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The Global Expansion of the Al Qaeda Franchise

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CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE
THE GLOBAL EXPANSION OF THE AL QAEDA FRANCHISE

SUBMITTED TO
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AND
DEAN GREGORY HESS
BY
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**In Loving Memory of My Grandmother Betty A. Forster, and Grandfather Robert
H. Forster**

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Introduction

On December 25, 2009, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the son of a wealthy Nigerian banker, boarded Northwest Flight 253 from Amsterdam to Detroit. As the plane made its final descent, Abdulmutallab proceeded to ignite high explosive powder sewn into his underwear. Though the attack was thwarted by quick thinking passengers, it raised significant questions about how the well-to-do 23 year old Nigerian man had crossed into the world of violent extremism, and more importantly, how the US intelligence community failed to identify and prevent what would have undoubtedly ended as the deadliest attack on the US since 9/11. But Abdulmutallab is far from unique. Indeed Major Nidal Malik Hasan, the US Army psychiatrist responsible for the Fort Hood shootings a month earlier, is of an 'atypical' background. What is most revealing about Abdulmutallab's case is neither his background nor the seemingly apparent failure of US intelligence. Rather, the case illustrates the ability of one of Al Qaeda's latest branches in its broader organization, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, to operate at a global level.

Since 9/11, the transnational terrorist group known as Al Qaeda continues to thrive despite efforts by the U.S. government and its allies to disrupt it. As Al Qaeda central recedes in command, control, and operational capabilities, the organization has become increasingly decentralized, with offshoots reaching globally from South East Asia, Central Europe and Eurasia, to Africa, Western Europe and the U.S. Likened by many as a global franchise, a venture capital firm, a contagious virus, or the 'McDonalds of terrorism', it continues to inspire and spread its radical agenda worldwide. News headlines of terrorist attacks from Mumbai to London are quickly followed by suspected

‘Al Qaeda involvement’. But how important is Al Qaeda’s role in these disparate operations? While some argue that Al Qaeda has receded in importance entirely, others claim that the organization very much continues to exist and thrive. Nine years after the commencement of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, there is still much uncertainty about the constantly evolving nature of this transnational threat.

Gaining an understanding of how Al Qaeda expands, and to what degree it actually maintains influence around the world is crucial in understanding how and where to combat it. Al Qaeda’s global operational strategy is aimed at provoking the overreaction of its enemies into a prolonged conflict that will alienate them from the masses. More importantly, the Al Qaeda model serves as a potential operational blueprint for other jihadist, criminal, or terrorist groups. Understanding this organizational blueprint is vital in combating tomorrow’s enemies, including other activist, terror, and criminal groups which already are copying this model.¹

Solving this problem raises significant questions. What is Al Qaeda’s organizational structure today and how do we characterize it? Historically, where, how and why has it expanded, and which countries and regions are susceptible to the presence of the Al Qaeda in the future? More specifically, what are the social, economic, demographic, and political conditions that are conducive to the presence of Al Qaeda? If Al Qaeda recedes in importance or is eliminated entirely, what is the likelihood that its local franchises will continue Al Qaeda’s global struggle? It is these questions that I hope to answer.

¹ David Kilcullen, "Counter-insurgency Redux," *Survival* 48, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 114.

As this analysis will argue, Al Qaeda has evolved into an increasingly diffuse, franchised organization whose arms are poised to operate with limited operational direction from senior Al Qaeda leadership in Afghanistan or Pakistan. Al Qaeda is capable of extending its influence and operations throughout both the developing and developed worlds. As Al Qaeda's adventure in Yemen illustrates, by exploiting domestic unrest, tribal grievances, and lack of central governance, the organization has established a well integrated, visible, and organized local presence in the form of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). While no single factor can explain Al Qaeda's rise in Yemen, Al Qaeda's ability to exploit tribal alliances and weave its global narrative into local concerns appears to be the most significant variable. It is no surprise then that National Counter Terrorism Center Director Michael Leiter recently judged AQAP to be not only the most operationally active arm of Al Qaeda, but also the biggest threat to the homeland.²

In developed countries where Al Qaeda is denied a visible presence, the organization relies on a limited number of covert cells, grassroots followers, and affiliates to operate and recruit. Specifically in the UK, Al Qaeda exploits familial ties, political and social grievances, existing jihadist networks, and loopholes in national civil law to conduct operations and recruit. Al Qaeda's capacity to influence a much broader audience, including American citizens, at the grassroots level via its Salafist inspired ideology and exploitation of the global media are essential in this regard. Despite this, Al Qaeda's global appeal is dwindling, both due to its grandiose objectives as well as its

² Marc Thiessen, "Al-Qaeda's American-bred Leadership," *Washington Post*, March 10, 2011.

collateral damage to the Muslim world. However, even in the absence of an Al Qaeda identity, it is likely that these groups will continue to operate at a global level.

Thus, there is not a single set of environmental variables that predict where Al Qaeda will be able to establish a presence. As the case studies in this thesis illustrate, at minimum, Al Qaeda is able to maintain an ideological presence, anywhere in the world. Not only does this follow from the organization's professed belief that it serves as the vanguard of the global jihadist movement, but it serves an important strategic purpose as well. As Osama bin Laden stated in 2004: "All we have to do is to send two mujahidin to the furthest point East to raise a cloth on which is written al-Qaeda, in order to make the [U.S.] generals race there to cause America to suffer..."³ Al Qaeda's connections to affiliated insurgencies, grassroots jihadists, and regional branches makes it nearly impossible to separate Al Qaeda "members" from the international jihadist herd.

While lack of governance, domestic unrest, and the presence of preexisting jihadist networks allow Al Qaeda to establish visible and well organized operations in a given country, this is not always the case. Even with these variables present, incompatible ideologies or tactics can prevent Al Qaeda from establishing anything more than a limited 'supportive' presence. In countries that lack these negative environmental variables, (i.e. those that are well governed, lack domestic unrest, and have few if any jihadist networks) Al Qaeda still manages to exploit positive factors such as freedom of speech (access to the internet), loopholes in civil laws, or familial connections abroad.

Organization

³ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 29.

The first chapter introduces prominent organizational and networking theories that provide the analytic context for evaluating Al Qaeda's historical and projected evolution. The basic network models proposed by David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla, as well as the role of technology and the internet in facilitating communication within decentralized networks are also examined. Recent adaptations of networking models, including franchising theory and business organizational models, and the conditions necessary for sustaining an effective and operational network are considered. The second half of the chapter looks at some of the baseline conditions that encourage the presence of terrorist groups. This will build off of related research by the RAND Corporation which examines various environmental factors that are conducive to the presence of terrorist groups.

Chapter Two places the Al Qaeda organization within the networking theories previously described. It will be shown that Al Qaeda is organizationally diffuse, consisting of three main arms including regional branches, a grassroots network of ideologically inspired followers, and affiliated insurgent movements. As the core of Al Qaeda's once centralized command and control group fades, the arms of the broader Al Qaeda organization are poised to assume independent operations. Chapter Two will also look at how Al Qaeda expands, the group's global strategy, ideological base, use of global media, and organizational weaknesses.

Chapter Three examines AQAP, one of the latest regional branches to emerge within the broader Al Qaeda organization. AQAP is well organized, hierarchical, and exercises centralized command and control. Learning from its organizational failures in other theaters of operation, Al Qaeda has succeeded in establishing a well integrated

presence in Yemen capable of operating independently at a global level. Thus the case study of AQAP in Yemen is illustrative of the environmental and operational needs of Al Qaeda when operating in more permissive countries. Though AQAP faces serious long term strategic challenges, it will likely continue to target the US even in absence of its Al Qaeda identity.

Chapters Four illustrates how Al Qaeda has established a limited presence in developed countries in which it is denied relatively unimpeded access. Al Qaeda has succeeded in recruiting, and to a lesser extent, operating in the United Kingdom (UK) through its broad organization, propaganda campaign, and by exploiting domestic social connections and political grievances. This chapter also suggests that a similar dynamic is currently playing out in the US. While Al Qaeda lacks the hierarchical command and control structure of AQAP and other regional affiliates in the West, it has nonetheless proven capable of directly controlling a limited number of cells there. However, as security and intelligence services crackdown on Al Qaeda's operations in the West, the organization is increasingly reliant on ideologically inspired followers who are unpredictable, unorganized, and lack operational direction.

Chapter 1: Networking Theories and the Conditions that are Conducive to the Presence of Terrorist Groups

Today's criminal and terrorist groups are increasingly diffuse and complex organizations, largely as a result of their exploitation of a new generation of communications technology and today's complex social environment. Although it is difficult to predict how any single network will evolve, understanding the nature of modern terrorist networks and how they interact with various environmental factors is vital in understanding Al Qaeda's current and projected evolution. After introducing some contemporary organizational models of criminal and terrorist networks, this chapter examines environmental factors that are conducive to the presence of terrorist groups.

Networks

Understanding the organizational dynamics of terrorist networks allows us to understand how these groups recruit, expand, and achieve sustainability.¹ After presenting prominent networking models, this section looks at the role of the internet in maintaining internodal communication within these networks. Also considered are contemporary networking structures including business models, diffuse and dynamic networks, and the conditions necessary in maintaining organizational survival.

Types of Networks

John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, in their work *Networks and Netwars*, propose a concept called "Netwar". In Netwar, separate groups or individuals will coordinate with one another utilizing various means of communication. Rather than free standing hierarchical organizations (with a centralized base) and formalized doctrines or strategies,

¹ Steve Ressler, "Social Network Analysis as an Approach to Combat Terrorism: Past, Present, and Future Research," *Homeland Security Affairs* 2, no. 2 (July 2006): 2 (accessed October 30, 2010).

these groups are loosely connected factions.² Netwar is a new type of warfare in which small dispersed groups “communicate, coordinate and conduct their campaigns in an interconnected manner, without precise command and control”.³

Arquilla and Ronfeldt point to three general categories of networks, each with unique organizational characteristics. These are chain links, hub networks, and all-channel full matrix networks. Chain networks generally rely on a bureaucratic structure with orders passing from top to bottom. One example is smuggling groups where communications, goods, and people, travel from one end to another. In hub networks (including, for example, franchises and cartels), actors (nodes) are tied to a central node from which they receive orders direction, and through which they can communicate to other nodes.⁴ Finally, all channel or full matrix networks are the most dispersed and least organized. All nodes are connected to each other, and there is no centralized leadership, command, or headquarters. Multiple leaders may exist and therefore decision making is decentralized as well. Operational directives can be issued from each cell, allowing for the maximum level of autonomy and local initiative. Locally grown ideas can be transmitted to the central hub, where they then receive approval or adjustment.⁵

For a full matrix network to maintain effective performance and continued existence, shared ideologies (such as religion), principles, and operational doctrines that span all nodes are necessary. This ensures that all nodes, despite geographic dispersion,

² John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001), 6.

³ Ibid 30.

⁴ Ibid 7-8.

⁵ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 164.

are of “one mind”.⁶ However, geographic dispersion of nodes can also impede the network’s operational effectiveness as isolated components of the network can diverge from the intent of senior leadership without any intentional effort to modify tactics or strategy.⁷ A full matrix network can continue to function despite the loss of numerous nodes or leaders. As an organization becomes further decentralized, it also becomes harder to defeat.⁸ Although the organization is decentralized, leadership still remains important (especially at the local level).⁹ The ad hoc nature of these groups permits the practice of what Arquilla and Ronfeldt describe as “swarming”, where dispersed nodes can attack a given enemy from multiple points at once. This is an effective tactic and one that is actively employed by Al Qaeda.

The Role of the Internet in Facilitating Communication within Decentralized Networks

The internet and other forms global communication allow decentralized networks to maintain cohesiveness despite geographical dispersion, and this is particularly true of full matrix networks. Within these networks, communication and coordination is not formally specified in one particular way but rather changes according to new situations, and internal networks are complemented by linkages to individuals outside of the organization such as ideological affiliates. These internal and external ties are determined by shared norms and values rather than a bureaucracy.¹⁰ Given the characteristics of full matrix networks, constant communication is required for the organization to grow and

⁶ John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001), 9.

⁷ Brian A. Jackson, "Groups, Networks, or Movements: A Command-and-Control Driven Approach to Classifying Terrorist Organizations and Its Application to Al Qaeda," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (2006): 245 (accessed December 1, 2010).

⁸ John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001), 365.

⁹ Ibid, 327

¹⁰ Ibid, 31

reach its full potential, however some groups can remain highly effective even without consistent communication.

Communication between nodes ensures that the binding ideology of the group will remain intact.¹¹ Modes of communication to accomplish this goal include everything from emails, cell phones, and faxes, to hand delivered correspondence.¹² Cell phones and the internet have been used to recruit new members, coordinate attacks, and broadcast their ideology or message to target audiences. The internet in particular has reduced the need for face to face interaction, allowing groups to use online message boards and chat rooms to share information, such as strategy and operational tactics, or participate in virtual training grounds.

The attractiveness of the internet stems primarily from its ease of use and access, little or no regulation, access to a global audience, and the instantaneous speed at which information can be transferred between members of the organization. Web pages are very cheap to operate, and can be used to display a variety of media forms.¹³ Web activity is also difficult to trace, especially as terrorists utilize steganography, encryption software, and various other means of clandestine operation, allowing them to operate in safety over the internet. This gives organizations the freedom to not only establish central websites, but allows individual nodes to develop their own websites and propaganda arms. Many criminal, militia, and extremist groups that were once isolated are becoming leaderless networks as a result. Before the advent of the internet, fanaticism of isolated jihadist or terrorist groups would have faded in absence of communication. Now access to shared

¹¹ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, 158.

¹² John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001), 10

¹³ Gabriel Weimann, *How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet*, Special Report 116, p. 3, <http://www.usip.org/publications/wwwterrornet-how-modern-terrorism-uses-internet>.

communication technologies reinforces emotional and ideological support of these groups and their members.¹⁴ This has made terrorist networks extremely resilient, especially since online chat rooms and social networking media like Facebook and Twitter have essentially created virtual communities or havens that parallel physical organizations.¹⁵ However, despite the popularity of the internet as a training tool, some analysts argue that the benefits offered by physical training camps cannot be replaced by virtual ones.¹⁶

Applying Business Models to Terrorist Groups

Unlike strictly hierarchical organizations, today's groups appear to be taking on businesslike organizational structures. Research by Aaron Zelinsky and Martin Shubik from Yale University highlight four different organizational models, including hierarchical, venture capital, franchise, and brand model groups. With centralized resources and operations, hierarchical groups exercise tight command and control, and require a large financial support base to maintain expansive projects.¹⁷ Hierarchical groups require a safe base of operations and physical security to protect senior leadership, and minimal knowledge is necessary to conduct operations at the nodal level. Unlike more decentralized groups, leadership at the top of the organizational hierarchy exercise direct control over operations and resources.¹⁸

Venture capital groups exercise decentralized operations with centralized resources. These groups lack the central leadership and coordination necessary to oversee

¹⁴ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, 160

¹⁵ Ibid 161

¹⁶ Eben Kaplan, "Terrorists and the Internet," Council on Foreign Relations (accessed December 1, 2010).

¹⁷ Aaron Zelinsky and Martin Shubik, "Terrorist Groups as Business Firms: A New Typological Framework," *Terrorism and Political Violence*: 329 (accessed December 1, 2010).

¹⁸ Ibid

large scale operations such as training camps. Though they may fund organizations to set them up on their behalf, they do not retain operational control over them.¹⁹

Franchise groups maintain centralized operations with decentralized resources. These organizations cannot maintain large scale operations, and are financially decentralized, with a central authority that is unable to directly fund programs or operations.

Brand model groups exhibit an extremely low degree of centralization, with both decentralized operations and decentralized resources (likened to a social movement). It is important to note that this model represents the true franchise organization (taken in its literal definition), in that the main organization only provides rights or licenses to a local company that allow it to market the main corporation's product in a given area.²⁰ These groups rely heavily on ideological self identification and ad-hoc cooperation. There is little if any contact amongst cells, and the terrorist trademark is what holds the organization together. Furthermore, brands can survive even if a number of the organization's nodes are destroyed. Because these groups have little organizational structure, they are unable to undertake long term planning and nodes have minimal communication with each other.²¹ Modern groups have the potential (as is the case with Al Qaeda) to shift between different models depending on outside pressures that may disrupt the central hub or key leadership.²²

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Joshua McLaughlin, "The al Qaeda Franchise Model: An Alternative," *Small Wars Journal* (blog), January 31, 2010, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2010/01/the-al-qaeda-franchise-model-a/>.

²¹ Aaron Zelinsky and Martin Shubik, "Terrorist Groups as Business Firms: A New Typological Framework," 330

²² Ibid

The model chosen has implications for how the group will expand. In the case of venture capital groups, small companies can choose to expand their own business by merging with an international corporation. A larger international group can choose to enter a specific geographic area by buying out a smaller local company, while supplying a small number of its own employees to give strategic guidance. The larger corporation, despite offering limited guidance and funds, will allow the smaller company (now part of the larger international company) to operate independently.²³ While the local company benefits from the added support, training, and financial assistance (not to mention greater international recognition), the global company has secured its own position in a strategic location, using the local company to achieve its own goals. Operating in this way, brand model groups (franchise organizations in the literal sense) may offer little more than inspiration, small funds, and ideology to other groups.

Social Networking Theory and Diffuse Networks

Beyond business models and franchising theories, an analytic model worth noting is social networking theory and its companion field Social Network Analysis (SNA). This model has shed light on the nature of more decentralized matrix networks. Social networking theory attempts to analyze the complex social relationships between dispersed nodes within full matrix networks.²⁴ In contrast to strictly political and sociological approaches, social networking theory argues that the value of the network structure far outweighs the characteristics of the individual within the organization, in turn emphasizing bonds over leadership. By utilizing modern information sharing, these

²³ Joshua McLaughlin, "The Al Qaeda Franchise Model: An Alternative," *Small Wars Journal*

²⁴ Steve Ressler, "Social Network Analysis as an Approach to Combat Terrorism: Past, Present, and Future Research," *Homeland Security Affairs* 2, no. 2 (July 2006): 1-2 (accessed October 30, 2010).

multi-node social networks develop stronger social bonds between nodes than those in strictly hierarchical organizations.²⁵

By applying SNA to terrorism, Marc Sageman presents the global jihadist network; a large social network within which violent conservative Islam (Salafi jihadism) exists as the centrally shared ideology. The global Salafi jihadist movement can be divided into a number of smaller regional social networks (hubs), which are essentially independent grassroots groups that connect with each other via the internet.²⁶ These hubs have the ability to independently operate and recruit.

As Sageman argues, the Salafi movement is not a specific organization, but rather a social movement operated from the bottom up in contrast to more formalized networks.²⁷ In this way, the global jihadist movement is essentially no different (in organizational structure) than other types of social movements. The amorphous nature of the Salafi jihadist network gives it the ability to form and break bonds with other radical groups at will.²⁸ Although Salafism is central to the network's cohesive identity, it is far from being the sole determinant of the network's radical nature.

Another type of social network is the tribal group, which, unlike larger social movements, relies on greater internodal cohesion. Similar to the Salafi jihadist movement in its dynamic nature, classic tribes differ in that their key organizing principle is kinship (nuclear and extended families and clans), rather than religion.²⁹ A classic tribe can be tied to specific territories, can span various villages, and can number in the thousands.

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 140

²⁷ Ibid 142-143

²⁸ Ibid 151

²⁹ David Ronfeldt, *Al Qaeda and Its Affiliates: A Global Tribe Waging Segmental Warfare*, RAND: Project Air Force, 36, accessed December 1, 2010.

Though lineage and ties through marriage are important for smaller tribes, fraternal associations and doctrinal orders play a more important role in larger ones.

Despite variations in size between different tribal groups, kinship still remains the central component in binding all members together, and with tribal growth, becomes even more important (binding it like a full matrix network). Customs, codes, and religion are the primary means of keeping cohesion within the group. For example, warlords in many of the world's tribal zones (especially Central Asia and the Middle East), operate almost exclusively with the intent of bringing honor to the given tribe, and all individuals within the tribe strive to maintain good standing within the organization.³⁰

Other important aspects of tribes are that they are segmental (without internal operational specialization) and lack a central leader. Like franchise organizations, each unit within the tribe is identical to all others. Tribes can absorb or merge with another tribe based upon intermarriage, or can just as easily splinter apart (a village can separate from a tribe to form its own tribe). Classic tribes rarely have formal leaders or a single chief, and leadership changes tend to be low profile to discourage conflict.³¹ Operational decision making is often done in open council where all voices are heard. Tribes thus declare war as a whole, but tend to fight in splintered groups determined by village or geographic dispersion. Uniting against a common enemy is a key way for tribal groups to boost cohesion.³²

Dynamic Networks

³⁰ Ibid 36-37

³¹ Ibid

³² Ibid 38

Dynamic Network Analysis (DNA), pioneered by Kathleen Carley at Carnegie Mellon University, studies large multi-nodal networks with constantly changing relationships. By using various computational tools, DNA maps the organizational trends of dynamic covert networks (such as terrorist groups). Whereas SNA considers more static items such as agent position within an organization, DNA considers changes in agent position including the ability of cells to communicate, store information, and adapt.³³

DNA has yielded a number of important conclusions regarding the characteristics of dynamic networks. Within dynamic networks, changes in the relations of nodes are extremely difficult to predict, though they generally occur for several reasons: cognitive (changes in what individuals know), social (dictated change in ties by authorities within the network), and political (legislation that affect the overall goals of the organization).³⁴ Dynamic networks are able to heal themselves, and the isolation of a single node that links disparate groups together is typically unable to disconnect them, due to the fact that they have the ability to seek alternative contact points.³⁵ Splintering of the network can cause new more assertive leaders to emerge. How a network heals is dependent on the underlying cultural basis of the network, as well as the type and degree of isolation imposed upon it. However dynamic networks are able to heal themselves regardless of the isolation strategy used against them.³⁶

Maintaining Stability and Effectiveness within Networks

³³ Kathleen Carley, "Dynamic Network Analysis" (NRC Workshop on Social Network Modeling and Analysis), p.11.

³⁴ Ibid, 8

³⁵ Kathleen Carley et al., "Destabilizing Dynamic Covert Networks" (8th International Command and Control Research and Technology Symposium, Washington, D.C. 2003), Carnegie Mellon University, accessed April 4, 2011.

³⁶ Kathleen Carley, "Dynamic Network Analysis", 9

Arquilla and Ronfeldt note four factors that are vital to the maintenance of a network's ability to operate: organization, narrative, doctrine, technological infrastructure, and social underpinnings. At the organizational level, diffuse groups such as full matrix networks, and especially dynamic networks, rely on autonomous cells and local leaders to operate without coordinating with the organization's central leadership. Without centralized command and control, the cohesive identity must be strong in the group or it will lose operational efficiency or break up. The narrative level is this cohesive identity and shared values of the group. It is the group's sense of 'who we are, and why we are different from them.'³⁷ Narrative is also how the world sees the organization, say as freedom fighters, liberators, victims, etc., and therefore is necessary to maintain a support base. Doctrine includes the means of attack of the network (swarm tactics by attacking opponents using multiple nodes simultaneously) as well as how it operates.³⁸ Technological infrastructure includes the network's access to technology, and its ability to exploit the internet, global telecommunications, or use low technology communications (such as face to face interactions between couriers). Finally, social underpinnings include how well various members of the network know each other. In purely social networks this is obviously an essential element, if not the entire modus operandi for the group. Again, nodes within a strictly hierarchical organization (such as a corporation) will relate to one another in a distinctly different way than nodes within a tribal group. Thus when determining how a network will operate, strong personal ties, friendship, as well as high or low degrees of interpersonal trust are essential to understand.

³⁷ John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001), 327

³⁸ *Ibid* 328-329

Environmental Conditions that are Conducive to the Presence of Terrorist Groups

Having seen how contemporary criminal and terrorist networks operate, it is also important to understand the environmental conditions that permit the expansion and evolution of these networks. RAND's study, *Ungoverned Territories* highlights a number of important factors that are conducive to the presence of terrorist groups including: lack of governance, inadequate border security, exploitable infrastructure, the presence of subversive groups, favorable social and demographic factors, and invisibility. It is important to note that many of these factors are interrelated. For instance, while criminal networks or insurgent groups exist in failed states, or may even be a cause of state failure, they certainly exist in well governed states as well. Depending on what conditions are present, this has implications for what types of nodes will exist. Semi-permanent nodes (training camps) are more likely to emerge in the failed or failing state context, while temporary nodes (suicide bombers or operatives) are more likely to emerge in states that are not necessarily failing structurally, but offer an environment that permits smaller scale terrorist activities.³⁹

Lack of Governance and Border Security

The single greatest indicators of lack of governance are dysfunctional or nonexistent state institutions. Due to geographic, economic, or resource constraints, law enforcement and military personnel may only be capable of maintaining an active presence in the country's urban areas, leaving outlying areas like rugged border regions largely un-policed. Areas that lack state security services typically lack state sponsored social services, like schools or hospitals. In such areas, state laws may have little effect (if

³⁹ Michael Innes, *Denial of Sanctuary* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2007), 39.

any) on the local populace, creating a vacuum for local criminals, smugglers, and insurgents to fill. These areas are often economically retarded as well.⁴⁰ Corruption also flourishes in states suffering from inadequate governmental institutions, poverty, and/or political competition among sub-national identity groups. Terrorist organizations can exploit corrupt officials and the weakened governance to which they contribute.⁴¹

On this note, the inability of a state to retain control over its borders is an important indicator of lack of governance. Because border regions often reside far from the nation's capital, these areas are typically less governed and easily exploited by criminal, insurgent, or terrorist groups.⁴² In this regard, neighboring states may wish to exert influence within the given country, or to engage a spillover insurgent group that may be affecting the invading country's security, thereby further inhibiting the ability of the host country to establish effective governance within its borders.

It is important to note that the only true benefit of a failed state is the relative sanctuary it provides to terrorist groups, as state security forces are unable to combat these spoilers. Although failed or ungoverned states and open territories can offer terrorists the ability to exploit natural resources, illicit economies, weapons, establish training camps with little impunity, and coordinate logistics, they may not be close enough to potential targets to offer much operational use.⁴³

Exploitable Infrastructure and Illicit Economies

⁴⁰ Angela Rabasa et al., *Ungoverned Territories* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2007), 7-8 (accessed December 11, 2010).

⁴¹ Ibid 9.

⁴² Angela Rabasa et al., *Ungoverned Territories* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2007), 12 (accessed December 11, 2010).

⁴³ Ibid 15.

Access to infrastructure is an important requirement for terrorist groups. This includes access to communications, an official or unofficial banking system, and transportation networks that facilitate access to potential targets or urban centers.⁴⁴ Again, if a state lacks essential infrastructure elements like telecommunications or a formal economy, it is difficult, if not impossible, for nodes to coordinate logistics, and gather intelligence etc. Therefore operational access (such as proximity to Western embassies, military installations, urban areas) is important. Western Europe is a good example of this because, although it may not allow for large scale operations, it does permit relatively easy access to the United States. North African countries such as Morocco or Algeria offer relatively easy access to France and Spain.

Also important is a source of income to fund terrorist operations, and can include both legal and illicit economies. Illicit economies, often relying on exploitation of natural resources, such as the illegal drug trade (poppies, cocoa), diamond smuggling, or human smuggling etc. is also great financial stream that terrorist groups can tap into. Depending on the economic resources available to the individual node, varying degrees of reliance are placed on legal and illicit sources of income. For instance, terrorist groups in the Arabian Peninsula rely heavily on charities and money laundering, while those in Afghanistan rely heavily on opium and human trafficking.⁴⁵ Illicit economies can provide criminals, insurgents and other belligerents with numerous benefits.⁴⁶ Various informal social assistance programs, such as NGOs and Islamic charity organizations also provide

⁴⁴ Ibid 16.

⁴⁵ Angela Rabasa et al., *Ungoverned Territories* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2007), 17 (accessed December 11, 2010).

⁴⁶ Michael Innes, *Denial of Sanctuary* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2007), 151-157.

funding for terrorist groups that is extremely difficult to track in states that are not necessarily failed or failing.⁴⁷

Presence of Insurgent and Criminal Groups

Insurgent and criminal groups serve not only to challenge the state's authority and monopoly on the use of force, but provide terrorists with abundant operational resources. Armed subversive groups, such as local militias, insurgent groups, or criminal networks typically try to exert their own power within the state, and while some groups may leech off of state resources and institutions to fund their operations, others seek to either wholeheartedly undermine or replace them.⁴⁸ Some insurgent groups, such as Pakistani Taliban have, in the absence of a state presence, sought to establish a certain degree of law and order where they are based, although they have not sought to establish any form of government.⁴⁹ In Iraq as well, insurgent groups have established rudimentary local administrative systems, though in many instances they have failed to raise taxes and regulate daily life, an indication of their more destructive rather than productive potential.⁵⁰ A number of insurgencies have become transnational in nature by linking up with groups in neighboring countries to share resources and operationally coordinate.⁵¹ When these groups aggregate, they can invite foreign intervention, thereby further eroding the host nation's monopoly on the use of force. Again, in absence of effective national institutions within a state's borders, this creates vacuums that terrorist groups can exploit.

⁴⁷ Ibid 39.

⁴⁸ Angela Rabasa et al., *Ungoverned Territories* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2007), 10 (accessed December 11, 2010).

⁴⁹ David Kilcullen, "Counterinsurgency Redux," *Small Wars Journal*: 5 (accessed December 11, 2010).

⁵⁰ Ibid 5.

⁵¹ Ibid 9-11

Criminal and insurgent movements also offer terrorist groups a source of recruitment, access to resources, and a means of state penetration. Given the potential for operational coordination between criminal and terrorist groups, it is easy for members of one group to quickly move into the other. This is especially true in Afghanistan where foreign fighters from the greater Central Asia have married into local clans or criminal networks, seemingly eliminating the divide between criminal, terrorist, and insurgent. Strategic alliances between criminal groups and terrorists can be mutually beneficial, allowing both to achieve mutual objectives using shared resources. Such objectives can be the destruction of the state government (or at the very least the weakening of it); similar logistical and operational requirements; and shared infrastructure (such as roads, financial and money laundering networks, illicit economies). In this regard, an abundant supply of weapons and munitions (resulting from civil unrest or insurgency) is also an invaluable resource for terrorists. This is the case in the Horn of Africa where booming illicit weapons markets, as a result of continuing civil war, have given terrorists a vast supply of small arms and explosives for use in various operations.⁵²

Social, Economic, and Demographic Factors

Supportive or shared social norms, grievances, or ethno-religious cleavages between the terrorist group and the local population can also facilitate terrorist group penetration. Some of the strongest ties within an organization are the result of ethnic or religious connections, as is the case with tribal groups. At a religious level, both the terrorist group and local population may adhere to similar religious sects, allowing terrorists and insurgents easy penetration of these enclaves. However, and as Chapter

⁵² Michael Innes, *Denial of Sanctuary* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2007), 77.

Two will illustrate, shared religion is not in and of itself conducive to the presence of terrorist groups.⁵³ An example of supportive social norms can be found in Afghanistan where the Pashtun code of conduct requires that the host provide safe haven and protection for outsiders. Shared grievances could exist when a terrorist group seeks to expel Western influence or presence in a given region, and the local population of the given country wishes to expel Western military involvement in that particular country. Political discontent can emerge when citizens of the given state have limited participation in government, or are the victims of state violence. Individuals who are caught in the middle of violence between subversive groups and state security forces, may direct their anger at the state (or outside influence) by joining terrorist groups, creating operational quicksand for governments that wish to combat terrorism through the use of violence, as in Chechnya and the Russian Caucasus.⁵⁴

Economic depravity is also an indicator of societal discontent and violence, often by leading to perceptions of relative deprivation amongst citizens, who may in turn direct their anger toward the government or outside forces that they perceive as being the root cause of their problems. Extremist groups frequently tend to exist in underdeveloped regions, particularly East Africa, the Middle East, Eurasia, and East Asia, where poverty, bad governance, and poor social services are an inescapable part of everyday life. To people in these so-called 'at risk societies', Westernization, secularization, consumerism, and free market capitalism represent significant ideological challenges, especially to

⁵³ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 143.

⁵⁴ Library of Congress, "The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why?," by Rex A. Hudson, 29, http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf-files/Soc_Psych_of_Terrorism.pdf (accessed May 1, 2010).

religiously conservative cultures.⁵⁵ Inevitably in today's global economy, while some states have seen overwhelming economic gains (for example the UAE), others have seen the economic devastation of dwindling natural resources (Yemen). The result in these regions has been collective perceptions of relative deprivation: a sense of having been taken advantage of by the world economy. Individuals who are unemployed, lacking in formal education, or are socially alienated tend to seek out alternative sources of social and psychological stability.⁵⁶ Small, radical religious or activist groups may provide this sense of stability. Countries that have experienced youth bulges tend to be more susceptible to the contagion of radical ideology. For this reason, foot soldiers within terrorist organizations and insurgent groups typically join in adolescence or their early twenties.⁵⁷

Invisibility

Invisibility is also a highly important resource for terrorist groups. It is important to note that, as defined in this thesis, invisibility differs from sanctuary in that invisibility refers to the superficial ability of terrorists to remain hidden from authorities, though not necessarily maintain a long and durable presence. Invisibility can range from geographic isolation (as in the case of an ungoverned territory), anonymity, or the product of terrorists' ability to blend in socially, linguistically, and culturally into the host country.⁵⁸ Terrorist groups in Iraq have achieved invisibility in heavily urbanized areas and towns where population density and operational covers are abundant. Holy shrines in Iraq have

⁵⁵ Audrey Kurth Cronin, "Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism," *International Security* 27, no. 3: p. 38 (accessed May 1, 2010).

⁵⁶ Library of Congress, "The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why?," by Rex A. Hudson, 24-25, http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf-files/Soc_Psych_of_Terrorism.pdf (accessed May 1, 2010).

⁵⁷ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 92.

⁵⁸ Angela Rabasa et al., *Ungoverned Territories* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2007), 20, (accessed December 11, 2010).

offered protection for insurgents and terrorists from pursuit by U.S. and Iraqi security forces. Though they may limit training capabilities, cities tend to offer a great deal of cover and support.⁵⁹

In developed Western countries, large heterogeneous cities offer diversity in language and culture, making assimilation unnecessary, especially in small immigrant circles. Small groups of likeminded individuals, such as Koran reading groups or members of Mosques, can meet in isolation from outside influence and threat from state security forces. Although these states may perform governance effectively, terrorists or criminals are able to exploit legal and social loopholes (including assembly rights, asylum laws, legal protections against unlawful search and seizure etc.), access to transportation among other things.⁶⁰ When combined with access to the internet, and given that it is heavily exploited by terrorist groups to proliferate propaganda, urban safe havens can be just as or more effective than isolated training camps in remote regions. As mentioned before however, physical training camps offer education that internet recruiting simply cannot match. Risks to terrorist invisibility emerge due to the need for nodes to communicate with other nodes via phone, internet, or personal interaction. Conceivably, sleeper cells could reduce this risk by severing communication with other nodes, though doing so could greatly reduce the operational effectiveness of those cells. Again, terrorists will trade operational capacity for physical security and greater invisibility by moving to geographically isolated areas. In this sense, the invisibility

⁵⁹ Michael Innes, *Denial of Sanctuary* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2007), 87.

⁶⁰ Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Policy Planning, "Ungoverned Areas and Threats from Safe Havens," 19-20, http://www.cissm.umd.edu/papers/files/ugash_report_final.pdf (accessed December 11, 2010).

offered by large cities with dense populations can be a greater attraction for terrorist groups that isolated areas for the aforementioned reasons.

Conclusion

The study of organizational, business, and social networking models allows an understanding of the evolving nature of terrorist groups. Although difficult to predict, each structure has a different implication for how a group will evolve over time. Applied to international terrorism, while state failure is conducive to the presence of terrorist groups, other factors such as invisibility and favorable demographic factors allow these networks to find sanctuary in developed countries. The following chapters illustrate that the Al Qaeda organization has shifted through many of the aforementioned organizational types, and is able to exploit a variety of environmental conditions to penetrate both failed and developed states. The next chapter will contextualize Al Qaeda in light of these organizational and environmental factors.

Chapter 2: Al Qaeda's fit into the Networking Model

The international terrorist organization Al Qaeda was created in 1988 by Osama bin Laden, a wealthy former Saudi national, as a runoff of Maktab al-Khidamat (MAK) which was organized to fight the Soviets during their occupation of Afghanistan from 1979-1989. In recent years, Al Qaeda has become the equivalent of a 'global clearing house' for terrorism, both by inspiring other non-affiliated radical groups as well as directly sponsoring its own terrorist cells. In this way, the broader Al Qaeda organization essentially functions as a sort of full matrix network, with nodes and subgroups that exhibit more centralized command and control. Shared mission and ideology are thus essential to maintaining cohesiveness across what is a highly diffuse organization.

This chapter will first examine Al Qaeda's organizational structure, which incorporates a hybrid of grassroots followers, loosely controlled regional branches, and supportive affiliations with other radical Islamist movements.¹ As the organization's hub group in Afghanistan and Pakistan, referred to as Al Qaeda central fades away, Al Qaeda's ideological network, affiliates, and regional branches are poised to assume independent control. Also examined are the ways that Al Qaeda expands organizationally, and some of the weakness of its structure. Next the chapter will look at Al Qaeda's global strategy, and particularly its ideological base which is central to maintaining stability and operational effectiveness across the diffuse Al Qaeda organization. While ideology allows Al Qaeda to resonate with a wide audience, it also limits the structural and operational integrity of the organization. Finally, this chapter will

¹ Bruce Hoffman, "The Global Terrorist Threat: Is Al Qaeda on the Run or on the March?" *Middle East Policy* XIV, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 45-49.

look at how Al Qaeda utilizes the internet and global media both as a means of recruiting and communicating across the organization, and also as an operational tool.

Al Qaeda and its Organizational Structure

Al Qaeda's current structure is truly a hybrid one, combining both bottom up, and top down control. It incorporates many of the characteristics of a full matrix network in that it is highly decentralized and lacking in central command and control. Structurally, as Bruce Hoffman notes, the Al Qaeda organization consists of four dimensions: Al Qaeda central, Al Qaeda affiliates and associates, Al Qaeda regional branches, and an Al Qaeda network of grassroots followers.² It is also important to look at how Al Qaeda establishes an integrated regional presence, as well as some of the inherent weaknesses of this organizational structure, particularly the operational autonomy granted to regional branches. This issue makes ideology a key role in ensuring cohesiveness and operational unity across the organization.

Al Qaeda Central

Al Qaeda central remains the core of the Al Qaeda network. Based formerly in Afghanistan and now mostly in Pakistan, this Al Qaeda network has made a significant shift since the September 11th terrorist attacks. From the late 1980s to mid 1990s, Al Qaeda functioned as a hierarchical system centered in Afghanistan where Bin Laden and his deputies exercised tight control over the organization. This included a 31 member consultative council "Shura" that included military, religious affairs, financial and other sub-councils.³ During the mid to late 1990s, as a result of Al Qaeda's evolved mission to

² Ibid

³ Aaron Zelinsky and Martin Shubik, "Terrorist Groups as Business Firms: A New Typological Framework," *Terrorism and Political Violence*: 331, accessed December 1, 2010.

wage jihad against the West, the organization changed focus from the “near enemy” (Russia in Afghanistan) to the “far enemy” (the US). This necessitated a shift from a more hierarchical command and control structure, to a “venture capital” structure that utilized decentralized operations. In essence, this is the origin of the bottom up and top down planning and operations methodology. Largely as a result of the disruption of Al Qaeda central’s operations and communication, it has taken on a more consultative role. This has included providing financial and limited training and or materiel assistance to global jihadist affiliates.⁴

Following US operations in Afghanistan in 2001 during Operation Enduring Freedom, Al Qaeda central lost some of its command and control capability over its regional franchises, resulting in the organization’s transformation to a brand model, or social movement structure.⁵ Today’s Al Qaeda central still includes the organization’s key leaders, most notably Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. Al Qaeda central operates mostly in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) where it continues to recruit and train, and is heavily reliant on support from Pakistani and Afghani Taliban groups.⁶ Despite losses in leadership, Al Qaeda central remains intent and capable of striking the US.⁷ The central group consists of a professional cadre of terrorist operatives which are utilized by Al Qaeda’s central leadership both to conduct high scale attacks, as well as to enlist the support of local groups. They will either expand the organization altogether (by establishing new regional offshoots), or get local support

⁴ Ibid, 331-332

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *2009 Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence*, 5.

⁷ Phillip Mudd, "Evaluating the Al-Qa'ida Threat to the U.S. Homeland," *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 8 (August 2010): 2.

for an upcoming attack. For an upcoming attack, locals will play a strictly supportive role, while the main planning and execution of the operation will be conducted by the professional Al Qaeda members from the central group.⁸

Al Qaeda Affiliates and Associates

Al Qaeda's affiliates and associates are groups or movements that maintain limited ideological or direct connection with the Al Qaeda organization. Some groups can be co-opted into the Al Qaeda franchise, while others may receive limited support without merging into the Al Qaeda organization.

Al Qaeda's affiliates include non-directly affiliated (often Sunni) groups. They include the South East Asian radical Islamic group Jemaah Islamiya, the Somali radical group Al Shabaab, Pakistan's Lashkar-e-Taiba, and other Muslim insurgent groups everywhere from the Russian Caucasus, to Central Europe, to North Africa.⁹ Although these groups focus on more regional political objectives, they nonetheless share much of the same anti-Western sentiment as Al Qaeda. Many of these groups receive funding, training, ideological support, and weapons from Al Qaeda central's operatives. These groups frequently cooperate with Al Qaeda in carrying out attacks on US embassies and military facilities abroad, provided doing so allows them to achieve their own regional objectives.¹⁰ Many of these insurgent groups utilize identical tactics as Al Qaeda and follow similar ideologies, although Al Qaeda itself does not directly control jihadist movements in each region or country. Al Qaeda's main goal is to sponsor isolated regional insurgent groups, and have them eventually buy into the Al Qaeda franchise, or

⁸ Bruce Hoffman, "The Global Terrorist Threat: Is Al Qaeda on the Run or on the March?" p. 46.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Audrey Kurth Cronin, "Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism," *International Security* 27, no. 3: p. 47 (accessed May 1, 2010).

at the very least to channel isolated grievances into a “global jihad” with global ambitions.¹¹

As a business model, this is equivalent to a local company “buying into” the larger Al Qaeda franchise. Al Qaeda, as a large business, conducts a survey of these local affiliates to determine whether or not they would be valuable additions to the organization. This includes identifying whether compatible ideologies and objectives exist, and whether or not the group will provide needed assets to the global Al Qaeda network. Al-Shabab is an example. While the group maintains its own leadership and local objectives, some believe that it has been co-opted from a local group that received training, funds, and arms from Al Qaeda, into a regional affiliate, although this has not been conclusively established.¹² Like many other regional groups wishing to carry the Al Qaeda black banner, it needed to make overtures that included a reaffirmation of its jihadist ideological commitment. Recruitment from a local movement into the Al Qaeda franchise is often a slow integration process that occurs over many years. Al-Shabab’s large Somali diaspora throughout the west is also a potentially valuable operational asset that Al Qaeda can leverage. The Palestinian terrorist organization Hamas, however, has shown dedication only to its own local anti-Israeli objectives and for this reason has not been co-opted by Al Qaeda.¹³

Some affiliated groups may benefit solely from Al Qaeda’s financial and materiel support without actually adhering to the same ideological views as Al Qaeda. Bosnia is an example. Muslim insurgent forces in Bosnia benefited from Afghanistan based Al

¹¹ Bruce Hoffman, “The Global Terrorist Threat: Is Al Qaeda on the Run or on the March?” p. 46.

¹² Joshua McLaughlin, “The al Qaeda Franchise Model: An Alternative,” *Small Wars Journal* (blog), January 31, 2010, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2010/01/the-al-qaeda-franchise-model-a/>.

¹³ Ibid

Qaeda central's support (the only real source of support for the group) without taking on Al Qaeda's global objectives. All other factors equal, ideology is central in determining which groups are more likely to be eventually co-opted from a simple affiliate to an eventual local branch of the Al Qaeda organization itself. These regional brands are often seen publicly as direct offshoots of Al Qaeda (especially after attacks), when in reality they may only be receiving limited support from Al Qaeda central.

Al Qaeda Regional Branches

Al Qaeda's regional branches are those that have direct connection, either ideological or literal, to Al Qaeda central and possibly other regional branches or affiliates. According to David Kilcullen, these groups, which maintain considerable operational autonomy, are aimed at creating unrest by co-opting local insurgent movements. Common ideology and culture play key roles in facilitating this cooperation. These groups essentially function as sub hubs within the broader Al Qaeda organization, allowing them to maintain and build their own connections.

Al Qaeda's local branches are those that have a direct physical connection to Al Qaeda. These include Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and others. These local branches have successfully co-opted local insurgencies (many of which are fundamentally Islamic) into groups that receive direct operational and ideological guidance from Al Qaeda central. This is aimed at aggregating local conflicts across more than 60 countries into one unified movement (of which Al Qaeda is the vanguard).¹⁴ Given the more recent diffusion of the Al Qaeda network and disruption of Al Qaeda central's command and

¹⁴ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 14.

control capabilities, these local/regional groups are operating more and more autonomously, with little if no direction from Al Qaeda central.¹⁵ Radical Islamic movements, such as insurgencies in Yemen, Afghanistan, and Somalia, tend to function through “regional theaters of operation”, in which radicals can cooperate and conduct activities in neighboring countries.¹⁶ This is to say that Al Qaeda tends to piggyback on pre-existing insurgencies by providing tactical support to achieve its broader objectives.

AQI operations, as evidenced by correspondence from the late AQI leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, have been aimed at undermining a democratic government by exploiting sectarian divides, as well as utilizing bombings, assassinations of prominent Iraqi leaders, and kidnappings, in order to undermine the government. Once this occurs, AQI hopes that the collapse of a US sponsored Iraqi regime will cultivate a fundamentalist Islamic state in its place. From there, AQI hopes that its radical Islamic message will spread to neighboring countries.¹⁷ ¹⁸ Influenced by Al Qaeda’s ideology, foreign fighters from surrounding countries have flocked to join the cause, giving AQI a multinational and multiethnic dimension. As in Iraq, Afghanistan’s porous borders have allowed countless foreign fighters from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and the greater Central Asia to join the fight in the hopes of waging jihad against the west. As Al Qaeda’s central leadership dissipates, these affiliate groups are poised to ‘assume command’.

¹⁵ James Roberts, "Addressing the Zawahirist Outsurgency," *Small Wars Journal* (blog), March 3, 2010, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2010/03/addressing-the-zawahirist-outs/>.

¹⁶ David J. Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 4: p. 598, (accessed May 1, 2010).

¹⁷ House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, *Al-Qaeda: The Many Faces of an Islamist Extremist Threat*, 109th Cong., June 2006, H. Rep. 109-615, p. 12, <http://intelligence.house.gov/> (accessed May 1, 2010).

¹⁸ Audrey Kurth Cronin, "Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism," *International Security* 27, no. 3: p. 51; (accessed May 1, 2010).

While insurgency is not the only pre-condition for the successful establishment of a local Al Qaeda group, there is a nearly 85 percent correlation between Islamist insurgency and an Al Qaeda presence.¹⁹ Al Qaeda offers local insurgent movements access to funds, recruits, and publicity, all in return for ideological and operational support.²⁰ Furthermore, although these groups plan and execute their own operations, they also independently recruit (as is the case in Yemen), and cooperate between regions. Common ideologies, languages, cultures, faiths, and interconnected familial relations by birth or marriage, all have served to connect regional jihadist groups. In fact, the connections between these radical Islamic groups give the global jihadist movement (Al Qaeda as the vanguard), an intricate web of dependency and mutual patronage, more akin to the structure of a tribal group and organized crime syndicate than a military organization.²¹ With these co-opted or aggregated local insurgencies, Al Qaeda essentially operates a large scale insurgency campaign against its enemies utilizing asymmetric warfare.

Establishing Regional Groups

As David Kilcullen notes, Al Qaeda's methods for establishing regional branches, aside from co-opting affiliated movements, include infiltrating members from the central group into local communities to establish an integrated presence. Next, Al Qaeda moves to aggregate the effects of local insurgent movements by maintaining both ideological and (to a lesser extent) direct communication with other regional branches. This in turn

¹⁹ David J. Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency," p. 599

²⁰ Daniel Byman, "Al Qaeda's M&A Strategy," Brookings Institution, http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2010/1207_al_qaeda_byman.aspx.

²¹ David J. Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency," p. 599.

prompts a foreign intervention on which Al Qaeda capitalizes as it portrays itself as protector of the Muslim population.

It is most important to note how Al Qaeda expands its network to incorporate new regional groups by further study. Though we have touched on the process of co-opting affiliated movements, it is necessary to illustrate this process in more detail. Al Qaeda's general strategy has been to infiltrate members of its central group (mostly trainers) into a given country or region, while slowly making themselves more valuable to the local insurgency in terms of logistical, financial, or training aid given. This includes the establishing of local cells, human intelligence networks, alliances with local tribal and community leaders, and sometimes a pact with the regime of the given country (as in the Taliban Afghanistan). The Al Qaeda cells can also establish their own training camps or indoctrination centers, transportation systems, illicit economies, weapons supplies, and media facilities (such as propaganda).²²

One technique for developing local alliances that has been employed in numerous areas, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bosnia, and Yemen, is that Al Qaeda members will marry into the local communities, thereby establishing blood relations with key tribal members and leaders. This makes it nearly impossible to separate local insurgents from hard core members of Al Qaeda central or its subordinate groups. In Iraq, for example, Sheiks have sided with Al Qaeda after the Sheik's daughters marry an operative of the organization.²³ In this way, Al Qaeda members are not the foreign fighters. As in Pakistan, over the past 25 years Al Qaeda has developed highly organic connections with local social circles, including everything from establishing close inter tribal connections

²² David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 36.

²³ Reid Sawyer, telephone interview by author, October 25, 2010.

(largely via marriage), to creating local businesses. Al Qaeda members thus become identical to other locals.²⁴ In areas with internal conflict, Al Qaeda members often wish to continue the struggle, even after local insurgents have declared a truce with other factions. This often leads to the eventual alienation of Al Qaeda components in those areas.²⁵ In the initial penetration phase, members of the local community are initially opposed to the new foreign presence, which often displaces the power of local leaders. Furthermore, moderate religious leaders are often resistant to Al Qaeda's highly conservative ideology. Local Al Qaeda cells may then resort to intimidation, forced marriage, or directed killings when all else fails.

After establishing an integrated local presence, the Al Qaeda cell will look toward spreading its influence abroad (moving local jihadist movements globally), often through a coordinated media and propaganda campaign. This includes operating websites, and online newsletters (such as the Al Qaeda managed magazine *Inspire*, in Yemen, Sawt al-Jihad, and even a women's jihadist magazine called *al-Khansa*), The intent is to spread ideological influence, recruit foreigners (be they Americans, Europeans, or individuals from the Middle East) or intimidate enemies. They also seek to portray a larger oppression of Muslims worldwide, exploiting disenchantment with many of the social and economic challenges mentioned in the previous chapter.^{26 27}

As a result of operations conducted by Al Qaeda abroad, or the continued destabilization of the local government, foreign intervention may result. This in turn

²⁴ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 34.

²⁵ Reid Sawyer, telephone interview by author, October 25, 2010.

²⁶ David J. Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency," p. 601-602.

²⁷ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 36.

causes what David Kilcullen calls the “accidental guerilla syndrome”, a local backlash against those that intervene from individuals that are often not at all associated with Al Qaeda or the local insurgency. According to Kilcullen, the definition of “foreigner” is truly elastic and is highly dependent on local perceptions. Al Qaeda may only be considered the foreign group by locals in Pakistan until U.S. or allied forces invade that village.²⁸ This same sort of dynamic has played out in numerous other conflicts, including Chechnya, Bosnia, and Yemen, where insurgents can quickly portray themselves as protectors of the local population after a violent intervention. Locals, either out of anger or sheer boredom, may choose to join the ranks of the insurgency and eventually Al Qaeda. In countries like Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, this dynamic exploits basic tribal tendencies where locals will almost always side with the closer rather than distant relative, even if the local may not share exactly the same ideological view of the insurgent group.²⁹ In this sense, Al Qaeda’s networking structure is not some sort of new prototype for guerilla warfare. In fact, its focus on tribal linkages looks backward in time more than it looks forwards.³⁰

Weaknesses of Regional Groups and Affiliates

The apparent weakness of Al Qaeda’s organizational structure is that by granting operational autonomy to its regional branches, it may undermine Al Qaeda’s binding ideological base or alienate the local movements. Al Qaeda’s efforts to co-opt local insurgencies in Bosnia, Chechnya, and Iraq are key examples of this. As will be

²⁸ Ibid, 37

²⁹ Ibid, 38

³⁰ David Ronfeldt, *Al Qaeda and Its Affiliates: A Global Tribe Waging Segmental Warfare*, RAND: Project Air Force, 42, accessed December 1, 2010.

discussed in chapter three, Al Qaeda has applied these lessons to establish a more organic connection with local populations, particularly in Yemen.

While expanding Al Qaeda's franchise offers the organization additional resources and new bases for operations, as Bruce Riedel notes, Al Qaeda central lacks tight control over its local branches, allowing strategic mistakes. Loose internodal connections permit flexibility, but they also allow individual nodes to run operations independently from central control. Local forces (especially those in dire need) will not turn down Al Qaeda's help and may even surrender limited operational control to them.³¹ Ultimately, compatibility across ideology and mission objectives between locals and Al Qaeda seem to be the determining factor in whether or not Al Qaeda will establish a lasting presence in a given area.

During the Bosnian War in 1992 for example, Arab foreign fighters travelled to Bosnia to assist the local soldiers in fighting off the armed Serbian invasion. Members of the fanatical Islamic Holy Warrior Brigade, or *Kaatebat al Mujahideen*, became a fully integrated part of the Bosnia 7th Army. They were known for using, Afghan style guerilla warfare, and mass suicide assaults against Bosnian paramilitaries, and eventually UN and Croatian allies. In addition to tactical disagreement between local Bosnian forces and Mujahadeen fighters, Bosnian leadership was resentful of the prospect of their land becoming a staging area for the global jihadist movement. In combination with the peace accords this ultimately led to the Mujahadeen's expulsion.³² Similarly, Chechnya's secular leadership, which has reluctantly accepted Arab foreign fighter support, has consistently been at odds with their highly conservative jihadist ideology. Though both

³¹ Reid Sawyer, telephone interview by author, October 25, 2010.

³² Michael Innes, ed. *Denial of Sanctuary* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2007), 55.

the secular Chechen government and the jihadists eventually waged full scale war against each other, this was put to an end by Russia's invasion of Chechnya, which unintentionally forced both jihadists and seculars back into a tense alliance.³³ Though in both of these instances supporting environmental factors existed that supported the presence of Al Qaeda, the mission and ideology became the prohibiting factors.

A similar dynamic occurred with Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Following the US invasion of Iraq, AQI sought (and still seeks) to exploit sectarian cleavages in Iraq to spur civil war. This was to be achieved by targeting Iraqi Shia militant groups and the Shia dominated government via roadside bombings, the bombing of Shia mosques, and targeted killings of leaders. The hope was to instigate Shia retaliation against Iraqi Sunnis. Zarqawi hoped this would draw in outside Sunni support from neighboring countries, resulting in a violent cycle of civil sectarian conflict that would eventually topple the Iraqi government.³⁴ While AQI allied itself with local Sunni tribes, it did not rely heavily on their support to carry out operations, largely as a result of Zarqawi's distrust of the local mujahedeen and disinterest in maintaining good rapport with the Sunni tribes. Furthermore, AQI operations only focused on Al Qaeda's global objectives without incorporating those of local tribes. At the same time, AQI undertook heavy handed tactics to integrate into the local community including forced tribal marriages and killings of tribal elders, all the while imposing its highly conservative ideology upon more secular citizens. In effect,

³³ Ibid, 57

³⁴ Ryan Evans, "From Iraq to Yemen: Al Qaida's Shifting Strategies," *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 10 (October 2010): 12.

AQI's actions turned many tribes against it (Sunni and Shia alike), leaving AQI little operational room in Iraq.³⁵

Al Qaeda is a learning organization. Many of these lessons are being applied to other regional enclaves, most notably Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Although this will be discussed in depth in the next chapter, AQAP has sought to establish close relations with Yemeni tribes, integrating local objectives and grievances more significantly into AQAP operations.³⁶ The limitations discussed here have major implications for how (or if) Al Qaeda will be able to expand its reach to other countries. There is a clear tradeoff that can be seen: while heavily integrating into the local community provides sanctuary, it forces Al Qaeda to remain more local. As its local branches turn more toward a pursuit of Al Qaeda's global objectives (such as targeting the US), it risks alienating itself from the local populace.

Al Qaeda Network

Beyond Al Qaeda's more or less organized structure, the Al Qaeda network, according to Bruce Hoffman, consists of homegrown Islamic radicals from across the globe that may not have a direct connection with Al Qaeda but have more of an inspirational relationship with the organization (usually via internet recruitment or exposure to radical propaganda). These individuals may carry out attacks independently or with the support of Al Qaeda and its regional affiliates. The Al Qaeda network comprises like minded individuals that share a collective sense of grievance towards the West, and belief in Al Qaeda's highly conservative ideology.

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Borzou Daragahi, "Yemen Branch of Al Qaeda Avoids Mistakes Made in Iraq, Report Says," *Los Angeles Times*, November 4, 2010.

The Al Qaeda network encompasses a diverse set of individual backgrounds. Although many of these individuals are marginalized, may live in lower socioeconomic classes, and practice conservative Islam, still others come from upper class families, are well educated, and practice liberal Islam.³⁷ Mujahadeen fighters with years of experience in fighting guerilla warfare in the mountains of Afghanistan are obviously not well suited to carry out operations in urban London or New York. This is illustrative of why Al Qaeda needs and seeks native recruits.³⁸ Again, the common factor that links these recruits is commitment to ideology and mission.³⁹ For this reason, the internet, as will be discussed later, is the primary method of maintaining this grassroots network of 'secondary' followers. Some of these individuals may also travel abroad to receive training (such as Yemen or Pakistan), or may carry out their own operations with the mere inspirational guidance of Al Qaeda.

Al Qaeda's Finance Network

Al Qaeda has also managed to maintain a far reaching financial base, in part as a result of its ties with Sunni fundamentalist groups. Strict adherence to Islamic codes forbid Al Qaeda operatives from using interest charging banks, forcing them instead to rely conveniently on a wide range of alternative institutions, including charities, NGOs, and unwitting donors. Money is often passed person to person with no intermediary banks or electronic wire transfers, making Al Qaeda's financial resources extremely difficult to track.⁴⁰ Islamic banks throughout the Middle East, including the oil rich

³⁷ Bruce Hoffman, "The Global Terrorist Threat: Is Al Qaeda on the Run or on the March?" p. 48.

³⁸ Daniel Byman, "Al Qaeda's M&A Strategy,"

³⁹ Bruce Hoffman, "The Global Terrorist Threat: Is Al Qaeda on the Run or on the March?" p. 48.

⁴⁰ Audrey Kurth Cronin, "Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism," *International Security* 27, no. 3: p. 50, (accessed May 1, 2010).

countries of the UAE and Saudi Arabia, hold substantial portions of Al Qaeda's funds. While these countries have actively cooperated with US authorities to track down Al Qaeda's money transfers, domestic sensitivities and inadequate domestic law enforcement in those countries often impede the financial intelligence gathering.⁴¹

Al Qaeda's Mission and Strategy

Al Qaeda's global mission follows closely from its highly conservative views. Among Al Qaeda's core aspirations are the expulsion of the US military from the Middle East, as well as the establishment of an Islamic caliphate that stretches across the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Europe.⁴² Simultaneously, Al Qaeda wages war on the West both operationally (via terrorist attacks) and economically as well. Although Al Qaeda is a terrorist organization, terrorism simply represents the most effective tactic available to the organization (and as is typical in insurgent warfare).

After declaring war on the West in 1998, Ayman al Zawahiri laid out a two step strategy for achieving the aforementioned goals (which in reality are pursued simultaneously). The first stage of this strategy is to create chaos in the Middle East, as well as the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in Egypt, the fallout of which would force the US from the region. Therefore, 'creating chaos' has frequently entailed piggybacking on existing insurgencies by supplying weapons, materiel, training and ideological support to aid in the destabilization and overthrow of governments. It is important to note that with the exception of a couple of cases, Al Qaeda has co-opted local insurgent movements without directly controlling them. Al Qaeda's objective is to aggregate the effects of a number of disparate conflicts, and to incite the world's Muslim

⁴¹ Audrey Kurth Cronin, p. 50-51

⁴² Bruce Livesey, "The Salafist Movement," PBS Frontline (accessed May 1, 2010).

population into overthrowing the world's 'corrupt' regimes (in a manner consistent with insurgent movements rather than traditional terrorist groups).⁴³

The second stage is to use the caliphate as a base of operations from which the Islamic world can wage jihad against the West. These radical political objectives distinguish Al Qaeda from state or regional terrorist groups with more conservative (and achievable) political objectives.⁴⁴ This is important to note because it has implications for how much support Al Qaeda can achieve when integrating with local communities or insurgent groups that will likely have much more limited political objectives.

In the second stage, Al Qaeda's military strategy is two dimensional with economic and operational sides. It is aimed at forcing the West to intervene in local conflicts (even a small terrorist attack could provoke a large scale intervention), and becoming engaged for a prolonged period of time, expending vast amounts of blood, treasure, and political will in the process. Their goals are particularly successful if the initial situation is not improved. While the foreign intervener is engaged in the given region, Al Qaeda relies on classic insurgent tactics of provoking the enemy's overreaction, exploiting the fallout of that overreaction to co-opt the local populace, and killing locals that cooperate with the enemy.⁴⁵ However, using violence to co-opt the local population also has repercussions.

Economically, Al Qaeda hopes that by forcing the US and the West to engage in prolonged conflict it will overload the Western military, police, and intelligence services

⁴³ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 29.

⁴⁴ David J. Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency," p. 598.

⁴⁵ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 29-32.

with astronomical spending on security, and putting strains on their respective economies.⁴⁶

A coordinated propaganda campaign also encourages grassroots jihadism throughout the West. By using the “swarm” tactic of attacking from multiple nodes or planting the ‘black banner’ in a foreign country, Al Qaeda aims at overloading Western national security services.⁴⁷ In this regard, lone wolf, homegrown attackers can be just as effective as hardcore Al Qaeda members given the media’s attention to failed attacks.⁴⁸

Al Qaeda’s Ideology

Given the loose connections of the Al Qaeda network, ideology is central to maintaining both organizational stability and operational effectiveness across dispersed nodes within the full matrix Al Qaeda organization. Al Qaeda’s ideology is rooted in a highly conservative Salafi Islamist sect, whose theological goal is human and Islamic reform. Al Qaeda sees itself as the vanguard of this global reform, and consistently justifies its actions through this lens. It is important to keep in mind that ideology also plays a critical role in Al Qaeda’s ability to expand its network, penetrate states or regions, and recruit within the global jihadist network. As mentioned earlier, ideology is an essential determinate of which groups are more likely to be co-opted into the Al Qaeda organization, and which individuals (at the grassroots level) are susceptible to recruitment.

Although Al Qaeda’s senior leadership practices variants of Islam, Al Qaeda is primarily rooted in Salafism, an extremely conservative religious tradition that is an offshoot of Sunni Islam, one of two primary sects of modern Islam. Salafists argue that

⁴⁶ *Internet Terror Recruitment and Tradecraft: How Can We Address an Evolving Tool While Protecting Free Speech?*, 111th Cong. (2010) (statement of Bruce Hoffman, Professor Georgetown University).

⁴⁷ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 29.

⁴⁸ *Internet Terror Recruitment and Tradecraft: How Can We Address an Evolving Tool*

contemporary Islam has strayed from its fundamental roots, and that contemporary believers should turn their focus toward an old, “pure” Islam rooted in the teachings of the prophet Mohammed and the Koran. Both of which are considered the highest sources of moral reasoning and social conduct.⁴⁹ Extreme Salafists, known as Salafi Jihadists, believe that in order to protect this fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, Muslims should strive to reestablish the political structures of the 7th century Muslim caliphate and reinstitute Sharia law (a strict religious moral code). As such, bin Laden viewed Taliban Afghanistan under Sharia law as an example for all Muslim countries to aspire to.⁵⁰ The establishment of such a state is to be achieved through “jihad”, meaning holy war.

This notion of jihad was pioneered by Said Qutb, an Islamic writer and teacher of Ayman al-Zawahiri, currently Al Qaeda’s second in command. Qutb’s theological concept focuses on the notion of reforming, through jihad, Islam and human society. Qutb argues that the latter has strayed from the fundamental teachings of Islam which prescribes a universal society governed by Islamic law. As Qutb argues, the world today is plagued by jahiliyyah, or a state of ignorance and corruption in which men reject divine authority for human authority, both in the context of the secular , religious, political and social environment. This prevents individuals from having a direct relationship with God, and therefore living according to divine law. Jahiliyyah is a social and spiritual condition of society, and is not bound to a particular state or region. In this state of Jahiliyyah, individuals follow and are blinded by their own personal ambitions and lust. While people are able to recite and learn the words of the Koran, they lack a practical understanding of the first generation of ‘pure’ Muslims, and how to live by their laws. It

⁴⁹ House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, p. 8

⁵⁰ Ibid

is therefore necessary to return the world to the pure system of Islamic governance of the period of Mohammad. Jahiliyyah prevents individuals from reforming their ideas so that they will serve only God, which is the necessary duty of all men. According to Qutb, all societies are either Jahiliyyah or Muslim.⁵¹

To bring about reform, a vanguard of true followers is needed to lead the world, through jihad out of Jahiliyyah and into true freedom under Sharia law. Upon Qutb's death, Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden's mentor, conceived of Al Qaeda as a means of achieving this type of reform. Jihad can be waged with force in defense of Islam, and offensively through any means that directly supports God's will. According to Qutb, jihad has "no relationship to modern warfare" either in its causes or in how it is conducted. It is *jihad bis saif* (striving through fighting) which aims to clear the way for a unified land in which there is an organic connection between religion and politics under Sharia law. This is essentially the return to a fundamental relationship between man and God with the complete abolition of social, ethnic, and political classes.⁵² It is important to note that jihad is not a defensive or offensive movement in the conventional sense, but rather a movement for the defense of Islam against corrupting forces, and those which limit man's freedom.⁵³ In this way, Al Qaeda's ideology and concept of a caliphate is really to protect the Muslim community and save all men by bringing them to serve God. As such, Al Qaeda sees itself as the vanguard of the global jihadist movement, the protector of the *ummah* (the world's Muslim population) and leader of a number of disparate jihadist insurgencies around the world.

⁵¹ Sayyid Qutb, *The Sayyid Qutb Reader: Selected Writings on Politics, Religion, and Society*, ed. Albert Bergesen (New York: Routledge, 2008), 36.

⁵² Ibid, 37

⁵³ Ibid, 38

More recently bin Laden has extrapolated on this, saying that Al Qaeda's operations are justified, just as any person has the right to defend themselves from attack: "this is a legal right...this is reassurance that we are fighting for the sake of God."⁵⁴ By Qutb's definition, Islam is a way of life and a religion (not simply a belief), and in this sense is true freedom. Though jihad may be waged in the immediate sense against states or regions, its ultimate goal is a universal system under Sharia law. Contrary to western perception, Qutb argues, jihad is not a fanatical holy war. Rather, it is the West that has been engaged in an "unholy war" by exploiting foreign markets, political systems, and the East's wealth of natural resources.⁵⁵ The jihadist struggle, Qutb notes, will continue until divine law is the only law which governs the lives of men.

It is no surprise that jihadist ideology resonates with potential followers at a very personal level. Although Al Qaeda may be comprised of religious fanatics, their ideology is based upon moralistic and relatively moderate principles.⁵⁶ For young populations, the global jihadist movement is a long indoctrination process that goes beyond brainwashing. It takes place over the span of one's young adult life where certain verses of the Koran are read and interpreted in such a way that the belief in jihad and its fundamental principles makes theological sense, and speaks to that person directly.⁵⁷ Without this connection, many experts have acknowledged that Al Qaeda would lose relevance amongst the global Muslim community, and could not survive as an organization.

⁵⁴ Alia Brahimi, "Crushed in the Shadows: Why Al Qaeda Will Lose the War of Ideas," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (2010): 96.

⁵⁵ Sayyid Qutb, *The Sayyid Qutb Reader*, p. 58.

⁵⁶ Alia Brahimi, "Crushed in the Shadows: Why Al Qaeda Will Lose the War of Ideas," p. 96.

⁵⁷ Ahmed Alwisha, interview by author, Pitzer College, Claremont, CA, November 1, 2010.

This ideology is the central component to what many call the ‘global jihadist network’. Using the term network can be misleading however, as the ‘connection’ between disparate jihadist movements may only be a shared ideology rather than intentional operational coordination. Nonetheless, common ideology is a remarkably effective ‘networking’ tool that encourages jihadist movements to coordinate with one another, and one which Al Qaeda actively uses to establish its own presence. As in the business model, if Al Qaeda wants to ‘buy into’ a particular area, it will be more successful in doing so if there is an existing pool of individuals that share a similar ideology.

Weaknesses of Al Qaeda’s Ideological Pillars

Since the early 1900s, many radical Salafi jihadists have adopted what is known as “takfir methodology”, namely the ability to partake in what would normally be considered violations of the Koran (killing of civilians, drinking alcohol, prostitution, shaving beards) in order to deceive the enemy in the course of waging jihad.⁵⁸ While intended to maximize operational efficiency by allowing deviations from Al Qaeda’s highly conservative norms, it has impacted upon both the organization’s operational effectiveness and popularity throughout the Muslim world.

Al Qaeda has now adopted the takfir method as an integral part of how it conducts its operations abroad, although in many cases this has served to undermine the premise of Al Qaeda as being a protector of the Muslim people. While takfir gives Al Qaeda wiggle room through which it can conduct operations, some suggest that this radical methodology creates distrust between members of the organization. For example, because

⁵⁸ Bruce Livesey, "The Salafist Movement,"

takfir prescribes the rooting out of “non-believers” and since members within the Al Qaeda network have different views as to who or what is “religiously pure”, this can confuse and distort the decision making at the operational or tactical levels.⁵⁹

Despite the concept of takfir, Al Qaeda’s continued killing of innocent Muslims represents a significant challenge to Al Qaeda’s role as the vanguard of jihad. While bin Laden has made various attempts at recasting this violence in light of the US’ continued attacks on Muslim civilians (corruption etc.), Al Qaeda is nonetheless losing popularity amongst the global Muslim community. According to the 2010 US Intelligence Community’s Annual Threat Assessment, two thirds of Muslims have said that extremists attacks on civilians “cannot be justified at all”, and overall support for Al Qaeda continues to be a minority view.⁶⁰ According to World Public Opinion, however, roughly half of Muslims in lower income countries such as Morocco, Egypt, Indonesia, and Pakistan expressed agreement with Al Qaeda’s ideology. No more than 23 percent of those individuals supported Al Qaeda’s use of suicide attacks.⁶¹ Throughout Europe, support for radical Islamist movements is very low with more Islamic activist groups moving to support political and economic reform rather than resort to violent radicalism.⁶² Because jihadism is not theologically accurate, it is not likely to appeal to those who are knowledgeable in Islamic theology. This has major implications for the future of Al Qaeda’s ideology (or its network) and its ability to continue to expand.

The Role of the Internet and Global Media

⁵⁹ Nelly Lahoud, "The Strengths and Weaknesses of Jihadist Ideology," *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 10 (October 2010): p. 3-4.

⁶⁰ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *2009 Annual Threat Assessment*, p. 8.

⁶¹ Steven Kull et al., *Public Opinion in the Islamic World on Terrorism, al Qaeda, and US Policies*, World Public Opinion, 23.

⁶² Tom Heneghan, "Low Support for Radicalism Among European Muslims," *Reuters*, September 15, 2010.

Al Qaeda's exploitation of the internet serves as the organization's primary means of recruitment, maintaining relevance, and communicating both within regional franchises and the broader grassroots Al Qaeda network. It also serves as a vital operational tool by amplifying the publicity effects of isolated terrorist attacks.

In terms of recruitment and communication, utilization of the internet has included everything from the distribution of jihadist audio cassettes and videos at the local level (used in regional franchises), and the global proliferation of online books and monographs (both in English and Arabic) written by respected jihadist scholars, and to targeting grassroots followers in the West.⁶³ In this way, Al Qaeda is able to establish an organic rapport with individuals rather than the cliché like mindless brainwashing of disenfranchised youth. Given the level of proliferation of jihadist propaganda, it may be virtually impossible to distinguish an Al Qaeda operative from a member of the broader jihadist social network. With easy access and lack of regulation, Al Qaeda now has virtually unimpeded reach throughout the world.

Many experts have called the internet a virtual online "terrorism university", where jihadists can meet, coordinate, and broaden their vision of Islam.⁶⁴ As Social Networking Analysis illustrates, communication is essential in diffuse, dynamic, multinodal networks. For this reason, the grassroots Al Qaeda network is by its nature, entirely dependent upon its ability to maintain communication between regional groups and members of the network. The communication between Al Qaeda central and its regional groups is almost entirely spiritual or strategic (as claimed in Al Qaeda's propaganda) rather than direct.

⁶³ Michael Innes, ed. *Denial of Sanctuary* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2007), 126-129.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 126

Al Qaeda's use of the internet and media outlets as an operational tool has transformed many local events or terrorist attacks into what are known as "glocal" events.⁶⁵ For instance, with access to a digital camera and an internet connection, the accidental killing of civilians in Afghanistan by coalition forces can quickly be publicized by Al Qaeda as a direct attack on Muslims. Al Qaeda's regional franchises can encourage locals to rise up against their respective governments, eliminating the need for direct contact with Al Qaeda central. Given the media's attention to small scale attacks and even failed attacks, such as the failed Christmas Day bombing attempt, Al Qaeda can produce the same saturation effect on Western security services that successful attacks provide. As social psychologists note, crises such as terrorist attacks tend to lead to more simplistic and less rational thinking. This leads to individuals, particularly military and political leaders, making snap, seat-of-the-pants decisions. Again, central to Al Qaeda's strategy is capitalizing on states' overreactions to terrorist attacks in the hope that they will further compromise their own security.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined Al Qaeda's diffuse organizational structure, its mission and ideological pillars, and exploitation of the global media, particularly the internet. In light of Al Qaeda's structure, it can be seen how ideology, shared mission, and constant (albeit indirect) communication play key roles in maintaining structural and operational cohesiveness across the organization. Practically, Al Qaeda can be considered a full matrix network.

⁶⁵ Audrey Kurth Cronin, "Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism," *International Security* 27, no. 3: p. 45-48 (accessed May 1, 2010).

In the chapters that follow, this analysis will help to illustrate the nature of Al Qaeda's presence in Yemen and the United Kingdom, some of the organization's current structural and operational limitations, and as well the ability to predict the outcome of the organization's attempts at developing network bases.

Chapter 3: Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is a highly structured and increasingly well organized regional group within the broader Al Qaeda organization. AQAP combines hub-like command and control structures with the decentralized stability of a full matrix network, and receives strategic guidance from Al Qaeda central. Learning from its operational mistakes in Iraq, Al Qaeda has proven successful in developing a well integrated local presence in Yemen by exploiting the country's favorable environmental conditions, and particularly its tribes. It earned international attention with its 2009 Christmas Day trans-Atlantic airline bombing attempt, proving its nascent ability to launch global operations. Through its targeted propaganda campaign, AQAP has also proven capable of developing its own international network of ideological followers including Westerners. For all its success at establishing an integrated local presence, AQAP's long term, Al Qaeda inspired strategic objectives puts it at risk of alienating local partners. However it will likely still maintain the ability to launch global operations. After presenting the various environmental conditions that have made Yemen a safe haven for AQAP, this chapter will look at the organization's structure, and means of exploiting these environmental factors.

Understanding Yemen's Complex Political, Social and Religious Environment

Yemen's underlying social, demographic, and security conditions have created a favorable environment for Al Qaeda to exploit as it attempts to establish an integrated presence in the country and conduct operations. Specifically, the nature of Yemen's tribal communities, particularly their social relations and cultural norms, gives Al Qaeda venues through which it can achieve a great deal of protection and sanctuary. Yemen's

highly decentralized and unstable government has allotted considerable autonomy to the country's tribes even while its central government policies continue to fuel instability. In addition to its historically conservative Islamic sects, Yemen is also home to an extensive and experienced network of jihadists. The country also faces a significant economic and demographic crisis. In addition to these factors, Yemen faces two major rebel movements in the North and South, the fallout of which provide Al Qaeda with further physical and ideological support.

Yemen's Tribes

Within Yemen, tribes are the central pillars of governance and society. Tribe sizes vary from a cluster of extended families from as few as 50 people, to as many as 1,000. In Arabic, "tribe" is interpreted flexibly and can refer to friendly reception or hospitality, rather than the tight connection of a family tie. Therefore the size and nature of a tribe is often dependent on perspective and circumstance.¹ Each tribe consists of families and clans that are connected either by blood or by shared alliances or customs. For centuries, tribes in Yemen have effectively acted as microstates, each with its own leadership, authority structures, and administrative divisions. Yemen's tribes have a long history and culture of independence and self governance, and over the course of thousands of years have essentially developed what are semi-autonomous states. These structures govern the tribe from the smallest unit of an individual village, to the large number of villages within the tribe. Although these tribes have developed different governance and leadership structures, there are a number of similarities that span them. These include the *umana*, a leader who oversees individual villages; the elders, who administer clans in nearby

¹ Barak Salmoni., Bryce Loidolt., and Madeleine Wells, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Huthi Phenomenon* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 46.

villages; and the Sheik, essentially the pinnacle of tribal leadership who directs the entire tribe.² Tribal leadership is relatively pyramidal, though the Sheik's power and position are highly dependent upon the consent and goodwill of the elders (who themselves are dependent upon the approval of the tribesmen).³ In this way, cultural norms of honor continue to facilitate relations between tribesmen, and damaging one's honor is equivalent to social condemnation.⁴ This makes it considerably difficult for an individual tribesman to expel, or turn over outsiders to government authorities as doing so reflects negatively upon the entire tribe.

Governance in Yemen, exercised primarily through the tribes, is a network of complex social and cultural norms and legal structures that define everyday life.⁵ In Yemeni tribal law, norms of acceptance and protection of outsiders continues to be a hallmark, where obligatory protection is provided to a vaguely defined range of foreign travelers, political refugees, or those unable to physically protect themselves. Tribal laws govern both inter and intra-tribal affairs, are based upon a long history of shared tradition and history, and are highly adaptive and efficient and often preferred by many tribesman over strict Islamic (Sharia) law.⁶ Even so, Sharia law is followed in parallel to tribal laws and governs issues including theft, violence, and penalties for crimes. Unlike hardcore Salafists however, Yemenis interpret Sharia as more of a general framework for individuals, and where it lacks guidance on specific day to day issues (such as the resolution of conflicts), tribal law is referenced. In this way, conservative Islamic

² Michael Horton, "The Tribes of Yemen: A Threat to Stability of Asset to Unification? Part One," *Terrorism Monitor* 9, no. 1 (January 2011): 8.

³ Ibid

⁴ Shelagh Weir, *A Tribal Order*, p. 144-145

⁵ Michael Horton, "The Tribes of Yemen: A Threat to Stability of Asset to Unification? Part One," *Terrorism Monitor* 9, no. 1 (January 2011): 7.

⁶ Ibid 8

practices continue to permeate everyday thinking and daily life where applicable.⁷

Though Al Qaeda's ideology is a far cry from that of many tribes, shared religion offers AQAP a level of compatibility through which the organization can appeal to, or maintain a lasting presence in Yemen's tribes.

Lack of Central Governance

Yemen's central government is a highly decentralized network of administrative divisions that exercise little control, and provide few social services to a country with a rugged geography. The government consists of smaller governates or administrative divisions which provide little to no assistance to the local population and have limited contact with the capital Sanaa.⁸ Sanaa has sought to deregulate utility services to these regional administrative posts, prioritizing government delivery of essential medical services and water supplies to urban areas, essentially leaving these rural governates to fend for themselves.⁹

Remote and rugged areas throughout the country are largely inaccessible, and successive Yemeni central governments, including that of current Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh, have had to carefully balance tribal authority to ensure relative stability in these areas. In fact, the Yemeni government actively directs state resources to the tribes, including financial handouts, direct access to government institutions, and in some cases support from the military.¹⁰ These payments serve as an incentive for the tribes' maintenance of physical and social stability, although by supporting what is essentially

⁷ Shelagh Weir, *A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 144.

⁸ Christopher Boucek, *Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral*, Carnegie Endowment Middle East Program 102, 3.

⁹ *Ibid*, 7

¹⁰ Ahmed Abdelkareem Saif, *Complex Power Relations in Yemen Provide Opportunities for Al Qaeda*, Noref Report 4, 3-4.

an “informal army” of tribesmen, it has effectively undermined the government’s monopoly on the use of force.¹¹

Where government payments have succeeded in maintaining relative stability in the past, a plummeting economy and scarce food and water resources have impeded the Saleh administration’s ability to continue this patronage system. This has also contributed to intertribal tensions (particularly in the South), as well as tensions between once loyal tribes and the central government.¹² Cooperation between the state and the tribes has been heavily dependent upon shared norms, customs, and values.¹³ As such, many tribes have seen this curtailment of government handouts as a direct assault on the honor of the Sheiks.¹⁴ However, despite the many underlying social and economic problems facing the country, the Saleh administration has committed little support to these tribes other than what is immediately needed to maintain the regime’s power.¹⁵ Often this has involved supplying weapons and financial aid to competing political parties, tribes, or radical Islamist factions to ensure a balance of power outside of Sanaa while activating intertribal tensions in the process. Because these tribes support illicit economies and activities, and a non-state security apparatus, they provide Al Qaeda with access to both resources and shelter.

Beyond the inability of the government to exert control and maintain security throughout most of Yemen, many of the government’s policies are directly contributing to the country’s instability. With unrest in both the North and South of Yemen, the

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Gregory Johnsen, "Al Qaeda in Yemen: A New Foothold," interview by Kenneth Pollack, January 21, 2010, Brookings Institution.

¹³ Shelagh Weir, *A Tribal Order*, p. 146

¹⁴ Michael Horton, "The Tribes of Yemen" p. 9

¹⁵ Thomas Juneau, "Yemen: Prospects for State Failure - Implications and Remedies," *Middle East Policy* 17, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 135.

Yemeni government has focused most of its resources and attention on the conflicts that represent the most immediate threat to the regime's survival, thus making the costly mistake of ignoring Al Qaeda.¹⁶ At the same time, Saleh has used religion to his advantage by subsidizing various radical religious institutes in the North (many of which likely support Al Qaeda's recruitment efforts) while also using his connections with radical Sunni groups to arm tribal mercenaries in order to fight the secessionists.¹⁷ However, because of the current decline in state revenues (particularly due to a fall in oil revenue), the Saleh administration has relied increasingly on punitive airstrikes against remote tribal areas as a means of coercion, a stark contrast to previous attempts by the government to peacefully work with the tribes.¹⁸ Compounding Saleh's problems is an increasingly close military relationship with the US since 9/11, causing many radical jihadists previously allied with the central government to turn against it.¹⁹ In sum, by ignoring the underlying social and economic grievances of the Yemeni population, using heavy handed (and often imprecise) military assaults on tribes, and endorsing Salafi militias to fight insurgents, the government has contributed to the country's instability by creating socio-political conditions that Al Qaeda can exploit. Yemen's lack of governance to date, and Yemenis distrust of Sanaa, means that the government's efforts to exert more authority in tribal areas contribute to its declining popularity.

Religion and the Presence of Jihadist Networks

¹⁶ William Rugh, "Yemen's President Salih and Al Qaida," American Diplomacy, last modified March 1, 2010, http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2010/0103/comm/rugh_yemen.html.

¹⁷ Barak Salmoni, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen*, p. 24.

¹⁸ Michael Horton, "The Tribes of Yemen" p. 9

¹⁹ Michael Knights, "Jihadist Paradise: Yemen's Terrorist Threat Re-Emerges," *Jane's Intelligence Review* (June 2008): 22.

Yemenis generally practice some of the more conservative sects of Islam in the Middle East. Over the past 40 years, the country has also been home to a number of Islamic fundamentalist movements that have developed expansive jihadist networks throughout Yemen. During the 1960s and 1970s, radical Islamist groups were a cornerstone of Yemeni society. During Yemen's communist rule, Northern Yemen recruited the Yemeni branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, along with other Islamist groups, as proxies to overthrow Southern Yemen's communist government. This was similar to the dynamic that occurred during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. With an influx of weapons and financial support, political and religious leaders in Northern Yemen, including Sheik Abdul al-Zindani (a leader of the Yemeni Muslim Brotherhood, who allegedly has financial ties to Osama bin Laden) established a number of jihadist guerilla units and *Tarbiah* religious schools that gave militant organizations a steady flow of recruits.²⁰ Over time, Yemen became a base and hub for jihadists.²¹

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Yemeni government allowed numerous Yemeni jihadists to travel abroad to fight in various Muslim conflicts, including Bosnia, Chechnya, and Afghanistan. Successive Yemeni governments have co-opted these experienced militants to assist in quelling tribal and sectarian unrest. Although Yemen's current jihadist network is largely homegrown and comprised of inexperienced fighters, it is built around a leadership cadre of experienced jihadists who have fought abroad.²² Throughout the 1990s, jihadists continued to enjoy direct connections and support with the highest levels of leadership in Yemen's government. This eventually ceased in the

²⁰ Youssef Aboul-Enein, "Islamist Militancy and Yemen's Internal Struggles," *Infantry* (January-February 2008): 43-45.

²¹ Michael Knights, "Jihadist Paradise" p. 21.

²² *Ibid*

late 1990s due in large part to disagreement between jihadists and the government over the proposed basing of US forces in Yemen.²³

In recent years, Salafists and Wahabis have become more vocal in Southern and eastern Yemen. The radical Al Iman University in Sanaa, run by al-Zindani, has alumni that include John Walker Lindh (American Taliban member) and Farouk Abdulmutallab. The university offers degrees in Sharia law, and has been consistently supported by Saleh despite US claims that the school serves as a pipeline for fundamentalists.²⁴ According to Gregory Johnsen, the school continues to attract foreign students from around the world (including the US, Europe, and the Middle East). Yemen's long history of fostering jihadist circles and abundance of conservative Muslims provides AQAP with fertile soil on which it can flourish.

Economic and Demographic Crisis

One of Yemen's major problems is its enduring economic crisis. Yemen's oil reserves, which currently generate more than 75 percent of government revenue, are projected to run out in the next 10 years.²⁵ Again, this has created significant tensions throughout the country as the government spends a significant portion of its budget on subsidies to citizens, tribes, and government employees. Yemen's dependency on its limited oil supplies means that potential attacks on its reserves would have crippling effects that could accelerate Yemen's likely decline into state failure.²⁶

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Gregory Johnsen, "Yemen's Al-Iman University: A Pipeline for Fundamentalists?" *Terrorism Monitor* 4, no. 22 (November 2006).

²⁵ Christopher Boucek, *Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral*, p. 5.

²⁶ Thomas Juneau, *Yemen: Prospects for State Failure*, 134-135

Other significant factors are Yemen's rapidly dwindling water supply, burgeoning unemployment rate, and large illicit economy. Yemen has the lowest per capita water availability in the world and, due to Sanaa's poor regulation of water supplies, corruption, and reprioritization of water delivery to urban areas, many isolated rural communities have been forced to rely on their own fresh water procurement.²⁷ For this reason, massive food shortages also plague the country, and child malnutrition rates are amongst the highest in the world. This has helped to further undermine the government's credibility. Unemployment in Yemen hovers at 35 to 40 percent, and the country's population growth rate exceeds three percent per year. Many of Yemen's youth are younger than 24, and Yemenis currently live on less than 2 dollars per day.²⁸ These demographic and economic factors have contributed to a marked increase in discontent amongst the Yemeni population over the past decade. Yemen is also home to a large illicit economy that facilitates international narcotics and weapons trafficking. Qat, a narcotic leaf hugely popular in Yemen and Somalia, is both imported from Somalia and grown locally, serving as a crucial source of income for many Yemeni farmers.

Domestic Unrest in Yemen: The Houthi Rebellion and Southern Secession

Besides economic and demographic turmoil, Yemen faces two major ongoing conflicts: the Houthi rebellion in the North and secessionists in the South. The Houthi rebellion, which began during the arrest of former parliament member Husein al-Houthi, resulted in a continued struggle under the leadership of his relative. The initial stages of the conflict, which eventually flared into open violence in 2004, stemmed from a history

²⁷ Barak Barfi, *Yemen on the Brink? The Resurgence of Al Qaeda in Yemen*, New America Foundation, Counterterrorism Strategy Initiative Policy Paper, 15.

²⁸ Christopher Boucek, *Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral*, p. 2-9.

of local and tribal violence and has since created a large humanitarian crisis in its wake.²⁹

Unlike the Southern movement, the Houthi rebellion in the North does not seek to overthrow the Yemeni government. At its base, it is a conflict over local material discontent, competing identities, perceived socioeconomic injustice, and a desire for Northern tribal autonomy.³⁰ The Houthis, who practice Zaidi Islam (a branch of Shiism), also say that they are defending their religion from the Yemeni government, which they claim has come under the influence of Salafists.

Since the unification of Yemen, Southern Yemen has complained of economic and social marginalization. The Southern conflict traces back to the 1990 unification of the country, and subsequent civil war in 1994, after which many former Southern government officials were replaced with Northern ones.³¹ Initially a dispute between former bureaucrats, military officers, and the central government over higher pensions, it has become an unorganized movement of disgruntled citizens without any coherent ideology or clear cut goals. Though the majority of Yemen's oil reserves are located in the South, the region has seen little development, a fact that the Southerners claim is a result of the government siphoning off the country's oil revenue.³² Although most of the unrest has been political rather than physical, limited only to violent protests and destruction of property, secessionist sentiment is rising as government forces use increasingly repressive tactics against protestors. According to a retired Southern colonel, many Southerners are simply waiting until the government is unable to make patronage

²⁹ Barak Salmoni, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen*, p. xv

³⁰ Lawrence Cline, "Yemen's Strategic Boxes," *Small Wars Journal* (blog), January 2, 2010, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2010/01/yemens-strategic-boxes/>; Barak Salmoni, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen*, p. xv-xvi.

³¹ Lawrence Cline, "Yemen's Strategic Boxes," *Small Wars Journal*.

³² Thomas Juneau, *Yemen: Prospects for State Failure*, 138-139.

payments to the local tribes, after which Southerners will launch a coordinated offensive against the state.³³

The net effect of these conflicts has created fertile ground for Al Qaeda to exploit. With an expansive and porous border with Saudi Arabia in the North, and the under policed Gulf of Aden in the South, large amounts of weapons, explosives, narcotics, and people have flooded into these conflicts. Smuggling routes correlate closely with the presence of Al Qaeda cells, and tribal leaders (which are supported by the government) actively control and protect these routes to reap economic benefits, creating a mutually supportive network of terrorists, government officials, and tribal leaders that is nearly impossible to untangle.³⁴ At an ideological level, the fallout of these conflicts has created a large pool of disenfranchised recruits for Al Qaeda to tap into. In addition, US support to the Yemeni government (including known airstrikes against Al Qaeda militants) has caused much discontent amongst tribal leaders who see this as an invasion. Al Qaeda militants can use this support to confirm their narrative of the US invading the Muslim lands.

As the Yemeni government is preoccupied with its own internal security issues, Islamist militants and other disaffected groups are seizing the opportunity to mobilize and coordinate operations. It is important to note that as the Huthi conflict reached the high water mark in late 2009, so did Al Qaeda's operational and propaganda activity.³⁵ Furthermore, as Yemen struggles with the country's two major conflicts, the state's lack of effective counterterrorism legislation further increases its appeal as a Sunni jihadist

³³ Lawrence Cline, "Yemen's Strategic Boxes," *Small Wars Journal*.

³⁴ Ahmed Abdelkareem Saif, *Complex Power Relations in Yemen*, p. 3-4

³⁵ Barak Salmoni, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen*, p. 270.

safe haven.³⁶ Yemen's extremely poor prison system is often a major source of recruitment, where frequent visits from radical imams and prison breaks aid in Al Qaeda recruitment.

The Al Qaeda Connection

AQAP is an increasingly hierarchical and well structured regional group within the broader Al Qaeda organization. However, given its proven ability to operate with significant independence from Al Qaeda central, according to Gregory Johnsen, AQAP essentially functions in parallel to, rather than as a subsidiary of Al Qaeda central.³⁷ This section looks at AQAP's organizational structure; use of propaganda to recruit and maintain local relevance; exploitation of and integration into local tribes; and the inherent weaknesses of AQAP's approach.

AQAP and its Organizational Structure

Although Al Qaeda has had a known presence in Yemen since 1992, the group officially known as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was formed by a merger of Al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia and Al Qaeda in Yemen branches in January 2009. Prior to this, Al Qaeda in Yemen essentially functioned as a logistical, propaganda, and recruiting hub to serve Al Qaeda central in Afghanistan. The two Al Qaeda entities in Saudi Arabia and Yemen did have historical linkages.³⁸ Following the CIA assassination of Al Qaeda in Yemen leader Abu Ali- al-Harithi in 2002, and the subsequent capture of his replacement Mohammed Hamdi al -Ahdal, Al Qaeda in Yemen was largely defeated by

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Julie Cohn, "Islamist Radicalism in Yemen," Council on Foreign Relations, <http://www.cfr.org/yemen/islamist-radicalism-yemen/p9369>.

³⁸ Daniel Byman, "Al Qaeda in Yemen: A New Foothold," interview by Kenneth Pollack, January 21, 2010, Brookings Institution.

late 2003.³⁹ After the 2006 escape of 23 Al Qaeda suspects from a Yemeni prison, including current AQAP leader Nasir al-Wahayshi, the organization made efforts to quickly reorganize and rebuild Al Qaeda in Yemen.⁴⁰ Since June 2007 when Al Qaeda re-announced its presence in the country and claimed al-Wahayshi as its local commander, al-Wahayshi has sought to create an organization with a durable structure that can withstand the loss of key leaders (in which it appears to be succeeding).⁴¹ The 2009 merger of Saudi and Yemeni Al Qaeda branches has effectively transformed Al Qaeda from a local chapter to a regional franchise, designed specifically to allow the group to expand its operations abroad much like Al Qaeda's organization in Afghanistan.⁴²

Despite the relative dearth of information regarding the organizational inner workings of AQAP, according to Barak Barfi, it is both compartmentalized and hierarchical. However, AQAP is decentralized enough to ensure the organization's survival even when individual nodes are eliminated or removed. It includes a political leader that provides strategic direction for the organization, a military chief to plan operations, an increasingly prominent propaganda wing that operates a number of AQAP's publications, and a religious branch that ensures that AQAP's operations follow its ideological narrative.⁴³ Bin Laden and Zawahiri utilize their propaganda instrument *Al Sahab* to provide AQAP with general strategic direction by identifying target priorities

³⁹ Gregory Johnsen, "Waning Vigilance: Al-Qaeda's Resurgence in Yemen," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, last modified July 14, 2009, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=3088>.

⁴⁰ Gregory Johnsen, "Al Qaeda in Yemen: A New Foothold," interview by Kenneth Pollack, January 21, 2010, Brookings Institution

⁴¹ Gregory Johnsen, "Waning Vigilance: Al-Qaeda's Resurgence in Yemen"

⁴² Gregory Johnsen, "Al Qaeda in Yemen: A New Foothold," interview by Kenneth Pollack, January 21, 2010, Brookings Institution

⁴³ Barak Barfi, *Yemen on the Brink?* p. 2-3

and without giving specific instructions.⁴⁴ Although specifics are unknown, it is likely that AQAP maintains little direct communication with Al Qaeda central for security reasons.⁴⁵ As was the case in Iraq, by granting operational autonomy to regional branches, Al Qaeda risks alienating supporters if these branches deviate from the Al Qaeda playbook.

To overcome this, familial relations, in addition to shared faith and ideology, allow AQAP to maintain tribe like connections with Al Qaeda central. For example, al-Wahayshi served as bin Laden's personal secretary in Afghanistan, and this has helped to cement strategic ties between Al Qaeda central and AQAP. Militants in Yemen often have familial connections with Al Qaeda members in Afghanistan and Pakistan, thereby ensuring strong ideological ties within the organization.⁴⁶ Al Wahayshi's relationship with bin Laden, as well as the fact that most of AQAP's senior leadership has either fought or trained in Afghanistan also serves as an effective recruiting tool.

AQAP's Ideological Pillars, Propaganda Campaign, and Western Recruitment

AQAP is waging a coordinated propaganda campaign aimed at maintaining local relevance by adjusting its global ideology to fit local grievances. Recent events also suggest that the group is turning its attention toward a global audience and the recruitment of Westerners. Today's AQAP is believed to be comprised of three groups: Yemenis (56 percent), Saudis (37 percent), and a mixed bag of foreign recruits (7 percent). According to Murad al-Shishani, Yemeni recruits are represented roughly equally across the North and South, indicating AQAP's ability to generate popularity

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Barak Barfi, *Yemen on the Brink?* p. 3,5.

⁴⁶ Bruce Riedel, "Al Qaeda in Yemen: A New Foothold," interview by Kenneth Pollack, January 21, 2010, Brookings Institution.

across sectarian divides in an area roughly half the size of Yemen.⁴⁷ AQAP's primary method of drawing in recruits and maintaining local relevance is through its coordinated and comprehensive propaganda campaign.

In Yemen, AQAP's narrative is consistent with the core tenets of Al Qaeda, while also incorporating themes that resonate with the tribal communities, including grievances of government persecution, marginalization, and economic depravity. This has effectively created a 'glocalization' of events, by connecting local grievances with Al Qaeda's global ideology.⁴⁸ This also includes addressing issues of relevance to the broader Muslim world, such as events in Palestine and Gaza, and the Guantanamo military detention center (the majority of inmates are Yemeni nationals). Al Qaeda also seeks to address the numerous social, demographic, and economic issues of Yemen that are of direct relevance to the local population, including the government's corruption, the inability of the Saleh administration to provide for its citizens, issues of natural resource depletion, and the uneven distribution of wealth. Thus, consistent with Al Qaeda's professed position as a vanguard of the global jihadist movement, Al Qaeda positions itself as a sympathetic leader of reform.⁴⁹

AQAP's propaganda arm uses a variety of media to broadcast its ideological message throughout the region and abroad. Its flagship publication, called *Sada al-Malahim* or *Echo of Battles* (which has been reportedly discontinued), includes everything from details on how to avoid divulging information during interrogation, to reviews of weapons, explosives, and offers explanations of world events (such as the

⁴⁷ Murad Batal Al-Shishani, "An Assessment of the Anatomy of al-Qaeda in Yemen: Ideological and Social Factors," *Terrorism Monitor* 8, no. 9 (March 2010): 6.

⁴⁸ Alistair Harris, *Exploiting Grievances: Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula*, Yemen: On the Brink 111, 6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 7

global recession) in the light of jihadist ideology.⁵⁰ By addressing local issues, AQAP is able to resonate so heavily with the local population that according to Gregory Johnsen, it is the most representative organization in Yemen because it transcends class and tribal distinctions.⁵¹ Though AQAP's proselytizing is not theologically sound, there are few religious scholars who are able to speak out against it. Local Sheiks and religious clerics that preach against Al Qaeda have not achieved as broad a following as AQAP, essentially allowing AQAP to dominate Yemen's "virtual space". With little ideological pushback, AQAP is able to recast accidental killings of civilians in such a way that it maintains good rapport with the local tribes.⁵²

AQAP has also woven its narrative into Yemen's two major internal conflicts. The group has expressed a marked distrust of the North, and is believed to have developed contacts with the Southern secessionist movement as evidenced by AQAP's recent calls for alignment with the Southern cause.⁵³ At this point, however, the relationship between Southern Sheiks and Al Qaeda is unclear. Although a number of Southern leaders are known to have fought with the mujahedeen in Afghanistan alongside current Al Qaeda members. Although Southern leaders mostly dismiss their alleged ties to Al Qaeda, as the violence continues in the South, it is likely that AQAP could try to capitalize on this.⁵⁴ The group also presents the Northern Houthi movement in a way that capitalizes on the fear of the expansion of Shia Islam and Iranian influence.⁵⁵ The

⁵⁰ Barak Barfi, *Yemen on the Brink?* p. 6-7; Gregory Johnsen, "AQAP: Propaganda and Recruiting in Yemen," *Waq al -Waq* (blog), <http://bigthink.com/ideas/26254>.

⁵¹ Ryan Evans, "From Iraq to Yemen: Al Qaida's Shifting Strategies," *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 10 (October 2010): 15.

⁵² Brian O'Neill, "AQAP a Rising Threat in Yemen," *CTC Sentinel* (January 2010): 8.

⁵³ Stephen Day, *The Political Challenge of Yemen's Southern Movement*, Yemen: On the Brink 108, 2-3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 10

⁵⁵ Alistair Harris, *Exploiting Grievances*, p. 7.

Houthis however, have limited motivations and although they share some anti-Western sentiment with AQAP, they do not have international aims and do not wish to upset Saudi ethnic groups. The Houthis' intolerant view of expanding Salafi and Wahhabi influence makes them unlikely to ally themselves with Al Qaeda barring a major paradigm shift.⁵⁶

AQAP's propaganda also targets foreigners, and particularly individuals from the US and Western Europe. In July 2009, AQAP launched its English language magazine *Inspire*, which, likely written by American jihadists and Al Qaeda members Anwar al Awlaki and Samir Khan, includes much of the same propaganda as *Echo of Battles* though directed toward a Western audience.⁵⁷ Because of his American citizenship and professed belief in jihad, Awlaki is able to connect to Western Muslims in a way that other AQAP members cannot. He uses social media such as Twitter, Paltalk, as well as postings in *Inspire*. Awlaki has connected with individuals including Nidal Hasan and Farouk Abdulmutallab, allegedly inspiring them to carry out their respective attacks.⁵⁸ It was not until the latter occurred that US counterterrorism officials identified AQAP as an organization with global ambitions.⁵⁹ The fact that Abdulmutallab received his training in Yemen illustrates that while Al Qaeda central's operational and recruiting capabilities decline, AQAP seems poised to pick up the slack in recruiting and training individual cells. Other inspired followers include Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad (aka Carlos Bledsoe), the self radicalized Little Rock Arkansas military recruiting office shooter, who, after converting to Islam as a teenager travelled to Yemen where he alleges to have

⁵⁶ Barak Salmoni, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen*, p. 270.

⁵⁷ Bob Drogin, "The 'Vanity Fair' of Al Qaeda," *Los Angeles Times*, November 26, 2010.

⁵⁸ Barak Barfi, *Yemen on the Brink?* p. 4.

⁵⁹ Peter Bergen and Bruce Hoffman, *Assessing the Terrorist Threat*, Report of the National Security Preparedness Group, 9.

been recruited by AQAP.⁶⁰ AQAP increasingly demonstrates itself as willing and able to recruit grassroots jihadists into the Al Qaeda network through its propaganda.

AQAP's Exploitation of and Integration into Local Tribes

Given the prominence of tribal society throughout Yemen, the illicit economies they support, and the sanctuary they can provide, AQAP is currently taking steps toward integrating itself into tribal communities. Although Al Qaeda's core message essentially advocates anarchy, learning from its failures in Iraq and successes in Afghanistan and Pakistan, AQAP is trying to work more closely with tribal leaders rather than displace them.⁶¹ In a joint statement made by Zawahiri and al Wahayshi in February 2009, both Al Qaeda leaders called on the local tribes of Yemen to resist the Yemeni government and to provide support to AQAP members.⁶² It is likely that Al Qaeda members have brought families into Yemen from abroad, in an attempt to further integrate into the local communities.⁶³

AQAP's attempts at integrating into Yemeni tribes also serve an operational purpose. Deep seated ties with local movements, as Al Qaeda has accomplished in Central Asia with groups like Pakistani Taliban and Lashkar e Taiba, help facilitate operational coordination between groups. Recruits into one organization can quickly be seconded to AQAP, which will then use these recruits to achieve its own operational objectives. This effectively makes any intervention on the government's part a double edged sword where they are fighting allied tribes and Al Qaeda members who are often

⁶⁰ Peter Bergen and Bruce Hoffman, *Assessing the Terrorist Threat*, 17.

⁶¹ Thomas Juneau, *Yemen: Prospects for State Failure*, 142.

⁶² Sarah Phillips, *What Comes Next in Yemen? Al Qaeda, the Tribes, and State-Building*, Yemen: On the Brink, Middle East Program 107, 4.

⁶³ Daniel Byman, "Al Qaeda in Yemen: A New Foothold," interview by Kenneth Pollack, January 21, 2010, Brookings Institution.

indistinguishable. This also plays into what David Kilcullen describes as the “accidental guerilla syndrome”, where locals may join the fight not out of any particular ideological loyalty to Al Qaeda, but because they are being attacked by an outside force. This could potentially ignite small scale counterterrorism operations into a large scale war of tribes versus the government.

AQAP has achieved tribal integration through marriage, exploitation of tribes’ complex social relations, civil laws, and cultural norms, and by weaving its global Salafist agenda into more palatable local grievances. Again, despite its ideological tension with a number of Yemen’s factions, Al Qaeda has made significant efforts to adopt a softer attitude with its ideological enemies. Although AQAP has established a presence in areas that are predominately Sunni, it has adopted a softer attitude toward the Zaydi Shia in the north by emphasizing the admirable elements of its ideology and separating it from the Huthis (which AQAP is opposed to).⁶⁴ Because of the blood ties shared by members of tribes, integrating into them is not difficult, and can be accomplished through marriage. Therefore AQAP is actively marrying into tribes in an effort to establish an organic and integrated presence in the country.

AQAP also exploits tribal customs as a means of gaining sanctuary. According to a tribal Sheik in the Mar’ib governate of eastern Yemen, where Al Qaeda maintains a large presence, Yemeni tribes will usually refuse to hand over fellow tribesman regardless of the charges brought against them. This is because the tribes (which have a distinctly different judicial system than the state) believe that the government cannot provide accurate justice, and that the suspect will not be able to defend himself

⁶⁴ Barak Barfi, "AQAP's Soft Power Strategy in Yemen," *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 11-12 (November 2010): 2-4.

adequately. Because tribal identity is collective, the decision of an individual tribesman to turn over an AQAP member is reflective of the entire tribe. Shared ideology between the tribes and Al Qaeda, such as anger against Western influence, also makes tribes less willing to hand over AQAP militants. Tribes that have a good relationship with the government are more likely to give up AQAP members, though this is in no way guaranteed. It is particularly difficult for tribes to turn over Al Qaeda members if they have familial ties to the tribe. Outsiders will sometimes bribe tribal leaders into offering safe haven, though this relationship to the tribe offers little assurance to the Al Qaeda member who may be turned over if government authorities will offer a larger bribe.⁶⁵

Despite these facilitating conditions, Al Qaeda faces some challenges among Yemen's tribes. The two predominant tribes are the Bakil and Hashid; the Bakil are Yemen's largest tribal confederation. Due to their familial connections to the Yemeni president, both tribes have rejected Al Qaeda's attempts to recruit within their communities. Moreover, even those tribes that have embraced Al Qaeda will shift alliances when it is beneficial to do so.⁶⁶ In Yemen, the balance of power between tribes, or between tribes and the central government, has oscillated over time.⁶⁷ The tribes tend to act out of their own self interest and are flexible about breaking and forming alliances. This creates opportunities for Al Qaeda, but means tribes may turn against the organization with little warning.

Weaknesses of Al Qaeda's Approach

⁶⁵ Arafar Mudabish, "Why Do Yemeni Tribes Refuse to Hand Over Terrorist Suspects?" *Al-Sharq al-Awsat Online*, November 20, 2010.

⁶⁶ Michael Horton, "The Tribes of Yemen" p. 8

⁶⁷ Ibid

Despite AQAP's short term successes in establishing an integrated local presence, the organization's long term strategy is inherently at odds with those of its local clients and partners. AQAP is little more than a pipeline to channel the entrenched grievances of its Yemeni supporters, and it is not clear that the group will be able to mobilize enough tribal support for it to be able to maintain a lasting presence in the country. As Sarah Phillips from the Carnegie Endowment points out, AQAP's global political objective is to establish an alternative to political control (via Sharia ruled society) in an ungoverned Yemen. In order for AQAP to achieve its global objectives, it will require more territory and political influence, and thus could potentially find itself in competition with Yemeni tribes. This inherent conflict between local and global objectives prevented Al Qaeda from achieving sanctuary in Bosnia and Chechnya. If this occurs, AQAP could potentially lose its client relationship with the tribes, thereby risking its own physical security and ensuring its demise (as was the case in 2000-2002 when the group did not integrate with the tribes).⁶⁸ Although AQAP is thus far proving able to work across Yemen's many political and ideological divides, its ultimate goal of establishing a pan Islamic caliphate steps on more toes than hands it shakes. Even in the south, where AQAP has its largest contingent, secessionist goals are inherently at odds with Al Qaeda's ideology, and Southerners are unlikely to support strict Sharia governance.⁶⁹ The tendency of Al Qaeda to use overwhelming violence could also potentially alienate Yemeni tribes. At the same time, by adopting a more sympathetic and less radical stance

⁶⁸ Sarah Phillips, *What Comes Next in Yemen?* p. 7.

⁶⁹ Ibid; Barak Salmoni, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen*, p. 270.

on the Zaydi Shia of the north, AQAP risks alienating its Sunni supporters in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and abroad.⁷⁰

This implies that AQAP must necessarily drop some of its international objectives rather than merely tone them down. Al Qaeda sees its regional branches (particularly AQAP) as a means of aggregating the effects of isolated insurgencies to establish a global Islamic caliphate. By keeping its hard lined global ideology, it risks local alienation. In the absence of a cohesive ideology within a full matrix network (like the current Al Qaeda network), AQAP risks becoming less relevant to the overall Al Qaeda organization. If this occurs, AQAP could very well transform into a local insurgent movement, eventually losing its Al Qaeda identity entirely. Returning to the conditions Ronfeldt and Arquilla outline as necessary for an organization to maintain effectiveness, we see that AQAP does have a favorable social base and access to technological infrastructure. While it is difficult to know exactly how cohesive the AQAP organization is from the little information available about its internal structure, it is safe to assume that the organization is well connected, although highly decentralized to maintain physical safety. If this is the case, even if AQAP eventually loses its Al Qaeda identity, it could very well continue to attack foreign targets, absent a significant loss in leadership. On the other hand, if targeting foreign countries invites an intervention that could potentially disturb Al Qaeda's support base, AQAP could very well discontinue operations abroad.

Conclusion

AQAP has exploited the various tribal, demographic, economic, religious, and domestic security cleavages in Yemen to establish an integrated local presence. The

⁷⁰ Barak Barfi, "AQAP's Soft Power Strategy in Yemen," p. 3-4.

organization itself its well organized, hierarchical, and maintains at least strategic and ideological connections to Al Qaeda central. Of particular importance is AQAP's proven ability to recruit and operate at a global level. Although AQAP is plagued by long term strategic problems, if the organization is able to overcome them (regardless of whether or not it retains its Al Qaeda identity), it could very well continue to launch operations against US and Western interests in the future.

Chapter 4: Al Qaeda in the UK

In contrast to AQAP's operations in Yemen, Al Qaeda has established a diffuse network throughout the UK by leveraging its connections through its regional branches and affiliated insurgent groups, and by recruiting grassroots followers. This very different approach is due to the unique environment in the UK. However, this strategy has faltered, as the British government has ramped up domestic intelligence gathering and policing efforts, leaving Al Qaeda increasingly reliant on ideologically inspired individuals who maintain few if any direct ties to the organization.

The first section of this chapter aims at identifying the environmental conditions conducive to the presence of Al Qaeda and its affiliated groups. The second section will look at how Al Qaeda has exploited these factors to achieve a limited organizational presence in the UK, while the third section briefly considers some of the negative environmental factors (such as policing) that impede upon Al Qaeda's ability to operate in the UK. The final portion of this chapter identifies similarities between Al Qaeda's operations in Britain and its current operations in the US.

Environmental Factors that Contribute to Al Qaeda's Presence in the UK

In order to understand how Al Qaeda has achieved a limited presence in the UK, it is necessary to address three key environmental factors: Britain's demographic makeup and the political sensitivities of Muslims; British civil law and cultural policies; and the presence of Islamic organizations.

Demographic and Religious Makeup, and Political Outlook of Britain's Muslim Communities

Muslims represent the largest religious minority in the UK, have the youngest age profile of any minority or ethnic group in Britain, and are generally the most

disadvantaged.¹ Most of the UK's immigrant communities trace their origins to the former British colonial territories of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, which make up roughly two thirds of the Muslim community in the UK, have a significantly higher incidence of economic and social disadvantage than any other Muslim ethnic group. This is not to discount other ethnic groups, as jihadists also come from the Middle East and Africa and include some Caucasian converts to Islam.² Muslim communities also have the highest proportion of workless children in the household (30 to 40 percent), low levels of civic participation and volunteering in the local community, and generally have mixed attitudes toward integration, largely as a result of their struggle to reconcile their modern Islamic identity with secular British society.³ Displacement caused by urbanization has also created significant tensions between Muslim communities and the state.⁴

Second-generation British Muslims, who fit into neither their parents' country of origin nor the UK and face significantly higher unemployment rates, are particularly susceptible to recruitment into jihadist networks. The generous British welfare state makes it possible for the unemployed to continue to spend time on the internet or attend small religious group sessions, and this is particularly dangerous when individuals isolate themselves in internet chat rooms or religious study groups.⁵ According to Marc Sageman, boredom, especially amongst unemployed or student youth, is a major factor in

¹ Paul Gallis et al., *Muslims in Europe: Integration Policies in Selected Countries*, Congressional Research Service, 10, 16.

² Sean Rayment, "Report Identifies UK Terrorist Enclaves," *The Telegraph*, November 8, 2008; FCO/HO, "Young Muslims and Extremism," 2005, <http://www.offnews.info/verArticulo.php?contenidoID=1654>.

³ Brendan O'Duffy, "Radical Atmosphere: Explaining Jihadist Radicalization in the UK," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 40 (July 2008): 41; UK Home Office, "Relations with the Muslim Community," May 10, 2004, <http://www.offnews.info/verArticulo.php?contenidoID=1654>.

⁴ FCO/HO, "Young Muslims and Extremism"; UK Home Office, "Relations with the Muslim Community".

⁵ UK Home Office, "Relations with the Muslim Community,"

drawing grassroots followers into the global jihadist network.⁶ It is important to note, however, that while many jihadists come from poverty and lack education, just as many are well educated and employed. In fact, well educated individuals are just as susceptible to proselytizing as those who are less educated.⁷ While no single factor can account for radicalization, boredom, personal crisis, and a need for a sense of fulfillment are the usual suspects. Al Qaeda recruiters thus actively target a wide range of individuals from affluent middle class to economically impoverished British Muslims.⁸

The religious predispositions of these communities are also an important factor. Even within the British Muslim community there are religious divisions relevant to terrorism. Bangladeshi Muslims, for example, practice Sufism, a more moderate form of Islam. They are far less susceptible to Al Qaeda recruitment than are Pakistani immigrants who generally tend to practice more fundamentalist offshoots of Sunni Islam.⁹ These more conservative elements give Al Qaeda an ideological and political window through which it can recruit. Moreover, these more conservative elements tend to be treated with suspicion and perceived as terrorists even when they are not. This increases their alienation and is almost a self-fulfilling prophecy. Such alienation is worsened by police partnerships with the more moderate Sufi communities; more conservative Muslims believe they are routinely painted as 'the bad guys'.¹⁰

⁶ Marc Sageman, "Jihad and 21st Century Terrorism" (lecture, New America Foundation, February 25, 2008).

⁷ Paul Wilkinson, ed. *Homeland Security in the UK: Future Preparedness for a Terrorist Attack since 9/11* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 41; Brendan O'Duffy, "Radical Atmosphere: Explaining Jihadist Radicalization in the UK," 41.

⁸ FCO/HO, "Young Muslims and Extremism".

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Robert Lambert, "Salafi and Islamist Londoners: Stigmatized Minority Faith Communities Countering al-Qaida," *Crime Law Social Change* 50 (2008): 76, 82.

Another exploitable source of alienation is the connection of domestic political grievances to global issues. That is, Muslims perceive a significant double standard in British foreign policy where although Britain champions democracy abroad, Muslims at home continue to suffer from economic impoverishment, lack of job opportunities, racial profiling, and an inability to vent those frustrations publicly.¹¹ A recent study, conducted by Brendan O’Duffy at the University of London, shows a noticeable correlation between domestic concerns, such as unemployment and British Muslims’ feelings about global political issues, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Yemen, Western policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Russian policy in the Caucasus. According to the study, some British Muslims attributed their own economic mobility to a broader “Zionist conspiracy”, that they see reflected in British foreign relations (such as the invasion of Iraq, or policies toward Israel).¹² It is no surprise that many homegrown radicals have adopted an Al Qaeda inspired global ideology. The Facebook page of recent Stockholm suicide bomber Taimour al-Abdaly, who previously lived and studied at a university in the UK for several years, had videos of Iraqi’s being abused by American soldiers as well as a series on "Russian war crimes in Chechnya".¹³ As the case of Yemen illustrated, Al Qaeda’s ability to connect local issues to global ones is important in determining the group’s relevance to that particular country.

Britain’s National Policy of Multiculturalism and Lenient Civil Laws

Britain’s national policy of multiculturalism is intended to protect immigrant communities’ sociocultural identities by allowing them to freely practice their own

¹¹ FCO/HO, "Young Muslims and Extremism".

¹² Brendan O’Duffy, "Radical Atmosphere: Explaining Jihadist Radicalization in the UK," p. 41.

¹³ Jonathan Paige, "Stockholm Suicide Bomber: Taimour Abdulwahab al-Abdaly Profile," *Guardian*, December 12, 2010.

customs. The logic of this policy focuses on promoting tolerance and discouraging discrimination. For example, and in stark contrast to France's new policy, Muslim women may veil themselves in public. Multiculturalism, originally implemented out of the need to integrate England's early immigrant communities, including Scots, Irish, and Welsh, in recent years has effectively segregated Muslim communities from secular British society to such a degree that they essentially function outside of mainstream daily life.¹⁴ In effect, this has entrenched cultural identities at the cost of a collective national identity (something that the US, in contrast, has proven remarkably adept at cultivating), creating defacto urban tribalism in some parts of the country in the form of small, alienated, and psychologically-isolated immigrant communities.¹⁵

Compounding the effects of this policy, Britain's lenient civil laws and strong legal protections of free speech, religion, and privacy not only have attracted large numbers of radical clerics and Middle Eastern dissidents to the UK, but have made it extremely difficult to preemptively respond to terrorism.¹⁶ During the 1980s and 1990s, numerous foreign extremists, some of whom were expelled by their own countries for radical behavior, set up shop in London, creating an overseas base of operations for their movements. This was possible because of Britain's nearly automatic asylum granting policy.¹⁷ Given the degree of leniency in the UK, even individuals with ties to terrorist or radical Islamist groups are unlikely to be deported. Violent radical groups, who hide under the guise of peaceful Islamic political movements, take advantage of this.¹⁸

¹⁴ Paul Gallis et al., *Muslims in Europe: Integration Policies in Selected Countries*, p. 12.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid, 11

¹⁷ Michael Innes, ed. *Denial of Sanctuary* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2007), 148-149.

¹⁸ Paul Wilkinson, ed. *Homeland Security in the UK*, p. 39-40.

Moreover, because it is a subtle shift from a 'peaceful' theological subscription, to jihadist ideology, and then to becoming a terrorist, Britain's lenient policies make it difficult to preemptively address this jump from extremism in theory to extremism in practice. This puts the UK security services in a more reactive position. These legal impediments, however, are far from unique to Britain and are characteristic of all democracies combating homegrown terrorism.

While the British government has sought to reach out to Muslim communities and maintain vigilant intelligence-gathering and policing, any counterinsurgency or counterterrorist operation will involve heavy handed tactics that potentially risk alienating individuals, thereby compounding existing problems. British domestic security forces have been wary of their experience in Northern Ireland, but in seeking to avoid actions that might alienate moderate Muslims, they have contributed to a low rate of successful prosecutions of terrorist suspects.¹⁹

Presence of Peaceful and Radical Islamic Organizations and Networks

A number of neo-fundamentalist faith and activist communities have arisen in Britain.²⁰ While many of these are moderate groups that provide a cathartic and vocal pressure valve for the anxieties and frustrations of disenchanted Muslims, others have developed affiliations with violent groups, and an even smaller number have embraced jihadist ideology.²¹ Regardless of their intentions, however, wittingly or unwittingly all of these organizations provide a source of recruits for radical groups.

¹⁹ Paul Gallis et al., *Muslims in Europe: Integration Policies in Selected Countries*, p. 19.

²⁰ Brendan O'Duffy, "Radical Atmosphere: Explaining Jihadist Radicalization in the UK," p. 38.

²¹ FCO/HO, "Young Muslims and Extremism"; Brendan O'Duffy, "Radical Atmosphere: Explaining Jihadist Radicalization in the UK," p. 38.

According to 2008 British intelligence documents, there are currently an estimated 200 terrorist networks functioning within the UK, many of which have developed extensive roots in the UK over the past 30 years.²² These included Harakat Al-Ittijah Al-Islami (Islamic Tendency Movement), Harakat Al Nahda (Movement for Rebirth), the London-based Tunisian jihadist magazine al-Minhaj (The Method), and numerous others. Salafist Saudi “Islamic awakening movements” also emerged. One such group, the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights (CDLR), claimed that it was the ideological voice for the Al Qaeda organization in the UK.²³ The Advice and Reformation Committee (ARC) served as a propaganda hub established by Osama Bin Laden in July 1994 and operated until 1998. It also allegedly supported Al Qaeda central’s military activities, including the recruitment of operatives, disbursement of funds, and transfer of equipment and services.²⁴ The Algerian based Groupe Salafist pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC), now known as Al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM after their merger in 2006) appears to have shifted to France, but is likely to have had cells operating in the UK after many radicals from affiliated group GIA (which maintained an extensive presence throughout British schools and Mosques) transferred to GSPC in the 1990s.²⁵ Al Muhajiroun (The Emigrants), which operated in the UK from 1986 to 2005, used to recruit students and provided funds for a variety of fundamentalist cells abroad. Although al Muhajiroun has been routinely disbanded, it

²² Sean Rayment, "Report Identifies UK Terrorist Enclaves," *The Telegraph*, November 8, 2008.

²³ Michael Innes, ed. *Denial of Sanctuary* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2007), 143.

²⁴ Ibid; Peter Bergen, *Holy War Inc.* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 91-92.

²⁵ Michael Innes, ed. *Denial of Sanctuary* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2007), 145; Europol, *TE-SAT 2010 EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report*, 24.

consistently resurrects itself disguised as new organizations.²⁶ Although these groups may not have direct ties to Al Qaeda they share similar ideologies and through their abundance of social contacts abroad, can help facilitate individuals' gradual transition from peaceful to more radical groups. This will ultimately provide opportunities for Al Qaeda.

Aside from radical Islamist organizations, an assortment of radical mosques also facilitate recruitment, including the Finsbury Park and East London mosques, known for spreading radical Islamist propaganda and encouraging recruitment into the global jihad.²⁷ Many radical Muslim Imams and spiritual leaders are foreigners, possess very few qualifications, have little knowledge of secular British society, and preach jihadism. Radical preachers such as Abu Qatada, Omar Bakri Mohammad and others are known by MI5 to have been directly involved in using Al Qaeda ideology in British mosques to incite violence and encourage individuals to join Al Qaeda.²⁸ In the UK, as in Yemen, Al Qaeda exploits the legitimate grievances of individuals to rationalize its global agenda. Even fundamentalist Mosques that serve legitimate purposes can move individuals ideologically closer to potential recruitment.²⁹

British universities are also thought to be exploited by terror groups as a source of recruitment. Farouk Abdulmutallab, the Christmas Day underwear bomber, studied at the University College London and was the head of the college's Islamic Society (ISOC), where he may have been drawn to radical Islam.³⁰ From 2009 to 2010 ISOC, led by

²⁶ Paul Wilkinson, ed. *Homeland Security in the UK*, p. 43.

²⁷ Paul Wilkinson, ed. *Homeland Security in the UK*, p. 46.

²⁸ "Al Qaida and the UK," MI5, <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/output/al-qaida-and-the-uk.html>.

²⁹ UK Home Office, "Relations with the Muslim Community".

³⁰ "Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab," *New York Times*, February 3, 2010.

South Asian Salafists, routinely hosted jihadist sermons and continued to re-publish the writings of Anwar al-Awlaki and others affiliated with Al Qaeda.³¹ At universities across the UK, small lecture groups and campus Islamist clubs like ISOC frequently provide the means for like minded individuals to network with one another. Through guest teachers or visiting 'scholars', student participants can develop connections to foreign jihadist networks not unlike the typical networking that occurs in an everyday job search.

Al Qaeda in the UK

Al Qaeda's network in the UK has leveraged connections with its organizational affiliates, but particularly its ability to inspire grassroots followers. To understand this dynamic, this section looks at Al Qaeda's organizational structure, recruitment methods, connections to Central Asia, and places these trends in the context of the 7/7 London bombing cell.

Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure in the UK

Al Qaeda in Britain lacks the centralized and hierarchical command and control structure of AQAP, largely because it is denied the ability to operate with the same unimpeded access that it enjoys in Yemen. This is due in no small part to the effectiveness of Britain's domestic security and intelligence services, which has forced Al Qaeda to rely on an informal network of recruits that it draws from its regional branches, affiliated movements such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Pakistani Taliban (which Al Qaeda cooperates with operationally), and a cadre of self radicalized, ideologically inspired followers. Guided by Al Qaeda propaganda, these individuals are typically less dangerous because they lack operational direction from Al Qaeda cells as well as access

³¹ James Brandon, "British Universities Continue to Breed Extremists," *CTC Sentinel* 4, no. 1 (January 2011):6-7.

to training and weapons. As they lack social ties, 'secondary followers' are less predictable and more difficult to find. Given Al Qaeda's 'ideological' connections with its secondary followers, this also gives Al Qaeda the appearance of a having a larger presence than it actually does.

Al Qaeda also maintains a number of directly controlled operational cells who carry out attacks.³² The limited number of cells that are directly controlled by Al Qaeda appear to be taking on a similar structure to those of the IRA in the 1980s and 1990s. Each group is commanded by an organizer, a planner that maintains control over the members of the groups, and individuals responsible for the procurement of operational and tactical items such as explosives and firearms.³³ Some cells are formed independently while others are formed with the help of sleeper cells connected to Al Qaeda.³⁴ These cells operate with relative independence, both logistically and financially (often times relying on criminal activity to procure funds), although core leadership in Pakistan and Afghanistan appears to direct the operations of these cells, most often via the internet.³⁵ For example, shoe bomber Richard Reid maintained close email contact with an extensive network of individuals in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and France.³⁶ However these cells appear to be more of the exception rather than the rule as most Al Qaeda recruitment occurs at the grassroots level. According to Peter Neumann, Al Qaeda recruits already subscribe to jihadist ideology (typically through the venues previously mentioned:

³² Bruce Hoffman, *Combating Al Qaeda and the Militant Islamic Threat*, Testimony presented to the House Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities, 3-5.

³³ Paul Wilkinson, ed. *Homeland Security in the UK*, p. 33-34.

³⁴ Brendan O'Duffy, "Radical Atmosphere: Explaining Jihadist Radicalization in the UK," p. 40.

³⁵ Paul Wilkinson, ed. *Homeland Security in the UK*, p. 33-34.

³⁶ "Islamist Radicalism in the UK - A Case Study from 2001," *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, September 14, 2005.

mosques, universities, radical groups), and then over the course of a number of years reach out to sleeper cells who then provide operational direction. In this way moving to a training camp abroad is a logical next step in a gradual, self started process.³⁷

Recruitment and Al Qaeda's Afghanistan-Pakistan Connection in the UK

Al Qaeda currently relies on a number of means for recruiting individuals into its loose UK network, particularly internet propaganda (self radicalization) and facilitator cells. Indeed, while these are not the only methods used (radical preachers are used too), they are by far the most exploited. In what Neumann refers to as the UK's counterculture environment, propaganda videos from Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and increasingly Yemen (AQAP's English magazine *Inspire* routinely addresses its broad messages to the West) are used to inspire grassroots followers. A striking example of this is Mohammad Irfan Raja, who, self radicalized on a wealth of extremist propaganda including videos of suicide bombings in Iraq, jihadist songs, and texts (all of which he obtained via the internet), joined up with four young men from Bradford to travel to the Pakistani Frontier Province. Via internet blogs and jihadist websites, Raja came into contact with a 17 year old American student from New Jersey named "Ali", who connected him to the "Bradford four", and another Briton named Imran, who gave the men advice on counterintelligence. All four men spent considerable time in their homes or college dorm rooms frequenting jihadist websites, some likely run by Al Qaeda.³⁸ This case illustrates both the complexity of connections within the jihadist social network, but also the unclear role that Al Qaeda plays in recruitment and radicalization. Although it is known that Al

³⁷ Peter Neumann, telephone interview by author, February 9, 2011.

³⁸ Dominic Casciani, "Students Who Descended into Extremism," *BBC News*, July 26, 2007; Shiraz Maher, "Internet Spreads Terror in Britain," *The Telegraph*, November 7, 2007.

Qaeda propaganda has frequently been cited in the copy cat messages of jihadist groups, it is still impossible (and will likely never be known except to the perpetrators) as to how much influence Al Qaeda played in facilitating their radicalization. This is likely also an indication that with greater pressure by British security and intelligence services, Al Qaeda relies increasingly on developing a cadre of secondary recruits with little or no direct ties to the organization.³⁹

Al Qaeda has also relied on covert facilitator cells both to proliferate propaganda and facilitate recruitment.⁴⁰ Younes Tsouli, a Moroccan immigrant from West London under the alias Irhabi007, served as a key conduit for proliferating and repackaging Al Qaeda propaganda in the West from 2004 to 2007. Tsouli, a frequenter of jihadist websites, and avid reader of extremist material started out as a freelance activist, posting hacking manuals and jihadist propaganda on websites from 2003 to 2004. After catching the eye of senior leaders of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Tsouli soon became one of AQI's primary propaganda distributors by building and running a myriad of Al Qaeda websites, converting homemade videos to various formats (such as for mobile phones) and disseminating Al Qaeda propaganda to as wide an audience as possible.⁴¹ Tsouli maintained connections with self-radicalized individuals from across the globe, and through the password protected message boards and forums he ran for Al Qaeda before his arrest in 2007, facilitated intelligence gathering for AQI and connected individuals from across the West (including Canada, US, UK among others) to AQI in ways that

³⁹ Peter Neumann, telephone interview by author, February 9, 2011.

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Gordon Corera, "The World's Most Wanted Cyber-Jihadist," *BBC News*, January 16, 2008; Gordon Corera, "Al-Qaeda's 007," *The Sunday Times*, January 16, 2008.

would have been otherwise difficult.⁴² Funding for the operation was facilitated by two other Britons who relied on stolen credit cards to set up new websites (some of which were on American servers) on which the three men could post AQI propaganda.⁴³

Although the internet has proven crucial in radicalizing individuals and/or connect them to the broader Al Qaeda network, online interactions cannot fully replace real world interactions. Therefore operational facilitators are necessary who can help individuals receive training overseas. An interesting comparison is the two towns of Luton and Bradford. Both cities have large Pakistani Muslim communities. While Bradford is economically more deprived than Luton, it has graduated fewer terrorists largely because Luton is known to have had more Al Qaeda middle men who facilitate recruitment.⁴⁴ Familial contacts have also played an important role in facilitating travel and recruitment overseas. Although 7/7 cell leader Mohammad Sidique Khan was an alleged facilitator, it is extremely difficult to identify these individuals largely because of the discretion they employ while maintaining contact with Al Qaeda elements overseas. For example, Mohammad Qayum Khan, also an alleged facilitator, has yet to be charged for lack of sufficient evidence.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, following US led operations in Afghanistan, Al Qaeda central's command and control operations shifted to relative security in the lawless Pakistan border regions. This has allowed Al Qaeda to tap into social networks that connect Pakistani mujahedeen and militia fighters with Britain's large Pakistani

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Gordon Corera, "The World's Most Wanted Cyber-Jihadist," *BBC News*, January 16, 2008.

⁴⁴ Peter Neumann, telephone interview by author, February 9, 2011.

population (who make 40,000 annual visits to relatives in Pakistan).⁴⁵ Many British Pakistanis come from districts within the same proximity in Kashmir, and individuals routinely travel to that region to receive training from one of the many groups operating there. In addition to those mentioned earlier, these include Jaish-e Mohammed, Pakistani Taliban, and Lashkar-e-Taiba. Therefore, nearly all of the major terrorist plots or operations in the UK have been associated with paramilitary and guerilla training in this region.⁴⁶ These militias frequently merge operations and work with each other (including Al Qaeda) to such a degree that it is unclear whether multiple groups within the same geographical area are really separate entities, or one group. As in Yemen it may be virtually impossible to distinguish between local militia members and members of Al Qaeda central. According to Marc Sageman, although Al Qaeda central in Pakistan essentially operates as one of a number of businesses in a growing network of jihadists, Al Qaeda functions as the Harvard of jihadist groups in that because of its selectivity, individuals are often trained by one group and then merge into Al Qaeda.⁴⁷

7/7 London Bombing Cell

A glance at London 7/7 bombing cell illustrates many of the points made in this chapter so far, including cell organization, means of training, political motivation, and connection to Al Qaeda central. The cell consisted of a leader, Mohammad Sidique Khan, a 30 year old son of Pakistani immigrants, along with three other men between the ages of 18 to 22.⁴⁸ It is likely that connections through local mosques or online chat groups

⁴⁵ Brendan O'Duffy, "Radical Atmosphere: Explaining Jihadist Radicalization in the UK," p. 38.

⁴⁶ Chetan Bhatt, "The 'British Jihad' and the Curves of Religious Violence," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33, no. 1 (January 2010): 47-55.

⁴⁷ Marc Sageman, "Jihad and 21st Century Terrorism"

⁴⁸ "Suicide Bombers' 'Ordinary' Lives," *BBC News*, July 18, 2005.

helped facilitate networking between the individuals involved in the attack. According to a released MI5 intelligence report, in 2003 Khan's group likely lead a facilitation network providing logistical and financial support to Al Qaeda in Pakistan.⁴⁹ Prior to the attack, at least two cell members (including Khan) traveled to Pakistan in 2003 where they attended some sort of training camp and were likely in contact with Al Qaeda central leadership.⁵⁰ Although the degree to which the operation was coordinated from foreign Al Qaeda operatives remains unclear, it is known that Khan maintained contact with Mohammad Qayum Khan, or "Q", an alleged facilitator engaged in "charity work" and who is said to have had ties to senior Al Qaeda lieutenants in Afghanistan.⁵¹ Although lacking clear information about the case, British intelligence services judge it likely that the bombers were directed by unknown Al Qaeda elements overseas.⁵²

In 2005, Al Jazeera released a video of Mohammad Sidique Khan in which he expressed a commitment to jihadist ideology in defense of Islam. Khan also praised Ayman Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden, with Zawahiri subsequently praising the attack in the "enemy's land" in a separate recording. Although Zawahiri also claimed responsibility for the attack, it remains unclear (at least publicly) whether this is true.⁵³ Post attack investigations sponsored by the British government revealed clear links between Western foreign policy in the Middle East and the expressed ideology of the

⁴⁹ Parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee, *Could 7/7 Have Been Prevented? Review of the Intelligence on the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005*, p. 7, <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/uk/july7review.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee, *Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005*, p. 12, http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Politics/documents/2006/05/11/isc_7july_report.pdf.

⁵¹ Dominic Casciani, "Path to Extremism: How It Started," *BBC News*, May 3, 2007.

⁵² Parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee, *Could 7/7 Have Been Prevented?* p. 101.

⁵³ Parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee, *Report into the London Terrorist Attacks*, p. 12-13

attackers (similar to the connection made by AQAP to local events in Yemen to mobilize followers toward global objectives).⁵⁴

Environmental Factors that Mitigate Al Qaeda's Presence in the UK

In addition to British counterterrorism efforts, the UK has also taken on a number of proactive initiatives designed to curb radicalization. Following 9/11 and the 7/7 London attacks, the British government has been waging what is effectively a hearts and minds campaign hinged on outreach to British Muslim communities and designed to foster civic participation. This includes a number of Muslim outreach groups, including New Scotland Yard's Muslim Contact Unit (MCU), composed of both Muslim and non-Muslim police officers designed to reach out to minority Muslim communities. A Muslim Safety forum was also established, allowing the Muslim community a venue through which they can express grievances and propose civil policy changes. The Home Office and Foreign Office have also funded moderate Muslim scholars to tour through the UK and give lectures in local mosques.⁵⁵ On a similar note, the British government has also been looking to encourage the development of homegrown Imams in mosques throughout the country, rather than relying on foreign Imams who, as mentioned earlier, are often under qualified and lack knowledge about secular British society.⁵⁶ The MCU has supported various community outreach efforts with Muslim youth communities, including student groups, designed to counter Al Qaeda propaganda by hearing various concerns regarding UK foreign and civil policies (especially antiterrorism measures).⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Brendan O'Duffy, "Radical Atmosphere: Explaining Jihadist Radicalization in the UK," p. 39.

⁵⁵ H.A. Hellyer, *Engagement with the Muslim Community and Counter-Terrorism*, p. 7.

⁵⁶ Paul Gallis et al., *Muslims in Europe: Integration Policies in Selected Countries*, p. 16.

⁵⁷ Robert Lambert, "Salafi and Islamist Londoners: Stigmatized Minority Faith Communities Countering al-Qaida," p. 87.

Other measures have included adopting new English language and citizenship requirements, and including citizenship study as a compulsory part of the British national educational curriculum in secondary schools.⁵⁸ David Cameron, in his first speech on radicalization and the causes of terrorism, called for an end to Britain's longstanding policy of multiculturalism in favor of new national policies aimed at promoting a unified national identity.⁵⁹ As previously noted, this is precisely because multiculturalism has created social and psychological niches that radical groups can exploit by cementing immigrant identities at the cost of a cohesive national identity. This appears to be the goal of many of Britain's most recent initiatives.

UK security services, including Scotland Yard, MI5, MI6, and Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) (British equivalent of the US National Security Agency) have dramatically ramped up policing and intelligence gathering efforts since the 7/7 bombings. Increased staffing and budget levels, in addition to closer intelligence partnerships with the US and other European countries have made it increasingly difficult for Al Qaeda to recruit and operate within the UK.⁶⁰ Tighter border controls, and less stringent deportation laws have reportedly seen some success. British security services have achieved a higher level of penetration of terrorist organizations within the UK, and when considering the number of extremist networks throughout the country, the lack of a successful Al Qaeda terrorist attack in the past five years is an indication of the relative success of the British government's efforts thus far.⁶¹ It remains unclear however, as to

⁵⁸ Paul Gallis et al., *Muslims in Europe: Integration Policies in Selected Countries*, p. 14.

⁵⁹ "State Multiculturalism Has Failed, Says David Cameron," *BBC News*, February 5, 2011.

⁶⁰ James Boxell and James Blitz, "MI5 Badly Stretched before 7/7 Bombings," *Financial Times*, May 19, 2009.

⁶¹ Peter Neumann, telephone interview by author, February 9, 2011.

how successful the British government's hearts and minds campaign has been. While some polls seem to indicate that support for jihadist ideology remains strong throughout the country, others, including a 2010 Pew report, indicate that this remains a minority view.⁶² At the same time, many publicly available polls fail to give an accurate picture of the subject due to biased sampling or incomplete data gathering.

Homegrown Jihadism and Al Qaeda in the US

Recent trends in grassroots jihadist recruiting in the United States by Al Qaeda and its affiliates closely mirror those of the UK. While Al Qaeda lacks an organizational presence in the US, it has proven able to recruit and operationally control a number of American recruits through three venues: its affiliates, the ideologically guided Al Qaeda network, as well as Al Qaeda central and its regional branches. As in the UK, Al Qaeda exploits internet based propaganda as its primary means of radicalization and recruitment, allowing radicalization to occur increasingly autonomously. American jihadists also appear to represent increasingly diverse social and demographic backgrounds, with the latest wave of jihadist recruits lacking physical or familial ties abroad. Despite America's "melting pot" social mentality, in contrast to British multiculturalism, the US is not exempt from the level of radicalization seen in the UK. Al Qaeda's increased reliance on operatives with little ties to the main organization (including regional branches) is part of the group's focus on waging more frequent small scale attacks against the US.

Firstly, while strategic objectives may differ, the ability of Al Qaeda and its affiliates to cooperate to achieve mutual logistical or operational objectives makes it

⁶² Abul Taher, "A Third of Muslim Students Back Killings," *The Sunday Times*, July 27, 2008; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Networks and Movements in Western Europe*, page #s, <http://www.pewforum.org/Muslim/Muslim-Networks-and-Movements-in-Western-Europe.aspx>.

nearly impossible to distinguish between groups which leaves the US vulnerable. Al Qaeda has proven able to both generate recruits and operationally coordinate with affiliated insurgent or terrorist groups including Pakistani Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba. After developing strong ties with senior Pakistani Taliban leadership through a number of trips to the country, Faisal Shazad was quickly recruited, trained, and deployed by the group to launch what became the recently failed Times Square attack.⁶³ As is the case for many British radicals, family connections and tribal ties to Pakistan greatly facilitated Shazad's recruitment.⁶⁴ Despite not having targeted the US, Lashkar-e-Taiba, the Pakistan based terrorist group and Al Qaeda affiliate, did launch the successful Mumbai attack with the help of American recruit David Headley, who was vital to LeT in collecting intelligence prior to the attack.⁶⁵ Headley's American identity allowed him to travel with relative freedom across borders and also attend LeT training camps in Pakistan. While LeT is not Al Qaeda, as Phillip Mudd, formerly of CIA's Counterterrorism Center notes, as these groups enter Al Qaeda's "ideological orbit" there is an increased tendency for them to operate in much of the same way as Al Qaeda.⁶⁶ In recent years, scores of Somali-Americans have travelled to Somalia to train and fight with Al Qaeda affiliate Al Shabaab, with some receiving training from Al Qaeda there.⁶⁷

Secondly and to a more limited extent, Al Qaeda has maintained direct operational control over a small number of cells, either through its regional branches such as AQAP or Al Qaeda central. Despite the relative decline of Al Qaeda central, it is

⁶³ Peter Bergen and Bruce Hoffman, *Assessing the Terrorist Threat*, Bi-Partisan Policy Center, Report of the National Security Preparedness Group, 12.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 7

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 13

⁶⁶ Phillip Mudd, "Evaluating the Al-Qa'ida Threat to the U.S. Homeland," *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 8 (August 2010): 3.

⁶⁷ Peter Bergen and Bruce Hoffman, *Assessing the Terrorist Threat*, p. 10.

through these venues that the organization has proven capable of bringing in more American recruits over the past several years.⁶⁸ Afghani-American Najibullah Zazi, who recently plotted an attack on the New York Subway system, is such an example. According to Mudd, individuals with ties to Al Qaeda central's leadership are typically drawn in after becoming self radicalized. In Zazi's case, he came into contact with Al Qaeda recruiters only after arriving in Afghanistan, and like Shazad, Zazi's family connections to Pakistan helped facilitate recruitment. Though Zazi had originally intended to fight for the Taliban, he was quickly seconded to Al Qaeda, and subsequently trained to conduct suicide operations in the US.⁶⁹ The plot was reportedly organized by senior Al Qaeda leadership overseas, and involved a US based Al Qaeda facilitator cell.⁷⁰ Similarly, Long Island resident Bryant Neal Vinas, a US Army dropout and convert to Islam who joined Al Qaeda's ranks in the Waziristan region several years ago, was reportedly in contact with a New York man (likely an Al Qaeda facilitator) who helped introduce Vinas to his Al Qaeda contacts overseas.⁷¹

As in the UK, both of these cases suggest that Al Qaeda relies on a limited number of facilitators based in the US to coordinate individuals' recruitment into the organization's central or regional groups.⁷² It is important to stress that beyond the presence of a small number of covert Al Qaeda facilitators, the Al Qaeda organization does not appear to have a structured presence in the US. Additionally, according to Brian

⁶⁸ Bruce Hoffman, e-mail interview by author, March 7, 2011.

⁶⁹ Phillip Mudd, "Evaluating the Al-Qa'ida Threat to the U.S. Homeland," p. 2.

⁷⁰ Peter Bergen and Bruce Hoffman, *Assessing the Terrorist Threat*, p. 7.

⁷¹ Michael Powell, "U.S. Recruit Reveals How Qaeda Trains Foreigners," *New York Times*, July 23, 2009.

⁷² Bruce Hoffman, e-mail interview by author, March 7, 2011.

Michael Jenkins, there are no indications to suggest there is presently an organized American terrorist underground either.⁷³

Thirdly, and as previously noted, with the marked decline in Al Qaeda central's recruitment and operational capabilities, the organization appears to be increasingly reliant on its network of secondary, ideologically charged followers with few if any direct links to Al Qaeda. An example of this is Fort Hood shooter Nidal Hasan, a US Army psychiatrist who was reportedly in contact with Anwar al-Awlaki (the radical former American Imam and current propagandist for AQAP) via email correspondence.⁷⁴ Now infamous Colleen LaRose, a Caucasian Pennsylvania woman and Muslim convert also known by her online alias "Jihad Jane", appears to have been radicalized by Al Qaeda inspired propaganda and YouTube videos.

In this regard, and as was evident in the UK, Al Qaeda utilizes internet based propaganda to recruit grassroots followers in the US. While far from the sole path of radicalization, many grassroots jihadists have begun the radicalization process over the internet. This is not to discount the value of Mosques and study groups which have also played a role in radicalization, though to a lesser degree than in the UK due to Britain's lenient policies. Media arms from Al Qaeda central, Al Qaeda affiliates, and Al Qaeda regional branches are able to lure individuals with jihadist propaganda. Hence, as described in a 2007 New York Police Department intelligence report, jihad is consistently an autonomous phenomenon with individuals beginning the radicalization process independently by exploring jihadist ideology, after which they begin to seek out fellow

⁷³ Brian Michael Jenkins, *Would-Be Warriors: Incidents of Jihadist Terrorist Radicalization in the United States since September 11, 2001*, RAND Corporation occasional paper, p. 4.

⁷⁴ Peter Bergen and Bruce Hoffman, *Assessing the Terrorist Threat*, p. 18.

jihadists and are gradually recruited into Al Qaeda or affiliated groups. As in the UK, social, economic, and psychological crisis tend to lead individuals to seek out likeminded individuals (through the internet, study groups, etc.) eventually subscribing to jihadist ideology.⁷⁵ In this way, recruitment is as much a matter of individuals reaching out to the Al Qaeda organization and its affiliates as it is them reaching out to individuals.⁷⁶ The jihadist indoctrination phase is typically led by a spiritual sanctioner (such as overseas propagandists like Anwar al-Awlaki) who allows these individuals to consistently intensify their beliefs. Acceptance of operational directives becomes the logical next step in a gradual process.⁷⁷

Though Al Qaeda's recruits in the US, like those of the UK, share certain ethnic characteristics or religious backgrounds, according to a 2010 report by the National Security Preparedness Group (NSPG), there is not a single demographic or social profile that predicts recruitment into the Al Qaeda organization or affiliated jihadist networks. Grassroots jihadists in the US appear to represent as diverse a range of individual backgrounds as they do in the UK, and some appear to have ethnic or familial ties to Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Whereas most grassroots jihadists in the UK appear to come from the country's Pakistani immigrant communities, American jihadists are primarily of Caucasian or Somali descent (21 and 31 percent respectively as of 2009).⁷⁸

The latest wave of jihadist recruits also appears to have few if any familial or physical ties abroad. Carlos Bledsoe (African American convert to Islam, and Little Rock

⁷⁵ Mitchell Silber and Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat*, p. 6-7

⁷⁶ Brian Michael Jenkins, *Would-Be Warriors*, p. 7

⁷⁷ Mitchell Silber and Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat*, p. 7,9.

⁷⁸ Peter Bergen and Bruce Hoffman, *Assessing the Terrorist Threat*, p. 14-16.

Arkansas Army recruiting station shooter), Bryant Vinas (Hispanic American convert to Islam), Michael Finton (Caucasian American convert to Islam, who plotted an attack on the Springfield Illinois Federal Building), and Daniel Boyd (Caucasian American convert to Islam, charged with plotting attacks at home and abroad), are cases in point.⁷⁹ With the only common factor being ideological commitment, there is little with which to tie together the increasingly diverse group of American recruits of the Al Qaeda network, regional groups, and affiliated insurgent movements. This suggests that the appeal of jihadist propaganda can transcend a strictly demographic or social basis in order to appeal to a narrow, unpredictable psychological profile.

Thus despite the US “melting pot” mentality of integrating various ethnic and religious groups, and despite the opportunities offered in the US, the pull of individuals’ heritage or personal troubles appear to be enough to encourage a handful of individuals to self radicalize.⁸⁰ Faisal Shazad, a Pakistani-American, father, husband, highly educated, and who lived in a middle class suburban home (fitting a similar profile as London 7/7 cell leader Mohammad Sidique Khan, and Christmas Day bomber Farouk Abdulmutallab) is such a case. Despite apparent environmental differences between the US and UK, according to Peter Bergen and Bruce Hoffman, conventional wisdom that the US could avoid the level of jihadist recruitment seen in the UK does not appear to hold. However, recent attention to this apparent rise in Al Qaeda recruitment over the past couple of years by US law enforcement and intelligence agencies may have curbed this increase.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Ibid, 32-34

⁸⁰ Mitchell Silber and Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat*, p. 8.

⁸¹ Bruce Hoffman, e-mail interview by author, March 7, 2011.

This being said, overall support for jihadism remains low amongst the American Muslim population. According to a 2009 Pew research report, most American Muslims are middle class and, unlike European Muslims, tend to be well educated and well integrated into American society. Only five percent were reported as having a favorable view toward Al Qaeda, and fewer than one in ten American Muslims believe that suicide bombing is justified.⁸²

While lacking in physical presence in the US, Al Qaeda is successfully exploiting its literal and ideological connections with individuals and affiliates to recruit Americans. Through its use of the internet, Al Qaeda is able to reach out to individuals despite apparent differences in British and American civil society. Al Qaeda's reliance on a diverse range of recruits and recruitment methods has been a major part of the organization's strategy. By focusing its efforts on smaller, more frequent attacks, Al Qaeda hopes to produce the economic and security overloading effects described in Chapter Two by grabbing the attention of domestic intelligence and police forces (and thus straining resources), and cultivating an overwhelming sense of fear within the host population (even with failed attacks).⁸³ As Shazad and Zazi illustrate, these types of operations are typically less successful (though they do not really need to be). As in the UK, while affiliates maintain their own strategic objectives, there is a growing tendency for these groups to second their recruits to Al Qaeda (as was the case with Zazi) or even operate in ways that are mutually beneficial to both the affiliate and Al Qaeda (as was the case with Shazad).

⁸² Richard Wike and Greg Smith, *Little Support for Terrorism Among Muslim Americans*, <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1445/little-support-for-terrorism-among-muslim-americans>.

⁸³ Peter Bergen and Bruce Hoffman, *Assessing the Terrorist Threat*, p. 17-18.

Conclusion

While the Al Qaeda network in the UK enjoys access to a wealth of social connections and affiliated groups, with tighter policing and intelligence measures in place, it is likely that Al Qaeda will continue to rely on cadres of secondary recruits which, although harder to track and less predictable, lack the operational capabilities of directly controlled Al Qaeda cells. As of 2006, British intelligence reports indicated that most threats within the UK come from individuals without any ties to Al Qaeda.⁸⁴ Nonetheless, because of its ability to inspire countless grassroots followers through the proliferation of its propaganda, Al Qaeda has links (whether accidental or intentional) to nearly every major recent terrorist plot in the UK.⁸⁵

The UK as a case study illustrates Al Qaeda's ability, given the environmental conditions described earlier in this chapter, to maintain a presence (albeit limited) in a developed state. Thus despite a large, organized national police force, full control over territory, and the presence of some of the world's most adept domestic and foreign intelligence services, the presence of extremist groups provide a great deal of invisibility to Al Qaeda operatives, recruiters, or financiers. This same dynamic appears to also play out in the US. While certainly the US does not have the same sort of disenfranchised Pakistani immigrant communities seen in the UK, Al Qaeda has nonetheless proven willing and able to recruit Americans.

As US and NATO operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan continue to deny Al Qaeda central safe haven in that region (though far from entirely), it is likely that Al Qaeda recruitment in the UK and the US will shift toward Al Qaeda's regional branches

⁸⁴ Parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee, *Report into the London Terrorist Attacks*, p. 23-27.

⁸⁵ Michael Innes, ed. *Denial of Sanctuary* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2007), 143.

or affiliated groups. As mentioned earlier, because US and British terrorists' familial and social connections abroad have facilitated their travel to Pakistan and Afghanistan, it remains to be seen whether Al Qaeda will be able to maintain its level of recruitment in the West as Al Qaeda central declines. While Al Qaeda's affiliates and regional groups appear, at least at the moment, to be successful in picking up the slack in recruitment, this is in no way guaranteed over the long term.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Bruce Hoffman, e-mail interview by author, March 7, 2011.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Al Qaeda has utilized markedly different operational doctrines aimed at exploiting diverse environmental conditions in the UK, US and Yemen. This is illustrative of Al Qaeda's evolving organization and operational approach. As Al Qaeda central's command and control becomes more limited, the arms of its broader organization are operating autonomously as Al Qaeda evolves into a truly franchised organization. Despite the organization's apparent physical resilience, it also has a number of significant strategic weaknesses.

In Yemen, AQAP has established a well organized, hierarchical, and resilient organization. AQAP not only maintains strategic and ideological connections to Al Qaeda central, but it has also proven capable of operating independently at a global level, allowing it to pick up recruitment where Al Qaeda central falls short. Factors that include the nature of Yemen's tribal communities, lack of centralized governance, preexisting jihadist networks, domestic unrest, and resulting access to weapons and an abundant source of potential recruits are the environmental variables that have allowed AQAP to establish such an integrated and visible presence. Of these factors, tribal grievances and the country's internal unrest are likely the most significant. However, Al Qaeda's long term strategic goals are inherently at odds with those of its local partners. By shedding these goals to maintain local relevance, the group stands to lose its Al Qaeda identity, though it will likely retain the ability to continue to launch global attacks against the West.

In contrast to Yemen, Al Qaeda in the UK must rely on the full extent of its organization when it is denied the relatively unimpeded environmental access seen in

Yemen. These organizational arms have achieved operational and recruiting success primarily by exploiting Britain's various Muslim communities, Islamic organizations, and loopholes in national civil law. Familial ties to South Asia and political and social grievances are also key factors that Al Qaeda and its affiliates have exploited. Though there are some clear environmental differences between the UK and the US, such as Britain's secluded and disenfranchised Muslim communities, Al Qaeda has achieved the same level of success in recruiting in both theaters of operation. As in the US, individuals who subscribe to conservative Islamic ideology are more prone, though in no way guaranteed, to make the jump to more radical forms of Islam. However, as a result of UK counterterrorism efforts, Al Qaeda relies increasingly on ideologically inspired individuals with little or no ties to the organization.

Given the difference in, and apparent success of Al Qaeda's penetration efforts in Yemen, the UK, and US, it is difficult to quantifiably compare these countries' environmental conditions in terms of their conduciveness to Al Qaeda's presence. Certainly states that rank low in governance and high on tribal networks allow a more structured presence to exist, as Yemen illustrates. However, Al Qaeda is able to adapt and establish a virtual or covert presence in countries that rank high in governance, and low for underlying insurgent, criminal, or tribal activity.

Operational and recruiting trends in the UK and US (as with AQAP in Yemen) demonstrate the ability of Al Qaeda's organizational arms to operate as essentially independent entities while continuing to embrace Al Qaeda inspired ideology and limited objectives such as targeting Western interests. In the minds of senior Al Qaeda leadership, this is undoubtedly to ensure the survival of the organization. It is also

indicative of an intentional operational shift. As recent plots illustrate, including those of Faisal Shazad and Farouk Abdulmutallab, operations are moving away from large scale 9/11 sized attacks to smaller, more frequent, and ultimately less successful ones (swarming). Therefore, networking theory suggests that Al Qaeda is evolving into an increasingly diffuse, dynamic, full matrix network. The organization's ability to exploit the internet and spread propaganda at a global level ensures ideological influence across jihadist organizations, transforming it into what is effectively a social movement. As in dynamic networks, bonds, not leadership, are key, and the organization will remain impervious to the destruction of individual nodes.

Considering this diffuse network, there is debate about the amount of control Al Qaeda central maintains. Certainly, as a number of cases in the UK and US illustrate, Al Qaeda does maintain control over at least a limited number of cells, although as Marc Sageman points out, this ability has been significantly mitigated due to recent counterterrorism operations.¹ As the case study of AQAP illustrates, Al Qaeda provides strategic guidance while leaving operational specifics to leadership in Yemen.² Nonetheless, Al Qaeda does appear to be "on the march" as Bruce Hoffman suggests, albeit as a diffuse organization with increasingly decentralized command and control delegated to its affiliates, regional groups, and the Al Qaeda network.³

However with growth comes problems, and Al Qaeda faces a number of significant strategic weaknesses. As recent polls of the Muslim world indicate, Al

¹ Marc Sageman and Bruce Hoffman, "Does Osama Still Call the Shots?" *Foreign Affairs* (July-August 2008), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/64460>.

² Bruce Riedel, "Al Qaeda in Yemen: A New Foothold," interview by Kenneth Pollack, January 21, 2010, Brookings Institution.

³ Marc Sageman and Bruce Hoffman, "Does Osama Still Call the Shots?"

Qaeda's popularity is declining globally. According to the NSPG, some religious scholars that were previously allied with Al Qaeda have turned against it. The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, previously loosely affiliated with Al Qaeda, publicly turned away from the organization in 2009.⁴ Thus, Al Qaeda is in danger of losing its cohesive identity (narrative). ,

As previously noted by Ronfeldt and Arquilla, narrative, doctrine, technological infrastructure, and social underpinnings are important factors in ensuring an organization's survival.⁵ At the doctrinal level, Al Qaeda's propensity for collateral damage appears to be hindering the organization's relevance as "leader of the ummah". At the organizational level, by granting operational autonomy to its arms, Al Qaeda's increasingly diffuse structure risks further hindering its doctrinal position if these groups cause collateral damage. By ceding recruiting efforts to its regional branches and affiliates, Al Qaeda also loses a significant degree of operational control. In the case of AQAP in Yemen, Al Qaeda's regional branches may have to shed their hardliner Al Qaeda narrative to maintain local relevance. Yet, Al Qaeda's survival is dependent upon its ability to maintain global relevance. Though it has undoubtedly learned from its strategic failures in Iraq, Al Qaeda's long term vision of a global Islamic caliphate is inherently at odds with those of its partners. At a technological and social level, Al Qaeda appears, at least for the moment, to enjoy strength in both of these venues. Given the ease with which Al Qaeda exploits the internet, both by proliferating propaganda and by coordinating with individuals regardless of physical ties (like Nidal Hassan and Colleen

⁴ Peter Bergen and Bruce Hoffman, *Assessing the Terrorist Threat*, Bi-Partisan Policy Center, Report of the National Security Preparedness Group, 21-22.

⁵ John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001), 327

LaRose), the organization will continue to maintain a global ideological presence. Even if the organization loses physical ground, it will continue to inspire affiliated movements.

Al Qaeda's affiliates and regional groups may become operationally independent (as AQAP illustrates), and may even decide to abandon the Al Qaeda brand name altogether if it benefits them to do so. Nonetheless, they can continue to function and operate as Al Qaeda entities, such as by targeting the West, without actually being subsidiaries or affiliates of the organization.

Implications for Al Qaeda's Affiliates and Regional Branches

As Al Qaeda's affiliates and regional groups become increasingly autonomous, this suggests, even in the absence of Al Qaeda sponsorship or leadership, that these groups will likely continue to operate against Western interests. While they may behave in the same way as Al Qaeda, they need not hold to the organization's global objectives or retain its ideology to make an impact or to maintain an ability to operate internationally. Pakistani Taliban's and AQAP's abilities to recruit, train, and deploy Westerners are indicative of this trend. Nonetheless, Al Qaeda's ability to coordinate recruiting and operational efforts with its regional groups and affiliates suggests that these groups (or Al Qaeda) may begin to branch out to and cooperate with non-Muslim insurgencies or international criminal networks as well. According to Jon Perdue at the Fund for American Studies, terrorist groups including Hezbollah and Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), maintain either a significant connection to, or presence in South America. Hezbollah has raised money from both Middle Eastern immigrants and narcotraffickers in the region, while ETA has sent members to train in FARC terrorist camps in Columbia. Mexican drug cartels have also reportedly sent operatives to train in

Iran with the Revolutionary Guard Corps.⁶ Given the operational level of coordinated function and recruiting seen between Al Qaeda and its broader organization, with Najibullah Zazi and Mohammad Sidique Khan being just two examples, it is feasible that training could shift to additional third parties as well. For instance, an individual could be recruited by Pakistani Taliban (or any one of Al Qaeda's affiliates or regional branches), sent abroad to train with a non-Muslim criminal or insurgent group such as FARC, travel either to the group or recruit's country of origin, and then become operationally active. It could be operationally beneficial for affiliates and regional groups to shed some of Al Qaeda's more radical ideologies in order to establish cooperative ties beyond Muslim insurgent or terrorist movements. Therefore by taking advantage of the organization, political and structural elements set by Al Qaeda, groups that were once fundamentally franchised to the organization are now capable of acting independently of the network structure to spread their own message.

⁶ Jon Perdue, "Radicalism South of the Border," *Journal of International Security Affairs*, no. 19 (Fall-Winter 2010): 103-104.

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