TESTIMONY

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Re-Examining the Al Qa'ida Threat to the United States

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Re-Examining the Al Qa'ida Threat to the United States[2]

Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade
United States House of Representatives

Global al Qaeda: Affiliates, Objectives, and Future Challenges

July 18, 2013

Chairman Poe, Ranking Member Sherman, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify at this hearing, "Global al Qa'ida: Affiliates, Objectives, and Future Challenges." The growth of al Qa'ida's affiliate in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusrah, and other recent developments make this hearing timely and important.

In reviewing al Qa'ida's evolution since 1988, I will make three arguments in this testimony. First, al Qa'ida has been resilient.[3] There has been a net expansion in the number and geographic scope of al Qa'ida affiliates and allies over the past decade, indicating that al Qa'ida and its brand are far from defeated. This growth is likely caused by several factors. One is the Arab uprisings, which have weakened regimes across North Africa and the Middle East, creating an opportunity for al Qa'ida affiliates and allies to secure a foothold. In addition, the growing sectarian struggle across the Middle East between Sunni and Shi'a actors has increased the resources available to Sunni militant groups, including al Qa'ida. Second, this expansion – along with the weakness of central al Qa'ida in Pakistan – has created a more diffuse and decentralized movement. Al Qa'ida's local affiliates largely run their operations autonomously, though they still communicate with the core leadership in Pakistan and may seek strategic advice. Third, within this disparate movement, most al Qa'ida affiliates and allies are not actively plotting attacks against the U.S. homeland. In the near term, Al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) likely presents the most immediate threat to the U.S. homeland, along with inspired networks like the Tsarnaev brothers that perpetrated the April 2013 Boston Marathon bombings. Other groups, such as Jabhat al-Nusrah in Syria, do not appear to pose a near-term threat to the U.S. homeland. But Jabhat al-

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[2] This testimony is available for free download at http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT396-1.html.
[3] See, for example, Bruce Hoffman, "Al Qaeda's Uncertain Future," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 36, 2013, pp. 635-653.

Nusrah's growing recruitment and funding networks in Europe should be a cause of concern for U.S. policymakers.

Taken together, these arguments suggest that the United States needs to adopt an increasingly nuanced – but long-term – approach to countering the al Qa'ida movement. In cases where al Qa'ida poses an immediate threat to the U.S. homeland, either through an affiliated group or an inspired network, the U.S. government should work with local partners to target al Qa'ida operatives overseas and at home using a combination of military, law enforcement, economic, diplomatic, and information tools. In areas where al Qa'ida does not pose a significant threat to the homeland, the U.S. government should support local countries and allies as they take the lead – much like the United States did in supporting France's counterterrorism efforts in Mali in 2013. Perhaps most importantly, U.S. policymakers should view the al Qa'ida threat as a decades-long struggle like the Cold War.

This testimony is divided into four sections. The first outlines al Qa'ida's objectives. The second section examines its organizational structure. The third focuses on the al Qa'ida threat to the United States today. And the fourth section offers a brief conclusion.

Al Qa'ida's Objectives

What are al Qa'ida's objectives? The answer depends, in part, on which al Qa'ida figure one is referencing. Al Qa'ida leaders in various parts of the world – Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (also known as Abu Du'a) in Iraq, Abdelmalek Droukdal in North Africa, Ahmed Abdi aw-Mohammed in Somalia, Nasir al-Wahishi in Yemen, and Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani in Syria – tend to have parochial goals. They want to establish Islamic emirates in specific countries or regions, though they may be agnostic about a broader violent jihad. For al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) leader Abdelmalek Droukdal, for example, the goal is to overthrow regimes in North Africa, especially Algeria, and replace them with an Islamic regime. And France, rather than the United States, is the most significant foreign enemy.

For al Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, the primary goal is broader: to overthrow regimes in key Muslim countries.[4] The governments in these areas constitute the "near enemy," or *al-Adou al-Qareeb*.[5] Al Qa'ida leaders have also attempted to target the United States and its allies as the "far enemy," or *al-Adou al-Baeed*, who support them. But attacking far enemy countries is a

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[4] See, for example, "Al-Qaida: Constitutional Charter, Rules And Regulations," Harmony Document AFGP-2002-600175, p. 2; "Interior Organization (of al Qa'ida)," AFGP-2002-000080, pp. 2-3.
[5] On the establishment of a caliphate see, for example, Abu Bakr Naji, *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Ummah Will Pass*, Translated and Published by the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University, May 23, 2006.

means to an end, not an end in itself.[6] Contrary to some arguments, most al Qa'ida leaders are not interested in establishing a global caliphate and do not seek to overthrow regimes in much of the world.[7] For Zawahiri, the envisioned caliphate includes a specific swath of territory in North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, as highlighted in Figure 1. These areas reflect a modified version of the Ummayad caliphate, which lasted from 661 to 750 AD.

Figure 1: Map of Zawahiri's Envisioned Pan-Islamic Caliphate[8]
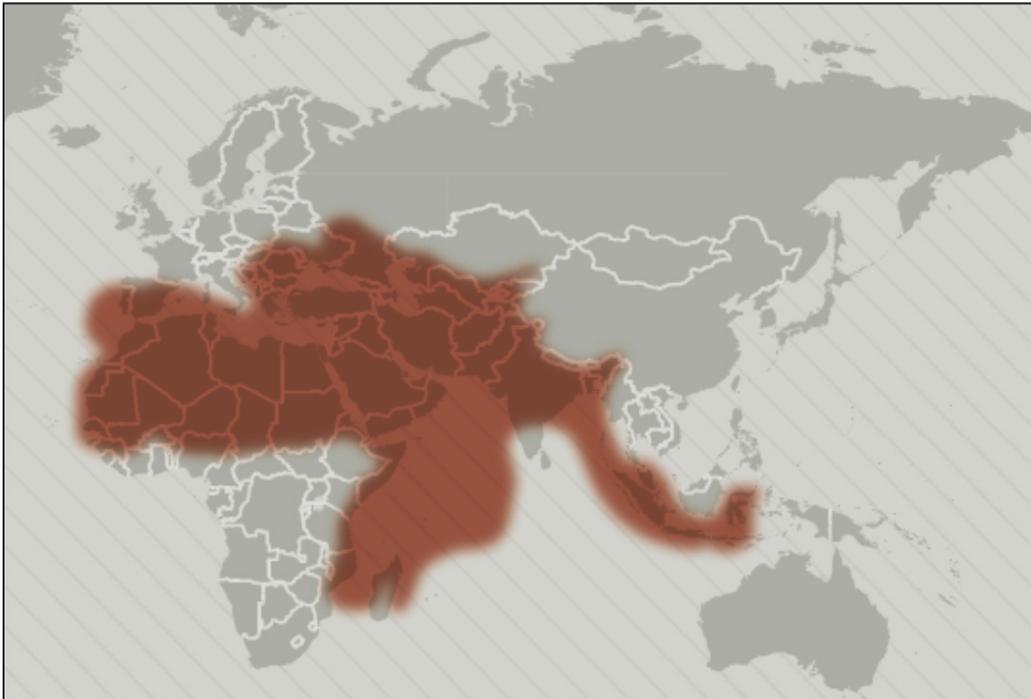
In his book *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, Zawahiri writes, "it is the hope of the Muslim nation to restore its fallen caliphate and regain its lost glory."[9] Most of its leaders are inspired by the works of such individuals as Sayyid Qutb and Abdullah Azzam. Qutb argued that only a strict following of sharia as a complete system of morality, justice, and governance would bring significant benefits to humanity.[10] Modern-day Islam, he wrote in his book *Milestones*, had become corrupt, and he compared the modern Muslim states with *jahiliyya*. As used in the Qur'an, *jahiliyya* describes the state of ignorance in which Arabs were supposed to have lived

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[6] Sayyid Qutb, *Ma'alam fi al-tariq* [*Milestones]* (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2007).
[7] See, for example, David J. Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 165-227.
[8] See the National Counterterrorism Center's interactive map of al Qa'ida's pan-Islamic caliphate at http://www.nctc.gov/site/map/index.html. Accessed on December 27, 2012.
[9] Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner,* trans. by Laura Mansfield (Old Tappan, NJ: TLG Publications, 2002), p. 201.
[10] Qutb, *Ma'alam fi al-tariq*.

before the revelation of Islam to the Prophet Mohammed at the beginning of the seventh century.[11] In two of his key works, *In the Shadow of the Qur'an* and *Signposts on the Road*, Qutb pleaded for contemporary Muslims to build a new community – an Islamic emirate – much like the Prophet Mohammed had done a thousand years earlier.[12] An emirate refers literally to a territory ruled by an "emir," which is sometimes translated as "commander," "prince," "governor," or "ruler." In early Islamic history, emirates denoted local Muslim principalities or small kingdoms nominally subordinate to the Islamic caliphate, established as part of Islam's steady expansion eastwards and westwards.[13] According to Qutb's interpretation, the only just ruler is one who administers sharia according to the Qur'an.[14] After his execution by the Egyptian government in 1966, Qutb's fiery ideology was influential for Islamic radicals from Morocco to Indonesia.[15]

In order to establish a pan-Islamic caliphate, Zawahiri has long sought to replace regimes within this area. To accomplish this goal, al Qa'ida's strategy rests on violent jihad; joining an existing order through peaceful means was never part of bin Laden or Zawahiri's strategy. Captured al Qa'ida documents show that Bin Laden and Zawahiri emphasized guerrilla campaigns as the main vehicle of its jihad against apostate governments.[16] During the 1990s, for example, the curriculum of al Qa'ida's training camps in Afghanistan and Sudan focused primarily on guerrilla warfare and theological indoctrination. Even after al Qa'ida turned to terrorism in 1996, it developed terrorism capabilities alongside its guerrilla war capabilities, not as a replacement of them.[17]

Organizational Structure

Over time, the al Qa'ida movement has become more diffuse and decentralized. In 2001, al Qa'ida was composed of a shura council and several committees, such as those dedicated to military, media, finance, and religious issues. It was hierarchically structured. The shura council was the most powerful committee, and served as an advisory body to Osama bin Laden, who acted as its chairman. The shura council met regularly, sometimes once a week, to discuss

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[11] *The Qur'an*, 5:50.

[12] On Qutb's work see Gilles Kepel, *The Prophet and Pharaoh: Muslim Extremism in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Olivier Carré, *Mystique et politique* (Paris: Presses de la FNSP et Cerf, 1984); Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi, *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Muslim Arab World* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996).

[13] Brynjar Lia, "Jihadi Insurgents and the Perils of Territorialisation," Paper presented at the International Studies Association's 52th Annual Convention, Montreal, Canada, March 16-19, 2011, pp. 6-7.

[14] See, for example, Qutb, *Ma'alam fi al-tariq*, p. 57.

[15] Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004), p. 113.

[16] Kim Cragin, "Early History of Al-Qa'ida," *The Historical* Journal, Vol. 51, No. 4 (2008), pp. 1047–1067.

[17] Michael Scheuer, *Imperial Hubris: Why the West Is Losing the War on Terror*, First Edition (Washington, DC: Potomac Books Inc., 2004), pp. 63-66; Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, First Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 5-9, 69-72; Daniel Byman, *The Five Front War: The Better Way to Fight Global Jihad* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), pp. 15-16.

important issues. Today, al Qa'ida is a more decentralized organization and can be divided into four tiers: central al Qa'ida, affiliated groups, allied groups, and inspired networks. Figure 2 highlights al Qa'ida affiliates and several key allied groups. This loose movement today is an expansion from 2001, when central al Qa'ida was based in Afghanistan. The organization had a small number of allies in Pakistan and Afghanistan, including the Taliban, but it did not possess a large coterie of affiliates and allies in North Africa and the Middle East.

Figure 2: Al Central, Affiliates, and Some Allied Groups
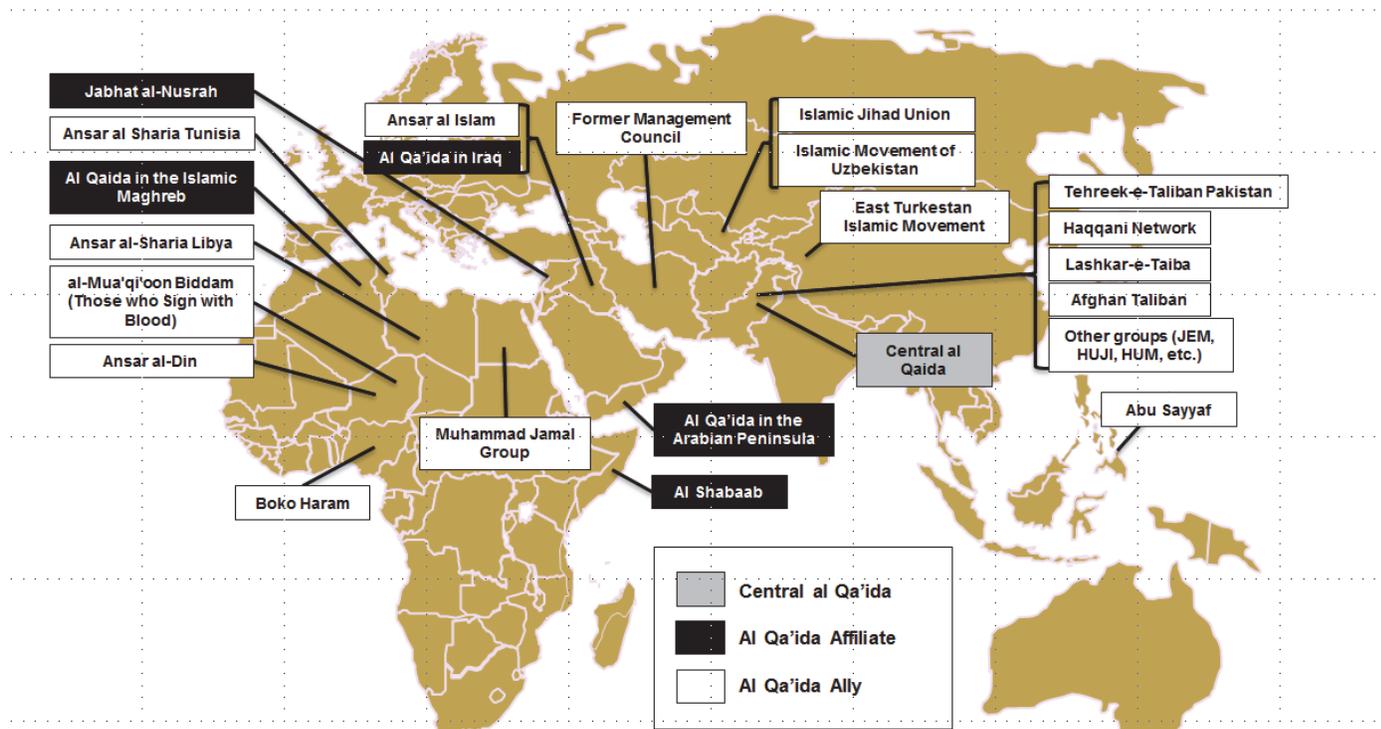
First, *central al Qa'ida* includes the organization's leaders based in Pakistan. It is led by Ayman al-Zawahiri, who is buttressed by such figures as Hamza al-Ghamdi (Saudi) and Abd al-Rahman al-Maghrebi (Moroccan). There are still a range of Americans in central al Qa'ida (such as Adam Gadahn) and operatives that have lived in America (such as Adnan el Shukrijumah). Al Qa'ida's senior leadership, including Ayman al-Zawahiri, retain a degree of oversight and, when necessary, may adjudicate disputes among affiliates or provide strategic guidance. There are three al Qa'ida senior leaders in Iran – Saif al-Adel, Abu Khayr al-Masri, and Abu Muhammad al-Masri – who could potentially replace Zawahiri if he were killed, though it is unclear whether they would return to Pakistan.

The second tier includes *affiliated groups* that have become formal branches of al Qa'ida. What distinguishes "affiliates" from other groups is the decision by their leaders, or emirs, to swear

bayat (loyalty) to al Qa'ida leaders in Pakistan. These organizations include al Qa'ida in Iraq (based in Iraq), al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (based in Yemen), al Shabaab (based in Somalia), al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (based in Algeria and neighboring countries), and Jabhat al-Nusrah (based in Syria). Jabhat al-Nusrah is the most recent affiliate. As the war in Syria began to intensify in 2011, al Qa'ida in Iraq leaders utilized their established networks in Syria and created Jabhat al-Nusrah as their operational arm. Al Qa'ida in Iraq leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi explained that "we laid for them plans, and drew up for them the policy of work, and gave them what financial support we could every month, and supplied them with men who had known the battlefields of jihad, from the emigrants and the natives."[18] As Jabhat al-Nusrah established its own sources of funding, fighters, and material, it became increasingly independent from al Qa'ida in Iraq. Asserting his independence from al Qa'ida in Iraq, Jabhat al-Nusrah leader Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani declared his loyalty directly to al Qa'ida's central leadership in Pakistan. "This is a pledge of allegiance from the sons of the al Nusrah Front and their supervisor general that we renew to the Sheikh of Jihad, Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri, may Allah preserve him," Jawlani announced in April 2013.[19]

The third involves *allied groups* that have established a direct relationship with al Qa'ida, but have not become formal members. This arrangement allows the groups to remain independent and pursue their own goals, but to work with al Qa'ida for specific operations or training purposes when their interests converge. In Pakistan, one example is Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (led by Hakimullah Mehsud), whose interests remain largely parochial in South Asia. But they have been involved in attacks overseas, including the failed 2010 attack in New York City led by Faizal Shahzad. Outside of Pakistan, there are other allied groups like the Muhammad Jamal network in Egypt and Ansar al-Sharia in Libya. Both groups participated with al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb operatives in killing Christopher Stevens, the U.S. ambassador to Libya, in September 2012.

Finally, the *inspired networks* include those with no direct contact to al Qa'ida central, but who are inspired by the al Qa'ida cause and outraged by perceived oppression in Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Palestinian territory. They tend to be motivated by a hatred of the West and its allied regimes in the Middle East. Without direct support, these networks tend to be amateurish, though they can occasionally be lethal. Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the ringleader of the 2013 Boston bombings, was motivated by the extremist preaching of now-deceased al Qa'ida leader Anwar al-Awlaki. Tsarnaev and his brother also used al Qa'ida propaganda materials, including an article from

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[18] Audio Statement by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, April 10, 2013.
[19] Audio Statement by Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, April 10, 2013. On the broader debate between Jabhat al-Nusrah and al Qa'ida in Iraq also see Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Nusrah Front Leader Renews Allegiance to al Qaeda, Rejects New Name," *Long War Journal*, April 10, 2013.

Inspire magazine, to build the bombs. But many others, such as the cell led by Russell Defreitas that plotted to attack New York City's John F. Kennedy International Airport in 2007, were rudimentary and their half-baked plot would have been difficult to execute.

Taken together, the al Qa'ida movement is more diffuse movement today. But there has been a growth in the number and geographic scope of al Qa'ida affiliates and allies over the past decade, indicating that al Qa'ida and its brand are far from defeated. This growth has been facilitated by the Arab uprisings, which have weakened regimes across North Africa and the Middle East.[20] In addition, the growing Sunni-Shi'a struggle across the Middle East involving countries and sub-state actors has increased the resources available to Sunni militant groups like al Qa'ida.

The Al Qa'ida Threat to the U.S. Homeland

Not all al Qa'ida affiliates and allies present a direct threat to the U.S. homeland. In the near term, Al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula likely presents the most immediate threat, along with inspired networks like the Tsarnaev brothers that perpetrated the April 2013 Boston Marathon bombings. The growth in social media and the terrorist use of chat rooms, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other sites has facilitated radicalization inside the United States. While al Qa'ida leaders did not organize the Boston attacks, they played a key role by making available the propaganda material and bomb-making instructions utilized by the Tsarnaevs.

Other affiliates do not appear to pose a near-term threat to the U.S. homeland. Al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb is focused on overthrowing regimes in North Africa, including Algeria. Al Shabaab's objectives are largely parochial. It has conducted attacks in Somalia and the region, even though some Americans have fought with al Shabaab in Somalia. And al Qa'ida in Iraq and Jahbat al-Nusrah are primarily interested in establishing Islamic emirates in their respective countries and the region. Indeed, the vast majority of al Qa'ida activity has been in the context of an insurgency where it has attempted to overthrow "near enemy" countries.[21] Between 1998 and 2011, al Qa'ida and its affiliates in Yemen, Iraq, North Africa, and Somalia conducted nearly 1,000 attacks, killed over 8,000 people, and wounded over 12,000 others.[22] As Figure 3

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[20] On al Qa'ida and the Arab uprisings, see Hoffman, "Al Qaeda's Uncertain Future," pp. 635-653; Seth G. Jones, "The Mirage of the Arab Spring," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 1, January/February 2013, pp. 55–63.
[21] Fawas A. Gergez, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[22] Data are from the Global Terrorism Database at the University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). Accessed at www.start.umd.edu/gtd/ on June 29, 2012.

highlights, approximately 98 percent of these attacks were part of an insurgency where operatives tried to overthrow a local government or secede from it – and were not in the West.[23]

Figure 3: Al Qa'ida Attacks, 1998-2011[24]
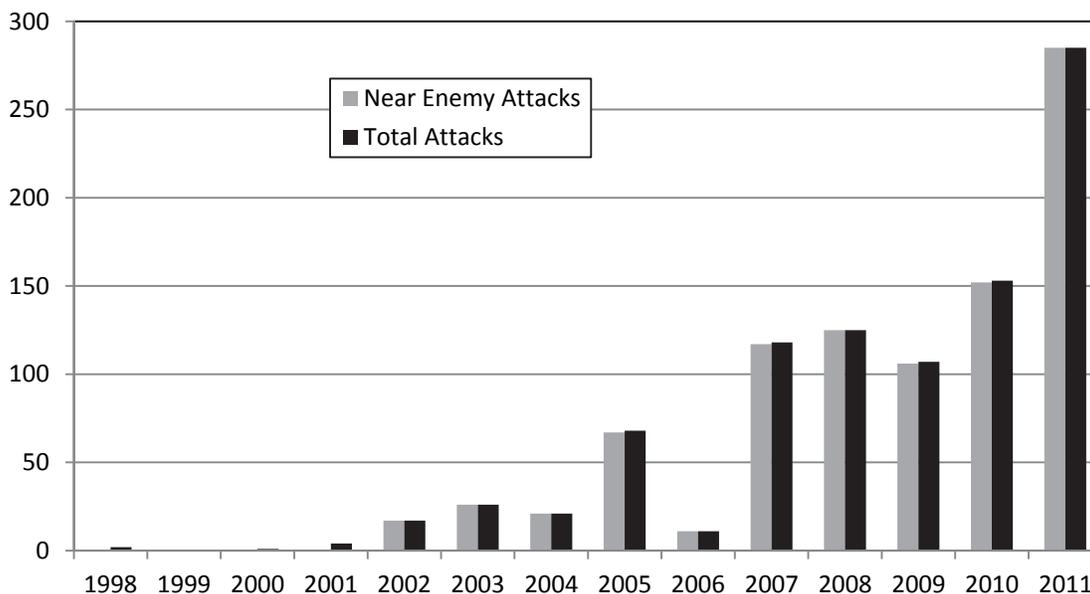
Still, most of al Qa'ida's affiliates and several of its allies pose a threat to the United States overseas. Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia, for instance, has planned attacks against U.S. diplomats and infrastructure in Tunis, including the U.S. embassy. As previously noted, al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb and its allies were involved in the 2012 attack that killed U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens.

Other groups, like Jabhat al-Nusrah, could be a long-term threat. Jabhat al-Nusrah's access to foreign fighters, external network in Europe and other areas, and bomb-making expertise suggest that it may already have the capability to plan and support attacks against the West. There appears to be a growing contingent of foreign fighters – perhaps several thousand – traveling to Syria to fight in the war. A substantial portion of these fighters are coming from the region, including Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq. Some have come from Chechnya. Others have apparently come from Afghanistan and Pakistan. But a significant number also appear to be coming from the West, especially from Belgium, France, and Sweden. Extremists have traveled

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[23] The data for fatalities were lower. Approximately 55 percent of fatalities from al Qa'ida attacks were in near enemy countries, largely because the September 2001 attacks in the United States killed nearly 3,000 people. Without the September 11 data, however, 89 percent of fatalities were in near enemy countries.
[24] Data are from the Global Terrorism Database at the University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). Accessed online at www.start.umd.edu/gtd/.

to Syria from other European countries. According to Spanish officials, for example, a network based in Spain and Morocco sent approximately two dozen fighters to Jabhat al-Nusrah over the past year. It is unclear how many of these fighters have returned to the West, but some have apparently returned to Germany, Denmark, Spain, and Norway among others. In October 2012, authorities in Kosovo arrested the extremist Shurki Aliu, who had traveled from Syria to Kosovo and was involved in recruiting and providing material to Syrian opposition groups. A small number of Americans – perhaps less than a dozen – have apparently traveled to Syria to fight with the Syrian opposition.[25]

It is currently unclear whether most of these fighters will remain in Syria over the long run, move to other war zones such as North Africa, or travel to the West to conduct attacks. And even if some return to the West, it is uncertain whether they will become involved in terrorist plots, focus on recruiting and fundraising, or become disillusioned with terrorism. Still, foreign fighters have historically been agents of instability. They can affect the conflicts they join, as they did in post-2003 Iraq by promoting sectarian violence and indiscriminate tactics. Perhaps more important, foreign fighter mobilizations empower transnational terrorist groups such as al Qa'ida, because volunteering for war is the principal stepping-stone for individual involvement in more extreme forms of militancy. When Muslims in the West radicalize, they usually do not plot attacks in their home country right away, but travel to a war zone first. A majority of al Qa'ida operatives began their militant careers as war volunteers, and most transnational jihadi groups today are by-products of foreign fighter mobilizations.[26]

U.S. Counterterrorism Efforts

Based on an examination of counterterrorism efforts against al Qa'ida's since its establishment in 1988, three steps can help weaken al Qa'ida.[27] The first is implementing a light footprint strategy that focuses on covert intelligence, law enforcement, and Special Operations Forces to conduct precision targeting of al Qa'ida and its financial and logistical support networks. In Afghanistan, the United States should withdraw most conventional forces, relying primarily on clandestine operatives as it has done in Colombia, Philippines, and other counterinsurgencies. Most of the terrorists involved in serious homeland plots after September 11 – from José Padilla's plot to blow up apartment buildings in the United States to Najibullah Zazi and Faisal Shahzad's plots to conduct terrorist attacks in New York City – were motivated by the large U.S. conventional military deployments overseas and by a conviction, however erroneous, that Muslims were its

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[25] Author interview with government officials from Europe and the Middle East, April and May 2013.
[26] Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad," *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Winter 2010/11, pp. 53-94.
[27] Seth G. Jones, *Hunting in the Shadows: The Pursuit of Al Qa'ida Since 9/11* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012).

helpless victims. A light footprint strategy means refraining from large numbers of U.S. forces in Muslim countries. The bulk of the U.S. military should focus on such tasks as preparing for conventional wars in the Korean Peninsula, the Taiwan Straits, and other theaters.

The second step is helping local governments establish basic law and order as a bulwark against al Qa'ida and other extremists. In cases where al Qa'ida does not pose a significant threat to the homeland, the U.S. government should support local governments and allies as they take the lead – as the French did in Mali in 2013. The U.S. government should work with local governments using a combination of military, law enforcement, economic, diplomatic, and information tools. The countries most in danger of becoming an al Qa'ida safe haven lie in an arc that extends from North Africa to the Middle East and South Asia, an area that once made up the Umayyad Caliphate from 661 to 750 AD. It is no coincidence that al Qa'ida has attempted to set up its affiliates in these areas: al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb in North Africa, al Shabaab in the Horn of Africa, al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, al Qa'ida in Iraq, Jabhat al-Nusrah in Syria, and al Qa'ida central in Pakistan. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the Arab Spring has undermined stability and eroded the strength of governments across this arc. The U.S. goal should be to establish effective and legitimate governments with security agencies capable of undermining al Qa'ida's ideology and capabilities.

The third is aggressively undermining al Qa'ida's extremist ideology. In 1999, the State Department disbanded the U.S. Information Agency, which played a prominent role in countering Soviet ideology during the Cold War. Today, no U.S. government agency has the lead role for countering al Qa'ida's ideology. The State Department has the lead for public diplomacy, but has not developed a comprehensive inter-agency strategy to counter al Qa'ida's ideology. The CIA is involved in some clandestine activity, but most senior officials do not view undermining al Qa'ida's ideology as its core mission. The Department of Defense is also involved in some efforts, but they are dispersed among U.S. Central Command, U.S. Special Operations Command, and other organizations. Ultimately, it is the President and the National Security Staff's responsibility to appoint a lead agency and hold it responsible.

These three steps – utilizing a light footprint strategy, improving the effectiveness of governments in countries threatened by al Qa'ida, and undermining al Qa'ida's ideology – would help weaken al Qa'ida.

A Long War

Let me add a final note. One of the most important battlefields will be on the Internet since the struggle against al Qa'ida and its allies remains, in part, a battle of ideas. Over the past decade, radicalization has become much less formal. "Extremists are moving away from mosques to conduct their activities in private homes and premises," a British intelligence report concluded. "We assess that radicalization increasingly occurs in private meeting places, be they closed prayer groups at mosques, self-defense classes at gyms or training camps in the UK or overseas."[28]

The rise of the Internet and social media fundamentally changed terrorist activities. Individuals like Anwar al-Awlaki, Adam Gadahn, and Shaykh Abdallah Ibrahim al-Faisal utilized YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Internet chat rooms, and other forums to distribute propaganda, recruit new supporters, and seek financial aid. Some, like Awlaki before his death, were successful in motivating individuals to conduct terrorist attacks. Others, like Gadahn, largely failed. As one al Qa'ida communiqué blithely noted in 2011, "In today's world, there's a place for the underground mujahideen who support the religion of Allah, men and women and youths in their cities and villages, and from their homes, and with their individual creativity and what is possible for them, as long as they are parallel with the general plans of the mujahideen … the arena of electronic warfare."[29]

Yet al Qa'ida increasingly stumbled here. Parents, siblings, wives, and other family members of operatives were often devastated – even embarrassed – about their relatives' terrorist activity. The wife of Mohammad Siddique Khan, the lead London bomber in 2005, was "ashamed" of her husband's activities. One of Najibullah Zazi's relatives remarked that "I'd bring him myself" to justice for his actions. Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab's parents were troubled by their son's attempt to blow up a Northwest Airlines flight, and had warned U.S. and Nigerian authorities that he was radicalizing. Abdulmutallab's Internet colleagues were also shocked, with one harshly reprimanding him for giving "Islam a bad name." And Faisal Shahzad's father-in-law was incredulous that he would "go to this extreme" with a wife and "two really lovely children."

Many al Qa'ida operatives also failed to practice what they preached. Anwar al-Awlaki was arrested twice in San Diego for soliciting prostitutes. Adnan el-Shukrijumah was arrested in Broward County, Florida for child abuse and battery. Adam Gadahn was arrested in Orange County, California for assault and battery. These were the activities of criminals and gangsters,

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[28] Quoted in Christopher Andrew, *Defend the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), p. 827.
[29] As-Sahab Media, "You Are Held Responsible Only for Thyself – Part Two," June 2011.

not hallowed religious leaders. Al Qa'ida leaders also came under withering criticism from Muslims worldwide, including deeply conservative Sunni leaders. Ayman al-Zawahiri faced criticism for slaughtering Muslims in his 2008 Internet question-and-answer session. Senior officials from Palestinian Hamas, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, and Egyptian Islamic Jihad dismissed al Qa'ida's leaders – and their ideology – as un-Islamic and supporting a fringe phenomenon.

In the end, the struggle against the al Qa'ida movement will be long – measured in decades, not months or years. Much like the Cold War, it is also predominantly an ideological struggle. Al Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri said it best in a 2005 letter to al Qa'ida in Iraq leader Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi: "I say to you: that we are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is in the battlefield of the media. And that we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma."[30]

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[30] Letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, July 9, 2005. Released by the Harmony Project, Combating Terrorism Center, West Point.