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Beyond al-Qaeda

PART 1

The Global Jihadist Movement

Angel Rabasa • Peter Chalk • Kim Cragin • Sara A. Daly • Heather S. Gregg
Theodore W. Karasik • Kevin A. O'Brien • William Rosenau

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1776 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138

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Summary

Al-Qaeda

Defeating the global jihadist movement—which we define as al-Qaeda and the universe of jihadist groups that are associated with or inspired by al-Qaeda—is the most pressing security challenge facing the United States today. The global jihadist movement can be distinguished from traditional or local jihads, which are armed campaigns conducted by Islamist groups against local adversaries with usually limited aims as well as geographic scope, in that it targets the United States and its allies across the globe and pursues broad geopolitical aims.

Although the U.S.-led global war on terrorism has had some notable successes—such as the destruction of al-Qaeda’s sanctuary in Afghanistan, the elimination of many of the group’s leaders, and the growing resolve of many countries to take action against al-Qaeda and its associates—no informed observers believe that al-Qaeda will be eliminated anytime soon. Indeed, in some respects al-Qaeda has metastasized into an even more formidable adversary, dispersed across the world, largely self-sustaining, and constantly adopting new and innovative terrorism tactics. Despite intense government countermeasures, it seems able to mount devastating operations from the air, land, and sea, such as the USS *Cole* operation in October 2000, the attacks of September 11, 2001, the Madrid railway bombing in March 2004, the Sinai resort bombings of October 2004, and the London bombings of July 2005. The United States itself continues to be threatened

by large-scale attacks. Countering al-Qaeda is thus likely to preoccupy U.S. national security institutions for at least the remainder of the decade, and probably longer.

Although al-Qaeda clearly still exists, as we have seen with the recent discovery of detailed surveillance reports of a multitude of targets in the United States, the group has been substantially transformed. Since September 11, al-Qaeda has gone through several phases: from a well-structured terrorist organization with headquarters in Afghanistan, to the hunted remnants of bin Laden's inner circle during and after Operation Enduring Freedom, to a disaggregated and atomized enterprise with reduced command and control but a continued capability to operate. Moreover, al-Qaeda still serves as the source of motivation and inspiration for regional terrorist groups that are not formally affiliated with it but that share its ideology of global jihad and its concept of operations.

Strategy

Al-Qaeda's strategy flows logically from its ideology. To outsiders, those within the network may appear irrational—motivated by insane hatreds, grossly unrealistic in their goals, and willing to kill innocent men, women, and children to achieve their ends. In reality, al-Qaeda, like other terrorist groups, acts in a largely rational manner in the sense that it weighs ends and means, considers alternative approaches, and calculates costs and benefits. Although the movement may emphasize flawed precepts, it makes logical assumptions on the basis of these precepts.¹ Among the central strategic priorities of al-Qaeda, mobilizing Muslims for a global jihad against the West and toppling “apostate” regimes, particularly Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan, remain paramount objectives.

Other objectives include creating an Islamic government according to its own ultra-orthodox interpretation of Hanbali Sunni Islam and isolating the majority of Sunni Muslims who follow other schools of Islam, not to mention the Shi'ites. For al-Qaeda and the groups that share its ideology, governments in the Middle East primarily exist

¹ For more on al-Qaeda as a rational actor, see Doran (2002).

because of U.S. support; their destruction thus is contingent on removing that support. Al-Qaeda has sought to achieve this objective by pressuring the United States to withdraw from the Middle East through the perpetration of increasingly costly acts of terror. Al-Qaeda anticipated U.S. retaliation and hoped that this retaliation could be presented in the Muslim world as a war against Islam that would advance its propaganda and recruitment efforts. (See pp. 23–33.)

Ideology

Ideology is central to understanding and prevailing over al-Qaeda and the phenomenon of global jihad. On a purely material level, terrorist organizations are almost always outmatched by the government forces that they oppose. If a terrorist group is to survive, it must at the very least have the ability to replace fallen converts with fresh recruits. To a certain extent, the execution of successful operations helps to serve this purpose, both by building morale within the group and by demonstrating to potential converts that the organization is operationally dynamic.² But terrorist attacks, while necessary, are not sufficient to sustain a movement operating against a determined adversary. Militant extremists also require the revolutionary “software” that helps convince militants—whose underground “lifestyle” characteristically tends to be marked by physical danger, isolation from loved ones, and psychological stress—that their mission is worth the sacrifices.

At its core, al-Qaeda’s ideology is profoundly internationalist, attempting to contextualize local conflicts as part of a broader global struggle against “apostasy” and “the infidel.” In essence, al-Qaeda’s ideology is a version of the ideology that a previous RAND study has described as “neo-fundamentalism” or “radical fundamentalism,” i.e., an extremist Islamic fundamentalist set of beliefs that borrows many of the characteristics of European fascism and Marxism-Leninism,³ or

² Crenshaw (1981), p. 387.

³ See Rabasa et al. (2004).

“jihadist-salafism,” described by Gilles Kepel as “respect for the sacred texts in their most literal form [combined with] an absolute commitment to jihad.”⁴

Although neither Osama bin Laden nor any other members of his inner circle have articulated a comprehensive vision of the future, bin Laden’s pronouncements emphasize certain themes and a selective interpretation of Islamic law, history, and precedent: There is a war of civilizations in which “Jews and Crusaders” are seeking to destroy Islam; armed jihad is the individual obligation of every Muslim; terrorism and other asymmetric strategies are appropriate for defeating even the strongest powers; Islam is under siege by Christians, Jews, secularists, and globalization; and the economy of the United States is its vulnerable “center of gravity.” These themes are circulated widely via the Internet; in books, cassette tapes, and pamphlets; and, most notoriously, through videotapes in which bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri (sometimes described as bin Laden’s deputy) expound on various subjects. What makes al-Qaeda’s propaganda distinctive is the relentlessly global nature of its dissemination and the quality of its production. As a result of this media strategy, al-Qaeda’s messages have penetrated deeply into Muslim communities around the world, preying on those Muslims who have a sense of helplessness both in the Arab world and in the Western Muslim diaspora. Al Qaeda appears to have had an impact by offering a sense of empowerment to those uninitiated in Islamic texts and history. (See pp. 7–22.)

Operational and Tactical Evolution

Ever since the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in East Africa, al-Qaeda has continuously altered and expanded its target set, making organizational modifications that have resulted in significant changes in the way it conducts operations. Although the network has opted to stick closely to what has worked in the past, such as multiple suicide bombings, the manner and means for carrying out those strikes have evolved. The use of planes as suicide bombs in the September 11 attacks and the small boat packed with explosives that devastated the USS *Cole*

⁴ Kepel (2002), p. 220.

are two of the best examples of al-Qaeda innovation. However, there have been many other instances of operational shift. These include switching from hard to soft targets and from mass casualties to smaller, more frequent attacks; increased focus on economic targets; greater efficiency in the utilization of loose networks and increased recruitment of U.S. and European nationals to evade detection; and moves to create new types of safe haven to maintain critical skills, such as conducting terrorist training in private homes. Each of these modifications, and the circumstances surrounding them, is discussed in more detail in this book. (See pp. 34–55, 63–70.)

Al-Qaeda's efforts to acquire unconventional weapons—chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) weapons—present incalculable dangers to the United States and other potential targets. Bin Laden's effort to acquire CBRN weapons began while he was living in Sudan in 1991–1996 and continued after he relocated to Afghanistan in 1996. Bin Laden reportedly received advice from Pakistani nuclear scientists.⁵ However, there is no evidence that he succeeded in fabricating a biological or chemical weapon, let alone a nuclear or radiological weapon, despite operating under near-ideal conditions under Taliban protection in Afghanistan. Again, this is not to say that bin Laden or the broader jihadist movement do not remain committed to acquiring CBRN devices. Al-Qaeda's continued interest in CBRN was confirmed in January 2003 in London, when police discovered precursor agents for producing ricin, a highly toxic poison, during the arrest of North African terrorists associated with al-Qaeda. (See pp. 44–47.)

Al-Qaeda's Finances

Al-Qaeda has also modified the way it moves funds around the globe. Before September 11, many financial institutions were believed to have helped transfer millions of dollars of al-Qaeda's money, wittingly or otherwise. However, given greater scrutiny over any such transactions now and other policies designed to prevent legal transmission of terror-

⁵ Anonymous (pseudonym of former CIA analyst Michael Scheuer) (2002), p. 188; Peter Baker, "Pakistani Scientist Who Met Bin Laden Failed Polygraphs, Renewing Suspicions," *The Washington Post*, March 3, 2002.

ist funds, terrorists are increasingly using the informal hawala transaction system⁶ and “mules”—couriers who physically carry large quantities of cash, gemstones, or other valuables to various parts of the globe. There is also evidence that al-Qaeda can and may be willing to expand even further into the criminal world to raise money. These financial dynamics are beginning to shape terrorist activity. Given the weakening of al-Qaeda command and control, local al-Qaeda jihadist groups may now find themselves both compelled to raise funds locally and possibly encouraged to make operational decisions on their own. (See pp. 57–62.)

The “al-Qaeda Nebula”

Al-Qaeda’s evolution from a structured terrorist organization into an ideology-based movement presents a complex counterterrorism challenge. The U.S. success in eliminating a substantial part of the pre-9/11 al-Qaeda leadership has greatly reduced the functional ability of al-Qaeda’s leadership core, but it clearly has not brought about the end of the al-Qaeda phenomenon. It created a more disaggregated entity that is more difficult to predict and preempt. The emergence of numerous like-minded local organizations that strike at soft targets with deadly force—what this study calls the “al-Qaeda nebula”—presents a substantial new set of challenges for counterterrorism planners and requires a major departure from the strategy that has been pursued against al-Qaeda. (See pp. 73–78.)

Jihadist groups in this category exhibit a dual nature: They are preoccupied with *both* local *and* regional jihads. They thus have a threat potential that goes beyond their immediate tactical environment. The hybrid ideological and operational nature of these organizations stems

⁶ *Hawala* means “transfer” or “trust.” It refers to an ancient system of money transfer that existed in South Asia before the advent of Western banking. Customers entrust money to hawala bankers or operators (hawaladars), who facilitate money movement worldwide through personal connections, sometimes using legitimate bank accounts but leaving a minimal paper trail.

from their interaction with the international jihadist movement as currently constituted under the existing umbrella of al-Qaeda's global network.

The scope and dimensions of the al-Qaeda nebula are both broad and complex. Ties among these groups run the gamut from logistical and financial support to combined operations and joint strategy meetings. Frequently, these relationships are the product of contacts that were established in the crucible of the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan and later consolidated in training camps set up in territories under the control of the Taliban.

Some of these organizations have been fully integrated into al-Qaeda (for example, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, or EIJ) or appear to be moving in that direction (for example, the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat or GSPC). A few organizations have clearly fallen into the category of "active and willing supporters," ready to act at al-Qaeda's behest when asked to do so. This has been particularly evident in North Africa, in the Laskar-e-Taiba (LeT) in Pakistan, in al-Itihaad in the Horn of Africa, and arguably in the al-Zarqawi network in Iraq. Most groups, however, seem to give precedence to local agendas. In these instances, decisions to work with outside jihadists are largely pragmatic in nature and undertaken in the expectation that foreign cooperation will be instrumental in furthering the "struggle at home." Indeed, when the expected (local) utility of the outside relationship begins to dissipate, some groups appear to question the wisdom of maintaining the al-Qaeda link. This is true even of networks that are thought to share an intimate organizational relationship with al-Qaeda such as a faction within Southeast Asia's Jemaah Islamiyah (JI).

The major groups in this "al-Qaeda nebula" and their degree of association with al-Qaeda, based on twelve key criteria, are shown in Table S.1. The values are as follows: (0) not established; (1) possible; (2) probable; (3) confirmed; and (4) confirmed and continuing. These values are based on the analysts' evaluation of the groups.

Table S.1
Associations Between Major Jihadist Clusters Worldwide and al-Qaeda

	Pledged allegiance to bin Laden	Joint leadership/family ties	Coordinated or AQ operatives	Received AQ funding, marriage, or	Received AQ funding for operations	Provided training for logistical support	Shared combat or training in local camps	Held joint strategy for wanted militants	Imitated AQ concept or operations	Internalized AQ world view of global jihad		
Al-Zarqawi Network	4	0	3	2	2	3	3	4	4	2	4	3
Saudi jihadists	2	3	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	2	4	3
Laskar-e-Taiba (Kashmir)	0	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3
Jaish-e-Muhammad (Kashmir)	0	0	2	3	3	2	1	2	4	3	4	3
Harakat-ul-Mujahideen (Kashmir)	4	0	2	3	3	3	1	3	4	3	3	3
Laskar-e-Jhangvi (Pakistan)	0	0	3	2	2	3	1	3	2	3	2	4
Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan	0	0	1	3	3	3	0	2	1	1	0	3
Harakat-ul-Jihad-Islami Bangladesh	4	0	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	4
Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group	0	1	4	3	3	3	1	3	4	4	4	3
Salafiya Jihadia (Morocco)	0	1	4	3	3	1	1	3	4	4	4	3
GSPC (Algeria)	4	3	2	2	2	3	2	3	4	4	2	3
Dhamat Houmet Daawa Salafia (Algeria)	0	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	3
Tunisian Combatant Group	0	1	4	2	2	3	3	3	4	2	4	3
Libyan Islamic Fighting Group	0	0	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	1	0	3
Al-Itihaad al-Islami (Somalia)	0	0	3	3	3	3	1	3	3	2	3	3
Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan	1	2	3	3	3	3	2	3	2	2	3	3
Chechens/Basayev faction	0	0	0	1	1	4	4	4	4	2	4	2
Jemaah Islamiyah (Southeast Asia)	0	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3

NOTE: AQ = al-Qaeda.
 RAND MG429-T-S.1

Conclusions and Recommendations

No one tool is likely to be decisive against al-Qaeda. An effective strategy for countering and defeating the global jihadist movement will necessarily employ a complex mixture of military, intelligence, financial, political, legal (including the enactment of appropriate legislation), and even social instruments. This strategy should also include the use of techniques of political warfare that the United States and its allies successfully applied to wage a largely successful campaign against Marxism-Leninism—like al-Qaeda, a global revolutionary creed that served as an intellectual, political, and emotional foundation of a worldwide revolutionary movement.⁷ (See pp. 159–171.)

Western policymakers might usefully draw on this now-forgotten corpus of Cold War knowledge and experience to develop a strategic informational warfare campaign against al-Qaeda. As a first step, policymakers should consider ways of attacking al-Qaeda's ideology. From the analysis in this book, it is clear that ideology is the center of gravity of the global jihadist phenomenon. Therefore, it is important to watch the rate of dissemination or retreat of the global jihadist ideology. If the ideology continues to spread and gain greater acceptance in the Muslim world, it will produce more terrorists to replenish the ranks of al-Qaeda and related groups. If the ideology is countered and discredited, al-Qaeda and its universe will wither and die. It is important for Muslim allies to highlight that the Islamic state envisioned by al-Qaeda would exclude the diverse streams of Islam. In the world of bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, there is no room for Shi'ites, and within Sunni Islam there is no place for mainstream interpretations of the religion.

A related factor is the extent and strength of the links between the global and local jihads. The clusters within the "al-Qaeda nebula" show the spread of the jihadist mindset throughout the Muslim world. The global jihadist movement gains strength to the extent that it can co-opt local struggles. If it cannot, the global movement loses coherence and focus.

⁷ For more on the strategic communications campaign of the Cold War era, see Lord (2004), pp. 220–221; Hixon (1997); Lucas (1999).

It follows that a comprehensive U.S. strategy needs to move beyond the boundaries of conventional counterterrorism theory and practice and address these ideological and political factors. Broadly, the strategy has four prongs: First, attack the ideological underpinnings of global jihadism. Second, seek to sever the links—ideological and otherwise—between the groups in the clusters of the terrorist nebula and the global jihad. Third, deny sanctuaries. Fourth, strengthen the capabilities of frontline states and moderate civil society groups to counter local jihadist threats in order to deny al-Qaeda alternative sanctuaries and over time reduce the “clusters” that compose the global jihadist movement. (See pp. 160–161.)

Attack the Ideology

The war on terror at its most fundamental level goes to the war of ideas. The goal here is to delegitimize jihadist ideology and the use of terrorism and to deny extremists the high ground of Islamic politico-religious discourse, which has been adroitly exploited by al-Qaeda to further the appeal of its own radical and absolutist rhetoric. As we have outlined in another RAND study, prevailing in the war of ideas requires empowering moderate Muslims to counter the influence of the radicals.⁸

Although ideology is inherently difficult to attack by outsiders, the ideological approach has weaknesses that are susceptible to exploitation. Some analysts note that the jihadist movement is sensitive to religious ideology to the point of vulnerability. Combatants are replaceable, but theologically trained sheikhs are not. The death or recantation of several Saudi sheikhs who had provided religious justification for jihadist attacks may have weakened the movement ideologically.⁹ However, the al-Qaeda ideology has always had a pronounced Egyptian bent, so the influence of Saudi sheikhs might not have been central to al-Qaeda’s ideological struggle. In any event, if this assessment of the centrality

⁸ That document, Rabasa et al. (2004), describes a strategy to empower Muslim moderates.

⁹ Stephen Ulph, presentation at Jamestown Foundation panel discussion, “The Iraqi Insurgency and al-Qaeda,” Washington, D.C., October 7, 2004; and Ulph (2004b).

of ideology is correct, then decapitation strategies should be expanded from operational leaders to ideologues. Not infrequently, these ideologues are asked to provide sanction for terrorist operations and are therefore a key part of the terrorist decisionmaking process. Preventing al-Qaeda's ideological mentors from continuing to provide theological justification for terrorism could expedite the movement's ideological deterioration. Prosecution of "spiritual leaders" such as Abu Hamza al-Masri in the United Kingdom and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir in Indonesia and the deportation proceedings in the United Kingdom against the Jordanian-Palestinian cleric Abu Qatada, regarded as al-Qaeda's spiritual leader in Europe, are cases in point.¹⁰

Break the Links Between the Global and Local Jihads

The second prong of the strategy is to break the links between the global and local jihadist groups. The international nature of al-Qaeda is both a source of strength and a potential weakness. Al-Qaeda's ability to persuade local groups to link their struggles with a broader, pan-Islamist campaign is arguably the organization's signal achievement. Thus, unlike the terrorist groups of the 1970s, al-Qaeda has not been hindered by geographical constraints that limit the scope of its operations.

However, internationalization brings costs as well as benefits. As demonstrated by the evolution of the international communist movement during the previous century, contradictions inevitably arise between the global vision promulgated by a movement's theoreticians and the national agendas that many local cadres naturally pursue.¹¹ Exploiting this friction could be part of an effective Western counterstrategy. For example, overt and covert information operations in Southeast Asia, South Asia, North Africa, and other areas of major terrorist activity might highlight the inapplicability of al-Qaeda's vision to

¹⁰ According to the 2001 Spanish indictment of the Madrid al-Qaeda cell, Abu Qatada was appointed as the spiritual leader of al-Qaeda, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), and the Tunisian Combatant Group. See Juzgado Central de Instrucción No. 005, Madrid, Sumario (Proc. Ordinario) 0000035/2001E.

¹¹ Rich (2003), p. 47.

regional and local conditions. In non-Arab Muslim countries such as Pakistan, the Arab nature of al-Qaeda's hard core could be stressed, as could al-Qaeda's preoccupation with "apostate" regimes in the Middle East. Such an approach could complement parallel political warfare themes that highlight the materialist, neo-fascist, and the upper- and middle-class character of al-Qaeda's hard core—in other words, the fundamentally "alien" nature of men like bin Laden and al-Zawahiri.

Achieving this goal hinges on decreasing the utility of the relationship with al-Qaeda for the local groups. A number of local Muslim rebel movements that had maintained some relationship with al-Qaeda and its affiliates before September 11—for instance, the Philippines' Moro Islamic Liberation Front—have distanced themselves from bin Laden to avoid being drawn into the wrong side of the war on terrorism.

To accelerate this trend, the United States will need to tailor the specific components of its counterterrorism policy to ensure that they are relevant to extant and emerging patterns of local and regional terrorism. This requires tracking closely the ideological and operational trajectory of the groups that constitute the "al-Qaeda nebula" in order to target weaknesses in their current configuration. For instance, in the wake of the arrest of key operatives over the past two years, Southeast Asia's Jemaah Islamiyah has become factionalized along an international/Indonesian divide: One leadership faction remains committed to the al-Qaeda vision of global jihad; another faction seems to be more focused on a local Indonesian agenda, including political activity through its Indonesian front organization, the Majlis Mujahideen Indonesia (MMI). Therefore, a U.S. and allied strategy to counter JI must target the group's political and terrorist dimensions. Similarly, addressing group ties that are predicated on logistical support (as they are in Kashmir) will require a policy mix that is somewhat different from those involving joint planning sessions and coordinated attacks (as in the case of the North African groups). Mapping and gauging the organizational parameters of terrorist connections will be equally important in prioritizing threats to U.S. interests.

Finally, the United States will need to be more proactive in its thinking and accept the idea that the problem of countering terrorism

is akin to what Bruce Hoffman has referred to as a time series of photographs: “. . . the image captured on film today is not the same as yesterday nor will it be the same tomorrow.”¹² A myriad of factors brought on by future world events could conceivably have a direct, or indirect but yet significant, impact on al-Qaeda and its affiliates—neither of which are likely to be consigned to the annals of history anytime soon. Accordingly, policies will need to be constantly assessed, reassessed, and modified to take account of potential surprises that could emerge over the near to medium term. (See pp. 161–163.)

Deny Sanctuaries

As discussed in greater detail elsewhere in this book, al-Qaeda’s sanctuary in Afghanistan allowed the group’s leaders to concentrate all their efforts on growing their organization and planning their operations. Securing that safe haven substantially increased al-Qaeda’s financial requirements but lowered its overall need for covertness, eased command and control, enabled extensive training and planning, and generally allowed it to operate at a far lower marginal cost per attack. The loss of its sanctuary has reduced the efficiency of the organization, made training of cadres more difficult and laborious, and raised the marginal costs of operations.

Sanctuaries are areas and physical facilities where terrorists can conduct training, network and plan operations, but they can also be defined in other ways—as financial, cyber, and propaganda nodes, for instance. Al-Qaeda has perfected the use of information technology (IT), particularly the Internet, as a terrorist tool, and has made use of the mass media to spread its propaganda. Part of what makes al-Qaeda and its affiliates such a difficult challenge is that they are able to “hide in plain view.” Jihadist groups in Western Europe are embedded in the broader Muslim communities and have used the services and infrastructure available on the continent for propaganda, indoctrination, recruitment, and operations on the scale of the March 2004 Madrid terrorist attack. Preventing the reconstitution of a sanctuary anywhere in the Muslim world is therefore a critical requirement of U.S. coun-

¹² Hoffman (2003a), p. 16.

terterrorist strategy. This requires proactive security cooperation with and support of countries under assault by al-Qaeda and its affiliates. (See pp. 163–164.)

Strengthen the Capabilities of Frontline States to Confront Local Jihadist Threats

Aside from the campaign against al-Qaeda, the global war on terror can be viewed as the sum of many wars on terror fought in local and regional theaters across the world. These local wars have to be fought and won by the local governments and security forces with the United States in a supporting role. Those governments have the most at stake, as well as the local knowledge, access to the population and, hopefully, political legitimacy, to carry these conflicts to a successful conclusion.

The United States could help friendly countries achieve their counterterrorism objectives by training and equipping local counterterrorist police and military units and intelligence services. As a general principle, counterterrorism operations are most effective when carried out by indigenous forces, with U.S. forces remaining in the background and providing support as necessary. Although the types of assistance provided would depend on the specific circumstances of individual countries, military assistance should focus on providing small-unit training and mobility while intelligence assistance could focus on data collection and analytical capabilities.

Encouraging cooperative regional arrangements can reduce the U.S. footprint in counterterrorism efforts. For instance, in the context of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), regional countries have agreed to establish a regionwide intelligence network, taken steps to block terrorist funds and tighten border controls, and established a regional counterterrorism center in Kuala Lumpur. Similar cooperative arrangements should be encouraged in other parts of the world.

Since many terrorist groups operate in ungoverned areas, the capabilities of governments with imperfect control over their territories should be strengthened to enable them to assert authority over areas that are currently outside government control. Terrorists also take

advantage of porous and poorly monitored borders to move personnel, equipment, and funds, so governments' ability to monitor and control their borders should be strengthened.

For the U.S. military, the main implication of the above is that increasingly, U.S. military forces may have to interact with respective police, intelligence, and security services, as well as military forces, creating potentially a new set of requirements in political-military relationship and interoperability issues. For the U.S. Air Force, new types of missions may require fusion not only with Army components, but also with the security forces of the cooperating country. (See pp. 164–165.)

Implications for the U.S. Air Force

Air and space power have important roles to play in countering al-Qaeda and the jihadist groups that form its nebula. Most of these missions are familiar, but the relative mix required for effective prosecution of a campaign against terrorists is quite different from what the Air Force is used to providing in more conventional military operations. In Afghanistan, air and space power, combined with Special Operations Forces (SOF), was the key to joint and coalition military operations. Future battlefields most likely will be discontinuous, with shadowy hostile forces organized in small, unlinked groups. Eliminating these forces will require integration of air and ground forces on a scale greater than today.¹³ (See pp. 166–171.)

SOF, especially Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC), once considered peripheral to the U.S. Air Force's (USAF's) main mission, are now central to antiterrorism missions, which often require "quiet operations" with a relatively low profile. These are particularly important in countries where overt U.S. military operations against terrorist groups might be politically difficult for cooperating governments.¹⁴ On the operational side, Air Force Special Operations Forces have the capability to pinpoint and track small groups and individuals, capture them, and search for critical intelligence. These capa-

¹³ "Air and Space Power" (2004), p. 95.

¹⁴ Tirpak and Grier (2004), pp. 70, 75.

bilities are of paramount importance in a murky war against small, elusive groups of enemies who move back and forth over borders.¹⁵ But just as important is their training functions. Air Force Special Operations Forces teach critical skills in night flying, air evacuation, and air assault to air forces of cooperating countries. However, there is only a single squadron, 6 SOS at Hurlburt Field, Florida, to carry out this crucial training function. Not only is this squadron too small to meet the requirements of the global war on terrorism, but throughout its existence it has had difficulties obtaining even the air-frames necessary to perform its mission.¹⁶

Air-delivered firepower has been used successfully in counterterrorist operations in a variety of contexts. The continued evolution of precision munitions has enabled air power to be used to target specific individuals and small groups—by Israel in the West Bank and Gaza (see Part 2) and by the U.S. against targets associated with the al-Zarqawi network in Fallujah, Iraq, in Yemen, and elsewhere. USAF and U.S. Navy (USN) jets provided the bulk of U.S. combat power in the war in Afghanistan and proved instrumental in bringing down the Taliban regime and eliminating al-Qaeda’s largest and most important sanctuary.

It is likely that air power will continue to be called upon to provide lethal punch to U.S. and allied efforts to root out and destroy terrorists and their supporting infrastructure. Modern air forces have the advantage of being able to reach terrorist and insurgent targets in inhospitable or inaccessible terrain while simultaneously being relatively invulnerable to the kinds of defenses that are likely to be found in jihadist arsenals.

An important combat role for U.S. air forces is to work closely with non-U.S. ground forces in locating and striking terrorist targets. As was the case in Afghanistan, this could mean developing an “on the fly” partnership with troops of a very different level of sophistication. In some cases, these ground units may be leavened with U.S. Special Forces or advisors, but it should be anticipated that, from time to time,

¹⁵ Hebert (2005), p. 32.

¹⁶ This point was made by one of the reviewers of this report, Dr. Thomas Marks.

USAF and USN pilots will find themselves supporting soldiers who have little or no U.S. training and scant knowledge of how to effectively employ air power. In such cases, the USAF will need to have available air-to-ground control elements that can be rapidly integrated into friendly ground force formations. In addition to their training in managing air support, these airmen will also benefit from having appropriate language skills and some cultural knowledge.

Air transport can be the key to counterterrorist or counterinsurgency operations in countries with widely dispersed populations and poor land transportation infrastructure—conditions that define almost all areas where terrorists and insurgents operate. Only by being able to bring forces rapidly to the scene can governments neutralize the terrorists' operational and tactical advantages and quell religious and ethnic clashes before they flare into full-scale communal conflict. Yet, many of the countries confronting terrorist and insurgent movements—Indonesia and Colombia come to mind—have woefully inadequate air transport capabilities. Rebuilding the air transport capabilities of countries at risk should be a priority in U.S. counterterrorism policy and security assistance programs. In addition, the U.S. Air Force—the world's premier practitioner of air mobility—will probably find itself called upon to directly provide transportation under some circumstances.

Providing training to the armed forces of friendly countries threatened by jihadist terror groups or insurgents will be another important job for the U.S. military, including the Air Force. It seems likely that these training missions could be numerous and potentially prolonged. Further, given that they will often be conducted in locations where the threat to U.S. personnel is quite high, they will impose force protection burdens. Finally, the fundamentally political nature of the battle against jihadist groups means that in some cases the training objectives will revolve at least as much around inculcating appropriate norms of behavior, such as respect for human rights and civilian lives and property, as transmitting expertise in operational and tactical skills.

None of these activities would appear to call for major changes in USAF force structure or posture.¹⁷ The same may not be true of the final task that we want to emphasize: providing timely, accurate, and actionable information to commanders and operators at all levels. Air and space platforms have shown themselves to be vital components of the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) architecture for the war on terrorism. Cross-border operations between neighbors will be crucial in the decades to come. However, it is equally true that the campaign against al-Qaeda and other jihadist terrorists and insurgents has been hindered by shortcomings in existing systems, organizations, and processes. Improvement is needed, and the USAF will likely be called upon to make important contributions.

Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) have emerged as very useful tools for surveillance, reconnaissance, targeting, and, at times, striking terrorist targets. As al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups continue to decentralize and disperse, the demand for the kinds of capabilities offered by platforms such as the USAF's Predator and Global Hawk UAVs seems almost certain to multiply. If, in the future, the United States may wish to maintain sustained 24-hour multiple-source surveillance over multiple—and widely separated—swaths of inhospitable terrain, it is not clear that the Air Force plans to make sufficient investment in UAVs. Certainly, space-based systems and manned aircraft will play important roles, but UAVs offer both greater effectiveness over satellites and less risk than manned platforms, making them highly appealing to future commanders. The USAF should assess the likely demand for UAVs and size its future force accordingly.

The intelligence demands of countering jihadist terrorism will also be a human capital issue, not just for the USAF but for every agency, civilian and military, on the front line of that battle. All of the strategies laid out here for checkmating terrorist groups—waging political warfare, attacking radical Islamist ideology, breaking the

¹⁷ The one exception might be the proposed procurement of some number of a tactical transport aircraft better suited than the existing fleet for operations in and out of smaller, less-developed airstrips. As this is written, there is some controversy surrounding how many aircraft to buy, if any, and whether the Army or Air Force should operate them.

linkages between local and global groups, and so on—depend vitally on U.S. and allied decisionmakers having an accurate image of how these organizations are structured and staffed and how they relate to each other. Further, since terrorist and insurgent groups are dynamic entities and the relationships among individuals and organizations are fluid, this picture will need to be continuously reassessed and updated. Properly trained personnel will be critical to success. Analysts will need a deep understanding of the region they are observing—its language, geography, history, and culture—to be able to interpret rapidly and accurately what they are seeing and hearing. They will also need to be tightly networked with one another, and perhaps with their counterparts in other countries as well, so that important information about new or evolving relationships in the threat space do not disappear in the gaps between institutional stovepipes. Developing and sustaining an adequate number and variety of these specialized intelligence professionals, as well as creating the technical and bureaucratic infrastructures to support them, will be a challenge not just for the Air Force but throughout the entire counterterrorism community.