation, ways to weaken bonds between the core and affiliate groups, and examples where these ideas might apply.²²⁹

THE DANGER OF LOCAL REGIME SUCCESSSES

One of the ironies of counterterrorism is that there is a tension between success for U.S. allies and success for the United States. As local jihadi groups fail, they are more likely to affiliate with al-Qa'ida because they need new resources, domestic legitimacy, and perhaps a new mission. Similarly, if their fundraising dries up they may turn to al-Qa'ida for financial support. However, the United States has an interest in seeing these groups fail, even if they are not al-Qa'ida affiliates, because of overall U.S.

opposition to terrorism of any kind, and the threat these groups may pose to the stability of U.S. allies. So to weaken these groups, Washington aids the counterterrorism efforts of allied governments with money, training, and at times operational support. But the result of this is that it may make the group seek support from al-Qa'ida and as a result become more global—and thus more of a threat to the United States. This is particularly likely with the components of the group that are outside a given country: they are more likely to survive a crack-down and at the same time more likely to interact with the al-Qa'ida core or other affiliates.

Such a situation occurred with EIJ in the 1990s. As the Egyptian regime steadily clamped down on the organization, the organization's ability to raise money, draw recruits, and operate at home declined. Parts of the group, particularly those elements based in Afghanistan and Pakistan or otherwise outside Egypt, became more enmeshed with al-Qa'ida. U.S. assistance in crushing the external apparatus, such as the 1998 renditions of EIJ members from Albania to the United States, further weakened the group.

²²⁹ Current U.S. strategy is to aggressively target al-Qa'ida personnel operating in remote parts of Pakistan and to use intelligence and law enforcement cooperation to disrupt al-Qa'ida-linked personnel elsewhere—an approach that often significantly degrades al-Qa'ida's relations with its core. Disrupting the al-Qa'ida haven makes it harder for the al-Qa'ida core to communicate and direct the global movement, in effect ceding more independence to local groups. In addition, one of the benefits of affiliation is diminished if groups can no longer send their personnel, or as many personnel, to Pakistan or another al-Qa'ida base for training. The drone campaign, which reduces the ability of senior leaders to operate freely and makes large-scale training camps dangerous endeavors, is an important part of a U.S. strategy to counter affiliates' training efforts. "Virtual" or "cyber" havens are no substitute. Although advanced communication technology can sustain existing relationships, in none of the affiliations discussed in this paper did a virtual relationship prove significant enough to foster an affiliation.

At the same time, however, such measures increased both EIJ's enmity for the United States and the feelings of vulnerability among EIJ members outside Egypt. This combination helped convince Zawahiri and others to join their group with bin Laden.

In Nigeria, a group like Boko Haram, which is already moving in a more radical and global direction, could follow this EIJ model if it faces defeat at home (which, as of this writing, seems far off at best). Because of the influence of global ideas on Boko Haram, embracing enemies outside Nigeria fits in with the group's philosophy. In addition, its ties to the Nigeria diaspora community means that at least some members could escape military operations and a dragnet in Nigeria and perhaps link up to the al-Qa'ida core. A perceived U.S. role in any defeat would increase the willingness of surviving members to embrace a more global outlook.

UNPACKING GROUPS AND ANTICIPATING SPLINTERS

Because some group members join with al-Qa'ida for mutual protection, and because some refrain from affiliation out of fear of taking on new enemies, it is vital to distinguish between those groups that are full-fledged affiliates and those groups where there is just limited interaction with al-Qa'ida. By lumping an unaffiliated group with al-Qa'ida, the United States can drive it into Zawahiri's arms.

AQAP and AQIM today are important instances where the degrees of affiliation may vary widely. As noted above, a review of unclassified information suggests that so far, AQIM can be considered a weak al-Qa'ida affiliate. While AQIM has changed its targeting priorities somewhat since affiliating with al-Qa'ida, it has not engaged in extra-regional attacks on the United States or taken its war to the

West in any comprehensive way. AQAP, in contrast, is far more aggressive outside its theater of operation, though the 2011 U.S. drone attack that killed Anwar al-Awlaki removed a leading voice and operative for anti-U.S. attacks.

Indeed, a very important lesson is not to think in terms of "the group" but rather in terms of elements of the group. In several cases, including those of the EIJ, Shebaab, GSPC, and the LIFG, part of the organizations did sign up with al-Qa'ida to varying degrees and, in the case of EIJ, took the name of the organization with them. However, in other cases, the link with al-Qa'ida was more dependent on individual within a group than the group as a whole. For instance, the GSPC in Algeria became the core of AQIM, but some members were willing to embrace an amnesty program offered by the government in exchange for laying down their arms.²³⁰ Much of the organization rejected the merger with al-Qa'ida, often bitterly. In some instances, GSPC members renounced violence or, in the case of several hundred Shebaab fighters, joined up with the group's enemy. The reason a group can fracture over the decision to affiliate is that many groups have decentralized command and control, and there is often a gap between fighters on the local front and those in the diaspora. Only in a few cases, like the GI, does the group have the internal discipline to impose a rejection of al-Qa'ida on its members, but even in GI's case there were exceptions. So "success" is not likely to mean the group as a whole leaves, but rather that a significant part of it does.

Indeed, with many members imprisoned or in exile, groups often have different strands, which often take very different trajectories. Omar Ashour has shown how this relates to the GI: "It can be said that the GI had one history inside the prison, and a concurrent one outside it."²³¹ For example,

²³⁰ Hassan Hattab, "We Want to Give Up Armed Activism," *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, October 15, 2006, p. 6. Interview by Allam Bou Ghimrasa; Omar Ashour, "Ending Jihadism? The Transformation of Armed Islamist Movements," *Arab Reform Bulletin*, September 9, 2009.

²³¹ Ashour, "Lions Tamed?" p. 609.

the 1997 GI ceasefire was an initiative of those in prison, and some in other strands did not embrace it. More recently, some GI members campaigned successfully for seats in the Egyptian parliament as other members of the group based abroad joined with al-Qa'ida.

This same type of division may play out in Gaza. It is plausible that some Salafi-jihadists in Gaza might affiliate with the al-Qa'ida core, particularly if they are able to travel more freely outside Gaza and meet up with core members. Some existing groups may then join with al-Qa'ida formally and declare an "al-Qa'ida of Palestine." In reality, however, the Salafi-jihadist cause in Palestine would likely remain highly divided by personality and by the question of whether to focus locally or embrace a more global agenda.

PLAY UP DIFFERENCES

Members of the global jihadist movement hold markedly different views on the identity of the leading theologians, the nature of an Islamic state, the priority of different "fronts" in the struggle, and so on. An information operations campaign can try to widen these gaps, highlighting differences and thus encouraging them. Promoting certain websites over others, giving wide play to dissenting voices, and reprinting critical tracts are all examples of how to advance anti-al-Qa'ida critiques. Much of this effort is better done by the security services of U.S. allies, which may know the local groups better, particularly on a propaganda and recruiting level, but the United States can provide technical and financial support for their efforts.

The deliberate killing of civilians and the takfiri elements within the jihadist movement are both powerful negatives that can be emphasized by parties seeking to undermine these groups. Al-Qa'ida will find it hard to walk away from unpopular violence undertaken by an affiliate—the killing of civilians, particularly Muslim civilians—without damaging

its relationship with the affiliate. Maintaining support, however, would make the core vulnerable to charges of impiety and would put at risk other al-Qa'ida affiliates that share the same broad brand. Similarly, declaring other Sunni Muslims to be unbelievers is wildly unpopular and earns the jihadists condemnation from a range of religious leaders as well as other jihadists. As noted above, while al-Qa'ida itself is not an extreme takfiri group, its limited takfiri stance and ties to individuals with a takfiri outlook makes it hard for it to disassociate itself from this position. A particularly powerful critique of takfiris comes from former jihadist leaders, such as EIJ's Dr. Fadl. These figures have "street cred" and their criticisms cannot be ignored.

Somalia may be one of the better arenas for trying to weaken a jihadist group by deepening wedges among its members and between the group and the general population. The Shebaab has many splinters and critics already, and the brand of Islam it champions is alien to many and does not fit easily in Somalia's history. In addition, the Shebaab's war is overwhelmingly against other Somalis, the vast majority of whom are Sunni Muslims, so highlighting this tactic to undercut the Shebaab's religious legitimacy is one way of reducing its appeal.

In Nigeria, playing up critiques of al-Qa'ida and the role of dissenting theologians would be appropriate to undercut Boko Haram, or at least make it less global. Knowledge of al-Qa'ida and the various strands of thought within the Salafist world is limited among many of Nigeria's Muslims. Calling attention to theological critiques of al-Qa'ida and highlighting different interpretations within the jihadist community of what it means to be an Islamic state to sow dissent might weaken the movement and decrease its appeal.

Groups like Hamas pose a tricky issue for the United States. Hamas no doubt threatens the security of Israel, is generally critical of U.S. policy, and is otherwise opposed to U.S. interests. Yet, Hamas possesses

tremendous credibility in the Gaza Strip—gained by its struggle against Israel—that amplifies its rebuff of al-Qa’ida. Specifically, Hamas’s Muslim Brotherhood philosophy, its social and political wings, and its willingness to compromise on issues like elections and temporary ceasefires with Israel are all rejections of al-Qa’ida and its teachings. So when Hamas battles al-Qa’ida and its local sympathizers, it can undermine these organizations’ effectiveness, commitment, and doctrine far more credibly than can the United States and its allies.

EMPHASIZE LOCAL NATIONALISM

Many of the most important jihadist-linked struggles, such as those in Chechnya, Kashmir, and Iraq, began with a more straightforward nationalist campaign against a perceived foreign invader. And even in cases where the fight did not begin for nationalistic reasons, such as Somalia and Yemen, nationalism remains high among locals and many within the jihadist community. Al-Qa’ida’s more global focus is often at odds with this initial, local focus of jihadist struggles.

One area in which this has been evident has been Somalia. Because of its affiliation with al-Qa’ida, the Shebaab “runs the risk of having one of its most powerful ideological cards—Somali nationalist, anti-foreigner sentiment—turned against it, as domestic adversaries accuse it of being a puppet of foreign jihadists bringing more trouble to the country.”²³² In addition, the foreign fighters often try to undermine local power relationships by going against tribe and clan structures. Given this, and the strong anti-foreign sentiment of many Somalis, playing up the role of foreigners in the Shebaab’s senior leadership ranks is vital. Even the egregious behavior of a few individuals who do not represent broader trends

or al-Qa’ida goals should be highlighted to discredit the al-Qa’ida relationship in general.

In short, whenever possible, the *foreign* nature of al-Qa’ida should be emphasized, particularly when it involves atrocities or other unwelcome behavior. Rather than allowing al-Qa’ida to exploit nationalism for its ends, the goal should be to expose al-Qa’ida for the anti-national force it is. The withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq at the end of 2011, and the planned drawdown of American troops from Afghanistan are opportunities.

In Iraq, the U.S. withdrawal makes emphasizing Iraqi nationalism and AQI’s foreign ties far more credible than in the past.²³³ As such, the role of foreigners in AQI should be underscored, as well as their links to non-Iraqi groups and causes. If violent opposition to the Iraqi government emerges—and if Maliki’s policies continue, it seems likely—the goal would be that the Sunni resistance would be national in focus, not global, and thus not influenced by al-Qa’ida.

THE DEMOCRACY CARD

Democracy remains extremely popular in the Arab world but al-Qa’ida sees it as anathema. Many affiliate groups share al-Qa’ida’s ideological aversion to democracy but may support it because it can be used to advance their power locally or simply because their potential constituents are participating and they do not want to alienate them. The United States and its allies should call attention to al-Qa’ida’s repeated and bitter critiques of democracy, and more than this, should advocate for political systems to be open to communities from which jihadists draw. U.S. leaders should communicate their support for free elections and willingness to

²³² Ken Menkhaus, “Somalia After the Ethiopian Occupation: First Steps to End the Conflict and Combat Extremism,” Enough Project, February 2009, available at: <<http://www.enoughproject.org/files/publications/Somalia%20After%20the%20Ethiopian%20Occupation.pdf>>.

²³³ With the Maliki government purging Sunni figures and discriminating against Sunnis in general, there is a strong possibility that AQI will be able to improve its position by again claiming to be the defender of Iraq’s Sunnis.

talk to peaceful Islamists of all stripes, even when there are significant disagreements. U.S. public diplomacy should also highlight statements by peaceful Salafi leaders in support of elections and contrast these with al-Qa'ida's communiqués. Such an effort may lead to tension between the radical, global elements of the jihadist group and those that have a more local orientation, and has already shown success. In Iraq, U.S.-sponsored elections at the end of 2005 led to splits between Zarqawi's group and other Sunnis, including some who had fought alongside him. The Sunni Association of Muslim Schools declared that Zarqawi's threats to massacre those who participated in elections as having "damaged the image of the jihad."²³⁴

In Egypt, the fall of Mubarak and the spread of elections have offered Salafist groups, including former jihadists, a chance to participate in legitimate politics. They have embraced this, with the al-Nour party having garnered almost a quarter of the overall vote in the first parliamentary elections held after the revolution. While the United States may oppose some of its policies, the group has made statements indicating that it would respect the peace deal with Israel.²³⁵ It has also signaled that it will focus on domestic matters first, with less attention to Egypt's foreign policy. While Egypt is in flux, initial fears that released jihadists would immediately turn to violence appear to be overstated.

Failed democratization, however, can cause exceptionally dangerous situations. In Iraq, the Maliki government's shutting out of Sunnis from the electoral process and from power in general has the potential to cause radicalization within Sunni communities. Excluding Sunnis from power legitimates

al-Qa'ida's argument that violence, not political participation, is the key to securing a true Islamic society. Similarly, should Egypt's military refuse to relinquish power or prevent Islamists from using their electoral mandate to govern, the potential for large-scale radicalization is extremely high.²³⁶

U.S. influence over democratization in the Arab world is limited at best, and intervention or even vocal rhetoric can lead to charges of meddling that would backfire against pro-U.S. voices. The United States, however, can make its position in support of democracy, including a role for Islamist parties, clear to both Arab publics and voices within Arab security establishments.

DRYING UP THE MONEY

In the years after 9/11, the United States has aggressively targeted al-Qa'ida financing. Such an effort has made it harder for al-Qa'ida to transfer money, enabled U.S. and allied intelligence services to track al-Qa'ida operatives through their fundraising apparatus, and decreased the overall amount of money available to the core organization, hindering its ability to attract new recruits and maintain its operational capacity. This effort has led to many intelligence successes and has diminished the core's financial resources considerably.²³⁷

Targeting al-Qa'ida financing is also a blow to its affiliation strategy. If the core's money diminishes, it will be less likely to be able to attract new groups to its banner. Moreover, this disincentive would grow if the groups fear that an affiliation with al-Qa'ida will lead to additional pressure on their own financial networks.

²³⁴ Kohlmann, "State of the Sunni Insurgency in Iraq."

²³⁵ "Egyptian Salafists Tell Israel They Will Keep the Peace," *Abram Online*, December 21, 2011, available at: <<http://english.ahram.org/News/29870.aspx>>.

²³⁶ U.S. support for minority rights, particularly women's rights, is a policy that al-Qa'ida will use to try to turn locals against democracy. Although democracy in general has high levels of support, Western notions of women's rights do not. Al-Qa'ida tries to capitalize on claims that the United States is subverting Islam with its emphasis on women's rights, helping them counter the broader hostility to their anti-democratic message. See *Arab Human Development Report 2002* (United Nations Development Programme), available at: <<http://www.arab-hdr.org/publications/other/ahdr/ahdr2002e.pdf>>.

²³⁷ Nathan Vardi, "Is al Qaeda Bankrupt?" *Forbes Magazine*, March 1, 2010.

Directly depriving terrorists of revenue often leads them to undertake illicit activities, such as kidnapping and theft as a means to make up the funding shortfall. These actions paint the group as more criminal than heroic, further damaging its brand. They also enable the FBI and foreign-based law enforcement-based services to increase their cooperation without inflaming nationalism, as the reason for the cooperation is clearly to pursue “criminal” activity rather than address more political issues associated with terrorism.

AQIM is a group that is already neck-deep in criminal activities and is vulnerable to broader efforts to counter criminal activity. Given that the Algerian government is often prickly about perceived slights to its sovereignty, emphasizing cooperation on “criminal” rather than “terrorist” issues may be one way to improve cooperation. Even more important, information operations should stress the criminal activity as a way to dispel any group claims to a more heroic narrative.

DIASPORAS AND TERRORISM

The Shebaab, AQIM, and various groups active in Kashmir draw on diasporas for fundraising and other logistical aid, and at times to attract recruits or plan terrorist attacks. Diaspora support, while an asset, is also a vulnerability for these organizations, and in turn for al-Qa’ida. Intelligence services can more easily penetrate the diaspora and otherwise gain intelligence because it is often based in Western countries or otherwise more accessible. In addition, diasporas can be policed to curtail fundraising.

The Shebaab is a group that relies heavily on the Somali diaspora and is therefore vulnerable to pressure on this community. As a result, the U.S. designation of the Shebaab as a terrorist group in February 2008 has reduced the level of remittances it has

received.²³⁸ But that is only one step. A sustained campaign to gather intelligence and police the diaspora globally could decrease Shebaab-affiliated elements’ ability to coerce support, reduce the flow of propaganda from these elements, and enable security forces to target key fundraising nodes. In addition, the threat of deportation or arrest might intimidate sympathizers who are not fully committed to the cause.

FOREIGN WARS AND PERSONAL NETWORKS

Whether or not the United States should take on new military interventions in the Muslim world is beyond the scope of this paper. However, in deciding whether to intervene abroad, U.S. policymakers should consider, along with other more obvious costs and benefits, how doing so may impact al-Qa’ida affiliation. In Afghanistan in the 1980s and Iraq after 2003, important linkages developed between the al-Qa’ida core and affiliate groups and among affiliates themselves in response to the Soviet and U.S. invasions and occupations. As discussed, once created, these networks are hard to undo. In addition, military interventions can validate the al-Qa’ida narrative of the West seeking to defeat the Muslim world, and allow al-Qa’ida to work with local groups by portraying itself as a defender of their traditions and communities rather than as foreign invaders. The invasion of Iraq, of course, inflamed locals and made them more likely to join with al-Qa’ida linked groups. Avoiding situations where large numbers of foreign fighters might be attracted is an important way to prevent new affiliations from occurring.

U.S. military efforts can play into the al-Qa’ida narrative and discredit allied counterterrorism efforts. After the 9/11 attacks, leading Salafist clerics in Saudi Arabia, normally critical of the United

²³⁸ Paul Cruickshank, “Al Shebaab—A Looming Threat,” CNN Security Clearance, October 5, 2011, available at: <<http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2011/10/05/al-Shebaab—a-looming-threat/>>.

States, published a conciliatory manifesto titled, “How Can We Coexist.” After the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, however, they had to avow that they still favored a confrontational stance toward non-Muslims.²³⁹

Even military efforts by other countries can affect U.S. homeland security as affiliates draw on diaspora communities in the United States. The Ethiopian invasion of Somalia led to anger and a surge of religious nationalism among Somalis in the diaspora. As a result, Shebaab recruiters came to the United States and other countries to exploit this anger.²⁴⁰

HOMELAND DEFENSE DIFFERENCES

The al-Qa’ida core is a relatively small group of individuals, and direct strikes against it can have a tremendous impact in degrading the group and keeping it off balance. While affiliate groups like AQIM and the Shebaab are much larger, most of their energies remain consumed in the local fight. Often only a small portion of an affiliate’s organization focuses on Western targets and an even smaller portion focuses on operations against Western targets outside the local theater of operations. In addition, while many members of affiliate groups are combat-hardened, and some have received al-Qa’ida training, relatively few are truly elites. As a result, affiliate fighters are often less skilled at global terrorism than are members of the al-Qa’ida core.

Still, affiliate groups present a challenge for those charged with protecting the homeland. Although the FBI and other security agencies are focused on the problem of diaspora groups tied to al-Qa’ida affiliates, it remains difficult to monitor large numbers of U.S. citizens in regular touch with a homeland where a large jihadist group is active. U.S.

officials should draw up a list of diaspora communities in the United States where the home country has a significant al-Qa’ida affiliate (e.g. AQAP) or potential affiliate (e.g. Boko Haram). The size of the community, its linkages to the home country, financial flows to the homeland potential grievances, and sources of information should be assessed as well as standard counterterrorism concerns like suspect individuals. Mapping potential affiliates is especially important, as security agencies must not be caught flat-footed should an affiliation occur. In addition, low-skilled individuals can still be quite lethal even though they often act in a less strategic manner and are less able to pull off so-called terrorism “spectaculars.”

FINAL WORDS

There are no simple choices when confronting al-Qa’ida affiliates. On the one hand, ignoring groups until they become affiliates, or ignoring affiliates until they strike at U.S. targets, risks leaving U.S. intelligence and security officials in a defensive and reactive mode and vulnerable to a surprise attack. On the other hand, too aggressive an approach can create a self-fulfilling prophecy, strengthening bonds between al-Qa’ida and other jihadist groups by validating the al-Qa’ida narrative and leading groups to cooperate for self-defense and organizational advancement.

It is possible that the death of bin Laden and other blows to the senior al-Qa’ida leadership will both inhibit future affiliations and degrade the quality of existing relationships. However, given the advantages of affiliation for both local groups and the al-Qa’ida core, it is likely that affiliation will remain a problem for counterterrorism in the years to come.

²³⁹ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, p. 150.

²⁴⁰ Shinn, “Al Shebaab’s Foreign Threat to Somalia,” p. 212; Andrea Elliott, “A Call to Jihad from Somalia, Answered in America,” *New York Times*, July 12, 2009.

Affiliation so far has proven a tough nut to crack. Individuals and groups have shied away from al-Qa'ida, and schisms have appeared in affiliate relationships. The United States should seize upon any opportunities to turn affiliates away from the core organization or at least reduce the strength of the relationship.

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The Saban Center for Middle East Policy was established on May 13, 2002 with an inaugural address by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan. The creation of the Saban Center reflects the Brookings Institution's commitment to expand dramatically its research and analysis of Middle East policy issues at a time when the region has come to dominate the U.S. foreign policy agenda.

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