



Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy

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January 25, 2011

Congressional Research Service

7-....

www.crs.gov

R41070

Summary

Al Qaeda (AQ) has evolved into a significantly different terrorist organization than the one that perpetrated the September 11, 2001, attacks. At the time, Al Qaeda was composed mostly of a core cadre of veterans of the Afghan insurgency against the Soviet Union, with a centralized leadership structure made up mostly of Egyptians. Most of the organization's plots either emanated from the top or were approved by the leadership. Some analysts describe pre-9/11 Al Qaeda as akin to a corporation, with Osama Bin Laden acting as an agile chief executive officer issuing orders and soliciting ideas from subordinates.

Some would argue that the Al Qaeda of that period no longer exists. Out of necessity, due to pressures from the security community, in the ensuing years it has transformed into a diffuse global network and philosophical movement composed of dispersed nodes with varying degrees of independence. The core leadership, headed by Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, is thought to live in the mountainous tribal belt of northwest Pakistan bordering Afghanistan, where it continues to train operatives, recruit, and disseminate propaganda. But Al Qaeda franchises or affiliated groups active in countries such as Yemen and Somalia now represent critical power centers in the larger movement. Some affiliates receive money, training, and weapons; others look to the core leadership in Pakistan for strategic guidance, theological justification, and a larger narrative of global struggle. Over the past year senior government officials have assessed the trajectory of Al Qaeda to be "less centralized command and control, (with) no clear center of gravity, and likely rising and falling centers of gravity, depending on where the U.S. and the international focus is for that period." While a degraded corporate Al Qaeda may be welcome news to many, a trend has emerged over the past few years that some view as more difficult to detect, if not potentially more lethal.

The Al Qaeda network today also comprises semi-autonomous or self radicalized actors, who often have only peripheral or ephemeral ties to either the core cadre in Pakistan or affiliated groups elsewhere. According to U.S. officials Al Qaeda cells and associates are located in over 70 countries. Sometimes these individuals never leave their home country but are radicalized with the assistance of others who have traveled abroad for training and indoctrination through the use of modern technologies. In many ways, the dispersion of Al Qaeda affiliates fits into the larger strategy of Bin Laden and his associates. They have sought to serve as the vanguard of a religious movement that inspires Muslims and other individuals aspiring to join a jihadi movement to help defend and purify Islam through violent means. The name "Qaeda" means "base" or "foundation," upon which its members hope to build a robust, geographically diverse network.

Understanding the origins of Al Qaeda, its goals, current activities, and prospective future pursuits is key to developing sound U.S. strategies, policies, and programs. Appreciating the adaptive nature of Al Qaeda as a movement and the ongoing threat it projects onto U.S. global security interests assists in many facets of the national security enterprise, including securing the homeland; congressional legislative process and oversight; alignment of executive branch resources and coordination efforts; and prioritization of foreign assistance.

The focus of this report is on the history of Al Qaeda, known (or attributed) actions and suspected capabilities of the organization and non-aligned entities, and an analysis of select regional Al Qaeda affiliates. This report may be updated as events warrant.

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Background¹

The Al Qaeda movement has transformed in recent years: some of the strategic objectives of the original, or core, organization have remained consistent while the views and goals of new affiliates, leaders, and recruits have evolved and become more diverse. Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaeda and the affiliated organizations that ascribe their actions to his violence-based philosophy continue to desire to attack the United States and its global interests. In a June 2010 speech, the Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism for the Department of State stated that "while (core) Al Qaeda is now struggling in some areas the threat it poses is becoming more widely distributed, more geographically diverse. The rise of affiliated groups such as Al Qaeda the Arabian Peninsula and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb is a new and important development and is also a troubling development."² In addressing threats to global security interests before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee in September 2010, the U.S. intelligence community assessed that "the range of Al Qaeda's core, affiliated, allied, and inspired U.S. citizens and residents plotting against the homeland during the past year suggests the threat against the West has become more complex and underscores the challenges of identifying and countering a more diverse array of homeland plotting."³

Due in large part to the actions of the U.S. government, core Al Qaeda, reportedly located in Pakistan, is under tremendous pressure. U.S. and coalition forces' military and intelligence operations appear to have degraded the core's capacity for conducting large catastrophic operations similar to the attacks of September 11, 2001. The core organization's apparent inability to commit large-scale attacks in recent years has led some analysts to question the relevancy, capabilities, and competency of the group.⁴ However, during the 2010 Annual Threat Assessment hearing in front of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Dennis C. Blair, Director of National Intelligence (DNI), observed that while "important progress has been made against the threat to the U.S. homeland over the past few years, I cannot reassure you that the danger is gone. We face a persistent terrorist threat from Al Qaeda and potentially others who share its anti-Western ideology. A major terrorist attack may emanate from either outside or inside the United States."⁵ In addressing how the U.S. might assess whether the organization remains a viable entity the DNI further stated, "until counterterrorism pressure on Al Qaeda's place of refuge, key lieutenants, and operative cadre outpaces the group's ability to recover, Al Qaeda will retain its capability to mount an attack."⁶

While pressure from the international community on core Al Qaeda appears to have limited the group's ability to undertake a catastrophic terrorist attack on U.S. interests, many terrorist groups and cells located throughout the world are affiliating their actions with the organization. Al Qaeda

¹ Prepared by John Rollins, Specialist in Terrorism and National Security, ext. 7-.....

² "U.S. Counterterrorism Policy," Remarks by Robert F. Godec, Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism, State Department, speech at the Global Young Leaders Conference, June 30, 2010.

³ "Testimony of Michael Leiter, Director of National Counterterrorism Center, hearing "Nine Years After 9/11: Confronting the Terrorist Threat to the Homeland," before the U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, September 22, 2010.

⁴ See comments of Brynjar Lia, an al Qaeda expert, in Ian Black and Richard Norton-Taylor, "Al-Qaida Faces Recruitment Crisis, Anti-terrorism Experts Say," *The Guardian*, September 10, 2009.

⁵ "Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence," Dennis C. Blair, Director of National Intelligence, February 2, 2010.

⁶ *Ibid.*

continues to attract potential recruits and possess an ability to influence and support global organizations with similar goals and philosophical objectives. The often-termed jihadi movement⁷ has increasingly become an issue of concern for senior members of the U.S. national security community. During the 2010 Annual Threat Assessment hearing DNI Blair noted the following:

Al Qaeda will continue its efforts to encourage key regional affiliates and jihadist networks to pursue a global agenda. A few Al Qaeda regional affiliates and jihadist networks have exhibited an intent or capability to attack inside the homeland. Some regional nodes and allies have grown in strength and independence over the last two years and have begun to project operationally outside their regions.⁸

Though Al Qaeda affiliated entities have attempted numerous deadly terrorist attacks in recent years,⁹ some analysts view these operations as evidence of desperation signifying that the core organization and its affiliates are no longer capable of launching a large-scale catastrophic terrorist attack directed at U.S. interests. These analysts suggest that recent attempted acts are an acknowledgment that the destructive capabilities of corporate Al Qaeda and those individuals with similar philosophical goals are actually on the decline and are indicative of an organization desperate to prove its continued viability. Others, however, suggest that this recent trend may be indicative of an organization becoming more selective and sophisticated in the operations it pursues and adopting a model of encouraging affiliates and sympathizers to undertake smaller-scale acts to divert international attention and resources away from planning and preparations for larger, more catastrophic, attacks.

Recognition of a more resilient enemy may have been enunciated in a September 22, 2010, statement by the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs:

the level of cooperation among Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups has changed in the past year suggesting that this collaboration and resulting threat to the homeland will increase. By sharing financial resources, training, tactical and operations expertise, and recruits, these groups have been able to withstand significant counterterrorism pressure from the United States, coalition, and local government forces.¹⁰

Similarly, in acknowledging the government's challenge of transitioning from an almost exclusive focus on core Al Qaeda to also attempting to assess the capabilities of numerous smaller groups that are more opaque, the Secretary of Homeland Security stated "the terrorist threat changes quickly and we have observed important changes in the threat even since this Committee convened a similar hearing last year. The threat is evolving in several ways that make it more difficult for law enforcement or the intelligence community to detect and disrupt plots."¹¹

⁷ See the text box on page 4 for a discussion of the use of the term jihad.

⁸ "Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence," Dennis C. Blair, Director of National Intelligence, February 2, 2010.

⁹ For information on attempted terrorist attacks occurring in the homeland in 2009 and 2010 see CRS Report R41416, *American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted).

¹⁰ Testimony of Robert Mueller, "Nine Years After 9/11: Confronting the Terrorist Threat to the Homeland" before the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, September 22, 2010.

¹¹ Testimony of Janet Napolitano, "Nine Years After 9/11: Confronting the Terrorist Threat to the Homeland" before the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, September 22, 2010.

Notwithstanding the challenges associated with continuing to limit core Al Qaeda's planning and destructive capabilities while also attempting to thwart potential attacks by lesser-known affiliated entities, some in the counterterrorism community suggest that the organization and the philosophical following it has spawned are significantly degraded. A December 2010 report issued by West Point's Combating Terrorism Center noted the following:

More than twenty years after its creation, Al Qaeda shows clear signs of decline. The group has lost many of its key operational leaders to arrest or assassination; a number of Al Qaeda franchises—including in Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Algeria—have been substantially weakened or defeated; and a host of ideological challenges, including recantations from prominent jihadis themselves, have compelled Al Qaeda to spend valuable time defending its reputation and actions. These setbacks and others suggest that Al Qaeda is not any closer to achieving its long-term goals than it was on 10 September 2001.¹²

Likewise, others in the national security community have offered observations that help explain why Al Qaeda may be an organization on the decline and possibly in jeopardy of losing its appeal to potential followers. According to the non-governmental Bipartisan Policy Center four key strategic issues are contributing to the demise of Al Qaeda: indiscriminate killing of Muslims, the lack of a political movement to represent the organization's interests, an ever-growing list of enemies, and the lack of a desirable vision that sustains interest in the group and its ideology (see "Al Qaeda's Global Strategy and Implications for U.S. Policy" below).¹³

Given recent discussions regarding the potential demise of Al Qaeda, some counterterrorism observers suggest that such assessments may be premature. In an article published in the December 2010 edition of *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, the authors argue that the organization's infrastructure and ideology are resilient and have the ability to endure external pressures from the international security community. The authors find that "although in recent years Al Qaeda has adopted more ideological and inspirational characteristics, it still exists as a group, and possesses, first and foremost, operational characteristics of guerilla and terrorist organization."¹⁴

¹² Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman (eds.), *Self-Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions within Al Qaeda and its Periphery*, U.S. Military Academy Combating Terrorism Center, December 2010.

¹³ Peter Bergen and Bruce Hoffman, "Assessing the Terrorist Threat," *A Report of the Bipartisan Policy Center's National Security Preparedness Group*, September, 2010.

¹⁴ Rohan Gunaratna and Aviv Oreg, "Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 33, no. 12 (December 2010).

Jihad, Al Qaeda, and other Violent Islamist Groups

The Arabic word *jihad* is derived from a verb that means “to struggle, strive, or exert oneself.” It appears in the Quran in the context of calls to strive for the advancement of Islam and to make a personal commitment to struggle “in the cause of God.” At its most general level, *jihad* denotes taking action on behalf of Islam and fellow Muslims, and thereby improving one’s standing as a pious member of the religious community. The concept has been understood by Muslims in various ways over time to include fighting (*qital*) against those who oppose the advancement of Islam or who harm Muslims, fundraising for Islamic causes, proselytizing, doing charitable work, and struggling against personal desires. Historically, key Sunni and Shi’a religious texts such as collections of sayings and deeds of the prophet Mohammed (*hadith*) most often referred to *jihad* in terms of religiously approved fighting on behalf of Islam and Muslims. Some Muslims have emphasized nonviolent social and personal means of *jihad* or have sought to shape the modern meaning of the term to refer to fighting only under defensive circumstances.

The term Islamist refers to groups and individuals who support a formal political role for Islam through the implementation of Islamic law (*sharia*) by the state, political action through a religious party, or the creation of a religious system of governance. Islamists differ in their theological views and political priorities. Islamists may use nonviolent or violent tactics in pursuit of local, national, or transnational agendas.

The early years of the Islamic faith in 7th century Arabia were marked by conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims and among Muslims themselves. The positive connotations early Muslims attached to *jihad* on behalf of their new community make the concept an attractive ideological tool for contemporary violent Sunni Islamist groups. In attempting to mobilize Muslims for collective action, many of these groups seek to cloak themselves in legitimacy by associating themselves with Mohammed and the first three generations of Muslims (*al salaf al saalih*).

Most Al Qaeda-produced ideological material reflects the group’s shared view of *jihad* as, first and foremost, an individual duty to fight on behalf of Islam and Muslims, and, in some cases, to offensively attack Muslims or non-Muslims who are deemed insufficiently pious or who oppose enforcement of Islamic principles and religious law. Al Qaeda and other violent Islamist groups seek to convince fellow Muslims that the use of violence as a tactic and support for violent groups is religiously justified and required. To do so, they draw on the Quran and other Islamic religious texts and adapt historical events—especially the experiences of Mohammed and the early Islamic community—to current circumstances.

Al Qaeda’s uncompromising approach to the practice of Islam, its use of violence against Muslims, and its views about the illegitimacy of democracy often put them at odds with other Muslims. Some conservative Sunni Muslim clerics also reject some violent Islamist interpretations of Islamic principles, including *jihad*. Since the 1980s, groups advocating violent *jihad* have differed over the relative importance of targeting local governments and societies or targeting the United States and other entities believed to be hostile to Muslims or supportive of hostile local governments. Al Qaeda’s transnational appeals to Muslims in Europe and North America often blend rhetoric about foreign conflicts and occupation with calls to join insurgencies or carry out terrorist attacks.

Overall, *jihad* remains a contested concept among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Some observers resist referring to the actions of Al Qaeda and other violent groups in terms of *jihad* because they believe that such usage unfairly links violence to an important concept in Islam and implies that violent groups are acting on behalf of Islam in a legitimate or praiseworthy manner. Others believe that references to *jihad* and jihadists in discussions of political violence and Islam are justified because Muslims historically have linked *jihad* to conflict and, at present, some violent individuals or groups that claim to be acting on behalf of Islam or Muslims self-identify as *jihadis* or *mujahidin*. As such, these observers argue that directly addressing differing views on *jihad* is critical for counteracting the messages and agendas of violent Islamist groups.

This report uses the term “jihad” to denote violent Sunni Islamists’ understanding of the concept as a religious call to arms and uses the terms “jihadi” and “jihadist” to refer to groups and individuals whose statements indicate that they share such an understanding of jihad and who advocate or use violence against the United States or in support of transnational Islamist agendas. Alternative terms include “violent Islamist” or “militant Islamist.”

For further discussion of *jihad* in the context of Al Qaeda and other violent Islamist organizations, see Thomas Hegghammer, “Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism,” in Roel Meijer, ed., *Global Salafism*, Hurst/Columbia University Press, New York, 2009, pp. 244-266; Steven Brooke, “Jihadist Strategic Debates before 9/11,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 31, 2008, pp. 201–226; and, Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman (eds.), *Self-Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions within al-Qa’ida and its Periphery*, United States Military Academy Combating Terrorism Center, December 2010. For background on the concept of *jihad* in Islam, see Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam*, Markus Weiner Publishers, 2008; David Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, University of California Press, 2005; Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History*, Princeton University Press, 2006; and Reuven Firestone, *Jihad*, Oxford University Press, 1999.

Origins of Al Qaeda¹⁵

The primary founder of Al Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden, was born in July 1957, the 17th of 20 sons of a Saudi construction magnate of Yemeni origin. Most Saudis are conservative Sunni Muslims, and Bin Laden, conservative from a young age, appears to have adopted militant Islamist views while studying at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. There he attended lectures by Muhammad Qutb, brother of Sayyid Qutb, the key ideologue of a major Sunni Islamist movement, the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁶ Another of Bin Laden's inspirations was Abdullah al Azzam, a major figure in the Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Azzam is identified by some experts as the intellectual architect of the *jihad* against the 1979-1989 Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and ultimately of Al Qaeda itself; he cast the Soviet invasion as an attempted conquest by a non-Muslim power of sacred Muslim territory and people.¹⁷

Bin Laden made his first visit to Afghanistan a few years after the December 1979 Soviet invasion, and then relocated to areas of Pakistan near the border with Afghanistan by 1986. He reportedly used some of his personal funds to establish himself as a donor to the Afghan *mujahedin* and a recruiter of Arab and other Islamic volunteers for the war.¹⁸ In 1984, Azzam and bin Laden structured this assistance by establishing a network of recruiting and fund-raising offices in the Arab world, Europe, and the United States. That network was called the *Maktab al Khidamat* (Services Office), also known as *Al Khifah*; many experts consider the *Maktab* to be the organizational forerunner of Al Qaeda. Another major figure who utilized the *Maktab* network to recruit for the anti-Soviet *jihad* was Umar Abd al Rahman (also known as "the blind shaykh"), the spiritual leader of radical Egyptian Islamist group Al Jihad. Bin Laden apparently also made occasional forays across the border into Afghanistan during the anti-Soviet war; he reportedly participated in a 1986 battle in Jalalabad and an April 1987 frontal assault by foreign volunteers against Afghan forces equipped with Soviet armor. According to some experts, Bin Laden has said he was exposed to a Soviet chemical attack and slightly injured in the latter battle.¹⁹

During this period, most U.S. officials perceived the volunteers as positive contributors to the effort to expel Soviet forces from Afghanistan, and U.S. officials made no apparent effort to stop the recruitment of the non-Afghan volunteers for the war. U.S. officials have repeatedly denied that the United States directly supported the non-Afghan volunteers.²⁰ The United States did covertly finance (about \$3 billion during 1981-1991) and arm (via Pakistan) the Afghan *mujahedin* factions, particularly the Islamic fundamentalist Afghan factions, fighting Soviet forces. By almost all accounts, it was the Afghan *mujahedin* factions, not the Arab volunteer

¹⁵ Prepared by (name redacted), Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs.

¹⁶ The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928 in Egypt, and it has since spawned numerous Islamist movements throughout the region, some as branches of the Brotherhood, others with new names. For example, the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas traces its roots to the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. In 1966, Sayyid Qutb was tried and executed for treason for his opposition to the government of Egyptian President Gamal Abd al Nasser.

¹⁷ Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*. Columbia University Press, 2002; Wright, Lawrence. *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*. New York, Knopf, 2006. pp. 60-144.

¹⁸ The September 11 Commission report says that U.S. officials obtained information in 2000 indicating that bin Laden received \$1 million per year from his family from 1970 (two years after his father's death) until 1994, when his citizenship was revoked by the Saudi government. *Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*. July 22, 2004. p. 170.

¹⁹ Gunaratna, p. 21.

²⁰ Author conversations with officials in the public affairs office of the Central Intelligence Agency. 1993.

fighters, that were decisive in persuading the Soviet Union to pull out of Afghanistan. During this period, Bin Laden, Azzam, and Abd al Rahman were not known to have openly advocated, undertaken, or planned any direct attacks against the United States, although they all were critical of U.S. support for Israel in the Middle East.

In 1988, toward the end of the Soviet occupation, Bin Laden, Azzam, and other associates began contemplating how, and to what end, the Islamist volunteer network they had organized could be utilized. U.S. intelligence estimates of the size of that network were between 10,000 and 20,000; however, not all of these necessarily supported or participated in Al Qaeda terrorist activities.²¹ Azzam apparently wanted this “Al Qaeda” (Arabic for “the base”) organization—as they began terming the organization in 1988—to become an Islamic “rapid reaction force,” available to intervene wherever Muslims were perceived to be threatened. Bin Laden differed with Azzam, hoping instead to dispatch the Al Qaeda activists to their home countries to try to topple secular, pro-Western Arab leaders, such as President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and Saudi Arabia’s royal family.

Some attribute the Bin Laden-Azzam differences to the growing influence on Bin Laden of the Egyptians in his inner circle, such as Abd al Rahman, who wanted to use Al Qaeda’s resources to install an Islamic state in Egypt. Another close Egyptian confidant was Ayman al-Zawahiri, operational leader of Al Jihad in Egypt. Like Abd al Rahman, Zawahiri had been imprisoned but ultimately acquitted for the October 1981 assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, and he permanently left Egypt in 1985 and arrived in the Afghanistan theater in 1986 after an intervening period in Saudi Arabia. In the Afghanistan conflict, he used his medical training to tend to fighters wounded in the war. In November 1989, Azzam was assassinated, and some allege that Bin Laden might have been responsible for the killing to resolve this power struggle. Following Azzam’s death, Bin Laden gained control of the *Maktab*’s funds and organizational mechanisms. Abd al Rahman came to the United States in 1990 from Sudan and was convicted in October 1995 for terrorist plots related to the February 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York. Zawahiri stayed with Bin Laden and remains Bin Laden’s main strategist today.

The Threat Unfolds

The August 2, 1990, Iraqi invasion of Kuwait apparently reinforced Bin Laden’s turn from a de-facto U.S. ally against the Soviet Union into one of its most active adversaries. Bin Laden had returned home to Saudi Arabia in 1989, after the completion of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan that February. While back home, he lobbied Saudi officials not to host U.S. combat troops to defend Saudi Arabia against an Iraqi invasion, arguing instead for the raising of a “*mujahedin*” army to oust Iraq from Kuwait. His idea was rebuffed by the Saudi leadership as impractical, causing Bin Laden’s falling out with the royal family, and 500,000 U.S. troops deployed to Saudi Arabia to oust Iraqi forces from Kuwait in “Operation Desert Storm” (January 16-February 28, 1991). About 6,000 U.S. forces, mainly Air Force, remained in the kingdom during 1991-2003 to conduct operations to contain Iraq. Although the post-1991 U.S. force in Saudi Arabia was relatively small and confined to Saudi military facilities, bin Laden and his followers painted the U.S. forces as occupiers of sacred Islamic ground and the Saudi royal family as facilitator of that “occupation.”

²¹ Report of the 9/11 Commission. p. 67.

In 1991, after his rift with the Saudi leadership, Bin Laden relocated to Sudan, buying property there which he used to host and train Al Qaeda militants—this time, for use against the United States and its interests, as well as for *jihād* operations in the Balkans, Chechnya, Kashmir, and the Philippines. During the early 1990s, he also reportedly funded Saudi Islamist dissidents in London, including Saad Faqih, organized as the “Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia (MIRA).”²² Bin Laden himself remained in Sudan until the Sudanese government, under U.S. and Egyptian pressure, expelled him in May 1996; he then returned to Afghanistan and helped the Taliban gain and maintain control of Afghanistan. (The Taliban captured Kabul in September 1996.)

Bin Laden and Zawahiri apparently believed that the only way to bring Islamic regimes to power was to oust from the region the perceived backer of secular regional regimes, the United States. During the 1990s, bin Laden and Zawahiri transformed Al Qaeda into a global threat to U.S. national security, culminating in the September 11, 2001, attacks. By this time, Al Qaeda had become a coalition of factions of radical Islamic groups operating throughout the Muslim world, mostly groups opposing their governments. Cells and associates have been located in over 70 countries, according to U.S. officials.

The pre-September 11 roster of attacks against the United States and U.S. interests that are widely attributed to Al Qaeda included the following:

- In 1992, Al Qaeda claimed responsibility for bombing a hotel in Yemen where 100 U.S. military personnel were awaiting deployment to Somalia for Operation Restore Hope. No one was killed.
- A growing body of information about central figures in the February 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York, particularly the reputed key bomb maker Ramzi Ahmad Yusuf, suggests possible Al Qaeda involvement. As noted above, Abd al Rahman was convicted for plots related to this attack.
- Al Qaeda claimed responsibility for arming Somali factions who battled U.S. forces there in October 1993, and who killed 18 U.S. special operations forces in Mogadishu in October 1993.
- In June 1995, in Ethiopia, members of Al Qaeda allegedly aided the Egyptian militant Islamic Group in a nearly successful assassination attempt against the visiting Mubarak.
- The four Saudi nationals who confessed to a November 1995 bombing of a U.S. military advisory facility in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, claimed on Saudi television to have been inspired by bin Laden and other radical Islamist leaders. Five Americans were killed in that attack. Saudi leaders do not attribute the attacks directly to Bin Laden or Al Qaeda.
- The September 11 Commission report indicated that Al Qaeda might have had a hand in the June 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers complex near Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. However, then-director of the FBI Louis Freeh previously attributed that attack primarily to Saudi Shiite dissidents working with Iranian agents. Nineteen U.S. airmen were killed.

²² On December 21, 2004, the Treasury Department designated Faqih as a provider of material support to Al Qaeda and Bin Laden, under Executive Order 13324.

- Al Qaeda allegedly was responsible for the August 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, which killed about 300. On August 20, 1998, the United States launched a cruise missile strike against bin Laden's training camps in Afghanistan, reportedly missing him by a few hours.
- In December 1999, U.S. and Jordanian authorities separately thwarted related Al Qaeda plots against religious sites in Jordan and apparently against the Los Angeles international airport.
- In October 2000, Al Qaeda activists attacked the U.S.S. *Cole* in a ship-borne suicide bombing while the *Cole* was docked the harbor of Aden, Yemen. The ship was damaged and 17 sailors were killed.

Afghanistan²³

Background and Threat Assessment

Afghanistan was Al Qaeda's main base of operations during Osama bin Laden's residence there in 1996-2001. Al Qaeda operatives—and their protectors in the Taliban regime that ruled those same years—were captured or mostly driven out of Afghanistan during the major combat phase of Operation Enduring Freedom, which began on October 7, 2001, and continues today. As reiterated by the December 16, 2010, summary of a late 2010 Administration review on Afghanistan, the U.S. mission in Afghanistan, now carried out by 98,000 U.S. forces plus about 41,000 forces from partner countries, is to deny Al Qaeda safe haven in Afghanistan and to deny the Taliban the ability to overthrow the Afghan government.²⁴

U.S. commanders say that Al Qaeda militants are more facilitators of militant incursions into Afghanistan than active fighters in the Afghan insurgency. Small numbers of Al Qaeda members—including Arabs, Uzbeks, and Chechens—have been captured or killed in battles in Afghanistan itself over the past few years, according to U.S. commanders. Some of these fighters apparently belong to Al Qaeda affiliates such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). In the most direct Administration statement on the strength of Al Qaeda in Afghanistan itself, Director of Central Intelligence Leon Panetta said on June 27, 2010, that Al Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan itself might number 50-100.²⁵ However, since that statement, some NATO/ISAF officials said in October 2010 that Al Qaeda cells may be moving back into remote areas of Kunar and Nuristan provinces.²⁶

Al Qaeda's top leadership has eluded U.S. forces in Afghanistan and other efforts in Pakistan. In December 2001, in the course of the post-September 11 major combat effort, U.S. Special Operations Forces and Central Intelligence Agency operatives reportedly narrowed Osama bin Laden's location to the Tora Bora mountains in Nangarhar Province (30 miles west of the Khyber

²³ Prepared by (name redacted), Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs.

²⁴ For text of the summary of the review, see http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&source=hp&q=overview+of+the+afghanistan+and+pakistan+annual+review&aq=0&aqi=g1&aql=&oq=overview+of+the+afgha&gs_rfai=

²⁵ Text of the Panetta interview with ABC News is at <http://abcnews.go.com/print?id=11025299>.

²⁶ Dreazen, Yochi. "Al Qaeda Returning to Afghanistan for New Attacks." *Nationaljournal.com*. October 18, 2010.

Pass crossing between Afghanistan and Pakistan), but the Afghan militia fighters who were the bulk of the fighting force did not prevent his escape. Some U.S. military and intelligence officers (such as Gary Berntsen and Dalton Fury, who have written books on the battle)²⁷ have questioned the U.S. decision to rely mainly on Afghan forces in this engagement, asserting that Afghan factions may have accepted funds or tribal and clan overtures to permit the escape of the Al Qaeda leaders.

Implications for U.S. Policy

Bin Laden and his close ally, Egyptian militant leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, are presumed to be on the Pakistani side of the border. After years in which U.S. and regional officials said there was virtually no information on their whereabouts, CNN quoted a NATO official on October 18, 2010, that assessments from the U.S.-led coalition now say the two are likely in a settled area near the border with Afghanistan, and not living in a very remote uninhabited area.²⁸ A U.S. strike reportedly missed Zawahiri by a few hours in the village of Damadola, Pakistan, in January 2006, suggesting that there has sometimes been actionable intelligence on his movements.²⁹ From their redoubt, these leaders continue to occasionally issue audiotapes and statements inspiring supporters and operatives to continue to be looking for ways to attack the U.S. homeland or U.S. allies and to threaten such attacks. On the ninth anniversary of the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, some U.S. observers said it was still significant to try to capture bin Laden if for no other reason than for symbolic value.

Among other efforts that have targeted senior Al Qaeda leadership, a strike in late January 2008, in an area near Damadola, killed Abu Laith al-Libi, a reported senior Al Qaeda figure who purportedly masterminded, among other operations, the bombing at Bagram Air Base in February 2007 when Vice President Cheney was visiting. In August 2008, an airstrike was confirmed to have killed Al Qaeda chemical weapons expert Abu Khabab al-Masri, and two senior operatives allegedly involved in the 1998 embassy bombings in Africa reportedly were killed by a Predator strike in January 2009. Press reports in early September 2010 say that Al Qaeda's former spokesman, Kuwait-born Sulayman Abu Ghaith, may have been released from house arrest by Iran and allowed to proceed to Pakistan.

These types of strikes have become more frequent under President Obama, indicating that the Administration sees the tactic as effective in preventing attacks. Unmanned vehicle strikes are also increasingly used on the Afghanistan battlefield itself and against Al Qaeda affiliated militants in such countries as Yemen.

²⁷ See for example, Berntsen, Gary. *Jawbreaker*, New York: Crown Publishers, 2005.

²⁸ Starr, Barbara: "NATO Official: Bin Laden, Deputy Hiding in Northwest Pakistan." *CNN*, October 18, 2010. http://articles.cnn.com/2010-10-18/world/afghanistan.bin.laden_1_tribal-areas-al-qaeda-leadership-chitral?_s=PM:WORLD.

²⁹ Gall, Carlotta and Ismail Khan. "U.S. Drone Attack Missed Zawahiri by Hours." *New York Times*, November 10, 2006.

Pakistan³⁰

Background and Threat Assessment

U.S. officials remain concerned that senior Al Qaeda terrorists operate on Pakistani territory, perhaps with some level of impunity, and that the group appears to have increased its influence among the myriad Islamist militant groups operating along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, as well as in the densely populated Punjab province. Al Qaeda forces that fled Afghanistan with their Taliban supporters remain active in Pakistan and reportedly have extensive, mutually supportive links with indigenous Pakistani terrorist groups that conduct anti-Western and anti-India attacks, including the November 2008 assault on Mumbai, India, that left some 173 people dead and was perpetrated by the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba, a group considered closely linked with Al Qaeda.³¹ Al Qaeda founder Osama Bin Laden and his deputy, Egyptian Islamist radical Ayman al-Zawahiri, are widely believed to be hiding in northwestern Pakistan, along with most other senior operatives.³² Al Qaeda leaders have issued statements encouraging Pakistani Muslims to “resist” the American “occupiers” in Pakistan (and Afghanistan), and to fight against Pakistan’s “U.S.-allied politicians and officers.”³³ Recent unclassified assessments place more than 300 Al Qaeda operatives in Pakistan’s tribal areas.³⁴

Al Qaeda is widely believed to maintain camps in western Pakistan where foreign extremists receive training in terrorist operations. At least 150 Westerners reportedly have attended these camps since 2008. As military pressure has mounted on Al Qaeda, these camps may have become smaller and more mobile. In 2010, the flow of aspiring Western terrorist recruits continued, and the consensus view of analysts is that Al Qaeda’s sanctuary in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) remains a crucial threat.³⁵ Recent U.S. attention has focused on the threat posed by Yemen-based Al Qaeda elements who are likely to be receiving strategic and philosophical support from their Pakistan-based allies.³⁶

³⁰ Prepared by (name redacted), Specialist in South Asian Affairs.

³¹ During a late 2009 visit to Islamabad, U.S. Joint Chiefs Chairman Adm. Mike Mullen asserted that over the past 12-24 months Pakistan-based terrorist groups including Al Qaeda, the Afghan Taliban, the Pakistani Taliban, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Jaish-e-Mohammed were “working much more closely together.” Michael Leiter, Director of the National Counterterrorism Center, more recently called this “diversification” of the threat “most difficult for the counterterrorism community” (see the Pentagon’s December 16, 2009, transcript at <http://www.jcs.mil/speech.aspx?ID=1298>; Aspen Security Forum 2010, “Counterterrorism Strategy with the Hon. Michael E Leiter, Director, National Counterterrorism Center,” June 30, 2010).

³² “NATO Official: Bin Laden, Deputy Hiding in Northwest Pakistan,” CNN.com (online), October 18, 2010; “‘Heart’ of Al Qaeda in Afghan-Pakistani Border Area: Gates,” Agence France Presse, November 9, 2010.

³³ See, for example, “Qaeda’s Zawahiri Urges Pakistanis to Join Jihad,” Reuters, July 15, 2009. More recently, Al Qaeda figures criticized the Islamabad government for its allegedly corrupt and inept response to the major flood disaster (“Bin Laden Criticizes Pakistani Relief Mission,” Reuters, October 1, 2010).

³⁴ “New Estimate of Strength of Al Qaeda is Offered,” *New York Times*, July 1, 2010.

³⁵ “Qaeda’s Training Areas in Pakistan Notorious,” *New York Daily News*, September 21, 2009; “Terror Training Camps Smaller, Harder to Target,” Associated Press, November 9, 2009; Barbara Sude, “Al Qaeda Central,” New American Foundation Counterterrorism Strategy Initiative Policy Paper, February 2010; “Pakistan Retains Allure for Terror Trainees,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 5, 2010.

³⁶ “Pakistan Al Qaeda Aids Yemen Plots,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 5, 2010.

A 2007 National Intelligence Estimate on terrorist threats to the U.S. homeland concluded that Al Qaeda “has protected or regenerated key elements of its Homeland attack capability, including a safehaven in [Pakistan’s FATA], operational lieutenants, and its top leadership.”³⁷ In early 2009, the Obama Administration declared that the “core goal” of the United States should be to “disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaeda and its safe havens in Pakistan, and to prevent their return to Pakistan or Afghanistan.”³⁸ The President continues to assert that Al Qaeda represents the top-most threat to U.S. security, and the State Department’s *Country Reports on Terrorism 2009* (released August 2010) flatly stated that “In 2009, Al Qaeda’s core in Pakistan remained the most formidable terrorist organization targeting the U.S. homeland.”³⁹

It appears that Al Qaeda’s South Asia regional strategy has in recent years shifted toward greater emphasis on combating its Pakistani enemies. As articulated by one analyst,

Al Qaeda has utilized its media prowess and ideological authority to discredit the Pakistani state and promote cooperation among a variety of Pakistani militants to challenge the state’s authority and undermine its support for U.S. efforts in Afghanistan.⁴⁰

By justifying and rallying support for the Pakistani jihad, providing “force multiplier” facilitation of attacks inside Pakistan, and acting as a mediator and coalition-builder among Pakistan’s myriad Islamist militant groups, Al Qaeda’s leadership has sought to both preserve its geographic base and mitigate the negative effects of militarized U.S. and Pakistani actions against it.⁴¹

While taking questions from senior Pakistani journalists during a late 2009 visit to Pakistan, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton offered a pointed expression of U.S. concerns that some elements of official Pakistan maintain sympathy for most-wanted Islamist terrorists:

Al Qaeda has had safe haven in Pakistan since 2002. I find it hard to believe that nobody in [the Pakistani] government knows where they are and couldn’t get them if they really wanted to. And maybe that’s the case. Maybe they’re not gettable.... I don’t know what the reasons are that Al Qaeda has safe haven in your country, but let’s explore it and let’s try to be honest about it and figure out what we can do.⁴²

Pakistani officials are resentful of such suggestions. Islamabad reportedly has remanded to U.S. custody roughly 500 Al Qaeda fugitives since 2001, including several senior alleged operatives. U.S. officials have lauded Pakistani military operations against Al Qaeda- and Taliban-allied militants in western tribal areas beginning in late 2009 and continuing at a limited pace to date; Islamabad has devoted up to 200,000 regular and paramilitary troops to this effort. They also claim that drone-launched U.S. missile attacks and Pakistan’s pressing of military offensives against extremist groups in the border areas have meaningfully disrupted Al Qaeda activities there while inflicting heavy losses on their cadre.⁴³ The Obama Administration has significantly

³⁷ See http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/20070717_release.pdf.

³⁸ See http://www.whitehouse.gov/assets/documents/afghanistan_pakistan_white_paper_final.pdf.

³⁹ See the State Department report at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2009/index.htm>.

⁴⁰ Don Ressler, “Al-Qa’ida’s Pakistan Strategy,” *CTC Sentinel*, June 2009.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² See the State Department’s October 30, 2009, transcript at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/10/131103.htm>.

⁴³ The CIA Director repeatedly has asserted that increased Pakistani government coordination and what he called “the most aggressive operation that CIA has been involved in in our history” has driven Al Qaeda leaders into deeper hiding and disrupted their ability to operate (“CIA Director Says Attacks Have Hobbled Al Qaeda,” *Washington Post*, March (continued...))

accelerated the pace of unmanned aerial vehicle (drone) strikes in western Pakistan, with the reported number of such strikes rising from 34 in 2008 and 53 in 2009 to more than 110 in 2010.⁴⁴ In addition, a years-long effort by Western intelligence agencies to penetrate Al Qaeda with moles and informants may be paying off, despite the fact that dozens of such infiltrators have been executed in western Pakistan since 2001.⁴⁵

The Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP or “Pakistani Taliban”) is an umbrella organization of Islamist militant groups in western Pakistan that has more closely allied itself with Al Qaeda in recent years.⁴⁶ The August 2009 death of TTP leader Baitullah Mehsud was a notable success for U.S. strategy, as were the May 2010 death of Al Qaeda’s third-ranking operative, Egyptian national Mustafa Abu al-Yazid, and that of his successor, Egyptian national Sheikh Fateh, four months later. All three deaths were assumed caused by U.S.-launched missiles. Yet a flurry of lethal suicide bomb attacks on urban Pakistani targets in late 2009 continued (at a significantly reduced pace) in 2010 and demonstrates the resiliency of regional militant groups. New Al Qaeda-allied militant leaders have arisen to pose major threats beyond the region. Among the most notable is Ilyas Kashmiri, the commander of the Pakistan-based Harakat-ul Jihad Islami (HuJI, or Movement for an Islamic Holy War), a militant group formed in the 1980s and now closely aligned with Al Qaeda.⁴⁷

Some analysts worry that successful drone operations are driving Al Qaeda fighters into Pakistani cities where they will be harder to target, while also exacerbating already significant anti-American sentiments among the Pakistani people. Senior Al Qaeda figures have become more active in the Pakistani megacity of Karachi, about 500 miles south of the FATA; some have been captured there through joint U.S.-Pakistani intelligence operations. Al Qaeda may increasingly be focused on provoking conflict in both Karachi and in Pakistan’s “cultural capital” of Lahore as a means of diverting the Pakistani Army and establishing new safe havens.⁴⁸

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18, 2010; “Stepped-Up U.S. Operations in Pakistan Taking Serious Toll on Al Qaeda, CIA Chief Says,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 2010).

⁴⁴ See data at the New American Foundation’s “The Year of the Drone” at <http://counterterrorism.newamerica.net/drones>. Since 2004, drone strikes reportedly have killed at least 15 senior and 15 mid-level Al Qaeda leaders. At least 80 members of the terrorist group were killed in drone strikes in 2010 (“Drones Take Toll on Al Qaeda Leaders,” *USA Today*, June 3, 2010; “Inside Al Qaeda,” *Newsweek*, September 13, 2010).

⁴⁵ “Spy Agencies Infiltrate Al Qaeda,” Associated Press, November 5, 2010.

⁴⁶ The TTP was designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and Specially Designated Terrorist Organization under U.S. law in September 2010. A senior Obama Administration counterterrorism official describes the group as having a “symbiotic relationship” with Al Qaeda, offering safe havens in the FATA in return for “ideological guidance” and “force multiplier” assistance (see the September 1, 2010, comments of Ambassador-at-Large for Counterterrorism Daniel Benjamin at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/rm/2010/146597.htm>).

⁴⁷ Originally from Pakistani Kashmir, Kashmiri is identified as a rising Al Qaeda figure—the most senior non-Arab in the organization—with the experience, connections, and determination to make him a highly dangerous operative. In August 2010, the U.S. Treasury Department designated HuJI as a Foreign Terrorist Organization under U.S. law and named Kashmiri as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist. Today he is believed to be plotting *fedayeen* (suicide commando) attacks in western Europe and perhaps the United States similar to that in Mumbai, India, in late 2008 that left 165 people dead. Kashmiri is a veteran of both the 1980s insurgency against the Soviet Army in Afghanistan and of the 1990s insurgency against the Indian Army in Kashmir. He has been linked to an effort to assassinate then-Pakistani leader Pervez Musharraf in 2003 and may have abetted the 2008 Mumbai attack (“Lashkar-e-Taiba Cadres Sucked Into Al Qaeda Orbit,” Reuters, November 7, 2010; Treasury Department’s August 6, 2010, notification at <http://www.treas.gov/press/releases/tg818.htm>; “The New Bin Laden,” *Newsweek*, November 1, 2010; “Ilyas Kashmiri: Most Dangerous Man on Earth?,” CNN.com (online), November 10, 2010).

⁴⁸ “Key Osama Aide Among 9 Terrorists Held in Karachi,” *Daily Times* (Lahore), February 9, 2010; “Qaeda Operative (continued...)”

Despite Al Qaeda enduring some disruptions in its operations in Pakistan, the organization has been resurgent with anti-U.S. terrorists appearing to have benefitted from what some analysts have called a Pakistani policy of appeasement in western tribal areas near the Afghan border. Some Pakistani and Western security officials have seen Islamabad losing its war against religious militancy and Al Qaeda forces enjoying new areas in which to operate, due in part to the Pakistan Army's poor counterinsurgency capabilities and to the central government's eroded legitimacy. At the same time, the Pakistan Army appears hesitant to expand its ground offensive operations into western tribal agencies to which Al Qaeda and other militant leaders are believed to have fled (North Waziristan perhaps primary among these), and which may allow Al Qaeda to continue using the rugged region as a base of operations.

Implications for U.S. Policy

In the wake of the September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, President Bush launched major military operations in South and Southwest Asia as part of the global U.S.-led anti-terrorism effort. Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan has seen substantive success with the vital assistance of neighboring Pakistan. President Obama has bolstered the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan with a central goal of neutralizing the Al Qaeda threat emanating from the region. Yet neighboring Pakistan continues to be an "epicenter of terrorism" from which threats to the United States and other western countries continue to emanate. Recently uncovered evidence suggests that the 9/11 hijackers were themselves based in western Pakistan in early 2001 and, by one account, Al Qaeda and its Pakistani affiliates provided operational direction in 38% of the serious terrorist plots against Western countries since 2004.⁴⁹ As tensions between Pakistan and India remain tense more than two years after the November 2008 terrorist attack on Mumbai, India, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has warned that groups under Al Qaeda's Pakistan "syndicate" are actively seeking to destabilize the entire South Asia region, perhaps through another successful major terrorist attack in India that could provoke all-out war between the region's two largest and nuclear-armed states.⁵⁰

U.S. policy options to address the Al Qaeda threat in Pakistan are limited. While Al Qaeda remains widely unpopular among the Pakistani public, there exists a significant segment that views the terrorist group favorably. Anti-American sentiment is seen to be at peak levels within all spectra of Pakistani society, fueled by perceptions that the United States is fighting a war against Islam, that it is insufficiently attentive to the process of democratization in Pakistan, and that drone strikes and other U.S. operations on Pakistani territory are a violation of national sovereignty. A Pew Center public opinion survey released in July 2010 found the percentage of Pakistanis holding a favorable view of Al Qaeda doubling from 9% in 2009 to 18% in 2010. The poll also found only 17% of Pakistanis holding a favorable view of the United States; nearly three in five described the United States as "an enemy," while only 11% saw it as "a partner."⁵¹

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Arrested in Pakistan," *New York Times*, March 8, 2010; Ali Chishti, "Terror Report Card: Pakistan" (op-ed), *Daily Times* (Lahore), November 14, 2010.

⁴⁹ "In Military Campaign, Pakistan Finds Hint of 9/11," *New York Times*, October 30, 2009; Paul Cruickshank, "The Militant Pipeline," New American Foundation Counterterrorism Strategy Initiative Policy Paper, February 2010.

⁵⁰ "Al Qaeda Could Provoke New India-Pakistan War: Gates," Agence France Presse, January 20, 2010.

⁵¹ See the survey results at <http://pewglobal.org/files/pdf/Pew-Global-Attitudes-2010-Pakistan-Report.pdf>.

A significant and long-term increase in economic and development assistance to Pakistan is a key aspect of the Obama Administration's effort to reduce the bilateral "trust deficit"—the Enhanced Partnership With Pakistan Act of 2009 (P.L. 111-73) authorized \$1.5 billion in annual nonmilitary aid through FY2014. Moreover, the United States plans to continue devoting considerable resources toward bolstering Pakistan's counterterrorism and counterinsurgency capabilities (a new "Pakistan Counterterrorism Capability Fund" provided \$1.1 billion for this cause in FY2009-FY2010). Yet U.S. troops are officially prohibited from operating on Pakistani territory, and the combination of distrust of Americans and a dire security environment makes it extremely difficult for U.S. officials to operate effectively there.

For the near and middle term, then, it appears that U.S. strategy likely will continue to rely on large-scale economic and development aid, redoubled efforts to build Pakistan's relevant military capacity, accelerated drone attacks on militant targets, and admonitions that Pakistani leaders consolidate what progress they have made and endeavor to keep pressure on Al Qaeda and its allies on their territory.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)⁵²

Background and Threat Assessment

In January 2009, Al Qaeda-affiliated militants based in Yemen announced that Saudi militants had pledged allegiance to their leader and that the group would now operate under the banner of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).⁵³ A previous Saudi Arabia-based version of AQAP was largely dismantled and destroyed by Saudi security forces after a long and costly counterterrorism campaign from 2003 through 2007.⁵⁴ Some Saudi militants fled to Yemen to avoid death or capture, helping to lay the groundwork for a reemergence of the organization there in recent years alongside Al Qaeda figures who escaped from Yemeni custody and former Saudi detainees from Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and the Saudi terrorism rehabilitation program.

The emergence of Yemen as a safe haven for a reconstituted Al Qaeda threat has left Saudi officials working to prevent "inspiration and re-infiltration" by the new incarnation of AQAP. Continuing terrorism arrests have sustained concerns, particularly because of an apparent shift in attackers' objectives toward targeting critical energy infrastructure and Saudi government officials.⁵⁵ The arrest in Saudi Arabia of over 110 terrorist suspects in March 2010, along with

⁵² Prepared by (name redacted), Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs, and (name redacted) Analyst in Middle Eastern Affairs. For more information on Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, see CRS Report RL34170, *Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations*, by (name redacted), and CRS Report RL33533, *Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations*, by (name redacted).

⁵³ See OSC Feature FEA20090124809516, "Video Shows Saudi, Yemeni Al-Qa'ida Leaders Announcing Merger," January 24, 2009; and, OSC Report GMP20090128666004, "Al-Qa'ida Amir in Arabian Peninsula Urges Targeting 'Crusader' Interests," *Al-Jazirah.net* (Doha) January 26, 2009.

⁵⁴ Saudi counterterrorism officials appear confident that they have killed or captured most of the leaders and operatives that made up the original AQAP organization. King Abdullah echoed this sentiment in June 2006, when he stated that AQAP had been "defeated." "Saudi King Says Al Qaeda Militants Defeated," *Reuters*, June 7, 2006.

⁵⁵ The attack in February 2006 on the oil processing facility at Abqaiq was in some ways the most serious of Al Qaeda's attacks inside the kingdom. Accounts suggest that the attack came dangerously close to disrupting operations at one of the world's most critical oil facilities. Then-U.S. Ambassador James Oberwetter has stated that, "The Saudis fortunately deterred damage to the Abqaiq facilities, but al-Qaeda penetrated the plant site. This assault was evidence to (continued...)"

reports that some of the suspects planned to target energy installations, highlighted these concerns. The attempted assassination of Assistant Interior Minister for Security Affairs Prince Mohammed bin Nayef bin Abdelaziz Al Saud in August 2009 underscored the threat to the royal family.⁵⁶ In 2010, AQAP leaders released a direct appeal to Saudi security and military personnel to turn their weapons on government officials and royal family members.⁵⁷ The recruitment of Saudis who have passed through the kingdom's terrorist rehabilitation program has raised new questions about the tactics employed in the program and underlying assumptions about the rehabilitation prospects for committed, violent Al Qaeda supporters.

Yemen is an attractive base of operations for AQAP. Unlike Saudi Arabia, Yemen's much poorer population is more dispersed, rural, and geographically isolated than its neighbors. The central government, which is widely vilified for its poor governance and corruption, cannot exercise direct control in several of its own governorates without first seeking tribal support. President Ali Abdullah Saleh has ruled Yemen since its unification in 1990. Before that, Saleh ruled North Yemen from 1978 onward. He has a long history of allying himself with Sunni Islamist militants against Communist or Shiite⁵⁸ (revivalist Zaydi⁵⁹) domestic opponents. These ties have led in the past to his government's somewhat complacent attitude toward Al Qaeda sympathizers,⁶⁰ particularly when faced with other, more pressing security challenges in the north (Houthi conflict) and south (secessionist movement) that are perceived as more of a direct threat to Saleh's rule. As Yemen's oil production drops precipitously, its population rises, its water tables drop, and its government coffers dwindle, the country only becomes more ripe for instability and extremist activity.

AQAP operates both within the Arabian Peninsula and internationally. Some analysts also suggest that, with the encouragement of Al Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the group is expanding its ties with Al Shabaab in Somalia, though the extent of those ties is unknown. AQAP also may be working with other AQ affiliates. The *Washington Post* reported that France, with

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the leadership of Saudi Arabia that much more needed to be done to protect vital installations of all kinds." Jim Landers, "Saudi Arabia Works to Protect Oil Fields from Terrorism," *Dallas Morning News*, December 5, 2007. In late April 2007, Saudi authorities arrested 170 terrorism suspects, citing charges of planning to target critical oil facilities in the Eastern Province. Dan Murphy, "New Saudi Tack on Al Qaeda," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 30, 2007.

⁵⁶ The Prince counts four Al Qaeda attempts on his life and emphasizes the personal sacrifices made by Saudi security officers and their families in meetings with U.S. officials. OSC Document GMP20100816614007, "Saudi Paper Reveals Fourth Attempt To Assassinate Deputy Interior Prince Muhammad," *Ukaz*, August 16, 2010.

⁵⁷ Saudi national Sa'id al Shihri delivered an audio message entitled "'Together to Overthrow Al Sa'ud,'" posted online on August 9, 2010. Transcript in OSC Document GMP20100810535004.

⁵⁸ In November 2010, AQAP carried out a suicide bomb attack against a religious procession of Shiite rebels observing the festival of Al Ghadeer, a holiday which commemorates the appointment of Ali ibn Abi Talib by the prophet Muhammad as his immediate successor. The bombing killed 23 people.

⁵⁹ The population of Yemen is almost entirely Muslim, divided between Zaydis, found in much of the north (and a majority in the northwest), and Shafi'is, found mainly in the south and east. Zaydis belong to a branch of Shi'a Islam, while Shafi'is follow one of several Sunni Muslim legal schools. Yemen's Zaydis take their name from their fifth Imam, Zayd ibn Ali. They are doctrinally distinct from the Twelvers, the dominant branch of Shi'a Islam in Iran and Lebanon. Twelver Shiites believe that the 12th Imam, Muhammad al Mahdi, has been hidden by Allah and will reappear on Earth as the savior of mankind.

⁶⁰ Several of AQAP's Yemeni leaders were among those freed in a now infamous jailbreak in 2006, in which 23 convicted terrorists escaped from a supposedly high-security prison in the capital of Sana'a.

help from Saudi intelligence, recently broke up a joint AQAP-AQIM terrorist cell planning to carry out attacks inside France.⁶¹

Overall, AQAP seeks to:

- **Attack the U.S. homeland:** Most counterterrorism analysts believe that of all of Al Qaeda's regional affiliates, AQAP is the most active organization seeking to carry out a successful attack inside the United States.⁶² As it has demonstrated both through Anwar al Awlaki's indoctrination of American citizens and the sophisticated bomb-making of Ibrahim Hassan al Asiri⁶³ and others, AQAP is trying to radicalize U.S. citizens and carry out an attention-grabbing terrorist bombing on U.S. soil. In the third edition of its online *Inspire* magazine released in November 2010, AQAP claims that the October 2010 air cargo bomb plot was part of a long-term strategy to launch many small-scale attacks against the United States. The group states that "This strategy of attacking the enemy with smaller but more frequent operations is what some may refer to as the strategy of a thousand cuts. The aim is to bleed the enemy to death.... It is such a good bargain for us to spread fear amongst the enemy and keep him on his toes in exchange of a few months of work and a few thousand bucks.... In such an environment of security phobia that is

A Profile of Yemeni-American Terrorist Anwar Al Awlaki

Yemeni-American Anwar Al Awlaki (alt. sp. Aulaqi) was born in New Mexico in 1971, and he hails from a prominent tribal family in the southern governorate of Shabwa. Awlaki lived in Britain and in the United States, where he worked as an imam and lecturer at several mosques, including in Falls Church, VA. He traveled to Yemen in 2004, where he became a lecturer at Al Iman University. He was arrested by Yemeni authorities in 2006 and interrogated by the FBI in September 2007 for his possible contacts with some of the 9/11 hijackers. According to various reports, he began openly supporting the use of violence against the United States after his release from prison.

For the past several years, Awlaki has been one of the most deadly terrorist masterminds confronting the United States. He has been either directly or indirectly linked to radicalizing Major Nidal M. Hasan (allegedly committed the November 2009 mass shooting at Fort Hood Army Base in Texas), Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab (the Nigerian suspect accused of trying to ignite explosive chemicals to destroy Northwest/Delta Airlines Flight 253 from Amsterdam to Detroit on Christmas Day 2009), and Faisal Shahzad (alleged Times Square failed car bomb), who allegedly told U.S. investigators that Awlaki's online lectures urging jihad helped inspire him to act. According to several reports, the Obama Administration has added Awlaki, an American citizen, to the CIA's list of suspected terrorists who may be captured or killed. To date, Yemen has refused to extradite Awlaki (Article 44 of the Yemeni constitution states that a Yemeni national may not be extradited to a foreign authority), and his tribe has vowed to protect him. In January 2011, a Yemeni court sentenced Awlaki in absentia to 10 years in prison on charges of incitement to murder and belonging to a terrorist group.

⁶¹ "Al-Qaeda's Yemen affiliate widens search for recruits and targets," *Washington Post*, November 30, 2010.

⁶² It is worth noting that until the failed bomb attack against Northwest Airlines Flight 253 on Christmas Day 2009, most non-governmental observers believed that AQAP's influence and ability to threaten U.S. and Western interests from Yemen remained limited. In assessing the AQAP threat to the American homeland, a May 2010 Senate Intelligence Committee report concluded that U.S. intelligence agencies previously saw AQAP (before the December 25, 2009, attempted airline bombing) as a threat to American targets in Yemen, not to the United States itself. See, U.S. Congress, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, ATTEMPTED TERRORIST ATTACK ON NORTHWEST AIRLINES FLIGHT 253, 111th Cong., 2nd sess., May 24, 2010, 111-199 (Washington: GPO, 2010).

⁶³ Twenty-nine-year-old Saudi citizen Ibrahim Hassan al Asiri is believed to have created the explosive devices used in last year's Christmas Day attempted bombing of Northwest Airlines Flight 253, in a 2009 attack against Saudi Arabia's intelligence chief Mohammed bin Nayef, and the October 2010 air cargo packages destined for Jewish sites in Chicago.

sweeping America it is more feasible to stage smaller attacks that involve less players and less time to launch and thus we may circumvent the security barriers American worked so hard to erect.”⁶⁴

- **Attack U.S. and Western Interests in Yemen:** Even before the Saudi-Yemeni merger, militants in Yemen have targeted Western embassies in Sana’a, foreign oil companies and their facilities, and tourists. Two attacks on the U.S. Embassy in Sana’a in 2008 killed 17 people, including one U.S. citizen, and injured dozens of Yemenis. On April 26, 2010, AQAP carried out an unsuccessful assassination attempt against British Ambassador to Yemen Timothy Torlot, an operation that many experts believe was designed to demonstrate the group’s resilience in the face of a government crackdown following the Christmas Day attempted bombing. In October 2010, AQAP gunmen attacked a vehicle carrying five British embassy workers in Sana’a. The attack injured one British worker and two Yemeni bystanders. Britain’s second- ranking diplomat in Yemen, Fiona Gibb, was in the car, but escaped uninjured.
- **Destabilize the Yemeni Government:** Unlike previous generations of Islamist fighters in Yemen who fought elsewhere, such as in Afghanistan, many of AQAP’s footsoldiers are more inclined to target the Yemeni government itself. Throughout much of 2010, AQAP’s activities inside Yemen have resembled the kind of insurgent warfare witnessed most recently in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq. It appears that one of the group’s goals is to use the popular hatred of the central government, particularly in the former areas of Southern Yemen, to fuel a popular insurgency that is capable of holding territory. To date, this strategy has succeeded in sowing a certain degree of chaos and violence in the provinces of Abyan and Shabwah, though many observers remain skeptical of AQAP’s ability to evolve into a mass movement such as the Taliban. There is no indication that large numbers of Yemeni tribesmen are open to Al Qaeda’s ideological appeal, and many tribal leaders may be using AQAP as a temporary lever to pressure the government for benefits, settle scores with rival, neighboring tribes, or to strike back against the government to avenge some perceived historical injustice.
- **Assassinate Members of the Saudi Royal Family:** Several of AQAP’s top leaders are Saudi veterans combatants from conflicts involving Muslims in other regions or graduates of terrorist training camps based in Afghanistan who, upon returning home nearly a decade ago, turned inward against the Saudi royal family. Since their expulsion from the kingdom, they have used their positions within AQAP to strike back against the Saudi royal family, as was vividly illustrated by a failed assassination attempt in August 2009 against Assistant Interior Minister Prince Mohammed bin Nayef bin Abdelaziz Al Saud, the director of the kingdom’s counterterrorism campaign. According to one report, two of Saudi Arabia’s most powerful intelligence agencies, the Saudi General Intelligence Presidency (GIP), headed since October 2005 by Prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz, and the General Security Services (GSS), which is attached to the Saudi Interior Ministry, have been working with Yemen’s military and special forces units. In the lead up to the October 2010 failed air cargo bombing, Bin Nayef reportedly provided John Brennan, the Deputy National Security Advisor

⁶⁴ “FACTBOX: Qaeda Unveils “Strategy of a Thousands Cuts,”” *Reuters*, November 21, 2010.

for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, and Assistant to the President with critical information on the plot reportedly derived from a Saudi informant or an AQAP member who had recently turned himself in to Saudi authorities.⁶⁵

Implications for U.S. Policy

For the past several months, numerous reports have indicated the Obama Administration is contemplating how to properly increase assistance and intelligence cooperation with Yemen without overly militarizing the U.S. presence there and causing a backlash from the local population. Based on numerous reports, it appears that the Administration is simultaneously pursuing a short term decapitation strategy to capture or eliminate the top echelons of AQAP's leadership while also enacting policies over the long run to address the growing instability in Yemen that permits AQAP to grow.

In the short term, some reports suggest that the CIA may increase its use of drones inside Yemen or place military units overseen by the Defense Department (JSOC) under its control.⁶⁶ Anonymous U.S. officials have said that Predator drones (possibly launched from either Djibouti, Qatar, or the Seychelles Islands) have been patrolling the skies over Yemen in search of AQAP leaders, but many of these leaders have gone into hiding. One report suggests that a major buildup of U.S. assets is occurring in Yemen with the arrival of additional CIA teams and up to 100 Special Operations force trainers, and the deployment of sophisticated surveillance and electronic eavesdropping systems operated by spy services including the National Security Agency.⁶⁷ The U.S. military historically has maintained only a limited presence in Yemen, and as such, U.S. intelligence agencies may have limited knowledge of the local terrain and may need time before they are able to effectively employ all assets to their maximum capacity. On November 8, an anonymous senior Administration official said that the White House was pushing the Yemeni government for more collaboration and intelligence sharing.⁶⁸

In the long term, the Administration has significantly increased U.S. economic and military aid, although Yemen's socioeconomic challenges far exceed current U.S. and international development efforts. In FY2010, the United States is providing an estimated \$290 million in total aid and that figure is expected to increase in FY2011. The Defense Department also has proposed increasing its Section 1206 security assistance to Yemen to \$1.2 billion over a five- or six-year period.⁶⁹ In the past, the Yemeni government has cautioned the United States against overreacting to the terrorist threat there, though in recent months, Yemeni forces have launched several large-scale campaigns against suspected AQAP strongholds in the Abyan and Shabwah governorates.

⁶⁵ It is unclear whether the information was derived from Saudi national and former Guantanamo Bay detainee Jabir al Fayfi, who turned himself in to authorities in Yemen in October 2010. A man appeared on Saudi state television in late December 2010 and early January 2011 under that name to offer an account of his time as an Al Qaeda operative and his surrender to Yemeni and Saudi authorities. See OSC Report GMP20101223877001, "Saudi TV Hosts Former Wanted Person Al-Fayfi To Speak About Personal Experience," December 21, 2010.

⁶⁶ "Yemen Covert Role Pushed," *Wall Street Journal*, November 1, 2010.

⁶⁷ "U.S. deploying drones in Yemen to hunt for Al-Qaeda, has yet to fire missiles," *Washington Post*, November 7, 2010.

⁶⁸ "White House to Yemen: Share more now," *Washington Post*, November 8, 2010.

⁶⁹ "More U.S. Funds Sought for Yemen's Forces," *Wall Street Journal*, September 3, 2010.

Whether U.S.-Yemeni security cooperation can be sustained over the long term is the key question for U.S. lawmakers and policymakers. Inevitably, at some point, disagreements arise over Yemen's tendency to release alleged terrorists from prison in order to placate tribal leaders and domestic Islamist politicians who oppose U.S. "interference" in Yemen and U.S. policy in the region in general. One report suggests that in the fall of 2009, U.S. officials met with President Saleh and showed him "irrefutable evidence that Al Qaeda was aiming at him and his relatives," and "that seems to have abruptly changed Saleh's attitude."⁷⁰ At times, the United States government itself shares the blame for limiting its bilateral cooperation with Yemen. In the past, high-level U.S. policymakers have shifted focus to what have appeared to be more pressing counterterrorism fronts or areas of the Middle East. Yemeni leaders have grown adept at sensing U.S. interest and have adjusted their level of cooperation accordingly. According to Abdel-Karim al Iryani, a former prime minister, "The trust between the U.S. and Yemen comes and goes.... Everyone has his own calculations on what they want from this relationship."⁷¹

North Africa/Sahel: Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)⁷²

Background and Threat Assessment

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM, also known as Al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb or AQLIM) and its offshoots or autonomous cells pose the main terrorist threat in North Africa and the Sahel. Under pressure from Algerian security forces, AQIM has increasingly moved its operations out of the Algerian capital of Algiers. The vast area of Algeria's six Saharan provinces and of its sparsely populated Sahelian neighbors affords AQIM optimal terrain in which to move and conduct training as well as to advance its regional ambitions. Algeria's North African neighbors, Tunisia and Morocco, have prevented AQIM from penetrating their territories, except for some recruitment of individuals; both governments fear that AQIM will transfer operational capabilities to indigenous groups. Neither has experienced a major terrorism attack for several years, but both governments and that of Mauritania continue to unearth alleged Al Qaeda cells and affiliated terrorists.

It is not clear what AQIM's "unity" with or "allegiance" to Al Qaeda means in practice as the group does not appear to take directions from leaders in Afghanistan/Pakistan. A nominal link is probably mutually beneficial, burnishing Al Qaeda's international credentials as it enhances AQIM's legitimacy among radicals to facilitate recruitment. Since "uniting" with Al Qaeda in 2006, AQIM's rhetoric against the West and governments in the region and beyond (e.g., to Nigeria) as well as its calls for *jihād* against the United States, France, and Spain have increased. Yet, its operations remain geographically limited to Algeria and the Sahel, and public information available does not suggest a direct AQIM threat to the U.S. homeland. In mid-2010, French

⁷⁰ "Is Yemen the Next Afghanistan?," *New York Times*, July 6, 2010.

⁷¹ "Yemen Walks Fine Line in Aiding U.S.," *Washington Post*, January 5, 2010.

⁷² This section was prepared by (name redacted), former Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs, (name redacted), Specialist in African Affairs, and Lauren Ploch, Analyst in African Affairs. For additional background and information on AQIM in North Africa, please contact (name redacted), Analyst in African Affairs. See CRS Report RS21533, *Algeria: Current Issues*; CRS Report RS21579, *Morocco: Current Issues*; and CRS Report RS21666, *Tunisia: Recent Developments and Policy Issues*, all by (name redacted), for additional background and information.

officials declared that France is “at war Al Qaeda” following AQIM’s murder of a French hostage and AQIM issued several calls for attacks on France. A French national critical terrorism threat alert in September 2010 was attributed, in part, to a rise in AQIM threats, and in October, a message attributed to Osama Bin Laden justified AQIM and other Al Qaeda attacks on France.⁷³

Algeria

AQIM’s origins date to the 1990s, when Islamist extremists and security forces engaged in a conflict sparked by a 1992 military coup that prevented an Islamist political party from winning a national election in Algeria. The terrorists sought (and seek) to replace the Algerian regime with an Islamic state. The Armed Islamic Group (GIA) was then the main terrorist threat.⁷⁴ In 1998, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) split from GIA, claiming to oppose the GIA’s indiscriminate targeting of civilians. In 2003, under new leader Abdelmalik Droukdel (aka Abu Musab Abdulwadood), GSPC declared “allegiance” to Al Qaeda. In 2006, it announced “unity” with Al Qaeda, changing its name to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. AQIM raises funds by kidnapping for ransom and by trafficking arms, drugs, vehicles, cigarettes, and persons, and receives small-scale funding from cells in Europe.⁷⁵ AQIM communicates via sophisticated online videos.

In 2006, AQIM increased its attacks against the government, security forces, and foreign workers in Algeria. In 2007, it shifted tactics to “Iraqi-style,” suicide attacks, with simultaneous bombings of the Government Palace (the prime and interior ministries) and a suburban police station in April, and of the Constitutional Council and the U.N. headquarters in December, among other attacks. An AQIM suicide bomber failed to assassinate President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in September. After a relative lull, terrorist attacks on security forces escalated in summer 2008, when suicide bombers perpetrated a particularly bloody attack at a police academy, resulting in more than 40 deaths. In 2009, perhaps because security forces had made it difficult to conduct operations in the capital, AQIM mounted attacks elsewhere, notably in the Berber region of the Kabylie in northeastern Algeria, where the security presence had been reduced to pacify civil unrest, although it also shifted its attacks elsewhere.⁷⁶ In June, gunmen killed 24 gendarmes (paramilitary police) in an ambush more than 200 miles east of Algiers. In July, they ambushed a military convoy 90 miles west of Algiers, killing at least 14 soldiers.⁷⁷ In 2010, AQIM continued carry out attacks on police, including in areas outside the northeast.⁷⁸

⁷³ Paul Taylor, “PM Says France “at War” with Al Qaeda Over Hostage,” Reuters, July, 2010; Voice of America, “French Police: Al-Qaida Could Hit France,” September 22, 2010; Erika Solomon, “Bin Laden Blames French “Injustice” for Abductions-TV,” Reuters, October 27, 2010, among other sources.

⁷⁴ GIA remains on the State Department’s list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO’s), although its heyday ended in 2001 and it has not perpetrated an attack since 2006.

⁷⁵ Michael Jonson and Christian Nils Larson, “Illegal Tender: Funding Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb,” *Janes Intelligence Review*, October 2008.

⁷⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism*, 2008, April 30, 2009; and Lamine Chikhi, “Algerian Insurgents Seeking Out New Targets,” August 17, 2009.

⁷⁷ Some attributed the second ambush to the Protectors of Salafi Call, which reportedly had split from the GSPC and, therefore, is not considered AQIM.⁷⁷ Others attributed the attack to a regional command of AQIM and still others suggested that AQIM is encroaching on the Protectors’ territory. BBC Monitoring Middle East, “Five Regions Reportedly Designated for ‘Terrorist Deployment’ in Algeria,” *El Khabar* website, August 5, 2009; and, BBC Monitoring Newsfile, “Retreating of the Salafi Call Protectors,” *Echourouk el Youmi* website, August 17, 2009.

⁷⁸ See, e.g., Christian Lowe and Lamine Chikhi, “Ambush in Sahara Kills 11 Algerian Police - Report,” June 30, 2010.

Several Al Qaeda-linked international terrorist plots have involved Algerians. In December 1999, Ahmed Ressam, an Algerian trained in Afghanistan, was arrested after attempting to enter the United States from Canada; he was convicted for the so-called Millennium Plot that planned bombings in Los Angeles. His associates and other Algerians in Canada were linked to the GIA and Al Qaeda. In January 2003, six Algerians were arrested in a London apartment with traces of ricin, a deadly poison with no known antidote. In October 2009, two French brothers of Algerian origin, one a worker at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva, were arrested in France after intelligence agencies came to suspect them of “criminal activities related to a terror group” (i.e., AQIM).⁷⁹ Algeria continues to be a major source of international terrorists, and Algerians have been arrested on suspicion of belonging to or supporting AQIM in France, Spain, Italy, Germany, and Britain.

The Sahel

AQIM has become increasingly active in the West African Sahel, where it “continues to demonstrate its intent and ability to conduct attacks against U.S. citizens or other foreign nationals,” according to the State Department.⁸⁰ The Sahel stretches from Mauritania to Chad and encompasses several poor, often politically unstable countries with large, sparsely populated northern border areas and limited state capacity to monitor or secure them. AQIM reportedly maintains mobile training camps along the Algeria-Mali border, and carries out smuggling operations in countries across the Sahel, taking advantage of porous international borders. The group has carried out raids on military and police targets, primarily in Mauritania and Mali; kidnapped or assassinated tourists, diplomats, and private sector workers in these countries; carried out kidnappings in Niger; attacked foreign embassies in Mauritania; and repeatedly clashed with the militaries of Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Algeria.

In 2007, AQIM associates murdered four French tourists, prompting cancelation of the famous Dakar Motor Rally. In 2008, AQIM assassinated 12 Mauritanian soldiers and kidnapped a U.N. envoy to Niger and a Canadian colleague. The Canadians and several European tourists kidnapped in early 2009 were held in Mali and released several months later. A Briton in the group was beheaded after his government refused to meet AQIM demands to release a radical cleric with alleged Al Qaeda ties. In June 2009, a U.S. aid worker in Mauritania was murdered in an apparent kidnapping attempt for which AQIM claimed credit and, in August, AQIM carried out a suicide bombing near the French embassy in Nouakchott, Mauritania. In June 2009, it also assassinated a Malian military official involved in the arrest of several AQIM members. That killing was followed by a series of armed clashes between AQIM and Malian forces, which, with Algerian military aid and French air intelligence support, vowed an “all-out war” on AQIM. The threat of kidnapping is of growing concern. In November 2009, a heavily armed group attempted unsuccessfully to kidnap U.S. embassy employees in Niger and, in June 2010, U.S. embassies in the Sahel warned U.S. citizens of prospective AQIM kidnapping operation in the Mali-Niger-Burkina Faso border region. In July 2010, a Mauritanian-French attempt to rescue a French hostage in Mali resulted in AQIM fatalities, but the hostage was not secured and his death was announced days later. In August 2010, two kidnapped Spanish aid workers were released.⁸¹ In late

⁷⁹ Emily Andrews, “Big Bang Scientist Admits Plotting Al Qaeda Atrocity,” *Daily Mail*, October 12, 2009.

⁸⁰ U.S. Department of State, “Travel Warning: Mauritania,” December 2, 2009.

⁸¹ These and other hostage releases have reportedly been made possible by ransom payments, but such payments are sensitive and have never been confirmed by governments involved in negotiations. There has also been controversy over AQIM prisoner releases under release deals. Mauritania and Algeria have criticized Mali for releasing prisoners in (continued...)

August 2010, a suicide attack on a Mauritanian military post, attributed to AQIM, was thwarted. In mid-September 2010, seven French uranium mine workers were kidnapped in Niger and then moved into Mali. Days later, Mauritania launched “pre-emptive” air raids in Mali that reportedly killed several AQIM combatants but also civilians.

AQIM’s presence in the Sahel is divided between two main groups, one led by Yahia Djouadi and a second by Mokhtar Belmokhtar (MBM). The groups’ members are primarily Algerian, but include individuals from Mauritania, Niger, Mali as well as Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, and Benin.⁸² The groups appear to cooperate operationally, but their roles and relations are not clear. Differences between them may be reflected in the outcomes of the kidnappings noted above: in two cases, hostages were executed, reportedly after AQIM political demands were not met, while all other hostages were released, reportedly by MBM in return for ransom.⁸³ While terrorist attacks are attributed to MBM’s group, its activities focus on criminal income-earning operations, including kidnappings for ransom. It reportedly maintains a regional network of contacts, including state officials, possibly marking it as relatively pragmatic compared to other AQIM elements.

Implications for U.S. Policy

U.S. policy makers’ efforts to assist North African and Sahelian governments in countering AQIM threats may need to take into account colonial history and regional power balances and navigate them adroitly. Algeria, Mauritania, Niger, and Mali are all former colonies of France and often resist foreign involvement in their internal affairs and territories. Algeria, which waged a bloody independence war against France, is particularly opposed to foreign interference. It has a stronger military and is richer than its neighbors, thanks to its oil and gas wealth, and sees itself as a dominant regional power. Relations between Algeria and other AQIM-affected Sahelian countries have sometimes been strained due to Algeria’s regional aspirations and attempts to act as the key U.S. regional interlocutor and prevent French interference in the region. However, efforts to strengthen regional counterterrorism capabilities are being pursued via a variety of U.S. and European security cooperation programs and local initiatives. Algeria has hosted regional counterterrorism meetings, provided air cover for some Sahelian counterterrorist operations, and provided military aid to Mali and Niger. Under a 2010 agreement, the Tamanrasset Plan, Algeria, Mali, Mauritania and Niger are establishing a joint military center to combat terrorism, kidnappings, and trafficking. Under the plan, Algeria is to provide military materiel to other plan participants, and the latter are to expand the size of their militaries.

(...continued)

response to AQIM demands in order to secure kidnapped hostage releases. However, in August 2010 Mauritania extradited to Mali an AQIM prisoner who was then released in exchange for two kidnapped Spanish aid workers. The deal also reportedly involved a ransom payment.

⁸² The group led by Djouadi and a key commander, Abid Hammadou (commonly known as Abu Zeid), is linked closely to AQIM’s Algerian leadership. The MBM group operates semi-autonomously. MBM is a Mali-based former GIA and GSPC member who reportedly split from the GSPC after opposing Droukdel’s accession to the GSPC leadership. See U.S. Treasury, “Treasury Targets Al Qaeda-Affiliated Terror Group in Algeria,” July 17, 2008; Geoffrey York, “The Shadowy Negotiator Who Freed Fowler and Guay,” *Globe and Mail*, October 17, 2009; Reuters, “Mali Arrests Four Al Qaeda Members Near Algeria,” May 1, 2009; and Reuters, “The Main Players in Al Qaeda’s Saharan Operations,” August 12, 2010, *inter alia*.

⁸³ Andrew Black, “Mokhtar Belmokhtar: The Algerian Jihad’s Southern Amir,” *Terrorism Monitor*, (7:12), May, 2009; and U.N. Security Council (UNSC), Committee pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999), and other sources.

The U.S. government has conducted several initiatives to counter violent extremism in the region. In 2002, the State Department launched the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI) to increase border security, and military and counterterrorism capacities of Chad, Niger, Mali, and Mauritania. PSI programs focused solely on building security sector capacity. In 2005, the Bush Administration announced a “follow-on” program known as the Trans Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP). An inter-agency, multi-faceted effort, TSCTP integrates counterterrorism and military training with development assistance and public diplomacy. It aims to improve “individual country and regional capabilities to defeat terrorist organizations [by ...] disrupting efforts to recruit and train new terrorists, particularly from the young and rural poor, and countering efforts to establish safe havens for ... extremist groups.”⁸⁴ TSCTP is led by the State Department, but other agencies, including the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Department of Defense (DOD), implement components of the program, including DOD’s Operation Enduring Freedom—Trans-Sahara (OEF-TS).⁸⁵ Under OEF-TS, U.S. military forces work with African counterparts to improve intelligence, command and control, logistics, and border control, and to execute joint operations against terrorist groups.⁸⁶

Governments in the Sahel, a region where democratic gains have often been limited, face diverse security threats, including armed insurrection, banditry, illegal trafficking, and other criminal activities that may threaten state stability more directly than Islamist terrorism. Some in the development community question whether U.S. policy toward the region strikes an appropriate balance between countering extremism and addressing basic challenges of governance, security, and human development, which some view as contributing to the rise of extremism. Others question whether the U.S. response employs the appropriate mix of civilian and military resources or employs a counterproductive “militarization” of U.S. foreign policy in the region.

East Africa⁸⁷

Background and Threat Assessment

The East Africa region has emerged over the past two decades as a region highly vulnerable to terrorist attacks and is considered a safe haven for international terrorist groups. Africa’s porous borders, lax security at airports and seaports, and weak law enforcement agencies are major concerns. Political, ethnic, and religious conflicts in the region help create an environment conducive to the growth of and recruitment capabilities of terrorist groups. The inability of African security services to detect and intercept terrorist activities due to lack of technology and sufficiently trained and motivated manpower are major impediments addressing the terrorist threats in Africa.

⁸⁴ State Department, FY2011 Congressional Budget Justification. TSCTP includes Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia. Libya has been invited to join. Countries nominated for TSCTP membership by a USG agency are consulted and must agree on the designation.

⁸⁵ For more information, see CRS Report RL34003, *Africa Command: U.S. Strategic Interests and the Role of the U.S. Military in Africa*, by Lauren Ploch.

⁸⁶ TSCTP and OEF-TS capacity building activities with Chad, Mauritania, and Niger were limited in FY2009 due to U.S. government restrictions. Sanctions on Mauritania, applied after the 2008 coup, were lifted in September 2009. Programming in Chad and Niger has been restricted due to both political concerns and human rights vetting issues.

⁸⁷ Prepared by (name redacted), Specialist in African Affairs.

The takeover of power in Sudan by the National Islamic Front (NIF) in 1989 led to a significant increase in the activities of international terror groups in Africa. The NIF government provided safe haven for well known international terrorist organizations and individuals, and the government's security services also were directly engaged in facilitating and assisting domestic and international terror groups. Sudan has also been a safe haven for major terrorist figures, including the founder and leader of Al Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden. Bin Laden used Sudan as a base of operations until he returned to Afghanistan in mid-1996, where he had previously been a major financier of Arab volunteers in the war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

Many observers contend that it was during his five-year stay in Sudan that Bin Laden laid down the foundation for Al Qaeda. The penetration by Al Qaeda into East Africa is directly tied to NIF's early years of support to international terrorist organizations. The East Africa region is by far the most impacted by international terrorist activities in Africa. The 1990s saw dramatic and daring terrorist attacks against American interests in Africa. The U.S. Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 by Al Qaeda killed 229 people, 12 of whom were American citizens, and injured over 5,000 people. In November, 2002, simultaneous terrorist attacks struck Mombasa, Kenya. Al Qaeda suicide bombers drove a four-wheel drive vehicle packed with explosives into the Israeli-owned Paradise Hotel in Mombasa, killing 10 Kenyans and three Israelis. In June 1995, members of Gama'a Islamiya, an Egyptian extremist group, tried to assassinate President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

On July 11, 2010, the Somali terrorist group Al Shabaab carried out multiple suicide bombings in Kampala, Uganda. An estimated 76 people, including one American, were killed and more than 80 injured. The United Nations, the African Union, and the United States condemned the terrorist attacks. The attacks took place at a rugby club and Ethiopian restaurant while people were watching the final match of the World Cup. The following day, an Al Shabaab official, Ali Mohamud Rage, stated that "we are sending a message to Uganda and Burundi, if they do not take out their AMISOM troops from Somalia, blasts will continue and it will happen in Bujumbura (Burundi's capital)."⁸⁸

Al Shabaab and the Islamist Movements in Somalia

The United States, Somalia's neighbors, and some Somali groups have expressed concern over the years about the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in Somalia. In the mid-1990s, Islamic courts emerged in parts of the country, especially in the capital of Mogadishu. These courts functioned as local governments and often enforced decisions by using their own militia. Members of the Al Ittihad Al Islami⁸⁹ militia reportedly provided the bulk of the security forces for these courts in the 1990s. The absence of central authority in Somalia created an environment conducive to the proliferation of armed factions throughout the country. Somali factions, including the so-called Islamist groups, often go through realignments or simply disappear from the scene. In late September 2001, the Bush Administration added Al Ittihad to a list of terrorism-related entities whose assets were frozen by an Executive Order 13224. Bush Administration

⁸⁸ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10602791>.

⁸⁹ The 2005 U.S. State Department Country Report on Terrorism described Al Ittihad Al Islami as "a Somali extremist group that was formed in the 1980s and reached its peak in the early 1990s, failed to obtain its objective of establishing a Salafist emirate in Somalia and steadily declined following the downfall of the Siad Barre regime in 1991 and Somalia's subsequent collapse into anarchy. AIAI was not internally cohesive, lacked central leadership, and suffered divisions between factions."

officials accused Al Ittihad Al Islami of links with Al Qaeda. The leader of Hizbul Islam, Sheikh Hassan Aweys, who is on the U.S. terrorist list, was a leader in Al Ittihad Al Islami. In the late 1990s, after Ethiopia and its Somali allies attacked and crushed Al Ittihad, a number of its fighters, the current leadership of Al Shabaab, went to Afghanistan and others went underground.

The Evolution of Al Shabaab⁹⁰

In 2003, the leadership of Al Ittihad, including Sheik Ali Warsame, brother in law of Sheik Hassan Aweys and a number of other top leaders, decided to form a new political front. The young members of Al Ittihad disagreed with the decision of the older leadership in 2003 and decided to form their own movement. These young leaders, some of whom had fought in Afghanistan, met in Laasa aanood, a town in northern Somalia, and later formed a group known then as Harakat Al Shabaab Al Mujahedeen, currently known as Al Shabaab. The current leader of Al Shabaab, Ahmed Abdi Godane, the late Aden Hashi Ayrow, Ibrahim Haji Jama, Mukhtar Robow, helped form the new movement. The primary objective of this group was irredentism and to establish a “Greater Somalia” under Sharia. But Al Shabaab was not active and did not control any territory in Somalia until 2007-2008.

The Ethiopian invasion and the ouster of the Courts from power in December 2006 contributed to the emergence of a strong resistance movement. The leadership of the Islamic Courts moved to Eritrea, while the Al Shabaab secretive leadership slowly took control over the resistance movement. Many Somalis joined the fight against the Ethiopian forces. Some of these volunteers did not know or had only limited knowledge of the intent and objectives of Al Shabaab. By mid-2007, the true leaders of Al Shabaab emerged and the ties with Al-Qaeda became clear. In February 2008, then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice designated Al Shabaab as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist.

Al Shabaab and Other Somali Terrorist Groups in Somalia

On February 1, 2010, Al Shabaab and the Ras Kamboni group, led by Hassan Al Turki, reportedly agreed to merge under one name: Al Shabaab Mujahidin Movement. Both Al Shabaab and the Ras Kamboni group have been coordinating their attacks against Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and working closely with Al Qaeda leaders in East Africa and foreign fighters over the past three years. Senior TFG officials consider the merger a reaffirmation of a pre-existing informal alliance between the two groups.⁹¹ The merger is also triggered in part due to defections and the reported illness of Hassan Al Turki, the leader of Ras Kamboni. Al Turki, an Ethiopian from the Ogaden clan, was designated as a terrorist by the United States in 2004. In December 2010, Hizbul Islam merged with Al Shabaab. The merger is seen by some observers as a surrender after a string of defeats on the ground.

⁹⁰ For more on Al-Shabaab and other terror groups, see CRS Report RL33911, *Somalia: Current Conditions and Prospects for a Lasting Peace*, by (name redacted).

⁹¹ (name redacted) interviewed President Sheik Sharif Ahmad of Somalia and other senior officials, January 29 and February 1, 2010.

Implications for U.S. Policy⁹²

Al Qaeda poses a direct threat against U.S. interests and allies in East Africa. Al Shabaab, on the other hand, appears more focused on carrying out attacks against Somali citizens, the TFG, and African Union peacekeeping forces (AMISOM). According to the 2010 *State Department Country Reports on Terrorism*, “Al-Shabaab’s leadership was supportive of al-Qa’ida (AQ), and both groups continued to present a serious terrorist threat to American and allied interests throughout the Horn of Africa.” On February 2, 2010, Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair at a Senate Select Committee on Intelligence hearing stated:

We judge most Al Shabaab and East Africa-based Al Qaeda members will remain focused on regional objectives in the near-term. Nevertheless, East Africa-based Al Qaeda leaders or Al Shabaab may elect to redirect to the Homeland some of the Westerners, including North Americans, now training and fighting in Somalia.⁹³

Reportedly, over a dozen Somali youth from Minneapolis and other parts of the United States have left the country, and some community leaders believe they went to Somalia to join the insurgency. There is no clear evidence of how many and for what purpose these Somalis left Minneapolis, although some U.S. counterterrorism officials have expressed concern to Congress that some of these individuals could be recruited by Al Qaeda to perform attacks in Somalia or the United States.⁹⁴ U.S. officials stressed in early 2009 that they did not possess “credible reporting” that suggested such an operation targeting the U.S. homeland was planned or imminent.⁹⁵ The concerns appear based in part on the fact that one of the suicide bombers in the October 2008 attacks in Puntland and Somaliland was a Somali-American from Minneapolis, although broader concerns exist about the participation of U.S. citizens in Al Shabaab activities and potential U.S.-based financing for terrorist groups in Somalia. Over the past decade, many Somalis have returned to Somalia to work as journalists, humanitarian workers, and teachers. A number of these Somalis have been killed in the past two years by insurgents and security forces.

On August 5, 2010, more than a dozen Somali-Americans/permanent residents were indicted in California, Alabama, and Minnesota. Attorney General Eric Holder announced that 14 people are being charged with providing support to Al Shabaab. Two indictments unsealed in Minnesota state that Amina Farah Ali and Hawo Mohamed Hassan raised funds for Al Shabaab. The indictments state that 12 money transfers were made in 2008 and 2009. Holder stated at a press conference that “the indictments unsealed today shed further light on a deadly pipeline that has routed funding and fighters to the Al Shabaab terror organization from cities across the United States. These arrests and charges should serve as an unmistakable warning to others considering

⁹² For more information on U.S. counterterrorism programs in the region, see CRS Report R41473, *Countering Terrorism in East Africa: The U.S. Response*, by Lauren Ploch.

⁹³ Director of National Intelligence Dennis C. Blair, Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, February 2, 2010.

⁹⁴ See “Young Somali Men Missing from Minneapolis,” *International Herald Tribune*, November 27, 2008. In March 2009, an NCTC official expressed “concern... over the travel by some tens of Somali-American young men back to Somalia, some of whom have trained and fought with Al Shabaab.” Testimony of Andrew Liepman, Deputy Director, Intelligence, National Counterterrorism Center before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, March 11, 2009.

⁹⁵ Testimony of Andrew Liepman, op cit. “Let me stress we don’t have a body of reporting that indicates U.S. persons who have traveled to Somalia are planning to execute attacks in the United States. We don’t have that credible reporting. But we do worry that there is the potential that these individuals could be indoctrinated by al Qaeda while they’re in Somalia and then returned to the United States with the intention to conduct attacks.”

joining terrorist groups like Al Shabaab—if you choose this route, you can expect to find yourself in a U.S. jail cell or a casualty on the battlefield in Somalia.”

Al Qaeda and Radical Islamist Extremists in Southeast Asia⁹⁶

Background and Threat Assessment

The United States and Indonesia have a common interest in addressing the threat of militant Islamists in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. The syncretic nature of Islam in Indonesia, which has overlaid earlier animist, Buddhist, and Hindu traditions, is more moderate in character than Islam is in the Middle East or Pakistan. Further, the main political parties in Indonesia are secular-nationalist in their outlook. However, radical or militant Islamists are a threat to the largely secular state and moderate Muslim society of Indonesia. Terrorist activity is not limited to attacking Western targets in Indonesia. In June 2010, one militant was sentenced for his role in a plan to assassinate President Yudhoyono as well as for his involvement in two hotel bombings in Jakarta in 2009.⁹⁷

Indonesian views of the nature of the threat from militant Islamists have evolved over time. Islamists were generally suppressed under the New Order regime of former President Suharto. The *reformasi* period that followed Suharto’s fall allowed an opening up of society that gave such views space that was absent under the New Order. After the 2002 Bali bombing that killed over 200 people, Indonesia moved from seeing local militant Islamist groups, such as Jemaah Islamiya (JI), as threats not only to Western and American interests in Indonesia but also as direct threats to the Indonesian government and the Indonesian people. (For background information on JI and militant Islam in Indonesia see CRS Report RL34194, *Terrorism in Southeast Asia*, coordinated by (name redacted).) Key terrorist attacks in Indonesia include the Bali bombing of 2002, the 2003 bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta, the 2004 bombing of the Australian Embassy, and bombing attacks against Western hotels in Jakarta in 2009.

While for most of the 2000s, JI was the key terrorist organization in Indonesia, this now appears to be shifting. According to Sidney Jones of the International Crisis Group, it now appears that militant Islamists can be identified with one of three groups: JI; the remaining members of the network of Noordin Top, a militant killed in 2009; and a new alliance of various Jihadists that had set up a training camp in Aceh. JI is evidently now focused on rebuilding its organization after having been effectively pursued by the Indonesian government. JI is also focused on establishing an Islamist state in Indonesia and possibly the region, as opposed to the Noordin Top network that is more focused on attacking Western targets in Indonesia.

The raid on the new alliance of Jihadists in Aceh, which began on February 22, 2010, has uncovered a group which according to Sydney Jones “is a composite of people from a number of different militant groups like Jemaah Islamiya, Kompak and Darul Islam, who are frustrated with

⁹⁶ Prepared by (name redacted), Specialist in Asian Affairs, ext. 7-..... For more, see CRS Report RL34194, *Terrorism in Southeast Asia*, coordinated by (name redacted).

⁹⁷ “Indonesia Jails Driver Over Jakarta Hotel Bomb,” *BBC News*, June 14, 2010.

what they see as a lack of action within these groups. They're more radical, and apparently see themselves as Indonesia's Al Qaeda."⁹⁸ The February Aceh raid apparently led to the March 2010 raid that killed a militant named Dulmatin, who is thought to be one of the planners and executors of the 2002 Bali bombing. It is thought that a militant named Saptono took over the Aceh cell after Dulmatin was killed. Saptono was in turn killed during a raid in May 2010.⁹⁹ Some experts have observed that the capture, rather than the killing, of such leaders could yield valuable intelligence.

In May 2010, it was reported that a plot to assassinate President Yudhoyono and other national leaders in a rifle/grenade attack on Indonesia's Independence day (August 17, 2010) was disrupted. It was also reported that the plotters were considering moving the attack up to coincide with President Obama's now canceled June 2010 visit.¹⁰⁰ A leader of the Aceh cell that was reportedly planning to assassinate President Yudhoyono, Abdullah Sunata, was captured in June, 2010. He was previously released from prison after having been imprisoned for his role in the Australian embassy bombing.¹⁰¹

The government's response to militant Islamists has been largely effective, though there are some problem areas. Rivalry between the Indonesian military (TNI), the police, and the state intelligence agency BIN probably keeps the state's response from being as effective as it could be. Lax standards at prisons have reportedly allowed militants to communicate with their organizations while in prison. Government-run deradicalization programs, which are more cooptative than ideological in nature, have reportedly allowed some militants to rejoin their organizations after their release from prison.¹⁰² Indonesia has reportedly arrested 400 terror suspects and released 242.¹⁰³

In September 2010, General Ansyad Mbai was appointed head of Indonesia's new National Counter Terrorism Agency (BNPT) that was formed by presidential decree. The BNPT will carry out its functions under the Coordinating Minister of Security, Political and Legal Affairs and is tasked with formulating policies and programmes and coordinating the implementation of policies.¹⁰⁴ Some fears have been voiced that the BNPT will act in ways similar to former President Suharto's New Order regime. Others are concerned that BNPT may find it difficult to effectively coordinate the counter terror efforts of the police, TNI, and BIN.¹⁰⁵ Security Affairs Minister Djoko Suyanto stated that there was no room for complacency during his remarks to a BNPT organized conference on Counter Terrorism in October 2010.¹⁰⁶ Another new development

⁹⁸ "Are Indonesian Terror Networks Regrouping?" *BBC News*, March 10, 2010. Sydney Jones, Remarks with Ernest Bower, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, 2010.

⁹⁹ Tom Allard, "Police Mount Terrorist Raids in Lead-up to Obama's Visit," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 14, 2010.

¹⁰⁰ Ashish Kumar Sen, "'Terrorists Planned to Kill President During Obama Visit; Mumbai-Style Strike was Goal,'" *The Washington Times*, May 18, 2010.

¹⁰¹ Tom Allard, "Indonesia Terror Laws to Change," *The Age*, June 5, 2010. "SBY Hopes Terrorist Arrest Cripples Cell," *The Jakarta Post*, June 24, 2010.

¹⁰² Sydney Jones, Remarks with Ernest Bower, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, 2010.

¹⁰³ "Bali Bomber Dulmatin Confirmed Dead," *BBC News*, March 10, 2010.

¹⁰⁴ Fatima Astuti, "Indonesia's National Counter Terrorism Agency," *International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism*, October 2010.

¹⁰⁵ "Indonesia's National Counter Terrorism Agency," *Eurasia Review*, October 11, 2010.

¹⁰⁶ "Indonesia Seeks Renewed Anti-Terror Fight," *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 18, 2010.

in Indonesia's counter-terror operations in 2010 includes the use of TNI troops, particularly Kopassus troops, in counter-terror operations.¹⁰⁷

There reportedly was an increase in low level terrorism activity in Indonesia in 2010 which appears to be aimed at building up terrorist groups financial resources. In the Fall of 2010 there were a number of robberies that were believed to be linked to efforts to fund radical organizations. Three policemen were killed at the Hamparan Perak police station a few days after police arrested robbers of a bank in Medan. Police killed three who robbed a bank in Padang.¹⁰⁸ The Indonesian police reportedly believe that Abu Bakar Ba'asyir delivered sermons in Medan which motivated the attacks on the Hamparan police station and the robbery of the Bank in Medan.¹⁰⁹

Implications for U.S. Policy

The policy implications of developments in Indonesia are largely positive. Indonesia has moved from a somewhat ambivalent counter terror partner in the immediate post 9-11 period to a now effective, and increasingly close, partner. The evolving counter terror cooperation has also helped foster the larger bilateral relationship. President Obama, who spent part of his childhood in Indonesia, and President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono signed a Comprehensive Partnership agreement during President Obama's visit to Indonesia in 2010. This marks a strengthening and broadening of U.S. relations with Indonesia and opens the way for developing closer strategic relations with Indonesia.

Al Qaeda's Global Strategy and Implications for U.S. Policy¹¹⁰

Overall, Al Qaeda leaders' statements from the mid-1990s through the present suggest that they see themselves and their followers as the armed vanguard of an international Islamist movement. Nevertheless, some experts now argue that "al-Qa'ida has been a marginal actor in the larger drama of international Islamist militancy," and that believe that the group's "quest for influence has been in vain."¹¹¹ Al Qaeda and many of its affiliates state a commitment to ending non-Muslim "interference" in the affairs of Muslims and to recasting predominantly Muslim societies according to narrow interpretations derived from the practices of Sunni Islam's earliest generations. Statements from some Al Qaeda leaders advocate for a phased struggle, in which the initial goal is the expulsion of U.S. and foreign military forces from "Islamic lands" and proximate goals include the overthrow of "corrupt" regional leaders and the creation of governments that rule solely according sharia (Islamic law). References to the reestablishment of an Islamic caliphate frequently appear in Al Qaeda propaganda but often lack detail and are rarely

¹⁰⁷ Salim Osman, "Joint Terror Op Sparks Debate in Indonesia," *The Straits Times*, October 12, 2010.

¹⁰⁸ "Military Vows to Crush Terrorist Network," *The Jakarta Post*, September 27, 2010.

¹⁰⁹ "Ba'asyir Linked to Medan Group," *Koran Tempo*, October 9, 2010.

¹¹⁰ Prepared by (name redacted), Analyst in Middle Eastern Affairs.

¹¹¹ Vahid Brown, "Al Qa'ida Central and Local Affiliates," p. 69, in Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman (eds.), *Self-Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions within Al Qaeda and its Periphery*, U.S. Military Academy Combating Terrorism Center, December 2010.

accompanied by practical political prescriptions for achieving such a goal. Some Al Qaeda leaders also promote military confrontation with Israel and conflict with Shiite Muslims. The varying appeal and compatibility of these different components of Al Qaeda's ideology account for the group's successes and failures in attracting support.

In pursuit of their many goals, leaders of Al Qaeda and its regional affiliates frequently make appeals for support based on a wide range of political positions and, at times, attempt to harness nationalist sentiment or manipulate local grievances to generate support for their agendas. These differing priorities, approaches, and contexts create challenges for those Al Qaeda figures who have hoped to construct a unified narrative of Al Qaeda's goals or implement a unified strategy to achieve them. Some experts note that Al Qaeda's "description of the enemy is confusing and inconsistent" and suggest that, overall:

speaking of al-Qa'ida's "strategy" is a misnomer. The jihadi movement's various operational units, whether named al-Qa'ida affiliates or small cells, cull through various ideological and strategic documents to identify elements that they can achieve. Such strategic variation is enhanced by jihadis' inability to coordinate closely, which likely limits their ability to achieve ultimate policy goals, but also complicates the processes to combat the movement writ large.¹¹²

Although Osama Bin Laden's self-professed goal has been to "move, incite, and mobilize the [Islamic] nation" until it reaches a revolutionary "ignition point," Al Qaeda leaders' statements and Al Qaeda attacks to date appear largely to have failed to mobilize broad support among Muslims.¹¹³ Some observers believe that Al Qaeda faces fundamental limits to its appeal because its rhetoric and goals extend beyond what many Muslims view as religiously legitimate or practically desirable.¹¹⁴

While global public opinion polls and media monitoring indicate that dissatisfaction with U.S. foreign policy has grown significantly in some predominantly Muslim societies, the sectarian rhetoric of some Al Qaeda affiliates and the persistence of Al Qaeda-inspired terrorist attacks that kill and maim Sunni and Shiite Muslim civilians have undermined Al Qaeda's appeal among some Muslim groups. Some experts also argue that the uncompromising, anti-democratic tone of many of the statements released by Bin Laden, Al Zawahiri, and their regional supporters may be alienating Muslims who support the concept of secular or religious representative government.

Analysis of the statements issued by Al Qaeda leaders and affiliates since the mid-1990s suggests that these groups and individuals believe that characterizing their actions as religiously

¹¹² Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman, "Debates and Divisions Within and Around Al Qa'ida," pp. 11-2, in Moghadam and Fishman, (eds.) *Self-Inflicted Wounds*, December 2010.

¹¹³ In December 2010, the Pew Global Attitudes Project released the findings of a survey of Muslims in Turkey, Nigeria, Pakistan, Jordan, Egypt, Indonesia and Lebanon that found, with the exception of the surveyed group in Nigeria, "opinions of al Qaeda and its leader, Osama bin Laden, are consistently negative." The survey also suggests that support for suicide bombing and confidence in Osama bin Laden among Muslims surveyed has declined steeply since 2003. Pew Research Center "Muslim Publics Divided on Hamas and Hezbollah: Most Embrace a Role for Islam in Politics," December 2, 2010.

¹¹⁴ Some analysts believe that violent Islamist appeals that fit a model of so-called "classical jihad" by calling for an armed response to "the presence of foreigners on Muslim territory" have more popular resonance and are viewed as more religiously legitimate than Al Qaeda's appeals for "global jihad," which seek to mobilize Muslims in response to "a wider range of grievances, including perceived Western cultural imperialism and financial support for regimes [Al Qaeda figures] deem unacceptable." Fishman and Moghadam, "Do Jihadi and Islamist Divisions Matter? Implications for Policy and Strategy," p. 230, in Moghadam and Fishman, (eds.) *Self-Inflicted Wounds*, December 2010.

sanctioned, defensive reactions to external threats will increase tolerance of and support for their broader ideological program. Al Qaeda and its regional affiliates also appear to believe that the identification of limited political objectives and the suggestion to non-Muslim audiences that the fulfillment of those objectives will resolve their grievances may generate broader appeal than the group's underlying religious agenda. In fact, experts note that Al Qaeda and its affiliates "pursue a variety of objectives that are rarely clearly defined" and point out that the group "advocates everything from reestablishing the caliphate to the personal religious salvation of its members."¹¹⁵ The practical political and operational realities facing many Al Qaeda affiliates in pursuit of their discrete goals and needs have often led these groups to take actions that have undermined their efforts to portray themselves as defenders of Muslims with limited objectives. For example:

- In December 2004, Bin Laden identified the conflict in Iraq as "a golden and unique opportunity" for jihadists to engage and defeat the United States, and he characterized the insurgency in Iraq as the central battle in a "Third World War, which the Crusader-Zionist coalition began against the Islamic nation." Nevertheless, several strategic choices made by Al Qaeda's affiliates in Iraq undermined their support among key groups, specifically their decisions to stoke sectarian conflict, to rigidly enforce religious doctrine in some areas, and to target the leaders and citizens of some Sunni Muslim communities. Each of these decisions contributed to the significant attrition the group has suffered from 2007 onward at the hands of Iraqi security forces, the government's Sunni allies among the Awakening and Sons of Iraq movements, and the United States military.
- Similarly, affiliates of Al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia initially oriented their attacks against foreign interests in the kingdom during their 2003-2007 campaign, in line with Al Qaeda leaders' rhetoric that had long targeted the U.S. military presence and other outside influences. Saudi security officials believe that once local Al Qaeda affiliates shifted the focus of their attacks away from foreign targets and onto local security forces, Al Qaeda created an opportunity for the government to directly engage and eliminate the group. In addition to carrying out more robust security operations, the government launched a campaign that used nationalist sentiment to undermine popular support for the group by highlighting Al Qaeda attacks against security officers. Deradicalization programs have successfully demobilized some supporters of Al Qaeda, while other individuals have returned to militancy and rejected pro-government clerics' arguments about requiring rulers' and parents' permission to participate in violent jihad.
- Since 2006, Al Shabaab fighters in Somalia who affiliate themselves with Al Qaeda have rallied support from some Somalis opposed to external intervention in Somalia and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). However, Al Shabaab threats against the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) and several other aid agencies have largely shut down humanitarian aid delivery in southern Somalia, cutting access to almost half of WFP's planned beneficiaries in 2010 and exacerbating food insecurity. Terror attacks against civilian targets, including a medical school graduation ceremony in late 2009 and a Mogadishu hotel in August 2010, also have served to alienate many Somalis. Amid recruiting efforts that have drawn ethnic Somalis and other foreigners from the United

¹¹⁵ Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman, "Debates and Divisions Within and Around Al Qa'ida," pp. 8, in Moghadam and Fishman, (eds.) *Self-Inflicted Wounds*, December 2010.

States and Europe to Somalia, Al Shabaab nevertheless has sought to publicly downplay the presence of foreign fighters within its ranks, given local sensitivities to foreigners using Somalia for their own purposes.

- In Southeast Asia, the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) network's 2002 bomb attack in Bali, Indonesia that killed over 200 people led the Indonesian government to reverse course and undertake a concerted effort to track, arrest, and kill JI leaders, as well as to increase anti-terrorist cooperation with the United States and Australia. The ensuing crackdown in Indonesia and other countries appears to have degraded JI's capabilities, particularly its more militant factions, which were most closely associated with Al Qaeda. Since the mid-2000s, JI appears to be taking direction from more "bureaucratic" elements that oppose the militants' violent tactics, at least in the short term.

Many observers argue that the success or failure of U.S. and allied counterterrorism efforts are tied to decisions made by regional governments and publics about the relative importance of combating Al Qaeda operatives, affiliates, and ideologues within their own societies. Recent events suggest that U.S. and allied counterterrorism policies can be successful when they capitalize on Al Qaeda actions and messages that alienate current or potential supporters. Similarly, events also suggest that Al Qaeda members seek to capitalize on U.S. and allied policies and actions that are unpopular among Muslim audiences, such as military operations that result in civilian casualties as well as broader policies such as the presence of foreign military forces in Muslim countries. Action taken by the United States and its allies against Al Qaeda affiliates has the potential to shape the global fortunes of the Al Qaeda brand and the appeal of violent Islamism, and vice versa. Counterterrorism approaches that work in one theater of operations or political context may prove counterproductive when applied elsewhere. These complex dynamics and calculations are likely to continue to challenge decision makers and require unique approaches in each of the regional contexts described above.

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