THE PERSISTENT THREAT: AL-QAEDA'S EVOLUTION AND RESILIENCE

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C O N T E N T S

THE PERSISTENT THREAT: AL-QAEDA'S EVOLUTION AND RESILIENCE

Thursday, July 13, 2017

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COUNTERTERRORISM AND INTELLIGENCE,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:03 a.m., in Room HVC–210, Capitol Visitor Center, Hon. Peter T. King (Chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives King, Perry, Hurd, Rice, Jackson Lee, and Keating.

Mr. KING. Good morning. The Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism Intelligence will come to order. The subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony from three experts in al-Qaeda and global terrorism.

While the focus the past few years has primarily been on ISIS, we cannot forget and must not forget that al-Qaeda still has a global network intent on attacking the homeland.

I would like to welcome the Members of the subcommittee, particularly Ranking Member Miss Rice, and express my appreciation for the witnesses being here today, and I recognize myself for an opening statement which I will keep brief. I will ask that my full statement be inserted in the record because I do want to get to the testimony.

Nine-eleven changed the world. All emphasis was focused on al-Qaeda and an excellent job was done in those early years in going after al-Qaeda and taking away their base in Afghanistan, putting them on defense around the world and then culminating in the killing of bin Laden in 2011.

But I think there has been a mistake made over the last several years by people and this is not a partisan issue—it involves both parties, it involves spokespeople in both parties—is to emphasize ISIS. ISIS became the enemy. ISIS became the face of Islamist terrorism.

The fact is during this time al-Qaeda was reconstituting. It was reinforcing itself. Now where ISIS is certainly on the verge of losing its attempted caliphate, it also is really on its heels right now. It is definitely on defense.

But the fact is al-Qaeda, itself, al-Qaeda has been selecting new, younger leadership. It has become more media-savvy. It has positioned itself to, I think, in effect, reassume its leadership position as ISIS goes down. So I really look forward to the witnesses we are

having here today. I think that we have—again, in the United States we like the easy answers.

Al-Qaeda was the enemy, we are going after al-Qaeda. Now ISIS is the enemy, we are going after ISIS. The fact is al-Qaeda is still there. Al-Qaeda is extremely dangerous, and so again, I look forward to the testimony from the witnesses.

We had a brief chance to talk before, but again, I think this hearing is particularly important because we now know how we let our guard down before 9/11. I don't want us to ever let our guard down again. That is a concern that I have as ISIS is on the run and we sort-of take our eye off the ball of al-Qaeda.

So with that, I look forward to hearing from the witnesses the current state of al-Qaeda, an evaluation of their current intent, capability, the leadership structure and their affiliated networks. Again, this is a critical time, and let us not make mistakes we have made in the past with claiming victory too soon.

[The statement of Chairman King follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN PETER T. KING

JULY 13, 2017

On September 11, 2001, the world at large was introduced to the brutal, murderous, and morally bankrupt terrorist organization known as al-Qaeda. Although some in the United States intelligence community had been paying attention to their actions abroad before 9/11, the tragic events of that Tuesday morning presented al-Qaeda's distorted world view for everyone to see, at the cost of thousands of American lives.

In the time since those horrific attacks took place much has changed: Wars have been fought and won, our National security apparatus has been transformed, the Department of Homeland Security was created, and legislation has been enacted to counter the menace posed by al-Qaeda and its offshoots.

Some things, however, have not changed: The dedication and professionalism of the members of the United States military, law enforcement, and intelligence communities, the determination of the American people to defeat terrorism wherever it is found, and, unfortunately, the persistent threat posed by al-Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda has suffered severe defeats and setbacks in the nearly 16 years since America was attacked. From the 2011 raid on an Abbottabad compound that brought justice to Osama bin Laden, to the continued, sustained decimation of al-Qaeda senior leadership throughout the world, to the increased collaboration and partnerships that have been forged by the United States and our allies, al-Qaeda is under constant and relentless attack.

In response to this pressure, al-Qaeda has demonstrated its resilience and evolved: It has diffused its leadership structure across the globe, franchised jihad with various affiliates, and metastasized in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Europe and North America.

The last several years have seen the creation, rise, and eventual decline of ISIS, al-Qaeda's most potent knockoff. During these years the shocking atrocities committed by ISIS in Syria, Iraq, Western Europe, the United States, and elsewhere have monopolized much of the attention focused on the global jihadist movement. However, al-Qaeda has remained active during this time. They have selected new, younger leadership, become more media savvy and positioned themselves as an alternative to ISIS's brand of jihad.

In the face of the evolving threat posed by al-Qaeda, it is essential that we examine the direction that the organization is headed. This examination will help inform how Congress and the new administration can respond and continue to pressure al-Qaeda and its network of affiliated terrorists around the world, and ensure that there are no safe havens where these murders can hide.

Today's hearing will feature testimony from a distinguished panel of experts who have studied and analyzed the organizational and operational functions of al-Qaeda. These professionals work for institutions that have dedicated substantial resources to collecting and processing information that can provide insight into the future course that al-Qaeda may attempt to chart. This information, in turn, can help us to make determinations about how we can best and most effectively counter future

al-Qaeda efforts, continue to keep the pressure on al-Qaeda, and ultimately destroy the terror network.

I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses about the current state of al-Qaeda, including an evaluation of their current intent, capability, leadership structure, and affiliate network. This hearing comes at a critical time as al-Qaeda is making efforts to once again take leadership of the global jihadist movement.

Mr. KING. So with that, I now recognize the gentlelady from New York, Ranking Member Rice.

Miss RICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing and thank you to the witnesses who are testifying before us today. As we gather to discuss the evolution and the current state of core al-Qaeda and its affiliates, we know that there may be no clear-cut end to the war on terror, and particularly the war on this particular group, at least no clear end that we can see today.

But we also know that we have made real, significant progress in this fight. In the 16 years since 9/11, the United States, together with our allies and partners around the world, have severely weakened al-Qaeda's leadership and significantly reduced their power and operations here and abroad. As a New Yorker, I join the Chairman as a New Yorker here. That means a great deal to both of us.

I want to say how incredibly grateful I am for all those who work so hard and sacrifice so much in this fight. First and foremost, our fallen heroes, service members, veterans, and military families, but also our diplomats and government officials and policymakers, everyone who has come together and done their part to defeat an enemy that has taken so many innocent lives.

I think it is important to recognize that under the Obama administration we saw the creation, evolution, and implementation of effective counterterrorism policies that help lead to the deaths of several key al-Qaeda leaders, most notably, Osama bin Laden, among others. But there is no partisanship when it comes to fighting terrorism.

While many of the tangible successes against core al-Qaeda came under President Obama, there is no question that President George W. Bush's administration helped to lay the groundwork for that progress.

Days after the 9/11 attacks, President Bush reminded us that while our war on terror would begin with al-Qaeda, it would not end until every terrorist group that seeks to do us harm was found and defeated.

I think it is fitting to remember that now, first because we know that the threat from other terrorist groups has grown in recent years, but also because al-Qaeda has not been defeated. They have not given up, and that threat has not yet been eliminated.

So now almost 7 months into the Trump administration, I believe it is critically important for the new administration to craft and implement real strategies for countering the resurgence of al-Qaeda, as well as ISIS and other groups that still pose a real, evolving threat to our homeland and to our allies and interests abroad.

We need a serious comprehensive strategy across our entire government. Fiery rhetoric and tough talk is not a comprehensive strategy. Whether you agree with the policy itself or not, I think we can all agree that a travel ban on a few Muslim countries is not a comprehensive strategy and could actually undermine our counterterrorism efforts by fueling propaganda campaigns.

What we need is a serious, focused, long-term counterterrorism strategy that builds on all that we have learned over the past 16 years and guides us forward as we take on the evolving threats that we face right now and in the years ahead.

I sincerely hope that people within the administration are working to create and implement such a strategy. I know that our committee would welcome the opportunity to engage in that process, and I look forward to hearing any input our witnesses have on what some priorities and goals should be as we look to the future of our counterterrorism efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, again, and I yield back.

[The statement of Ranking Member Rice follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER KATHLEEN RICE

JULY 13, 2017

As we gather to discuss the evolution and the current state of core al-Qaeda and its affiliates, we know that there may be no clear-cut end to the war on terror, and particularly the war on this particular group. At least no clear end that we can see today. But we also know that we have made real, significant progress in this fight the 16 years since 9/11. The United States, together with our allies and partners around the world, have severely weakened al-Qaeda's leadership, and significantly reduced their power and operations here and abroad.

As a New Yorker, that means a great deal to me. I want to say how incredibly grateful I am for all those who all those who worked so hard and sacrificed so much in this fight—first and foremost our fallen heroes, service members, veterans and military families, but also our diplomats, and government officials, and policy-makers—everyone who has come together and done their part to defeat an enemy that has taken so many innocent lives.

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Mr. KING. Thank you, Miss Rice. Other Members of the committee are reminded that opening statements may be submitted for the record.

We are pleased to have a distinguished panel of witnesses before us today on this vital topic. All the witnesses are reminded that their written testimony will be submitted for the record.

Our first witness is Katherine Zimmerman. Ms. Zimmerman is a research fellow with the American Enterprise Institute which she manages AEI's Critical Threats Project. As a senior al-Qaeda analyst, she is a sought-after expert by major news networks and print news.

She has written a number of articles for AEI and other publications. She continues to be a great resource for the committee. It is my pleasure to welcome Ms. Zimmerman back before the subcommittee.

Ms. Zimmerman, thank you. You are recognized.

STATEMENT OF KATHERINE ZIMMERMAN, RESEARCH FELLOW, AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

Ms. ZIMMERMAN. Chairman King, Ranking Member Rice, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss the persistent threat from al-Qaeda. U.S. strategy is setting the stage for al-Qaeda to lead the Salafi-jihadi movement again.

Al-Qaeda has adapted and evolved to exploit our own strategic weaknesses, and our strategy has changed little since 2001. U.S. policy no longer recognizes the seriousness of al-Qaeda's threat.

The United States risks strategic surprise with al-Qaeda. Nothing indicates that al-Qaeda has altered its long-term objectives. Al-Qaeda's entrenchment into local conflicts is dangerous for the United States because al-Qaeda seeks to alter Muslim communities and unifying them under its name in its violent struggle for Islam. Al-Qaeda is determined to bring war to the United States.

Al-Qaeda is almost certainly refining and improving its external attack capabilities in order to deploy them against the United States at a future date. If current policy continues, al-Qaeda will begin attacking the United States anew with orders of magnitude, more resources, experience, and capability than it did on 9/11.

I would like to highlight key points from my prepared statement today: First, al-Qaeda's focus on local wars is not a sign of its decline; second, the al-Qaeda network is robust today; and third, ongoing trends will strengthen al-Qaeda.

To my first point, the impression of al-Qaeda's weakness is a deliberate pose. Senior al-Qaeda leadership rightly determines that portraying global dissolution and publicly embracing local fights would create confusion in Western minds about al-Qaeda's strength and its threat to the United States.

In fact, the West's prioritization of the anti-ISIS fight and the spread of civil wars and conflict in Muslim states gave al-Qaeda the freedom of operation to focus on strategic objective—the transformation of Muslim societies.

Al-Qaeda deliberately localized to build a popular support base and key human terrain in the Muslim world. Al-Qaeda's leaders

have been incredibly focused on gaining popular acceptance since the 1990's, but had failed repeatedly.

Al-Qaeda seized the opportunity presented by the break-down of states and governance across the Muslim world after the Arab Spring to finally win over the people. It seeks to buy support with its rebranding, softening its image and focusing on the local population.

It is doing so by delivering much-needed assistance to fill governance gaps and by fighting alongside local militias in defense of the community.

Al-Qaeda brings basic services, food, water, electricity, justice and security, and military skills and expertise to these communities, which accept al-Qaeda's presence based on a short-term calculation to secure their own survival. This is how al-Qaeda insinuates itself.

Al-Qaeda leadership made deliberate decisions to avoid attempting large-scale attacks in the United States and Europe and establishing Taliban-like governments. If accessed correctly this posture would prevent additional Western military action against it and further a narrative that it was weak.

To my second point, the al-Qaeda network is strong today and al-Qaeda's decentralized approach has made it more resilient. Al-Qaeda obfuscates its relationships with local groups to better achieve its objectives.

It is strengthening in each of the theaters in which it is active. Al-Qaeda prioritizes Syria as the primary struggle against Western and Russian aggression. It has used the conditions created by the Syrian civil war and the anti-ISIS fight to establish deep sanctuary in the northwest and position itself to expand further. Al-Qaeda is poised to reenter Iraq as ISIS weakens.

It is reconstituting in Afghanistan in concert with the Afghan Taliban. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is set to strengthen further in the context of the Yemeni civil war.

Al-Shabaab in Somalia serves as a key node between the Middle East and Africa for the al-Qaeda network, and it is gaining ground. Al-Shabaab remains a regional threat, particularly to Kenya.

Al-Qaeda reconsolidated in the Maghreb and Sahel after the rise of ISIS. It remains embedded in the insurgencies, and it is looking to reassert itself in the Indian subcontinent through the Punjab. Rising sectarian attacks in India might help drive support to al-Qaeda.

The senior leadership is no longer concentrated in Afghanistan-Pakistan, nor is it synonymous with what the Obama administration once dubbed al-Qaeda core.

Al-Qaeda's senior leadership is found today in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and beyond. The old leadership continues to provide strategic guidance, Ayman al-Zawahiri issues overall direction to the network, and leadership attrition has compelled al-Qaeda to reveal a deeper bench than we knew it was there before.

But a new generation of al-Qaeda is also rising. Osama bin Laden's son, Hamza, issued his first statement in August 2015 threatening attacks against the West. It also appears to be developing new leaders inside of Syria, though al-Qaeda is minimizing

its public face for the time being. Affiliate leaders throughout the world will serve to amplify al-Qaeda's echo chamber.

To my third point, trends favor al-Qaeda's future. Synergy among global trends will increase support for the Salafi-jihadi movement. Al-Qaeda seeks to capture this support. Rising sectarianism, not just Sunni-Shia, but Muslim and non-Muslim, will polarize populations.

Anti-Muslim Brotherhood policies pushed by Egyptian President Sisi and Emirati Crown Prince bin Zayed will almost certainly feed extremism rather than eliminate it. Al-Qaeda seeks to capture these disenchanted with the non-violent route.

Al-Qaeda may continue to attack Russian targets for Russia's role in Syria. It may begin attacks against the Emirates because of the Emirati role in Yemen, and it may also start to focus on Egypt.

We need to understand that al-Qaeda is prepared for the weakening of ISIS. ISIS galvanized a global movement and inspired a wave of fight-in-place attacks in the West, something al-Qaeda never did.

But al-Qaeda seeks to recruit these individuals to its own movement and to capture the remnants of ISIS. Warningly, the voices of pro-al-Qaeda ideologues have been amplified as a tool against ISIS to promote a more moderate group in al-Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda's evolution ensures that it will threaten the United States long-term and emerge stronger from the chaos that has enveloped the Muslim world. The American policy decision that al-Qaeda is not a priority threat gives al-Qaeda time and space to stockpile resources and plan truly devastating attacks of multiple types against the United States.

It is near impossible to guess when al-Qaeda will resume attacks against the United States. Our history shows that we have gotten it utterly wrong every time before. It is not sufficient just to defeat al-Qaeda and ISIS.

The Salafi-jihadi movement predates both groups and will generate another transnational organization if they are defeated. The United States must move beyond focusing on the groups and instead seek to weaken and defeat the global Salafi-jihadi movement. I thank the subcommittee for its attention.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Zimmerman follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KATHERINE ZIMMERMAN

JULY 13, 2017

Chairman King, Ranking Member Rice, and distinguished Members, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the committee on the persistent threat from al-Qaeda.

U.S. strategy is setting the stage for al-Qaeda to lead the Salafi-jihadi movement again when that movement is the strongest it has ever been globally. Al-Qaeda has adapted and evolved as America focused myopically on retaking two cities from the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS). Al-Qaeda has become more resilient and ready to exploit our own strategic weaknesses. It seized the opportunity presented by conflicts in the Muslim world to advance its strategic objectives. It has acted deliberately below the thresholds that would set off alarms in Washington. It embedded itself in local insurgencies from Mali to Syria to Afghanistan that will serve as a source of strength for the global organization. The rise of the ISIS galvanized the Salafi-jihadi movement globally, which will continue to strengthen al-Qaeda long after ISIS is gone. America's strategy to counter al-Qaeda has remained relatively

unchanged since 2001 even as the organization has adapted. The United States does not even recognize any more the seriousness of the threat al-Qaeda poses.

AL-QAEDA'S ROLE AS THE VANGUARD FORCE

Al-Qaeda sees itself as the vanguard of the Salafi-jihadi movement. It does not seek to establish a state in the short term, unlike ISIS. It aims, rather, to provide strategic guidance and capabilities to the network of individuals, groups, and organizations that subscribe to the Salafi-jihadi ideology and form the true base of the movement.

Al-Qaeda's objectives remain to unify the *umma*, Muslim community, in a struggle to destroy current Muslim societies and build in their stead what al-Qaeda considers to be true Islamic polities and eventually, a caliphate. Al-Qaeda prioritizes the Muslim world rather than attacking the West. It works hard to teach its religion to the masses, having learned through experience that too-rapid imposition of its views will alienate the population. It compares Muslims today to children, who must first learn right from wrong before they can be held accountable. Al-Qaeda senior leadership directed attacks against the United States and the West to compel them to retreat from the Muslim world and end their support for state governments, which al-Qaeda believed would pave the way for the success of popular revolutions in the name of Islam. Attacks against the West were always subordinate to the larger aims al-Qaeda pursues in the Muslim world itself.

Salafi-jihadi ideology shapes al-Qaeda's global strategy and operations in predictable ways. It holds that Islam must be revived in rigid allegory to the initial spread of the religion (See Figure 1). That allegory contains three primary phases: Mecca I, in which Mohammad began to receive the Qur'an from Allah but was threatened and persecuted in a hostile community; Medina, during which he emigrated to a more favorable location and built the base of the religion and its core followers; and Mecca II, when he returned to his original community, gained the ascendancy, and began to expand the faith broadly and rapidly. Al-Qaeda assesses the Salafi-jihadi movement to be in the Medina phase of defensive jihad and gathering strength through governance and building military capabilities. (ISIS, by contrast, argues that the movement is in the Mecca II phase.) Like the Prophet Mohammed during this period, al-Qaeda uses mediation and arbitration as a mechanism to generate support in local communities.

FIGURE 1.—THE PHASES OF THE PROPHET'S LIFE AND AL-QAEDA'S STRATEGY

Adapted from work by Mary Habeck.
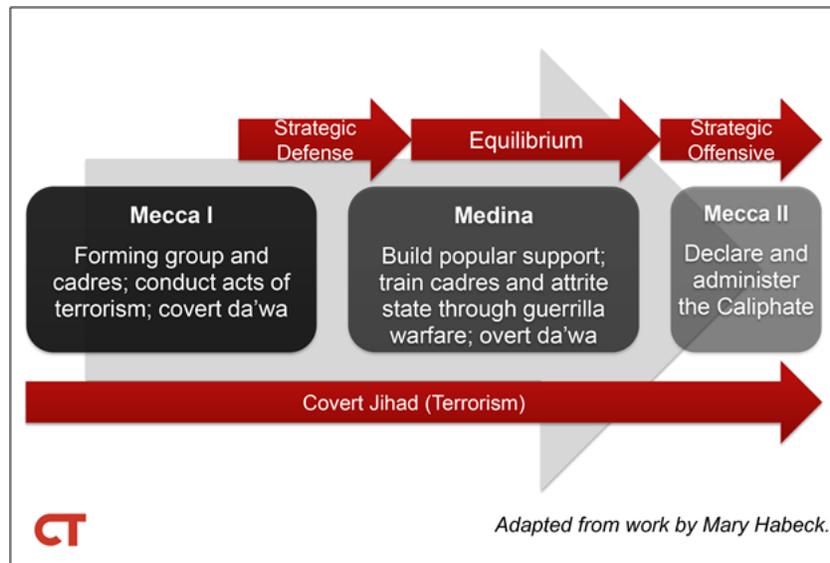
Source.—Author.

Divisions weaken the *umma*, thus al-Qaeda rejects state nationalism and judging the purity of Muslims, especially when facing a common enemy. Al-Qaeda seeks to eradicate the Nation as a primary form of identity for Muslims because al-Qaeda saw nationalism as part of the failure of the mujahideen in the 1990's in Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. Ayman al-Zawahiri stated:

"The cause of Sham is the cause of the entire umma. . . .The enemy seeks to transform the Jihad in Sham from a cause for the Muslim *umma* to an exclusively nationalist Syrian cause, then turn the nationalist cause to an issue of specific regions and localities, and finally reduce this to an issue of a few cities, villages, and neighborhoods."[1]

Al-Qaeda also rejects the division that ISIS introduced to the Salafi-jihadi movement because it distracted Muslims from fighting a shared, common enemy.

Zawahiri's September 2013 guidance identified a military line of effort against the United States and others to weaken their support for Muslim governments and a political line of effort to both form and cultivate the vanguard force and mobilize the masses in the name of Islam.[2] Zawahiri gave explicit guidelines for operational activities and legitimate targets, which local affiliates have reinforced.[3] Specifically, Zawahiri called for al-Qaeda to support the revolutions of "the oppressed against the oppressors" regardless of whether the groups are Muslim and to teach the revolutionaries Islam. Al-Qaeda affiliates all follow this guidance.

Al-Qaeda has thus become less visible, less oppressive, and less violent because its leaders have changed their approach, not because the organization has become weaker. It has, on the contrary, grown much stronger and in ways more dangerous than ever before.

THE AL-QAEDA NETWORK TODAY

Al-Qaeda deliberately "localized" to build a durable popular base in key human terrain in the Muslim world. The conflicts that spiraled out of control after the initial popular movements during the 2011 Arab Spring did what al-Qaeda had never been able to do for itself: They mobilized the Sunni populations against the state. Al-Qaeda seized the opportunity and insinuated itself into the local insurgencies to hijack and redirect them toward its own purposes. It intertwined its network with the Salafi-jihadi base, which serves as a source of resilience and strength for al-Qaeda. It eschewed directed attacks against Western targets, assessing correctly that the absence of such attacks would lead to the false narrative that it was weak and prevent additional military action against its groups. Al-Qaeda is not in decline; it is preparing to emerge from the shadows to carry forward the Salafi-jihadi movement.

The conditions in the Muslim world empower al-Qaeda, ISIS, and the Salafi-jihadi base. The collapse of five states since 2011—Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Mali— and the weakening of strong states such as Egypt made Sunni populations vulnerable. Communities mobilized in their own defense or as part of a popular insurgency. Al-Qaeda and the Salafi-jihadi base support their efforts; have also filled governance gaps, exacerbated by conflict; and have expanded into Sunni communities. Rising sectarianism and the slow polarization of societies from Africa to the India subcontinent created additional opportunities for the Salafi-jihadi base to expand. Communities that had rejected Salafi-jihadi ideology for decades now tolerate its presence as part of a short-term calculus to survive.

The marbling of al-Qaeda in local movements sometimes creates the appearance that local groups reject al-Qaeda as they break and reform relations with it. However, the shifting and realignment within the network is largely over organizational, rather than ideological, differences. Normal personal power politics and operational-level disagreements play a role in al-Qaeda's organizational relations, too. These fractures must not be mistaken for overall weakness or disintegration. Nor should

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[1] SITE Intelligence Group, "AQ Leader Zawahiri Declares Syrian Jihad an Issue Concerning All Muslims, Calls to Reject Nationalist Sentiment," April 23, 2017, *https:// news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/aq-leader-zawahiri-declares-syrian-jihad-an-issue-concerning-all-muslims-calls-to-reject-nationalist-sentiment.html*.

[2] SITE Intelligence Group, "Zawahiri Gives General Guidelines for Jihad Regarding Military, Propaganda," September 13, 2013, *https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/zawahiri-gives-general-guidelines-for-jihad-regarding-military-propaganda.html*.

[3] Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, for example, released a substantial document that provided a "Code of Conduct" for mujahideen in the Indian subcontinent. See SITE Intelligence Group, "AQIS Publishes Its 'Code of Conduct,' Declares U.S. Citizens and Interests in Pakistan Its 'Foremost Priority,'" June 25, 2017, *https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/statements/aqis-publishes-its-code-of-conduct-declares-u-s-citizens-and-interests-in-pakistan-its-foremost-priority.html*.

the United States try to distinguish between the globally-focused and locally-focused groups, as the Salafi-jihadi ideology is inherently global in nature. The focus on the local objectives advances the overall global objectives of the Salafi-jihadi movement by design.

Counterargument: Al-Qaeda Is in Decline.—Serious and respectable experts argue against the view outlined above. Daniel Byman, among others, recently argued that al-Qaeda's strength has waned because of its low operational pace, limited resources and popular support, and backward slide in its own objectives.[4] Yet he notes that even as al-Qaeda declined, the Salafi-jihadi movement that it helped mobilize is thriving. Byman based his assessment on the absence of a successful mass-casualty attack in the West in the past 10 years and the focus of the affiliates on local and regional objectives. He cited al-Qaeda core's inability to attract recruits—now drawn to ISIS—and the core's reliance on its affiliates for resources, rather than the reverse. Byman further identified the rejection of al-Qaeda by popular clerics as an indicator the group is failing. He noted, finally, that al-Qaeda is in decline because the organization underestimated the effect that the U.S. counterterrorism campaign and al-Qaeda's alienation from the people had on the organization itself.[5]

Many analysts have interpreted al-Qaeda's localization, its marbling in the local Salafi-jihadi base, as a strategic error that will weaken the al-Qaeda organization in the long term. Charles Lister, for example, cited al-Qaeda's dissolution of its affiliate in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra, and the concessions al-Qaeda leaders have made in Syria to a local support base as constraints on al-Qaeda's activities and an indicator that al-Qaeda will be absorbed into the local fight. Lister argued that the shifts in Syria move what was al-Qaeda's affiliate further outside of the al-Qaeda senior leadership's sphere, breaking up what was once a global network.[6] Al-Qaeda's deliberate localization risks its ability to achieve its long-term objectives in this view, as al-Qaeda groups compromise on ideology and strategy to court local support. Al-Qaeda global will become a diluted version of itself over time.

Al-Qaeda may indeed be in decline, but the evidence strongly suggests otherwise. Al-Qaeda's leadership statements, its stated objectives and strategy to achieve these objectives, and its adaptations to new conditions lead to a different assessment.

Al-Qaeda Rising.—Al-Qaeda benefits from the rise of ISIS and the conflicts that have swept through the Muslim world. It is positioned itself across the Muslim world to recapture the leadership of the Salafi-jihadi movement as pressure increases on ISIS. Al-Qaeda's shift toward decentralized operations and the dispersal of its network built resilience within the organization and adapted to pressures from U.S.-led counterterrorism actions.[7] It obfuscates is relationships with the Salafi-jihadi base to better achieve local objectives and to confound analysts and policymakers. Al-Qaeda gained local popular support previously denied to it by the very population it sought to influence and now governs communities by proxy to begin to restructure society in pursuit of its long-term objectives.

ISIS has strengthened al-Qaeda. It has galvanized the global Salafi-jihadi movement and drawn the West's attention. It has inspired a wave of would-be recruits to conduct fight-in-place attacks in the West, something al-Qaeda was never able to do. Competition between ISIS and al-Qaeda is limited to the top echelons of the movement: Groups on the ground deconflict and sometimes even cooperate. Should ISIS's global network collapse, al-Qaeda will be able to capture the remnants and incorporate ISIS's capabilities into its own organization. Al-Qaeda casts itself as more moderate than ISIS, gaining acceptance in populations that seek to defend themselves from ISIS. Finally, the West's prioritization of the anti-ISIS fight and the spread of civil wars and conflict in Muslim States gave al-Qaeda the freedom of operation to focus on a strategic objective: The transformation of Muslim societies.

Al-Qaeda's "rebranding" in the post-Arab Spring environment—the softening of its image and focus on local populations—is intended to buy support from the population. The shift signaled an inflection in al-Qaeda's population-centric approach in which it began to use the Salafi-jihadi base as a means to entrench itself in local

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[4] Daniel Byman, "Judging al-Qaida's Record, Part 1: Is the Organization in Decline?" Lawfare blog, June 27, 2017, *https://lawfareblog.com/judging-al-qaedas-record-part-i-organization-decline*.

[5] Daniel Byman, "Judging al-Qaida's Record, Part II: Why has al-Qaida Declined?" Lawfare blog, June 28, 2017, *https://lawfareblog.com/judging-al-qaedas-record-part-ii-why-has-al-qaeda-declined.*

[6] See for example, Charles Lister, "Al-Qaeda's Turning Against Its Syrian Affiliate," Middle East Institute, May 18, 2017, *http://www.mei.edu/content/article/al-qaeda-s-turning-against-its-syrian-affiliate.*

[7] Katherine Zimmerman, "The al-Qaeda Network: A New Framework for Defining the Enemy," AEI's Critical Threats Project, September 10, 2013, *https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/the-al-qaeda-network-a-new-framework-for-defining-the-enemy.*

contexts. Zawahiri reinforced this approach when he took over the movement from Osama bin Laden. Zawahiri experienced failure in Egypt in the 1990's as the population rejected his Egyptian Islamic Jihad group completely. This failure shapes Zawahiri's decision making. He is sensitive to the requirement of gaining popular acceptance and thus continuously forbids actions that could isolate al-Qaeda from the people. He recently ordered groups not to attack even legitimate targets if the masses would not understand the purpose of the action.[8] Al-Qaeda seeks to change the very fabric of Muslim society and cannot do so from a position of isolation.

Al-Qaeda is aggressively working through the Salafi-jihadi base to transform Sunni communities so that they willingly accept its ideology. The spread of violence and collapse of order imperils communities. Some, such as those in Syria, are under direct threat. These communities now accept the presence of al-Qaeda and the Salafi-jihadi base because their presence delivers much-needed assistance so that the community can survive. Al-Qaeda insinuates itself indirectly through the partners and proxies in the Salafi-jihadi base that focus on meeting the needs of the community. Communities receive not only basic assistance but also a sermon on Islam. The intent is to spread the Salafi-jihadi ideology alongside good works. Al-Qaeda embeds itself into local insurgencies by providing much-needed capabilities, resources, or planning and then hijacks the insurgency toward its own purpose. Al-Qaeda fills governance gaps in such a way as to deliver its message alongside basic services. Al-Qaeda channels resources through Salafi charities and organizations and elevates local Salafis to positions of authority in communities to begin to transform the governance system into one that meets al-Qaeda's requirements under shari'a.

The impression of al-Qaeda's weakness is a deliberate pose. Senior al-Qaeda leadership correctly assessed that portraying global dissolution and publicly embracing local fights would create confusion in Western minds about the threat al-Qaeda poses. The group seeks to remain below the level of U.S. and Western policy redlines to pursue its strategic objectives in the Muslim world without attracting Western responses. Al-Qaeda has thus for the most part avoided attempting large-scale attacks in the United States and Europe and establishing Taliban-like governments. Al-Qaeda has messaged that it no longer threatens the West, that it lacked centralized leadership, and that the rise of ISIS crippled it.[9] Al-Qaeda's prioritization of local fights also exploits the reluctance in Western governments toward intervening in local conflicts.

Al-Qaeda today.—Al-Qaeda currently seeks to incite the *umma* to undertake a global jihad to defend Muslims. Propaganda and media material focuses on the arguments to fight Western and Russian aggression against Muslims and on the need to unify against common enemies. It tailors its message toward target audiences in Muslim lands that are threatened and in the West. Al-Qaeda encourages those in Muslims lands to support the mujahideen fighting in their defense by whatever means possible. It tells Muslims in the West to mobilize and conduct small-scale attacks against Jews, Americans, and NATO allies, Russians, and those denigrating Islam. The group that conducted the recent terrorist attack in St. Petersburg, Russia, claimed to have done so on al-Qaeda's orders.

Al-Qaeda senior leadership (AQSL) no longer concentrates in the Afghanistan-Pakistan theater. Neither is it any longer synonymous with what the Obama administration dubbed "al-Qaeda core"—the al-Qaeda node in Afghanistan-Pakistan. This shift began in the early 2010's. AQSL is now dispersed throughout al-Qaeda's network with strong concentrations in Syria (primarily al-Qaeda's network that had been based in Iran), Yemen, and Afghanistan-Pakistan. AQSL is comprised of the senior leaders of al-Qaeda affiliates and veteran operatives, including those who gained their freedom from prison during the Arab Spring uprisings. The dispersion of the AQSL cadre creates certain operational challenges, such as rapid coordination, but also complicates Western efforts to eliminate the group.

Affiliate leadership still coordinates for strategic messaging. The joint releases by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) are the strongest points of coordination. These groups issued a joint statement eulogizing Omar Abdul Rahman (the Blind Sheikh) 1 day after reports of his death surfaced and one eulogizing Abu Khayr al Masri 4 days after his death. They may have secure communications to coordinate these joint statements rapidly, or

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[8] SITE Intelligence Group, "AQIS Publishes Its 'Code of Conduct,' Declares U.S. Citizens and Interests in Pakistan Its 'Foremost Priority.'"

[9] Two top al-Qaeda ideologues, Abu Muhammad al Maqdisi and Abu Qatada, discussed the weakening of al-Qaeda in a 2015 interview with the Guardian. Shiv Malik et al., "How ISIS Crippled al-Qaida," *Guardian*, June 10, 2015, *https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/10/how-isis-crippled-al-qaida*.

the groups may emplace members with one another to approve such joint statements. The echo of the same themes across affiliate leadership statements during the same period is another sign of coordination. Common talking points on ISIS and now on the global jihad and authorized activities are the primary examples of this coordination.

Al-Qaeda could again take the helm of the Salafi-jihadi movement. The core al-Qaeda leaders and groups remained part of the al-Qaeda network and have rejected ISIS. The entrenchment of its affiliates into local dynamics better positions al-Qaeda to capture the remnants of ISIS as the global anti-ISIS coalition degrades it. Al-Qaeda is strengthening in each of the theaters in which it is active.

Iraq and al Sham (Syria and Lebanon).—Al-Qaeda prioritizes the Syrian theater as the primary struggle against Western and Russian aggression. AQSL emphasizes the importance of the Syrian fight for all Muslims. Senior al-Qaeda members operate in Syria to provide overall strategic guidance to al-Qaeda's Syrian network. The United States first identified these individuals as the "Khorasan group" and sought to eliminate the cell.[10] Al-Qaeda operatives who had been in Iran began to base in Syria in 2013. Al-Qaeda secured the release of at least five senior operatives in a prisoner swap with Iran for an Iranian diplomat it captured in Yemen.[11] These operatives then traveled to Syria, among them al-Qaeda's chief of military operations, Saif al Adel, and the late deputy leader Abu Khayr al Masri.

Al-Qaeda is strongest in Syria, where it has used the conditions created by the Syrian civil war and Operation Inherent Resolve against ISIS to establish deep sanctuary in the northwest and position itself to expand farther into the Syrian theater. Al-Qaeda is consolidating control over Idlib province, which it likely will retain uncontested in the near term. Through Jabhat al-Nusra and Salafi-jihadi organizations such as Ahrar al Sham, al-Qaeda co-opted the majority of Syria's mainstream opposition into the Salafi-jihadi ranks, establishing itself as the dominant force within the northern Syria's opposition.[12] Al-Qaeda has set conditions for the future establishment of an Islamic emirate—not necessarily under al-Qaeda's name—that will secure al-Qaeda's objective to build an Islamic polity in Syria. Ayman al-Zawahiri explicitly referenced al-Qaeda's work toward establishing an Islamic emirate in Syria in May 2016.[13]

The Syrian al-Qaeda network is one of the best-resourced nodes in al-Qaeda because of Syria's primacy in the global theaters for jihad. Syria remains a top destination for al-Qaeda's foreign-fighter flow, creating a large foreign recruitment base. Al-Qaeda in Syria suffered some financial hits because of its loss of control over oil fields, but these losses will not likely affect its operations.[14] It funnels resources from groups in its network that receive external support (especially from Qatar and Turkey), it receives donations from individuals, conducts kidnappings for ransom, and also generates resources through taxation and commercial enterprise.

Zawahiri continues to see Iraq and al Sham as a single theater for al-Qaeda and desires the al-Qaeda organization to reenter Iraq. He argued for the treatment of Iraq and al Sham as a single theater during the break with ISIS and continued to direct al-Qaeda support to the Sunni in Iraq. Zawahiri called for Syrian mujahideen to reach out in support of the Iraqi Sunni in an August 2016 statement:

[10] Katherine Zimmerman, "The Khorasan Group: Syria's al-Qaeda Threat," AEI's Critical Threats Project, September 23, 2014, *https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/the-khorasan-group-syrias-al-qaeda-threat*.

[11] Iran reported that an Iranian operation freed its diplomat in Yemen in March 2015. Details emerged in September 2015 of the swap. See BBC, "Iranian 'Operation' in Yemen Freed Kidnapped Diplomat," March 5, 2015, *http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east–31744613*; and Adam Goldman, "Top al-Qaeda Operatives Freed in Prisoner Swap with Iran," *Washington Post*, September 18, 2015, *https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/top-al-qaeda-operatives-freed-in-prisoner-swap-with-iran/2015/09/18/02bc58e2-5e0c-11e5-9757e4927-3f05f65__story.html*.

[12] Jennifer Cafarella, Nicholas A. Heras, and Genevieve Casagrande, "Al-Qaeda is Gaining Strength in Syria," Foreign Policy, September 1, 2016, *http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/09/01/al-qaeda-is-gaining-strength-in-syria/*.

[13] SITE Intelligence Group, "Zawahiri Calls Fighters' Unity in Syria a Matter of 'Life and Death' in Audio," May 8, 2016, *https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/zawahiri-calls-fighters-unity-in-syria-a-matter-of-life-and-death-in-audio.html*.

[14] For a detailed account on financing into Syria, see Yaya J. Fanusi and Alex Entz, "Al-Qaeda's Branch in Syria: Financial Assessment," Foundation for the Defense of Democracy, June 2017, *http://www.defenddemocracy.org/content/uploads/documents/CSIF__TFBB-__AQIS.pdf*.

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"As for our brothers the heroes of Islam from the mujahideen of Sham, I urge them to help their brothers in Iraq to reorganize themselves, for their battle is one, and Sham is an extension of Iraq, and Iraq is the bedrock of Sham."[15]

Al-Qaeda will reenter Iraq seeking to lead a Sunni insurgency as ISIS weakens.

Afghanistan.—Al-Qaeda is reconstituting in Afghanistan in concert with the Afghan Taliban, which provides sanctuary to al-Qaeda. AQSL, such as Ayman al-Zawahiri and Hamza bin Laden, operates from the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. Retaining al-Qaeda's sanctuary in Afghanistan is a secondary but important effort for the global organization because the victory against the Soviets in Afghanistan remains al-Qaeda's crown jewel, proving that the mujahideen can defeat a superpower. Al-Qaeda never fully lost its sanctuary in Pakistan and used this base to project forward into Afghanistan again as the United States drew down militarily.[16] By 2015, al-Qaeda was running large training camps inside Afghanistan.[17] The United States began revising its assessments of al-Qaeda's strength in Afghanistan based on the discovery of these training camps.[18] The United States killed senior al-Qaeda leaders operating in Afghanistan in an October 2016 air strike, their presence a telling indicator that al-Qaeda had returned to the country.[19]

Yemen.—Yemen serves as a critical safe haven to support al-Qaeda's global operations and a cadre of senior leaders, and as the battlefield for the religiously significant Arabian Peninsula. AQAP remains one of al-Qaeda's premier nodes and is set to strengthen further in the context of Yemen's civil war. AQAP facilitates global al-Qaeda operations. AQAP-trained bombmakers went to Syria and Libya in 2011 and 2012. AQAP almost certainly provided the equipment or the expertise for al-Shabaab's 2016 laptop bomb.[20] Al-Qaeda leaders in Yemen, including long-time veterans, provide strategic guidance alongside senior leaders in Afghanistan-Pakistan to the global movement.

The collapse of Yemen into civil war presented al-Qaeda with a second chance to embed itself in the population.[21] Al-Qaeda's experiment with governance in 2011 failed after the group lost the support of the population in which it was operating. It learned from its errors. It used proxy groups drawn from the local population to provide security and governance after that debacle, which ensured a local face on al-Qaeda's efforts. These groups seized control of and administered Yemen's third-largest port city for a year, making nearly $2 million per day, and the populated areas that AQAP had controlled in 2011.[22] An Emirati-led counterterrorism operation ended AQAP's control of terrain, but AQAP's strength comes from its relationship with the mobilized Sunni population in Yemen, not the land.[23]

[15] SITE Intelligence Group, "Zawahiri Urges Sunnis in Iraq to Mount Long-Term Guerrilla War Against 'New Safavid-Crusader Occupation,'" August 25, 2016.

[16] Lauren McNally and Marvin G. Weinbaum, "A Resilient al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan," Middle East Institute, August 2016, *http://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PF18_Weinbaum_AQinAFPAK_web_1.pdf.*

[17] Bill Roggio, "Afghanistan's Terrorist Resurgence: Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Beyond," testimony prepared for the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, April 27, 2017, *http://www.longwarjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Cover_Roggio-Afghanistan-testimony-April–2017-final-1.pdf.*

[18] According to remarks by Major General Jeff Buchanan, deputy chief of staff for the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan in April 2016. Nick Paton Walsh, "Al-Qaeda 'Very Active' in Afghanistan: U.S. Commander," CNN, April 13, *2016, http://www.cnn.com/2016/04/13/middleeast/afghanistan-al-qaeda/index.html.*

[19] US Department of Defense, "Statement by Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook on Strikes Against al-Qaida leaders in Afghanistan," press release, December 19, 2016, *https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/1033929/statement-by-pentagon-press-secretary-peter-cook-on-strikes-against-al-qaida-le/.*

[20] Katherine Zimmerman, "Did al Shabaab Get a Bomb on Plane? Or Not?" AEIdeas, February 5, 2016, *http://www.aei.org/publication/did-al-shabaab-get-a-bomb-on-a-plane-or-not/.*

[21] Katherine Zimmerman, "AQAP: A Resurgent Threat," CTC Sentinel, September 11, 2015, *https://ctc.usma.edu/posts/aqap-a-resurgent-threat.*

[22] Katherine Zimmerman, "AQAP Expanding Behind Yemen's Frontlines," AEI's Critical Threats Project, February 17, 2016, *https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/aqap-expanding-behind-yemens-frontlines*; and Noah Browning, Jonathan Saul, and Mohammed Ghobari, "Al-Qaeda Still Reaping Oil Profits in Yemen Despite Battlefield Reverses," Reuters, May 27, 2016, *http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-smuggling-idUSKCN0YI0Q2.*

[23] Katherine Zimmerman, "AQAP Post-Arab Spring and the Islamic State," in *How al-Qaeda Survived Drones, Uprisings, and the Islamic State*, edited by Aaron Y. Zelin, Washington Institute, June 2017, *http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/how-al-qaeda-survived-drones-uprisings-and-the-islamic-state.*

East Africa.—Al-Qaeda affiliate al-Shabaab serves as a key link between the Middle East and Africa for the al-Qaeda network and is gaining ground in Somalia.[24] Al-Shabaab still administers parts of south-central Somalia and generates funding through taxation and control over certain trade.[25] It has increasingly projected force back into Mogadishu, Somalia's capital, and into northern Kenya. Al-Shabaab has also conducted multiple high-profile raids on military bases in Somalia that decimated military units and restocked al-Shabaab's military equipment. Its attraction is not its attacks against the government or African Union peacekeeping forces, but rather its competitive shadow government that appeals to disenfranchised clans,[26] which is how al-Shabaab expanded in Somalia originally. Al-Shabaab could broaden its support base through its limited provision of humanitarian aid as famine looms in Somalia.[27] It seeks to influence the Kenyan electorate and stoke tensions ahead of the August 2017 elections, which may result in political unrest in the country.

Sahel.—Al-Qaeda's network in the Sahel now operates under the name Jama'a Nusrat al Islam wa al Muslimeen (JNIM), merging various Salafi-jihadi groups that had been cooperating with al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda targeted key human terrain in the Sahel in order to expand its base. Iyad ag Ghali, JNIM's leader, not only heads al-Qaeda's associated group in the Sahel, but is also a key smuggler and leader within the Ifoghas Tuareg. Al-Qaeda embedded first within the 2012 Tuareg insurgency in Mali and then helped stoke a Fulani insurgency in central Mali.[28] Its recruitment of Fulanis likely enabled al-Qaeda's attacks against Western targets in Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast. Salafi-jihadi groups are reconstituting in northern Mali after the 2013 French intervention. JNIM coordinates closely with AQIM and could be subordinated to the al-Qaeda affiliate. A breakaway faction pledged to ISIS in the Sahara, but its presence has not affected al-Qaeda's activities. It is not clear whether al-Qaeda will restore relations with Boko Haram, which has split with both factions cleaving to ISIS.

Maghreb.—ISIS and al-Qaeda compete for the loyalty of North African groups. Al-Qaeda reunified in North Africa after the split with ISIS, consolidating multiple splinter groups that had left AQIM since 2011 to avoid division in its ranks. Al-Qaeda aims to preserve its sanctuaries and continue to capture foreign fight flows from the region. These include positions in Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. It is not yet clear what al-Qaeda's play is with its dissolution of Ansar al Sharia in Libya, but it may be a move similar to Jabhat al-Nusra's dissolution in Syria that will permit al-Qaeda personnel to remain accepted by the local populations. Al-Qaeda will almost certainly benefit from Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el Sisi's crackdown on political and violent Islamists in Egypt and in Libya. AQIM continues to generate resources through smuggling and kidnappings for ransom that it shares with JNIM and other members of the Salafi-jihadi base.

Indian Subcontinent.—The al-Qaeda presence in the Indian subcontinent remains weak after Ayman al-Zawahiri announced the launch of a new affiliate in September 2014.[29] Al-Qaeda divides the Pakistani theater by ethnic group. The Pashtun are part of its Khorasan theater, which includes Afghanistan and Iran, and the Punjab are under al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), which works through the Indian Punjab and Bangladesh. A recent surge in propaganda from AQIS leadership may indicate an attempt to revive the group.[30]

[24] Katherine Zimmerman, Jacqulyn Meyer Kantack, and Colin Lahiff, "U.S. Counterterrorism Objectives in Somalia: Is Mission Failure Likely," AEI's Critical Threats Project, March 1, 2017, *https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/us-counterterrorism-objectives-in-somalia-is-mission-failure-likely*.

[25] Yaya J. Fanusi and Alex Entz, "Al-Shabaab: Financial Assessment," Foundation for Defense of Democracy, June 23, 2017, *http://www.defenddemocracy.org/content/uploads/documents/CSIF_TFBB_Al-Shabaab_v05_web.pdf*.

[26] Tricia Bacon, "This is Why al Shabaab Won't Be Going Away Anytime Soon," *Washington Post*, July 6, 2017, *https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/07/06/this-is-why-al-shabaab-wont-be-going-away-any-time-soon/*.

[27] Jordan Indermeuhle, "Al Shabaab's Humanitarian Assistance," AEI's Critical Threats Project, April 24, 2017, *https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/al-shabaabs-humanitarian-response*.

[28] Alix Halloran and Katherine Zimmerman, "Warning from the Sahel: al-Qaeda's Resurgent Threat," AEI's Critical Threats Project, September 1, 2016, *https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/warning-from-the-sahel-al-qaedas-resurgent-threat*.

[29] Anurag Chandran, "Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent: Almost Forgotten," AEI's Critical Threats Project, September 3, 2015, *https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/al-qaeda-in-the-indian-subcontinent-almost-forgotten*.

[30] Critical Threats Project, "Threat Update," July 6, 2017, *https://www.criticalthreats.org/briefs/threat-update/update-and-assessment-july-6-2017*.

AL-QAEDA'S NEXT GENERATION

U.S. counterterrorism actions have significantly degraded the al-Qaeda leadership cadre over the years. But targeted killing has only had a short-term effect on the global organization. Al-Qaeda had a much deeper bench than assumed in 2001 when the high-value targeting began and has been able to generate a next generation of leaders who are rising to the fore today. Al-Qaeda's ideology and the Salafi-jihadi ideology provided the group's doctrine and strategy, which is exogenous to any single individual.

The old generation continues to provide strategic guidance to the Salafi-jihadi movement. The voices of pro-al-Qaeda ideologues, in fact, have been amplified as a tool against ISIS. Abu Qatada and Abu Muhammad al Maqdisi, for example, are active on the global stage to condemn ISIS, but in the process, justify support for al-Qaeda's methods (even as they portray al-Qaeda as weak). Ayman al-Zawahiri, whom many dismissed as irrelevant and uncharismatic, still issues guidance to his subordinates and addresses those living in Muslim lands to call them to join the jihad. Operational tensions between field commanders and the headquarters persist today, especially in Syria, as they did in the 2000's in Iraq. Zawahiri likewise might be elevating his former network from his days leading the Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Less visible but still active is a cadre of senior leaders based in Syria and Afghanistan-Pakistan such as Saif al Adel and others. Mokhtar Belmokhtar, if he is still alive, is coordinating operations in the Sahel.

Attrition at the leadership level compelled al-Qaeda to unmask long-standing senior operatives who could speak with legitimacy on a global platform. AQAP, which had lost its leader, deputy leader, and religious officials in a year, released a video showcasing the depth of its bench in Yemen in December 2015. Sheikh Ibrahim al Banna, who served as AQAP's security chief, appeared in the video after keeping a low profile because he was reported to have been killed in 2010. Al Banna earned a degree from al Azhar University, giving him religious credentials that add authority to his messages to all Muslim to embrace jihad. Another individual in the video was Ibrahim al Qosi, a former Guantanamo detainee released to Sudan who claimed to have been operating from Yemen since December 2014. Al-Qaeda continues to leverage individuals who had returned to the battlefield from Guantanamo as a badge of honor.

A new generation of al-Qaeda is rising. Osama bin Laden had been cultivating his son, Hamza, for years before his death. Al-Qaeda's al Sahab media released a message from Hamza bin Laden for the first time in August 2015.[31] Hamza called for lone-wolf attacks in the West. His continued focus on inciting attacks by Muslims living in the West, alongside criticism of the Saudi Kingdom, seems to indicate that Hamza is taking on his father's mantle. Al-Qaeda operatives released from prison in the Arab Spring and after, such as Khaled Batarfi in Yemen, have also taken an active role at a senior level. Zawahiri, likewise, appears to be developing new leaders. Syrian al-Qaeda leader Abu Muhammad al Julani[32] and the senior operatives now heading Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and Ahrar al Sham, may be new operational leaders whom Zawahiri could elevate if need be. It seems, for the time being, that Zawahiri is minimizing al-Qaeda's visible presence in Syria. Likewise, affiliate leaders Ahmed Umar (Abu Ubaidah) of al Shabaab and Asim Umar of AQIS will serve to amplify the al-Qaeda echo chamber.

LOOKING FORWARD: AL-QAEDA'S FUTURE THREAT

The United States risks strategic surprise with al-Qaeda. Nothing indicates that al-Qaeda as a global organization has altered its long-term objectives nor changed its position on how to achieve these objectives. Al-Qaeda's entrenchment into local conflicts is dangerous for the United States because al-Qaeda seeks to alter Muslim communities and unify them under it in its violent struggle for Islam. Global trends are also moving in al-Qaeda's favor such that it will likely benefit from increasing sectarianism and polarization in the Muslim world and even in the West. Al-Qaeda could reassume its position as the vanguard force of a much-empowered Salafi-jihadi movement as pressure increases on ISIS.

Al-Qaeda is almost certainly refining and improving its external attack capabilities to be prepared to deploy them at a future date. Ibrahim al Asiri, al-Qaeda's innovative bombmaker, remains at large and has already trained others in his tradecraft. Al-Qaeda's external attack capabilities are degraded because of United

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[31] SITE Intelligence Group, "Hamza bin Laden, Son of Usama, Calls for Lone-Wolf Attacks in the West," August 14, 2015.

[32] Jennifer Cafarella, "The Threat of New al-Qaeda Leadership: The Case of Syria's Abu Mohammed al-Joulani," Institute for the Study of War, June 30, 2015.

States and partnered counterterrorism actions, but they have not been destroyed. The 2017 Worldwide Threats Assessments from Director of National Intelligence Daniel Coats assesses that al-Qaeda still intends to conduct attacks against the United States and the West, although the group's capability to do so from the Afghanistan-Pakistan region has been degraded.[33] However, al-Qaeda's affiliates in Syria and Yemen "have preserved the resources, manpower, safe haven, local influence, and operational capabilities to continue to pose a threat," and al-Shabaab in Somalia has the "operational capabilities to pose a real threat to the region." Al-Qaeda may continue to attack Russian targets for Russia's role in Syria, may begin attacks against Emirati targets for the United Arab Emirates' role in Yemen, and may also focus on Egypt.

Synergy among global trends will increase support for the Salafi-jihadi movement overall, which al-Qaeda seeks to capture. Rising sectarianism, not just between Sunni and Shi'a, but between Muslims and non-Muslims, will polarize populations. Of concern are the reflections today in places such as India, where far-right Hindu groups are attacking Muslims for eating cow. Intercommunal sectarian violence serves to bolster support for Salafi-jihadi groups. Closing political space to Islamists and persecution of Salafis in the Muslim world will also drive some of these individuals and factions toward violence to achieve their aims or defend themselves. Al-Qaeda seeks to capture those disenchanted with the nonviolent route, especially in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. The anti-Muslim Brotherhood policies pushed by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el Sisi and Emirati Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed will almost certainly feed extremism rather than eliminate it.

Al-Qaeda is prepared for the weakening of ISIS. It has the position inside Syria to expand into terrain liberated from ISIS, some of which al-Qaeda had occupied before ISIS. Populations that had lived under ISIS will be less likely to reject al-Qaeda's ideology, although both are a far cry from mainstream Islam. The mass mobilization of Muslims in the West will continue beyond the defeat of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Hamza bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders seek to recruit these mobilized individuals under al-Qaeda's leadership.

Al-Qaeda's evolution and adaptation to conditions ensures that it will threaten the United States long-term and emerge stronger from the chaos that has enveloped the Muslim world. It is poised to take over the reins of the Salafi-jihadi movement. Yet, it is not sufficient just to defeat al-Qaeda and ISIS. The Salafi-jihadi movement predates both groups and will generate another transnational organization if they are defeated. Instead, the United States must move beyond focusing on the groups and instead seek to weaken and defeat the global Salafi-jihadi movement.

Mr. KING. Thank you very much for your testimony.

Our second witnesses is Ms. Jennifer Cafarella. Ms. Cafarella is the lead intelligence planner for the Institute for the Study of War where she is responsible for shaping and overseeing the development of ISW's plans and recommendations on how to achieve U.S. objectives against enemies and advisories and in conflict zones. She has focused on terror groups in Syria and in the region, including al-Qaeda affiliates.

Ms. Cafarella, thank you for being here today, and you are recognized.

STATEMENT OF JENNIFER CAFARELLA, LEAD INTELLIGENCE PLANNER, INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR

Ms. CAFARELLA. Chairman King, Ranking Member Rice, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me today. I am honored for the opportunity to testify on a critical National security issue facing our Nation.

Despite efforts made thus far, America still does not understand its enemy. The United States continues to fall victim to strategic surprise at the hands of Sunni jihadist groups.

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[33] Daniel R. Coats, "Worldwide Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community," Statement for the record before the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, May 11, 2017, *https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/os-coats-051117.pdf*.

The resurgence of ISIS was clear by at least mid-2013, but the United States did not act until ISIS had seized Iraq's second-largest city, beheaded Americans, launched a genocide against an Iraqi minority and launched a blitz defensive that threatened the survival of Baghdad.

The United States is now making the same mistake with al-Qaeda, which is building armies in failed states while the world focuses on ISIS. America's consistent inability to identify and neutralize the threat as it emerges reflect a failure to understand the nature of this enemy and the requirements to defeat it.

Al-Qaeda and ISIS are elite military organizations pursuing a religious war in defense of Sunni Muslim communities, which they perceive to be under existential threat.

Their goals are the same: To restore what they believe to be correct Islamic rule by tearing down the existing state system, expelling external actors from the Muslim world, and establishing Islamic governance in accordance with a fundamentalist interpretation of the Quran. Both groups intend to destroy the United States and the Western way of life.

Al-Qaeda differs from ISIS only on the practicalities of how to pursue these goals. ISIS' strategy is one of massive and sustained confrontation with the West that it calculates will break America's will to fight, while activating Sunni Muslim communities to join ISIS' war.

Al-Qaeda is pursuing long-term advantage, rather than short-term wins. It is dedicating most of its efforts to identifying and supporting local causes within vulnerable or victimized Sunni Muslim communities in order to develop the legitimacy, dependence, and trust that will allow it to transform those communities over time into adherence of al-Qaeda's ideology and supporters of its global religious war.

Its main effort is in Syria. Its initial reception in Syria was largely that of a necessary evil. Syrians exploited al-Qaeda's willingness to contribute to the war against the Assad regime even though most disagreed with al-Qaeda's vision.

Al-Qaeda is molding the opposition with a combination of infiltration, negotiated mergers, and discrete attacks against moderate rebel groups. Al-Qaeda has thus far attacked and destroyed four moderate U.S.-backed groups in northern Syria and co-opted at least four more.

Al-Qaeda's contribution to the anti-Assad war effort ensures that it will not face meaningful blowback for these actions. Al-Qaeda's rise in Syria is in part a direct outcome of the strategy of Bashar al Assad and his external backers, Iran and Russia.

Assad has waged a campaign of deliberate slaughter against the elements of the opposition that were willing to negotiate with him, including chemical weapons, intentional targeting of civilian infrastructure, and mass executions of political prisoners.

His aim was to preclude a Western intervention by eliminating any moderate opposition force that the United States could reasonably support. His slogan was "Assad, or we burn the country," and that is exactly what he has done.

Al-Qaeda's rise has been quickest in northwestern Syria, where the military campaign of the Assad regime and its external backers

has focused since Russia's intervention in late 2015. The brutal siege and bombardment of opposition-held neighborhoods of Aleppo in 2016, helped al-Qaeda finalize its consolidation of power in northwestern Syria.

Al-Qaeda is now shifting its main effort to Daraa province on the Israeli and Jordanian borders in order to replicate its success in the north. Al-Qaeda's efforts make it a more, not less, dangerous enemy to the United States.

Al-Qaeda is still developing external attack capability from its safe havens. Al-Qaeda has deprioritized executing an attack in order to avoid triggering an American response at this time, but it is still preparing capability for the future.

It is innovating explosives, cultivating its own foreign fighter population, and likely quietly developing its own networks in Europe. Al-Qaeda's future global phase may be even more effective than ISIS' current global campaign if al-Qaeda manages to acquire popular support inside of Syria for that world war.

America's current strategy is setting conditions that favor al-Qaeda. The United States has taken no meaningful action to contain al-Qaeda or slow its growth in Syria, aside from a handful of airstrikes against leaders which have had little effect on the organization's overall strength.

The United States has been ceding regional power to Iran and Russia in order to focus on fighting ISIS, causing many Syrians to perceive us to be de facto in support of Bashar al Assad's war effort. It is not an unfair conclusion to make.

This perception lends legitimacy to al-Qaeda's narrative that it and it alone is the source of protection for Syria's rebelling population. Destroying al-Qaeda is necessary to protect the American homeland, but al-Qaeda's local roots may make that fight even harder than our current fight against ISIS.

We at the Institute for the Study of War tested over 20 possible American ways forward in Syria, most of which failed because they either strengthened or failed meaningfully to weaken al-Qaeda's strength in Syria.

Al-Qaeda's core source of strength is a connection to the rebelling population. We will not destroy al-Qaeda or protect the American homeland until or unless we execute a counter-Assad strategy in Syria that begins to address the core reasons for this war to begin with and al-Qaeda's rise within it. I thank the subcommittee for its attention.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Cafarella follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JENNIFER CAFARELLA

JULY 13, 2017

Chairman King, Ranking Member Rice, and distinguished Members of this subcommittee, thank you for inviting me today. I am honored for the opportunity to testify on a critical National security issue facing our Nation.

Sixteen years after the September 11 attack, America still does not understand its enemy. The United States continues to fall victim to strategic surprise at the hands of Sunni jihadist groups. The resurgence of the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) in Iraq and its expansion into Syria was clear by at least mid-2013 but the United States did not act until ISIS had seized Iraq's second-largest city, beheaded Americans, launched a genocide against an Iraqi minority, and launched

a blitz offensive campaign that threatened the survival of Baghdad.[1] The United States has intervened against ISIS, but is making the same mistake with al-Qaeda, which is building armies in failed states while the world focuses on ISIS. America's consistent inability to identify the threat as it emerges or to neutralize it before it does places Americans at risk and drives up the cost of protecting the homeland by conceding the strategic initiative to the enemy. This pattern of American behavior is the outcome of a fundamental failure to understand the nature of the jihadist movement and the requirements to defeat it.

Al-Qaeda and ISIS are elite military organizations pursuing a religious war in defense of Sunni Muslim communities, which they perceive to be under existential threat.[2] Their goals are the same: To "restore" what they believe to be Allah's rule on earth by tearing down the existing state system, expelling external forces from the Muslim world, and establishing Islamic governance in accordance with a fundamentalist interpretation of the Qur'an.[3] Both groups intend to destroy the United States and the Western way of life. Al-Qaeda differs from ISIS only on the practicalities of how to pursue those goals. ISIS's approach was to launch and sustain an immediate world war. ISIS's strategy is one of massive and sustained confrontation against the West that it calculates will break America's will to fight while activating Sunni Muslim communities to join ISIS's war.[4] ISIS launched its world war before it had even seized Mosul, deploying attack cells into Europe by at least January 2014.[5] Mosul fell 6 months later.[6] ISIS's strategy is an evolution of its predecessor's shock and awe approach under Abu Mohammad al-Zarqawi, which ultimately failed because it drove Iraq's Sunni community to support the United States instead. The lesson ISIS learned was to go bigger and harder next time, which it has done to devastating success.

[1] Jessica Lewis, "Al Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent," Institute for the Study of War, September 2013, *http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA18/20131212/101591/HHRG-113-FA18-Wstate-LewisJ-20131212.pdf*; Jessica Lewis, "Al Qaeda in Iraq's 'Breaking the Walls' Campaign Achieves Its Objectives at Abu Ghraib—2013 Iraq Update No. 30", Institute for the Study of War, July 28, 2013, *http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2013/07/al-qaeda-in-iraq-walls-campaign.html*; Jessica Lewis, "Further Indications of al-Qaeda's Advance in Iraq: Iraq Update No. 39," ISW Blogs, November 15, 2013, *http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2013/11/further-indications-of-al-qaedas.html*; Jessica Lewis, "ISIS in Iraq: Battle Plan for Baghdad," Institute for the Study of War, June 27, 2014, *http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2014/06/in-iraq-battle-plan-for-baghdad-coming.html*; Lauren Squires, Jessica Lewis, and ISW Iraq Team, "Warning Intelligence Update: Baghdad," Institute for the Study of War, July 23, 2014, *http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2014/07/warning-intelligence-update-bagdad.html*; Jessica Lewis "The Battle for Baghdad: Scenarios," Institute for the Study of War, June 13, 2014, *http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2014/06/the-battle-for-baghdad-scenarios.html*.
[2] The then-leader of al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, Abu Mohammad al Joulani, echoed this theme in a June 2015 interview with al Jazzera, stating: "Everything that is happening is a conspiracy against Sunnis." Alessandria Masi, "Jabhat al-Nusra leader interview: 'no solution' to ISIS, al-Qaeda tension in Syria, Americans joined Nusra Front," *International Business Times*, June 3, 2015, *http://www.ibtimes.com/jabhat-al-nusra-leader-interview-no-solution-isis-al-qaeda-tension-syria-americans-1951584*.
[3] Frederick Kagan, Kimberly Kagan, Jennifer Cafarella, Harleen Gambhir, and Katherine Zimmerman, "Al Qaeda and ISIS: Existential Threats to the U.S. and Europe," Institute for the Study of War and Critical Threats Project, January 2016, *https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/PLANEX_Report1_FINAL.pdf*; Jennifer Cafarella, Harleen Gambhir, and Katherine Zimmerman, "Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS: Sources of Strength," Institute for the Study of War and Critical Threats Project, February 2016, *https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/jabhat_al_nusra_isis_sources_of_strength_report_three_final.pdf*; "'They came to destroy': ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis", U.N. Human Rights Council, June 15, 2016, *http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/A_HRC_32_CRP.2_-en.pdf*.
[4] ISIS's propaganda has illustrated this strategy. See: "Dabiq Issue 5," released in November 2014. Safe copy available from *Jihadology* at: *https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/the-islamic-state-e2809cdc481biq-magazine-522.pdf*; [ISIS article discussing downfall of U.S. progress], July 3, 2017, available with subscription from the SITE Intelligence Group at: *https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Chatter/jihadist-explores-economic-military-implications-of-u-s-led-coalition-against-is.html*.
[5] The first publically-known ISIS attack operative crossed into Greece from Turkey in January 2014. Rukmini Callimachi, "How ISIS built the machinery of terror under Europe's gaze," *The New York Times*, March 29, 2016, *https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/29/world/europe/isis-attacks-paris-brussels.html?_r=0*; "Why Nice was an unsurprising location for a terrorist attack," *The Economist*, June 15, 2016, *http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21702282-idyllic-mediterranean-beach-town-has-severe-problem-islamist-radicalisation-why*; Paul Cruikshank, "Raid on ISIS suspect in the French Riviera," *CNN*, August 28, 2014, *http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/28/world/europe/france-suspected-isis-link/index.html*.
[6] "Recent chronology of the fall of Mosul," Institute for the Study of War, June 10, 2014, *http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2014/06/recent-chronology-of-fall-of-mosul.html*.

Al-Qaeda's strategy is more patient and insidious. Al-Qaeda is pursuing long-term advantage rather than short-term wins. It intends first to convince Sunni Muslim populations that its goals are desirable, and then to bring that Sunni support to bear against the West.[7] Al-Qaeda is also preparing for its own world war by enlisting as much of the Sunni Muslim community as it can before launching the next phase. Al-Qaeda is dedicating most of its efforts to identifying and supporting local causes within vulnerable or victimized Sunni Muslim communities in order to develop the legitimacy, dependence, and trust that will allow it to transform those communities over time into adherents of al-Qaeda's ideology and supporters of its global religious war.[8] Al-Qaeda is vocal about denouncing ISIS's approach,[9] primarily because opposing the tactics used by ISIS allows al-Qaeda to appear moderate in comparison. Al-Qaeda has also been willing to sacrifice its brand name in order to allow its affiliates to address local concerns over the international perception of the al-Qaeda brand name.[10] Al-Qaeda's moderate image enables it to increase the overall percentage of the Sunni Muslim community that supports jihadism by converting people that would otherwise be alienated by ISIS's brutality. Al-Qaeda intends to fold residual elements of ISIS's fighting force and adherent population into its own in time.

Al-Qaeda's main effort is in Syria, which has become the world's largest jihadist incubator. Al-Qaeda's intent in Syria is to embed within the uprising against the regime of Syrian President Bashar al Assad and to transform that uprising into a global religious insurgency. Al-Qaeda deployed a small unit of fighters from Iraq to Syria in order to grow an affiliate there after the uprising started in 2011.[11] It initially hid its true goals in Syria in order to avoid alienating what was then mostly a pro-democracy uprising.[12] Al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra, announced its formation in a video on January 2012 but did not state its goal to establish an al-Qaeda emirate in Syria that could become a future component of a global al-Qaeda caliphate.[13] Jabhat al-Nusra merely identified itself as an Islamist group pursuing the "return the rule of Allah to the earth."[14] Al-Qaeda launched immediate and successful suicide attacks against the Syrian regime that helped provide time and space for the Syrian armed opposition to coalesce while al-Qaeda built its own

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[7] Jennifer Cafarella, "Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria: an Islamic State for al Qaeda," Institute for the Study of War, December 2014. Copy available from author upon request.

[8] Jennifer Cafarella, "Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria: an Islamic State for al Qaeda," Institute for the Study of War, December 2014. Copy available from author upon request; [Zawahiri statement in support of Syrian uprising as a way to create a state that defends Muslim countries], February 11, 2012, available with subscription from the SITE Intelligence Group at: *https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Multimedia/zawahiri-issues-video-in-support-of-syrian-uprising.-html*.

[9] [Zawahiri attacks ISIS for Creating and Maintaining Division], August 29, 2016, available with subscription from the SITE Intelligence Group at: *https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Multimedia/zawahiri-calls-fighters-to-unite-attacks-is-for-creating-and-maintaining-division.html*.

[10] Jennifer Cafarella and Katherine Zimmerman, "Avoiding al Qaeda's Syrian trap: Jabhat al-Nusra's rebranding," Institute for the Study of War and Critical Threats Project, July 29, 2016, *http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/07/avoiding-al-qaedas-syria-trap-jabhat-al.html*.

[11] Tara John, "Everything you need to know about the new Nusra Front," *Time Magazine*, July 29, 2016, *http://time.com/4428696/nusra-front-syria-terror-al-qaeda/*.

[12] The main body of Syrian armed and political opposition groups that emerged after the uprising began in 2011 united under an umbrella titled the Syrian Opposition Coalition. This opposition body pursued a diplomatic settlement with the Assad regime in accordance with the United Nation's "Geneva Communique" that outlined a 6-point plan for a political transition in Syria, released on June 30, 2012. The communique called for a "genuinely democratic and pluralistic" Syrian state. The strength and perceived legitimacy of the opposition groups willing to adhere to this communique diminished over time as al-Qaeda and like-minded groups rose within the opposition and the U.N.-backed negotiations failed to make progress. "Final Communique," U.N. Action Group for Syria, June 30, 2012, *http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Syria/FinalCommuniqueActionGroupforSyria.pdf*. Genevieve Casagrande with Jennifer Cafarella, "The Syrian opposition's political demands," December 29, 2015, *http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/syrian-opposition%E2%80%99s-political-demands*; Devin Dwyer and Dana Hughes, "Obama recognizes Syrian opposition group," *ABC News*, December 11, 2012, *http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/OTUS/exclusive-president-obama-recognizes-syrian-opposition-group/story?id=17936599#.UMfDkawpCHA*.

[13] Jabhat al-Nusra was forced to issue a public statement regarding its intent to establish an emirate after someone leaked audio of Jabhat al-Nusra leader Abu Mohammad al Joulani discussing the establishment of an emirate in Syria in July 2014. Jennifer Cafarella, "Jabhat al-Nusra regroups after ISIS success in Iraq," Institute for the Study of War, September 18, 2014, *http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2014/09/jabhat-al-nusra-regroups-after-isis.html*.

[14] [Jabhat al-Nusra formation statement], January 23, 2012, available with subscription from the SITE Intelligence Group at: *https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Multimedia/site-intel-group-1-23-12-mb-jihad-levant-syria-video.html*.

fighting force.[15] Al-Qaeda's initial reception in Syria was largely that of a necessary evil. Syrians exploited al-Qaeda's willingness to contribute to the war against the Assad regime even though most disagreed with al-Qaeda's vision for Syria. Al-Qaeda's ideology was a problem for the future, while Assad was the here-and-now threat.[16] This perception endures today, but the 6 years of horrific violence that Syrians have endured makes it increasingly likely that al-Qaeda is winning real local support for its goals.

Al-Qaeda is also dedicating resources to restructuring the Syrian armed opposition under the leadership of its Syrian affiliate and groups that adhere to a similar ideology. Al-Qaeda does not intend to dominate the Syrian opposition outright because doing so risks triggering backlash that could marginalize al-Qaeda within the opposition.[17] Al-Qaeda instead seeks to mold the opposition over time using a combination of infiltration, negotiated mergers, and discrete attacks against moderates. Al-Qaeda's operatives in Syria networked into the leadership of Islamist groups such as Ahrar al Sham al Islamiya that were close to al-Qaeda's ideology.[18] Al-Qaeda's goal was to ensure that Islamist groups became dominant within the opposition and to influence the evolution of their goals to more closely adhere to al-Qaeda's. Meanwhile, al-Qaeda has quietly dedicated resources to purging elements of the Syrian armed opposition that remain unwilling to support its ideology and discrediting the moderate opposition's ideology. Al-Qaeda has attacked and destroyed four U.S.-backed groups in northern Syria and co-opted at least four more since early 2015.[19] Al-Qaeda faces little real opposition to these measures because its military support remains vital to the anti-Assad effort. Al-Qaeda has grown increasingly bold as a result. Al-Qaeda now openly describes its war in Syria as a personal obligation for Sunni Muslims, making it a global war, and openly condemns moderate opposition groups in its propaganda for betraying the Syrian people.[20] Al-Qaeda's skill and ex-

[15] Jennifer Cafarella, "Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria: an Islamic State for al Qaeda," Institute for the Study of War, December 2014. The first attack occurred in December 2011. Jabhat al-Nusra explained its own rise in Syria in a June 2015 video titled "Heirs of Glory". Copy of video available from author upon request. Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Nusrah Front celebrates 9/11 attacks in new video," *The Long War Journal*, June 29, 2015, *http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/06/al-nusrah-front-celebrates-911-attacks-in-new-video.php*.

[16] Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, "Al-Qaida turns tide for rebels in battle for eastern Syria," *The Guardian*, July 30, 2012, *https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/30/al-qaida-rebels-battle-syria*; Sarah al Deeb and Bassem Mroe, "Syria's Ceasefire Strengthens al Qaeda Branch," Associated Press, May 29, 2016 *https://apnews.com/57bc8b0711074d74bd4b90bbf0292290/syrias-cease-fire-strengthens-al-qaida-branch;* [Creation of Mujahidin Shura Council-Deir al Zor], YouTube video, May 25, 2014, *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGrD9yzvHgM*; Thomas Joscelyn, "Aleppo-based rebel groups reportedly unite behind Ahrar al Sham's former top leader," *The Long War Journal*, February 20, 2016, *http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/02/zleppo-based-rebel-groups-unite-behind-ahrar-al-sham-former-top-leader.php*.

[17] Al-Qaeda leader Aymen al-Zawahiri has consistently reinforced this approach, including an early 2015 letter to Abu Mohammad Joulani. [Zawahiri speaks on strategy in Syria], April 18, 2014, available with subscription from the SITE Intelligence Group at: *https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Multimedia/zawahiri-denies-changing-his-ideology-speaks-in-interview-on-syrian-conflict-egypt-war-with-u-s.html*; Charles Lister, "An internal struggle: al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate is grappling with its identity," *The Huffington Post*, May 31, 2015, *http://www.huffingtonpost.com/charles-lister/an-internal-struggle-al-q__b__7479730.html*.

[18] Jennifer Cafarella, Nicholas Heras, and Genevieve Casagrande, "Al-Qaeda is gaining strength in Syria," *Foreign Policy*, September 1, 2016, *http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/09/01/al-qaeda-is-gaining-strength-in-syria/*.

[19] The United States-backed groups that al-Qaeda has attacked and destroyed are the 30th Division, Syrian Revolutionary Front, Harakat Hazm, and the 13th division. Al-Qaeda has absorbed the United States-backed group Harakat Nour al Din al Zenki while driving Fastaqim Kama Umirat, Kataib Thuwar al Sham, Jabhat al Shamiya-Western Sector, and Jaysh al Mujahideen to merge underneath Syrian Salafi jihadi group Ahrar al Sham. Luis Martinez, "General Austin: only '4 or 5' U.S.-trained Syrian rebels fighting ISIS," *ABC News*, September 16, 2015, *http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/general-austin-us-trained-syrian-rebels-fighting-isis/story?id=33802596*; Jamie Dettmer, "Main U.S.-backed Syrian rebel group disbanding, joining Islamists," *The Daily Beast*, March 1, 2015, *http://www.thedailybeast.com/main-us-backed-syrian-rebel-group-disbanding-joining-islamists*; Dominique Soguel, "In northern Syria, is the US running out of rebel allies?" *Christian Science Monitor*, March 4, 2015, *https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2015/0304/In-northern-Syria-is-the-US-running-out-of-rebel-allies-video*; Mariya Petkova, "Syrian opposition factions join Ahrar al Sham," *Al Jazeera*, January 26, 2017, *http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/01/syrian-opposition-factions-join-ahrar-al-sham-170126133928474.html*; [Agreement to end the clashes in Ma'arat al Numan on dissolving Division 13], *All4Syria*, June 10, 2017, *http://www.all4syria.info/Archive/417500*.

[20] An example of Jabhat al-Nusra's use of the phrase "fard ayn", or personal obligation, to describe its war in Syria can be found in the first issue of its *ar Risalah* magazine, released in July 2015. A copy is available with subscription from the SITE Intelligence Group at: *https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/statements/anti-is-fighters-in-syria-release-first-issue-of-english-magazine-*

perience manipulating local populations and armed groups in Syria makes it a formidable local actor.

Al-Qaeda's rise in Syria is in large part a direct outcome of the strategy of Syrian president Bashar al Assad and his external backers: Iran and Russia. Assad quickly dismissed the opposition against him as terrorist-infiltrated,[21] and then intentionally fueled the jihadist movement in Syria in order to make it true. He emptied Syrian prison of Islamists and al Qaeda-linked convicts as the protest movement against him gained strength in 2011 in order to create evidence of terrorist involvement in the uprising.[22] He has since waged a campaign of deliberate slaughter against the elements of the opposition that were willing to negotiate with him, including chemical weapons, the intentional targeting of civilian infrastructure and mass executions of political prisoners.[23] His aim was to preclude a Western intervention by eliminating any moderate opposition force that the United States could reasonably support. His slogan is "Assad or we burn the country",[24] and that is exactly what he has done. Nearly half of Syria's prewar population had been displaced by late 2014 according to U.N. data.[25] Three years later, the full scale of the damage is increasingly difficult to measure. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank estimate that rebuilding Syria will cost up to $200 billion dollars.[26] Assad and his backers now want the international community to foot the bill while they continue their war.[27]

Al-Qaeda's rise has been quickest in northwestern Syria, where the military campaign of the Assad regime and its external backers has focused since Russia's inter-

al-risalah.html; [AQ leader Zawahiri declares Syrian jihad an issue concerning all Muslims], April 23, 2017, available with subscription from the SITE Intelligence Group at: *https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Multimedia/al-qaeda-aq-leader-ayman-al-zawahiri-addressed-fighters-in-syria-urging-them-to-reject-nationalist-sentiment-and-wage-a-protracted-guerrilla-war-against-the-syrian-regime-and-called-on-musl.html*.

[21] Tim Lister, "Al-Assad's speech: reheated promises salted with threats," *CNN*, June 21, 2011, *http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/asiapcf/06/20/syria.assad/index.html*; "Transcript: ABC's Barbara Walters' interview with Syrian President Bashar al Assad," *ABC News*, December 7, 2011, *http://abcnews.go.com/International/transcript-abcs-barbara-walters-interview-syrian-president-bashar/story?id=15099152*.

[22] Leila Fadel, "Syria's Assad moves to allay fury after security forces fire on protestors," *The Washington Post*, March 26, 2011, *https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/syrias-assad-moves-to-allay-fury-after-security-forces-fire-on-protesters/2011/03/26/AFFoZDdB__story.html?utm_-term=.3824551f9518*; Simon Speakman Cordall, "How Syria's Assad helped Forge ISIS," *Newsweek*, June 21, 2014, *http://www.newsweek.com/how-syrias-assad-helped-forge-isis-255631*.

[23] "White House Press Release on "Government Assessment of the Syrian Government's Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21, 2013", The White House, August 30, 2013, *https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/30/government-assessment-syrian-government-s-use-chemical-weapons-august-21*; Judy Woodruff, "Amnesty documents 'human slaughterhouse' in Assad's Syria," PBS, February 7, 2017, *http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/amnesty-documents-human-slaughterhouse-assads-syria/*; "Bashar al-Assad's forces crush the resistance," *The Economist*, December 17, 2016, *https://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21711738-fate-100000-civilians-terrifyingly-unclear*; Ben Taub, "The Assad Files," *The New Yorker*, April 18, 2016, *http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/04/18/bashar-al-assads-war-crimes-exposed*.

[24] "Al-Telawi: Regime's Geneva II position 'Assad or we burn the country'," Syria Direct, January 21, 2014, *http://syriadirect.org/news/al-telawi-regime%E2%80%99s-geneva-ii-position-%E2%80%98assad-or-we-burn-the-country%E2%80%99/*; [Shabih burns a house and claims Assad or we burn the country leadked], Zajil Network Youtube, August 31, 2012, *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDcTEL-tW6w*; [Al Assad or we burn the country], YouTube, August 26, 2016, *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EG-9yLA4W7I*.

[25] Adrian Edwards, "Needs soar as number of Syrian refugees tops 3 million," U.N. High Commission for Refugees, August 29, 2014, *http://www.unhcr.org/53ff76c99.html*.

[26] Jeanne Gobat and Christina Kostial, "Working paper: Syria's Conflict Economy," International Monetary Fund, June 2016, *https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2016/wp16123.pdf*; Omer Karasapan, "Rebuilding or Redefining Syria?" Brookings Institution, February 13, 2017, *https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2017/02/13/rebuilding-or-redefining-syria/*.

[27] "Civil war has cost Syrian economy 226 billion dollars, says World Bank," *Daily Sabah*, July 10, 2017, *https://www.dailysabah.com/syrian-crisis/2017/07/10/civil-war-has-cost-syrian-economy-226-billion-dollars-says-world-bank*; Tony Badran, "Assad's Fundraiser at the World Bank," *Tablet,* February 8, 2017, *http://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/224291/assads-fundraiser-at-the-world-bank*; Tom Rollins, "Syria's reconstruction plans take shape," *al-Monitor*, May 22, 2017, *http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/en/originals/2017/05/syria-war-reconstruction-process-regime-opposition.html*; "The international community rises to the challenges of conflicts and refugees in the MENA region," The World Bank, July 5, 2016, *http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2016/07/05/the-international-community-rises-to-the-challenges-of-conflicts-and-refugees-in-the-mena-region*.

vention in September 2015.[28] Russia's air campaign in Syria has primarily targeted moderate, U.S.-backed elements of the Syrian opposition. Russia has also conducted repeated, intentional strikes against civilian infrastructure including hospitals, schools, and mosques.[29] The brutal siege and bombardment of opposition-held neighborhoods of Aleppo City over the course of 2016 helped al-Qaeda finalize its consolidation of power in northwestern Syria.[30] Al-Qaeda played a prominent role defending the city, managing to temporarily break through the siege in August.[31] Al-Qaeda's visible role in Aleppo further concretized its position at the forefront of the Syrian opposition, while the eventual fall of Aleppo to the regime and its backers ultimately assisted al-Qaeda's consolidation by eliminating Syrian opposition groups inside the city that had remained relatively more independent from al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda has since transitioned into a governing phase in northwestern Syria. Its activity there focuses on developing an "economic office" to regulate and profit from the local economy and consolidating control over service provision to include humanitarian aid.[32] Al-Qaeda runs numerous religious schools in the province that include schools for children and for women, some of which have begun to don the Burqa in accordance with al-Qaeda's ideology.[33] Al-Qaeda is now shifting its main effort south, to Dera'a Province on the Israeli and Jordanian borders. Al-Qaeda deployed senior military commanders, political leaders, and administrative officials to Dera'a Province in May 2017.[34] Al-Qaeda intends to replicate its success in Idlib and prepare to disrupt U.S. efforts to achieve a cease-fire in that area or strengthen opposition groups that may be willing to fight al-Qaeda in the future.

Al-Qaeda's local support confers large military advantages. Unlike ISIS, al-Qaeda does not need to allocate significant resources to maintaining control over the popu-

[28] Andrew Osborn and Phil Stewart, "Russia begins Syria air strikes in its biggest Mideast intervention in decades," Reuters, September 30, 2015, *http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-russia__idUSKCN0RU0MG20150930*.

[29] Genevieve Casagrande and Ellen Stockert, "Russia's unrelenting attacks on Syrian civilians," Institute for the Study of War, April 29, 2017, *http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2017/04/russias-unrelenting-attacks-on-syrian.html*.

[30] Jonathan Mautner, "Russian airstrikes in Syria: September 13–October 11, 2016," Institute for the Study of War, *http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/10/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-september.html*.

[31] Genevieve Casagrande with Jennifer Cafarella, "Opposition forces launch offensive to break the siege of Aleppo," Institute for the Study of War, August 3, 2016, *http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/08/opposition-forces-launch-offensive-to.html*; Christopher Kozak, "Opposition forces break siege of Aleppo City," Institute for the Study of War, August 8, 2016, *http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/08/opposition-forces-break-siege-of-aleppo__19.html*; Genevieve Casagrande and Jennifer Cafarella, "Syrian opposition launches second offensive to break Aleppo siege," Institute for the Study of War, October 28, 2016, *http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/10/syrian-opposition-launches-second.html*.

[32] "'Tahrir al Sham' Establishes Commission to Monitor Currency Exchange Market," El Dorar, May 13, 2017, *http://eldorar.com/node/111399*; Sam Heller, "Syrian Jihadists Jeopardize Syrian Relief," *The Century Foundation*, June 1, 2017, *https://tcf.org/content/report/syrian-jihadists-jeopardize-humanitarian-relief/*.

[33] [Ramadan in the Levant is Different! Vlog 18 Soraka al Makki], Soraka al Makki YouTube video, June 14, 2017, *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ug76Yg1Wqig*; [Watch Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's broad security operation in Idlib and countryside], HTS's Ibaa Channel YouTube, July 10, 2017, *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FssSa7Ci69Y*; "HTS News in Syria for June 13, 2017," June 13, 2017, available with subscription from the SITE Intelligence Group at: *https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/HTS-News-in-Syria/hts-news-in-syria-for-june-13-2017.html*.

[34] "Sources: 'Tahrir al Sham' sends leaders from Idlib to Dera'a," Enab Baladi, May 12, 2017, *https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/149363#*; "Hay'at Tahrir al Sham sends new leader to Dera'a from Idlib" *Shaam News Network*, May 13, 2017, *http://www.shaam.org/news/syrianews/%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%A6%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1%-D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%82%-D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9%D8%A7%-D9%84%D9%89%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AF%-D9%84%D8%A8.html*; "'Tahrir al Sham' confirms movement of some of its leaders in Dera'a to create new operations 'Ending the Lies of the Regime'," *Shaam News Network*, May 15, 2017, *http://www.shaam.org/news/syrianews/%E2%80%9C%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%85%E2%80%9D%D8-%AA%D8%A4%D9%83%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%D9-%82%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%85%D9%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8-%A5%D9%84%D9%89%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%AF%D9-%81%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AC%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%B2%D9%84%D8%B9%D9-%85%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9%E2-%80%9C%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B6%D9%85%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B9%D8%A7-%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85%E2%80%9D.html*.

lation and purging its own ranks of infiltrators.[35] Al-Qaeda has freedom of operation throughout Syria's rebel-held areas that allow it to maneuver and conduct logistical support operations without much risk of disruption.[36] The freedom of operations enables al-Qaeda rapidly to shift assets across the battlefield as the situation requires, further increasing the value of its contribution to the opposition's war effort. It is extraordinarily difficult for the United States to develop a strategy to destroy al-Qaeda without declaring war on behalf of Assad against the Syrian opposition. We at Institute for the Study of War tested over 20 possible U.S. courses of action in Syria, most of which failed because they either strengthened or failed to weaken al-Qaeda.[37] The key to destroying al-Qaeda in Syria is to break its bond with the local population. The United States will not break this link until and unless the United States develops and executes as counter-Assad strategy in Syria. Even then, a war against al-Qaeda will be costly.

Al-Qaeda's current local efforts make it more—not less—dangerous to the United States. Al-Qaeda is still developing external attack capability from Syria as well as its other safe havens in Yemen and Afghanistan.[38] The bomb maker for Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Ibrahim al Asiri, has helped train al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate in advanced bomb-making techniques.[39] The active planning of a cell of al-Qaeda external attack operatives based in Syria known as the "Khorasan group" triggered a new campaign of U.S. airstrikes in Syria beginning in September 2014.[40] Al-Qaeda has since chosen temporarily to deprioritize efforts to conduct major attacks in the West in order to avoid provoking an American response that would deny al-Qaeda its current freedom of operations. The then-leader of al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate stated in a May 2015 interview with Al Jazeera that he received instructions from al-Qaeda leader Aymen al-Zawahiri not to conduct attacks abroad.[41] Al-Qaeda is still preparing capability for the future, however. Al-Qaeda is cultivating its own foreign fighter population in Syria and is likely quietly cultivating a new network in Europe.[42] Al-Qaeda is building up these capabilities while holding them in reserve for its global phase yet to come. That phase may be more effective than ISIS's current global campaign if al-Qaeda manages to acquire a popular mandate from the Syrian rebelling population for a global war.

America is pursuing a self-defeating strategy in Syria, ensuring that the Syrian theater will remain a major jihadist recruitment center for the foreseeable future. The United States has taken no meaningful action to contain al-Qaeda or slow its growth aside from the handful of airstrikes against al-Qaeda leaders in Syria, which have had essentially no effect on the organization's strength. The U.S. campaign against ISIS will fail to destroy the group under America's current strategy, and is

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[35] "Sources: Jaysh Khalid executes military leaders accused of assassinating previous leader," Enab Baladi, June 5, 2017, *https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/154266*; William McCants and Hassan Hassan, "Experts weigh in (part 7): Is ISIS good at governing?" Brookings Institution, April 18, 2016, *https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/04/18/experts-weigh-in-part-7-is-isis-good-at-governing/*; Callum Paton, "War on Iraq: ISIS trapped families inside homes rigged with bombs to use civilians as human shields," Newsweek, July 10, 2017, *http://www.newsweek.com/mosul-isis-welded-families-doors-shut-and-rigged-homes-ieds-keep-civilians-634418*.

[36] Jennifer Cafarella, Kimberly Kagan, Frederick W. Kagan, "America's Way Ahead in Syria," Institute for the Study of War and Critical Threats Project, March 2017, *https://www.criticalthreats.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/ISW-CTP-Recommended-Course-of-Action-in-Syria-and-Iraq-March–2017.pdf*.

[37] Jennifer Cafarella, Kimberly Kagan, Frederick W. Kagan, "America's Way Ahead in Syria," Institute for the Study of War and Critical Threats Project, March 2017, *https://www.criticalthreats.org/wp_content/uploads/2017/03/ISW-CTP-Recommended-Course-of-Action-in-Syria-and-Iraq-March–2017.pdf*.

[38] Jennifer Cafarella and Katherine Zimmerman, "Warning update: Al Qaeda's global attack campaign," Institute for the Study of War and Critical Threats Project, November 6, 2016, *http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/11/warning-update-al-qaedas-global-attack.html*.

[39] Ewen MacAskill, "The Saudi chemist sparking fears of 'invisible' bombs on transatlantic flights," *The Guardian*, July 3, 2014, *https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/03/al-qaida-bombmaker*.

[40] Jennifer Cafarella and Katherine Zimmerman, "Warning update: Al Qaeda's global attack campaign," Institute for the Study of War and Critical Threats Project, November 6, 2016, *http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/11/warning-update-al-qaedas-global-attack.html*.

[41] "Nusra leader: Our mission is to defeat Syrian regime," Al Jazeera, May 28, 2015, *http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/nusra-front-golani-assad-syria-hezbollah-isil-150528044857-528.html*.

[42] Al-Qaeda publishes propaganda to recruit foreign fighters that is similar to ISIS's. Al-Qaeda has featured foreign fighter units in its *ar Risalah* magazine. A prominent example is foreign fighters belonging to the Turkistan Islamic Party that fight with al-Qaeda in Syria. See the 3d issue of *ar Risalah,* available with subscription from the SITE Intelligence Group at: *https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Periodicals/mujahideen-of-shaam-publish-3rd-issue-of-english-magazine-al-risalah.html*

actually setting conditions that ultimately favor al-Qaeda.[43] The United States has been ceding regional power to Iran and Russia, who view the United States as their enemy, in order to focus on ISIS. Members of the Syrian opposition perceive the United States to be de facto allied with Iran, Russia, and the Assad regime as a result, and is not an unfair conclusion to make. This perception lends legitimacy to al-Qaeda's narrative that al-Qaeda is the only source of protection for the Syrian Sunni community. The United States has traded all of this for a series of tactical victories against ISIS that will most likely not endure. America's primary ground partner in Syria, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) does not have the combat power to retake the rest of ISIS-held terrain beyond Raqqa. America's reliance on the SDF has put us in an indirect war with Turkey, a NATO ally, which views the Syrian Kurdish People's Defense Forces (YPG) as a direct threat to its national security because of the organization's links to the Turkish domestic insurgency waged by the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK).[44] The United States has no discernable strategy for how to seize the rest of ISIS-held terrain in Syria or to extricate ourselves from an indirect war within NATO. There is a very real risk of al-Qaeda resurgence in areas retaken from ISIS, moreover. Al-Qaeda is positioning to exploit local discontent with SDF rule in Raqqa that is likely to emerge due to the SDF's adherence to the YPG's political ideology.[45] All of these conditions undermine American National security by favoring al-Qaeda in the long term, which places the United States on a trajectory to fight an even worse war after ISIS.

Mr. KING. Thank you very much. Our third witness, as I said before, he is an old face. I didn't mean it that way, Seth.

Dr. Seth Jones, who has been before this committee a number of times and has really been a great assistance to us. He is the director of the International Security and Defense Policy Center at the Rand Corporation and is an adjunct professor at Johns Hopkins University.

He has served as the representative for the assistant secretary of Defense for Special Operations, and before that as an advisor the commanding general for U.S. Special Ops in Afghanistan.

Dr. Jones is the author of a number of published books on al-Qaeda, terrorism, and insurgencies, among other topics. Dr. Jones is a very familiar face in Congress and continues to be a valuable resource to this committee.

Dr. Jones, you are recognized for your testimony and welcome back.

STATEMENT OF SETH JONES, DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND DEFENSE POLICY CENTER, RAND CORPORATION

Mr. JONES. Thank you, Chairman King, Ranking Member Rice, and other distinguished Members of the subcommittee for conducting this hearing and for inviting us to testify. I think this is a very important hearing, particularly with the focus predominantly on ISIS.

My testimony is gonna explore how al-Qaeda might rebound in the future, though I would like to note from the beginning that

[43] Jennifer Cafarella, Kimberly Kagan, Frederick W. Kagan, "America's Way Ahead in Syria," Institute for the Study of War and Critical Threats Project, March 2017, *https://www.criticalthreats.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/ISW-CTP-Recommended-Course-of-Action-in-Syria-and-Iraq-March–2017.pdf*.

[44] Turkey intervened in Syria in September 2016 in order to block and ultimately reverse the YPG's gains in northern Syria. Jennifer Cafarella with Leah Danson, "Turkish incursion into northern Syria signals turning point in anti-ISIS fight," August 30, 2016, Institute for the Study of War, *http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2016/08/military-situation-in-northern-syria.html*.

[45] Al-Qaeda-linked clerics in Syria have issued support for the formation of new anti-YPG groups in eastern Syria, likely indicating that al-Qaeda will participate in future military operations against the YPG. @hxhassan, Twitter post, July 5, 2017, 3:13 p.m., *https://twitter.com/hxhassan/status/882693954013155328?refsrc=email&s=11*.

operatives from al-Qaeda, from ISIS, and other groups do move around quite fluidly across various countries, regions, and continents. So while we often like to talk about groups, and it is easier to do this, there is a fair amount of fluidity among Salafi-jihadists.

Since al-Qaeda's establishment in 1988, it is worth remembering that al-Qaeda has expanded its portfolio and surged in terrorist attacks in a series of waves. It also has suffered reversals. I think it is important to understand historically how it has weakened and in some cases expanded.

The first wave began in the 1990's and peaked around 2001 following the September 11 attacks. It was followed by a reversal as al-Qaeda leaders and operatives were captured or killed in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the United States and other areas, and the Taliban regime was overthrown.

The second wave began to build around 2003, around the time of the U.S. invasion, and was then characterized by spectacular attacks across not just Iraq, but in Casablanca, London, the relationship of the North African groups with al-Qaeda in Madrid, and other countries, and it was followed by a reversal around the type of time of the Anbar Awakening.

A third wave surged between 2007 and 2009 following the rise of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen and the activities of Anwar Al-Awlaki and was followed by a reversal by a targeting campaign by the United States against senior leaders, including Osama bin Laden in 2001, around that time period.

Finally, the Arab Spring helped create the conditions for a fourth wave of activity.

So that brings us to today. I think it is important to understand that the current trajectory or even past trajectories do not mean that is the way this organization will persist in the future. What I would like to highlight are six possible factors that could affect the rise or even decline of al-Qaeda over the next several years.

First would be the unfortunate withdrawal of United States or other Western forces, particularly special operations forces from key battlefields, such as Iraq or Afghanistan or even the small U.S. presence in Syria.

I think U.S. and other Western actions in these countries have served as a check against some groups, and their removal, I think as we saw in Iraq in 2011, would be extremely counterproductive.

Second, I think another round of the Arab Spring or the collapse of one or more key governments in the Arab world might allow al-Qaeda or other groups to resurge. I think instability in countries, like in Jordan or Saudi Arabia or Tunisia or Egypt could present potential problems and allow groups to establish sanctuary.

Most people, I should note, did not predict the first round of the Arab Spring and a second round would be potentially concerning for this subject.

Third, one or more events that highlight the oppression or the perceived oppression of Muslims by Western governments could increase the possibility of a resurgence. The uncensored Abu-Ghraib photographs began to appear on jihadist websites and were clearly used for recruitment purposes.

I think an overreaction by a Western government following a terrorist attack on its soil could trigger a broader concern about a war against Islam, which I think would be counterproductive.

Fourth, the rise of a charismatic leader, as we have heard as well, particularly by al-Qaeda, could help the organization revitalize. I think as I have looked at the organization over the past two decades or so, both bin Laden and al Awlaki were successfully in many ways for inspiring would-be extremists.

Adam Gadahn from the United States was not. I think nor has, in my view, Ayman al-Zawahiri been particularly effective at inspiring people. But Hamza is an interesting case, whether he could certainly inspire a new generation of al-Qaeda recruits.

Fifth, I think a large-scale conventional deployment of U.S. military forces to battlefields could increase the possibility of a resurgence by al-Qaeda or other groups.

Then, finally, I think the collapse of the Islamic State, and we are already seeing that to some degree, and the death of charismatic leaders, like Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, could allow groups like al-Qaeda to rejuvenate or at the very least increase the possibility of some kind of a merger between fighters under an umbrella, whether it is al-Qaeda or a newly-named organization.

I think it is worth noting, in conclusion, that al-Qaeda is a different organization than what we saw certainly a decade ago or even 9/11, probably less centralized, in my view. It is less focused for the moment on external operations.

That could clearly change. But I think Islamic extremism is certainly here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future. This will be a generational struggle. Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify. I think we all look forward to the discussion.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Jones follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SETH G. JONES [1] [2]

JULY 13, 2017

Thank you Chairman King, Ranking Member Rice, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee for inviting me to testify today. While the U.S. public and news media has focused on the fight against the Islamic State, it is worth re-examining the state of al-Qaeda (or "the base" in Arabic) and its threat to the U.S. homeland. After all, it was al-Qaeda that conducted the 9/11 attacks and nearly pulled off several attacks in the United States, including those led by Najibullah Zazi in September 2009 and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab in December 2009.

Assessments of al-Qaeda vary considerably. Georgetown University professor Bruce Hoffman argues that al-Qaeda has quietly preserved its strength, expanded its footprint in countries like Syria and Yemen, and positioned itself to take advantage of the potential collapse of the Islamic State.[3] Similarly, former Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agent Ali Soufan contends that al-Qaeda "has transformed itself from a close-knit terrorist outfit with a handful of struggling affiliates into a vast network of insurgent groups spread from Southeast Asia to northwest Africa."[4] Daveed Gartenstein-Ross at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies concludes that al-Qaeda has "emerged stronger by pursuing a strategy of deliberate yet low-

[3] Bruce Hoffman, "Al-Qaeda: Quietly and Patiently Rebuilding," *The Cipher Brief*, December 30, 2016.

[4] Ali Soufan, "The Resurgent Threat of al-Qaeda," *Wall Street Journal*, April 21, 2017.

key growth."[5] Others disagree. Georgetown University professor Daniel Byman maintains that al-Qaeda has been in decline because of limited popular support, effective counterterrorism efforts by the United States and other countries, and al-Qaeda's killing of Muslim civilians.[6] My RAND colleague Brian Jenkins argues that al-Qaeda and other groups have failed to conduct or inspire many attacks in the U.S. homeland, partly because their extreme interpretation of Islam has not gained traction among America's Muslims.[7]

Instead of predicting whether al-Qaeda will strengthen or weaken over the next several years—an exercise that is more guesswork than science—my testimony will take a slightly different approach. I argue that the ability of al-Qaeda or another Salafi-jihadist group to resurge will likely be a result of several factors: The group's ability to take advantage of a possible second wave of the Arab Spring; the rise of a charismatic leader; the withdrawal of U.S. or other Western forces from key counterterrorism battlefields; U.S. or other Western actions that fuel a perception that the West is oppressing Muslims; and the ability of al-Qaeda or others to co-opt extremists in the wake of an Islamic State collapse.

I have divided this testimony into two main sections. The first examines al-Qaeda's historical waves of activity, which highlight how al-Qaeda has reshaped its network in the past after suffering setbacks. The second section explores how al-Qaeda might rebound in the future.

AL-QAEDA'S WAVES AND REVERSES

Since al-Qaeda's establishment in 1988, there have been four primary "waves" of al-Qaeda activity (surges in terrorist violence), along with "reverse waves" (decreases in terrorist activity).[8] The first wave began in the 1990's and peaked in 2001 with the September 11 attacks. It was followed by a reversal, as al-Qaeda leaders and operatives were captured or killed in Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States, and across the globe. A second wave began to build in 2003 after the U.S. invasion of Iraq and was characterized by spectacular attacks across Iraq and in Casablanca, Madrid, London, and elsewhere. But it was followed by a reverse wave; by 2006, al-Qaeda in Iraq had been severely weakened, British and American intelligence agencies had foiled several plots, and U.S. drone strikes had killed senior al-Qaeda operatives in Pakistan. A third wave surged from 2007 to 2009 following the rise of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and was followed by a reverse wave with the 2011 death of Osama bin Laden and the deaths of other senior leaders. Finally, the Arab Spring helped create the conditions for a fourth wave of activity, as al-Qaeda affiliates established a foothold or expanded their presence in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Somalia. Most of the al-Qaeda attacks in the fourth wave occurred in "near enemy" countries like Iraq, Syria, and Somalia, not in the West.

First Wave

The first wave started in the late 1980's, as bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and other leaders established al-Qaeda during the anti-Soviet jihad. In August 1988, a group of foreign fighters, who had trekked to the region to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan, gathered in Peshawar, Pakistan, to form a new organization. Called al-Qaeda al-Askariya ("the military base"), the group included an advisory council and membership requirements for those interested in joining.[9] By the early 1990's, Afghanistan had deteriorated into a civil war following the departure of Soviet forces and the end of U.S. support to the Afghan mujahideen. Some fighters dispersed to countries like Bosnia, Algeria, Sudan, and Egypt, where they attempted to trans-

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[5] Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Nathaniel Barr, "How Al-Qaeda Survived the Islamic State Challenge," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, March 1, 2017.

[6] Daniel Byman, "Judging Al-Qaeda's Record, Part I: Is the Organization in Decline?" *Lawfare*, June 27, 2017. Also see Daniel Byman, "Judging Al-Qaeda's Record, Part II: Why Has Al-Qaeda Declined?" *Lawfare*, June 28, 2017.

[7] Brian Michael Jenkins, "Why Aren't There More Terrorist Attacks Like the One in London?" *Fortune*, June 7, 2017.

[8] On terrorism waves, see David C. Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism," in Audrey Kurth Cronin and James M. Ludes, eds., *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2004, p. 47; Seth G. Jones, *Hunting in the Shadows: The Pursuit of Al Qa'ida since 9/11*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2012.

[9] Peter Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of Al Qaida's Leader*, New York: Free Press, 2006; Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qa'ida and the Road to 9/11*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006, p. 133. Also see the "Tareekh Osama" ("Osama's history") document presented in *United States of America* v. *Enaam M. Arnaout*, United States District Court, Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division.

form domestic conflict into armed jihad, as bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders had urged them to do.[10]

Al-Qaeda leaders aimed to overthrow regimes in the Middle East (the near enemy, or *al-Adou al-Qareeb*) to establish a pan-Islamic caliphate. They also aimed to fight the United States and its allies (the far enemy, or *al-Adou al-Baeed)* who supported these regimes.[11] For al-Qaeda, the United States was the most significant far enemy. In February 1998, bin Laden, Zawahiri, and others published a fatwa to kill Americans.[12] Following a decade of preparation and organization, al-Qaeda launched its first wave of violence against the United States in the late 1990's. On August 7, 1998, al-Qaeda perpetrated simultaneous attacks against the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Al-Qaeda operatives then bombed the *USS Cole* on October 12, 2000, while it was refueling in Yemen. The attack killed 17 U.S. soldiers and injured 39 others. On September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda pulled off its most audacious terrorist attack, as 19 operatives hijacked four airplanes in the United States and killed nearly 3,000 people and wounded thousands more.

In response, U.S. military and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) forces took aim at al-Qaeda and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which had provided sanctuary to bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders.[13] It was a remarkably effective campaign. Approximately 100 CIA officers, 350 special operations forces, and 15,000 Afghans—running as many as 100 combat sorties per day—defeated a 50,000 to 60,000-man Taliban army as well as several thousand al-Qaeda fighters.[14] Al-Qaeda was severely weakened. The United States seized over 20 terrorist training camps, killed thousands of enemy fighters, and forced hundreds of al-Qaeda members and thousands of Taliban to flee across the border into Pakistan or Iran. By December 2001, 3 months after the attacks, al-Qaeda was in disarray. A quarter of bin Laden's top commanders had been killed or captured.[15] Al-Qaeda's first wave was on the wane.

Second Wave

In 2003, the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the subsequent insurgency gave al-Qaeda new life. America's invasion galvanized al-Qaeda sympathizers and helped launch the second wave of terrorism. One of al-Qaeda's strongest allies in Iraq was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who was born in 1966 in Zarqa, Jordan. On October 17, 2004, Zarqawi released a statement using the on-line Arabic magazine *Mu'askar al-Battar,* swearing allegiance to bin Laden. Zarqawi advocated the subjugation of Shia Muslims and creation of a world-wide caliphate governed by sharia (Islamic law).[16] By this time, Zarqawi's organization, which he renamed al-Qaeda in Iraq, had roughly 15 brigades operating under its banner, including two "martyr" brigades dedicated to suicide operations.

Al-Qaeda's second wave of terrorism was now under way. In May 2003, a group with ties to al-Qaeda killed 45 people in Casablanca during a series of suicide bombings. The same week, al-Qaeda operatives were involved in multiple attacks in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, killing 34 people and wounding 60 others. In August, a suicide car bomb detonated in front of a Marriott hotel in Jakarta, Indonesia, killing 13 and wounding 149 others. In November, there were multiple attacks in Istanbul, which killed over 40 people and wounded more than 750. Then came the Madrid attacks. On March 11, 2004, North African terrorists carried 13 improvised explosive devices concealed in blue sports bags into the Alcalá station in Madrid, Spain. The attack

[10] Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad," *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Winter 2010/2011, pp. 53–94.

[11] On the establishment of a caliphate see, for example, Abu Bakr Naji, *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Ummah Will Pass*, translated and published by the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University, May 23, 2006.

[12] The text is the second fatwa originally published on February 23, 1998, to declare a holy war, or jihad, against the West and Israel. It was signed by bin Laden; Zawahiri, then-head of al-Jihad; Rifai Taha, leader of the Islamic Group; Sheikh Mir Hamzah, secretary of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema of Pakistan; and Fazlul Rehman, leader of the Jihad Movement in Bangladesh.

[13] On the overthrow of the Taliban regime, see Gary Schroen, *First In: An Insider's Account of How the CIA Spearheaded the War on Terror in Afghanistan*, New York: Ballantine Books, 2005; Stephen Biddle, *Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2002; Gary Berntsen and Ralph Pezzullo, *Jawbreaker: The Attack on Bin Laden and Al Qa'ida*, New York: Crown Publishers, 2005; and Bob Woodward, *Bush At War*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002.

[14] Berntsen and Pezzullo, 2005.

[15] George Tenet with Bill Harlow, *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA*, New York: HarperCollins, 2007, p. 187.

[16] Letter from Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi to al-Qaeda leaders, circa January 2004. Released by the Harmony Project, Combating Terrorism Center, West Point.

left 191 dead and 1,755 injured, up to that point the largest number of casualties from an attack in continental Europe since World War II. The operatives were not members of al-Qaeda, but they were inspired by its ideology and activities. In addition, some of the Madrid attackers had connections to al-Qaeda operatives, such as Hamza Rabi'a, al-Qaeda's head of operations in Europe and North America.[17]

The following year, al-Qaeda struck London. On July 7, four suicide bombers trained by al-Qaeda operatives conducted attacks in central London. Three were on London's subway system, the Underground, and one was on the No. 30 double-decker bus traveling east from Marble Arch. Roughly 56 people were killed, including the four suicide bombers, and over 700 were injured. The ringleader, Mohammad Sidique Khan, had trained in al-Qaeda-affiliated camps in Pakistan.[18]

Much like during the first wave, however, the tide eventually began to turn. Zarqawi's brutality in Iraq was too much even for some al-Qaeda leaders. Members of the U.S. Army's 1st Brigade of the 1st Armored Division, Marines from the I and II Marine Expeditionary Force, CIA operatives, U.S. Special Operations Forces, and a host of agencies provided intelligence, firepower, and—ultimately—trust in local Iraqis to stand up for themselves. The wide-spread Sunni Arab Iraqi revolt against al-Qaeda in Iraq became known as the Sunni Arab Awakening, or *sahwah* in Arabic. The Awakening, which highlighted the end of al-Qaeda's second wave, resulted from a complex range of factors like egregious al-Qaeda abuses of the Sunni population, tribal infighting, criminal disputes, U.S. engagement, elite payoffs, and the surge of U.S. military forces.[19] Sunni Arabs joined anti-al-Qaeda militia groups and helped identify al-Qaeda leaders for targeting. The results of the Awakening were clear: Al-Qaeda lost control and support of the Sunni population in Iraq.

Third Wave

But al-Qaeda eventually mounted a third wave of terrorism after establishing a new front in Yemen, aided by a charismatic Yemeni-American operative named Anwar al-Awlaki. In January 2009, al-Qaeda publicly announced that Saudi and Yemeni operatives had unified under the banner of a single group in Yemen, which they named al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.[20] Awlaki settled in the Shabwah Governorate of Yemen and ran his global jihadi enterprise.[21] He developed a blog *(www.anwar-alawlaki.com),* which was later shut down. He also improved his Facebook and MySpace pages and posted on YouTube and other social media forums to spread his jihadi message. "The Internet has become a great medium for spreading the call of Jihad and following the news of the mujahideen," Awlaki wrote.[22]

By 2009, al-Qaeda—with operatives inspired by individuals like Awlaki—was plotting attacks in the United States. In June 2009, Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad, who had changed his name from Carlos Bledsoe, opened fire with a semiautomatic rifle on a military recruiting center in Little Rock, Arkansas, killing one soldier and wounding another. He had listened to Awlaki's sermons and spent time in Yemen.[23] On November 5, 2009, a U.S. Army major, Nidal Malik Hasan, gunned down 13 people and wounded 43 others at Fort Hood, Texas. Hasan had first met Awlaki in 2001 at the Dar al-Hijrah mosque in Falls Church, Virginia, where Awlaki was the imam. Hasan and Awlaki exchanged at least 18 emails that discussed the afterlife,

[17] Fernando Reinares, "The Madrid Bombings and Global Jihadism," *Survival*, Vol. 52, No. 2, April–May 2010, pp. 83–104; "Islamist Website Confirms Death of Key Player in Spanish Train Bombing," *El Pais*, May 8, 2010.

[18] Intelligence and Security Committee, *Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005*, Cm 6785, London: The Stationery Office, 2006; Intelligence and Security Committee, *Could 7/7 Have Been Prevented? Review of the Intelligence on the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005*, Cm 7617, London: The Stationery Office, May 2009; House of Commons, *Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005*, HC 1087, London: The Stationery Office, May 2006.

[19] For better insight into the Awakening, see Niel Smith and Sean MacFarland, "Anbar Awakens: The Tipping Point," *Military Review*, 2008, pp. 65–76; Timothy S. McWilliams and Curtis P. Wheeler, eds., *Al-Anbar Awakening Volume I: American Perspectives, U.S. Marines and Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, Quantico, Va.: Marine Corps University Press, 2009; and Gary W. Montgomery and Timothy S. McWilliams, eds., *Al-Anbar Awakening Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, Quantico, Va.: Marine Corps University Press, 2009.

[20] Video by Al Malahim Media Foundation, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, January 2009.

[21] New York Police Department, *Special Analysis: Anwar al-Awlaki*, New York: New York Police Department, Counterterrorism Bureau, December 2009.

[22] Anwar al-Awlaki, "44 Ways to Support Jihad," February 2009.

[23] Tommy Hudson, "Arrest of Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad," officer's report, June 1, 2009; Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Arrest of Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammed*, Little Rock, Arkansas: Federal Bureau of Investigation, June 2, 2009.

the appropriate time for violent jihad, and how to transfer funds abroad without being noticed by law enforcement.[24]

Al-Qaeda then attempted to strike again. Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who was born in Nigeria, met with Awlaki several times and attended a training camp in the Shabwah region of Yemen. On December 24, 2009, Abdulmutallab boarded Northwest Airlines Flight 253 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, which was scheduled to arrive in Detroit, Michigan, on December 25. The flight carried 279 passengers and 11 crew members. Abdulmutallab wore a bomb in his underwear. The bomb ignited, injuring Abdulmutallab and two other passengers, but the main charge failed to go off and the airplane landed safely.[25] It was a close call. But al-Qaeda was undeterred. That same year, Najibullah Zazi, a U.S. citizen from New York, met with senior al-Qaeda operatives in Pakistan. Zazi agreed to execute one of al-Qaeda's boldest plots since September 11, 2001: A suicide attack on the New York City subway modeled, in part, on the successful 2005 attack in London. The plot involved two other Americans: Adis Medunjanin and Zarein Ahmedzay. Zazi conducted training at al-Qaeda camps in Pakistan.[26] Thanks to British and U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies, Zazi's plot was thwarted. The FBI arrested Zazi on September 19, 2009. On January 10, 2010, the FBI arrested Adis Medunjanin and Zarein Ahmedzay.[27]

By late 2010, however, the third wave began to decline because of persistent U.S. action across the globe. U.S. strikes killed a number of al-Qaeda allied leaders: External operations chief Saleh al-Somali in Pakistan in December 2009, general manager Shaykh Sa'id al-Masri in Pakistan in May 2010, senior al-Qaeda operations officer Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Najdi in Pakistan in September 2010, Abu Hamza al-Muhajir in Iraq in April 2010, and Awlaki in Yemen in September 2011. The pace of U.S. drone strikes increased under the Obama administration and involved multiple U.S. intelligence agencies that recruited human assets, intercepted electronic communications, and analyzed satellite and other imagery. In May 2011, U.S. military and intelligence operatives killed bin Laden, and Zawahiri took up his role as leader.

Fourth Wave

Around 2012, a fourth wave started as al-Qaeda took advantage of the Arab uprisings and escalating wars in Syria, Yemen, Somalia, and Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda also found itself in competition with the Islamic State. Zawahiri remained al-Qaeda's leader, flanked by general manager Abd al-Rahman al-Maghrebi and senior manager Abu Muhammad al-Masri. In addition, a small number of al-Qaeda leaders remained in nearby Iran with ties to the leadership, including Saif al-Adel and Abu Muhammad al-Masri. But the core leadership had limited legitimacy and influence over al-Qaeda's affiliates in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. Most of al-Qaeda's power had trickled down to its affiliates.

In Syria, Jabhat al-Nusrah remained a key component of the insurgency against the Syrian regime. In July 2016, Jabhat al-Nusrah publicly announced a split with al-Qaeda, although in practice, Jabhat al-Nusrah leaders, including Mohammed al-Jawlani, remained in close contact with al-Qaeda. In January 2017, Jabhat al-Nusrah merged with elements of Ahrar al-Sham and other jihadist groups to form Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, but the group continued to effectively function as al-Qaeda's Syria branch.[28] Al-Qaeda leaders urged Jabhat al-Nusrah and other groups to conduct a guerrilla campaign against the Syrian regime and establish sharia law in areas they controlled.[29] From its base in Syria, al-Qaeda plotted external attacks against Western targets, though it failed to conduct an attack in the West.

As civil war raged in Yemen, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula tried to expand its foothold in the Abyan, Marib, and Shabwah Governorates. In April 2017, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula emir Qasim al-Raymi outlined his strategy of fight-

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[24] New York Police Department, *Special Analysis: Anwar al-Awlaki*, New York: New York Police Department, Counterterrorism Bureau, Terrorism Threat Analysis Group, 2009.

[25] *United States of America* v. *Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab*, United States District Court, Eastern District of Michigan, Criminal Complaint, December 26, 2009.

[26] U.S. Department of Justice, *Zarein Ahmedzay Pleads Guilty to Terror Violations in Connection with Al-Qaeda New York Subway Plot*, Washington: U.S. Department of Justice, April 23, 2010.

[27] *United States of America* v. *Ferid Imam, et al.*, United States District Court, Eastern District of New York, Case 1:10–cr–00019–RJD, Document 53, Superseding Indictment, July 7, 2010.

[28] See, for example, U.S. Department of State, "Rewards for Justice: Reward Offer for Information on al-Nusrah Front Leader Muhammad al-Jawlani," May 10, 2017.

[29] Ayman al-Zawahiri, "Sham Will Submit to None Except Allah," As-Sahab Media Foundation April 2017. The transcript and translation are courtesy of the SITE Intelligence Group.

ing the Houthis and building broad and deep support among Sunni groups and tribes in Yemen:

"By the grace of Allah, we fight [alongside] all Muslims in Yemen, together with different Islamic groups. We fought with the Salafs without exception. We fought with the Muslim Brotherhood and also our brothers from the sons of tribes. We fought together with the public in Aden and elsewhere. We participate with the Muslims in every battle."[30]

In September 2014, Zawahiri announced the creation of regional affiliate al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, taking advantage of sanctuaries in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.[31] As Zawahiri argued, "A new branch of al-Qaeda was established and is Qaida al-Jihad in the Indian Subcontinent, seeking to raise the flag of jihad, return the Islamic rule, and empowering the sharia of Allah across the Indian subcontinent."[32] The group was led by Asim Umar, an Indian and former member of Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami, a Pakistan-based terrorist group with branches across the Indian subcontinent. Umar was flanked by Abu Zar, his first deputy. In October 2015, U.S. and Afghan forces targeted a large training camp in Kandahar Province, killing over one hundred operatives linked to al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent.[33]

By 2017, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent boasted several hundred members and had cells in Afghanistan's Helmand, Kandahar, Zabul, Paktika, Ghazni, and Nuristan Provinces. Al-Qaeda's presence in Afghanistan was almost certainly larger and more expansive than 5 or even 10 years before.[34] This expansion may have been due partly to Taliban advances in Afghanistan and al-Qaeda's relationship with operatives from the Taliban and other groups, such as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and Lashkar-e Jhangvi. Al-Qaeda operatives in Bangladesh were particularly active, conducting a range of attacks. In addition, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent conducted a steady propaganda campaign from its media arm, As-Sahab. However, the group conducted few attacks in Afghanistan or Pakistan and was largely irrelevant in the Taliban-led insurgency.

HOW AL-QAEDA MIGHT RETURN

Despite al-Qaeda's persistence, it has struggled to be relevant. It remains a loose, overlapping, and fluid series of networks across multiple regions. Zawahiri has been a controversial leader, who lacks bin Laden's charisma and ability to inspire foot soldiers. As Zawahiri emphasized in his "General Guidelines for Jihad," published in 2013, al-Qaeda's "military work first targets the head of (international) disbelief, America and its ally Israel, and second its local allies that rule our countries." He explained that the "purpose of targeting America is to exhaust her and bleed her to death" by, in part, baiting the United States to overreact so that it suffered substantial human and financial losses.[35] But al-Qaeda has conducted few successful attacks in the West over the past several years. One exception was in France. Said and Chérif Kouachi, who trained in Yemen with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, were involved in the January 2015 attack against the French satirical weekly newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris. The attack killed 12 people and injured 11 others. Most of al-Qaeda's violence has been directed at near-enemy targets in countries like Syria, Yemen, and Somalia. In addition, al-Qaeda has failed to inspire many attacks overseas, unlike the Islamic State.

It is unclear whether al-Qaeda will be able to establish a fifth wave that might include an increase in territorial control, recruits, and global attacks. Several factors may impact the rise—or decline—of al-Qaeda over the next several years. Most of these factors are outside of al-Qaeda's control, though much would depend on how al-Qaeda or other Salafi-jihadist groups responded to them.

First, the withdrawal of U.S. or other Western military forces—particularly special operations forces, air power, or smaller numbers of conventional military forces that train, advise, and assist foreign partners—from jihadist battlefields might contribute to a resurgence by al-Qaeda or other Salafi-jihadist groups. Examples include the withdrawal of U.S. or other Western forces from Yemen, Afghanistan,

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[30] Thomas Joscelyn, "AQAP Leader Discusses Complex War in Yemen," *Long War Journal*, May 2, 2017.

[31] Ayman al-Zawahiri, audio message, September 2014.

[32] Bill Roggio, "Al Qaeda Opens Branch in the 'Indian Subcontinent,'" *Long War Journal*, September 3, 2014.

[33] Dan Lamothe, "'Probably the Largest' Al-Qaeda Training Camp Ever Destroyed in Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, October 30, 2015.

[34] See Richard Esposito, Matthew Cole, and Brian Ross, "President Obama's Secret: Only 100 al-Qaeda Now in Afghanistan," *ABC News*, December 2, 2009.

[35] Ayman al-Zawahiri, "General Guidelines for Jihad," Al-Sahab Media Establishment, 2013.

Syria, Iraq, Somalia, or Libya. U.S. actions in these countries, however limited, have served as a check against al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. The U.S. and Soviet exit from Afghanistan in the late 1980's and early 1990's contributed to the country's further deterioration and the rise of the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The U.S. withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 contributed to a resurgence of al-Qaeda, the rise of the Islamic State, and the spread of extremist ideology across the region. Other American disengagements, such as Lebanon in 1984 and Somalia in 1994, contributed to further war after American forces withdrew.

Second, another round of the Arab Spring or the collapse of one or more governments in the Arab world might allow al-Qaeda or other Salafi-jihadist groups to strengthen. Instability in some countries (such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, or Egypt) or continuing war in others (such as Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, or Somalia) could provide al-Qaeda or other jihadist groups with key sanctuaries. Among the most significant reasons for al-Qaeda's fourth wave was a weakening of governance during the Arab Spring. According to World Bank data, levels of political stability across the Middle East and North Africa dropped by 8 percentage points from 2010 to 2015, government effectiveness by 5 percentage points, regulatory control by 4 percentage points, rule of law by 4 percentage points, and control of corruption by 4 percentage points. Levels were low across South Asian countries like Afghanistan as well. Governance was virtually nonexistent in countries that saw a rise in al-Qaeda and other Salafi-jihadist activity.[36]

Third, events that highlight the oppression of Muslims by Western governments could increase the possibility of a resurgence by al-Qaeda or other Salafi-jihadist groups. In 2004, the U.S. television show *60 Minutes II* broke a story involving abuse and humiliation of Iraqi inmates by a group of U.S. soldiers at the Abu Ghraib prison. The uncensored Abu Ghraib photographs appeared on jihadist websites and were used for recruitment purposes. A similar situation could be used by Salafi-jihadist groups for propaganda. In addition, the United States or other Western countries could over-react to a terrorist attack on their soil and implement domestic policies that broadly target Muslims and create a "war against Islam." Such a development—which occurred during World War II, when the United States relocated approximately 120,000 Japanese, many of whom were American citizens, to internment camps—could increase radicalization and recruitment for al-Qaeda and other groups.

Fourth, the rise of a charismatic al-Qaeda leader might help al-Qaeda revitalize. Bin Laden was an inspirational leader, as was Awlaki. Fluent in English and adept at giving eloquent talks on Islam, Awlaki's stirring lectures earned him a growing cadre of followers and inspired numerous individuals to plot terrorist attacks. His lectures were available on the internet, and his CDs were sold in Islamic bookstores around the world. Awlaki operated his own blog and was active on several social networking sites. Other al-Qaeda leaders, such as Zawahiri, have been far less charismatic. But this could change. In 2016, al-Qaeda leaders began to promote one of bin Laden's sons, Hamza, in their propaganda. In May 2017, al-Qaeda labeled Hamza bin Laden a "shaykh," suggesting that they might be considering him for leadership. While it is unclear whether Hamza bin Laden will emerge as a charismatic leader, such a development could help increase global support for the movement.

Fifth, large-scale deployment of U.S. or other Western military conventional forces to key Islamic battlefields, however unlikely, could increase the possibility of a resurgence by al-Qaeda or other Salafi-jihadist groups. The U.S. deployment of conventional forces to fight terrorists overseas has generally failed to stabilize countries and has often been counterproductive.[37] In Iraq, for instance, the U.S. conventional presence contributed to radicalization. Large numbers of U.S. forces in Muslim countries tend to facilitate terrorist recruitment. Many of the extremists involved in U.S. homeland plots after September 11, 2001—such as José Padilla, Nidal Hassan, Najibullah Zazi, and Faisal Shahzad—were motivated, in part, by the deployment of large numbers of U.S. combat troops in Muslim countries and by a conviction, however erroneous, that Muslims were the helpless victims of the United States.[38] At the moment, it is unlikely that the current administration or the U.S. population would support the large-scale deployment of military forces to fight ter-

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[36] World Bank, Worldwide Governance Indicators Data Set, accessed May 11, 2017.

[37] Barry R. Posen, "Pull Back: The Case for a Less Activist Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 1, January/February 2013, pp. 116–128.

[38] Seth G. Jones, *Hunting in the Shadows: The Pursuit of Al Qa'ida Since 9/11*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2012.

rorism. But some Americans might rethink this possibility after a major terrorist attack on U.S. soil.

Sixth, the collapse of the Islamic State—particularly its core so-called caliphate area of Iraq and Syria—and the death of charismatic leaders like Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi might allow al-Qaeda or other groups to rejuvenate. The further weakening or collapse of the Islamic State could also increase the possibility of a merger between fighters loyal to both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State under one umbrella— or even to the emergence of a new group.[39]

CONCLUSION

Over the course of its existence, al-Qaeda has faced numerous challenges. One has been a failure to hold territory where the group or its allies could impose their extreme interpretation of Islamic law. Al-Qaeda leaders developed a close relationship with Mullah Omar's Taliban in the 1990's and established a sanctuary in Afghanistan, only to lose it by late 2001 after the 9/11 attacks. Al-Qaeda affiliates in Yemen, Syria, Somalia, Algeria, and Mali also consistently failed to hold territory because of poor leadership, incompetent governance, limited local support, excessive violence, internal tensions, and other factors. Another problem has been a lack of overall Muslim support. In a brusque letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in 2005, Zawahiri remarked that "we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds" of Muslims.[40] Yet bin Laden, Zawahiri, and other al-Qaeda leaders consistently failed to translate this recognition into practice. Public opinion polls show that Muslim views of al-Qaeda are consistently negative. "Strong majorities in most countries have unfavorable opinions of the group, founded by Osama bin Laden more than a quarter century ago," concluded one poll conducted in 14 Muslim countries.[41] Al-Qaeda's lack of popular support has been a chronic problem.

Al-Qaeda is a different organization today than it was even a decade ago. It is less centralized, less focused on external operations (at least for the moment), and less popular. But the Islamic extremism that al-Qaeda represents will not go away soon. The ideology will likely survive in some form. Conflicts in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia are likely to continue, with support from some terrorist networks in the West. Al-Qaeda's leaders do not control the circumstances that lead to its waves of resurgence, but rather position the al-Qaeda enterprise to take advantage of these circumstances. It is unclear whether al-Qaeda or other Salafi-jihadists will be able to rebound in the future. And even if there is a resurgence, it could be led by al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, a new organization, or a mix of Salafi-jihadist groups. Such a revival will likely hinge on a group's ability to take advantage of opportunities like the withdrawal of small numbers of U.S. or other Western forces from key battlefields; a second wave of the Arab Spring; a rising perception of U.S. or other Western oppression of Muslims; the rise of a charismatic leader; a large-scale conventional deployment of U.S. or other Western forces; or the collapse of the Islamic State.

Mr. KING. Thank you, Dr. Jones. I will start with the questions. Maybe you can tell us what is known about Hamza bin Laden other than being his father's son? Do we have any analysis of him? Would he have support? Dr. Jones mentioned that he has a certain charisma. But let me just—so you, Ms. Zimmerman, any knowledge you have of Hamza bin Laden?

Ms. ZIMMERMAN. I have only seen very limited knowledge, and that is what has been contained in the released Abadabah documents and how the al-Qaeda leadership was treating him. Bin Laden kept him very much protected for fear that he would be used against bin Laden.

We do see efforts to groom Hamza, so I think that you are going to see him increasingly on the global stage. He had been releasing one statement a year, and then we just saw two this year.

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[39] On the merger of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State see Bruce Hoffman, "The Coming ISIS–al Qaeda Merger," *Foreign Affairs*, March 29, 2016; and Soufan, 2017.

[40] Letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, July 9, 2005.

[41] Pew Research Center, "Concerns about Islamic Extremism on the Rise in the Middle East," July 1, 2014.

So I think that we are gonna see him actually try to fill the gap that pressure on ISIS has generated in terms of the ISIS propaganda with Hamza calling a younger generation to Islam.

Mr. KING. Yes.

Ms. Cafarella.

Ms. CAFARELLA. Yes. I would add simply that we do have some indications inside of Syria that al-Qaeda's local presence in Syria is actually assisting in building the image of Hamza. We have indications, for example, of al-Qaeda Syrian affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra referencing Hamza in lessons to children in Sharia camps.

So there have been—there is a video that comes to mind immediately of little children, including foreign fighter children in one of these camps, referencing Hamza as a model for their own development.

Mr. KING. OK.

Dr. Jones.

Mr. JONES. Well, we know that Hamza spent considerable time after 9/11 in Iran, where some of al-Qaeda's management council leaders were located. He would have interacted most likely extensively with some of al-Qaeda's senior leaders in Iran, including Saif al Adel, who was a colleague of Bin Laden's.

I think when you look around al-Qaeda right now, it probably lacks a very strong inspirational leader. Across the board it has got Muhammad al Jawlani in Syria. It has got some senior officials in Yemen.

Bin Laden with his Arab background, may represent—Hamza with his Arab background may represent someone that is more inspirational across multiple fronts, which is what al-Qaeda is trying to do.

But I think he is untested in many ways. So I think it is unclear right now how well he is received by foot soldiers across al-Qaeda's affiliates.

Mr. KING. Are there any known competitors to him, any rivals within the network?

Mr. JONES. Well, I would say there are senior rivals in the organization. I mean just to take one, Saif al Adel served on the inner shura for Bin Laden. He has most likely been residing in Iran. He is Egyptian.

But whether he is a charismatic leader is certainly an open question. But I think he would be somebody who would be considered a replacement for Zawahiri if he were to be killed.

Mr. KING. OK. Two areas where ISIS made very strong inroads is in attracting foreign fighters and also in almost a psychological use of the internet, seeing that they were able to go beyond the ordinary base and even appeal to people on the fringes of society. Does al-Qaeda—have they shown any ability to carry on that way?

I will start with Ms. Zimmerman.

Ms. ZIMMERMAN. Al-Qaeda's ability to recruit foreign fighters is still much lower than that of ISIS, because al-Qaeda hadn't weaponized the internet, as you noted. But al-Qaeda has sustained its networks to draw in foreign fighters to the various fights.

It is prioritizing the network into Syria, seeing that that jihad against the Assad regime as the primary fight for the defense of Muslims, and that is how al-Qaeda globally is characterizing the

Syrian fight. I expect that al-Qaeda is still drawing on that population, and it has networks inside of Europe, which I know that Jennifer can explain more fully.

I think that we are at risk of minimizing the concept that these foreign fighters aren't going to go anywhere if ISIS disappears, where a lot of them aren't mobilizing just for ISIS. They are mobilizing, because they see the Salafi-jihadi movement, the requirements to defend the Sunni as being something obligatory upon themselves. ISIS' call right now is loudest, but it is not the only one.

Mr. KING. Ms. Cafarella.

Ms. CAFARELLA. Absolutely. So I would add one example, which is that many of the foreign fighter units actually that ISIS has been deploying against Europe, many of those were originally al-Qaeda units and ended up flipping jerseys, so to speak, after the schism between al-Qaeda and ISIS.

This is noteworthy in one particular way, insofar as we have open-source information about the ISIS bombmakers in Europe, the individuals actually building the explosives used in the high-casualty attacks, such as Paris and Brussels.

Those bombmakers, in many instances, have been originally trained by al-Qaeda as part of al-Qaeda's foreign fighter program and local war effort inside of Syria. So I would highlight that as a particular overlap and risk.

Al-Qaeda does still have its own foreign fighter units inside of Syria that fight on the battlefield, are recruiting and have actually begun to deploy back to their home countries. I have less open-source information about active al-Qaeda deployments into Europe, although I suspect that they are there, in terms of foreign fighter returns.

But we do have instances, most notably the Turkistan Islamic Party, which is the Uyghur foreign fighter group that al-Qaeda inside of Syria has recruited, trained, and then begun to deploy back home.

The way that al-Qaeda—my final point is the way that al-Qaeda harnesses actually the media coverage of the Assad regime's brutality is of particular concern.

So while al-Qaeda, as Katie noted, had not been as adept at the social medial penetration and that kind of recruitment as ISIS was, al-Qaeda with its moderate image has actually managed to get its clerics on the BBC and in Western press and has managed to influence local reporters inside of, for example, rebel-held Aleppo, that very subtly championed the al-Qaeda interpretation of events, while covering the brutality of the Assad regime's war effort. I think that is a particular concern moving forward.

Mr. KING. Thank you.

Dr. Jones.

Mr. JONES. Just briefly, two points. One is that I think al-Qaeda has had some trouble inspiring people in the West to conduct attacks. Most of the individuals that I have looked at that have conducted or plotted attacks have generally been inspired by or at least have noted their inspiration by ISIS.

I think that, in part, reflects Zawahiri's less than charismatic view and probably also reflects ISIS' control of the caliphate, which attracted a number of individuals.

But I would highlight a couple of exceptions. One is Awlaki still from the grave is inspiring individuals, and we can see that in individuals that have plotted or conducted attacks in the West.

There have been connections with Yemen, you know, the Charlie Hebdo attacks. Cherif Kouachi did train with al-Qaeda in Yemen. We see with the Boston bombings, and I think we would see more recently cases where magazines like *Inspire* are facilitating or helping people build crude bombs.

So I think there are ways that al-Qaeda certainly has reached its hand in, even though it has not been, in my view, as effective as ISIS in inspiring, to this date anyway.

Mr. KING. Thank you.

Miss Rice.

Miss RICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to start with you, Dr. Jones. You mentioned, when you gave the list of six factors that could affect the rise of al-Qaeda, you mentioned one or more events that highlights the suppression of Muslims by the West.

I wonder if you can tell us what effect you think the travel ban has on al-Qaeda's recruitment capabilities, and how it relates to that one point that you made about actions of the West that could give rise to the resurgence and continued power of al-Qaeda?

Mr. JONES. Thanks. That is a good question. I think on the travel ban, I think it is a little early to know the impact that it has had. I mean, when you look at the jihadist social media sites, it certainly has been highlighted by a certain number of groups as a cause for attempting to inspire individuals to conduct attacks. Whether and to what degree that has been successful is unclear right now.

I still think it's important to consider a range of other variables in looking, not just at the travel ban, but other variables, like U.S. actions overseas pulling out or putting in large numbers of forces.

I think my final point would be just in terms of the travel ban itself, when you look at most plots and attacks in the United States, and there was a pretty good report that came out of G.W., George Washington University recently, most of these had been done by individuals that did not come into the United States as refugees. They were Americans that radicalized.

So there will be a large chunk of potential threats that will be well outside of this ban. I would also note that the range of countries not on it, that I think a range of us would be concerned about, including Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Miss RICE. So this morning I was at a breakfast where we spoke with the Afghanistan's Ambassador to the United States. He was talking about how al-Qaeda, ISIS, a bunch of these terrorist organizations are really truly alive and well in Afghanistan. There are instances of them working together, whereas maybe they didn't before.

They are not being so ideological maybe as you would think that they would. They are not as much in competition as they are trying to maybe work together.

So this is really a question to all three of you. This is just in Afghanistan, but I am sure that, you know, obviously, they are a joint presence in Syria and elsewhere. To what extent do you see that? Is it competition? Is it coordination? Is it a combination of the two, and how do we address that?

We can start with you, Ms. Zimmerman.

Ms. ZIMMERMAN. It is an excellent question, and I actually think that we have done a disservice to ourselves by talking about the competition between al-Qaeda and ISIS because the competition between the two groups is literally, is minor ideological disagreements that are within the Salafi-jihadi ideology.

They both share the same end-state, and it is the leadership levels that are arguing over what the right strategy is and how to pursue it, where the Islamic State believes that you need to build a state at the same time as military conquest and that the conditions are set today for that.

Al-Qaeda has a much longer-term strategy to build the conditions in order to emerge victorious. I would say that action against ISIS has somewhat validated al-Qaeda's strategy.

But at the lower levels, even at the group level, the affiliate level, and certainly at the foot soldier level, it is not an ideological competition. It is not a place where you can draw a line between an ISIS fighter and al-Qaeda fighter.

Most of the local fighters are fighting in support of their local community or because the group is paying them or because it happens to be the only group that is acting against the government or another source of grievance.

They are not as concerned with this idea of the Islamic State or of the idea of al-Qaeda. Certainly, the foreign fighters make a distinction, but the local fighters in each of these conflicts don't.

What we saw after the rise of the Islamic State was that the al-Qaeda network remained very cohesive. The groups that were on the periphery, the ones that didn't fully share al-Qaeda's strategic doctrine were the ones that split to ISIS not because they thought that ISIS was better, but because ISIS had delivered what they were looking for, delivered the caliphate, and they had delivered it with access to resources.

So what we saw were fighters flipping inside of Yemen because the ISIS fighters were making twice as much as the al-Qaeda fighters were. We can see fighters flipping inside of Libya and elsewhere, because to declare the caliphate in Sirte, Libya, immediately generated attention to their cause and drew in additional fighters.

We need to understand that both al-Qaeda and ISIS are part of the same movement, which is on the rise, frankly, and that if we were to just focus on the groups, we are going to end up with the same problem of strengthening one over the other. That is why we need to draw back and actually depress both al-Qaeda, ISIS, and the movement writ large.

Mr. KING. Ms. Cafarella.

Ms. CAFARELLA. Yes. Absolutely. Thank you for the question, because I agree with Katie. I think it is a very, very real important one, especially at this phase, as Mosul falls, and Raqqa, hopefully, will follow.

The word, actually, I would use to describe al-Qaeda and ISIS inside of Syria, but it scales globally, is deconflict. Al-Qaeda deconflicts its operations with ISIS in order to avoid, actually, expending resources fighting a near peer that is pursuing the same goals.

So al-Qaeda actually was in control of most of southeastern Syria along the Euphrates River Valley, southeast of Raqqa City, the terrain that ISIS now controls in 2013.

In 2014 al-Qaeda basically handed that terrain over to ISIS and withdrew in order to use its resources against the Assad regime in western Syria rather than contest ISIS in southeastern Syria. So I think that is a very good example, actually, of the pragmatic decision making from al-Qaeda's perspective.

The second is that al-Qaeda benefits from ISIS' existence because ISIS' brutality allows al-Qaeda to seem moderate in comparison. So al-Qaeda actually needs ISIS in some respects to be as successful as al-Qaeda has been in pitching to Syrians, but also disenfranchised Muslim communities elsewhere that, hey, ISIS is extreme. We are just al-Qaeda. We are here to defend you and your families.

That narrative is incredibly powerful. Without ISIS to compare themselves to they would have a harder time with that narrative. So I would highlight that for your consideration.

Miss RICE. Dr. Jones.

Mr. JONES. I agree with what my two colleagues have noted. Two quick comments. One is I do think there is a fair amount of both competition and cooperation on the competition side. To take your Afghanistan example, ISIS was severely pushed back in southern Afghanistan, in Helmand, and Farah Province.

Thanks to both the Taliban and al-Qaeda that were operating in the south, that is in part because ISIS put on a pretty serious ideological campaign in its magazines like "Dabiq" denigrating al-Qaeda. There was pretty intense competition, I think there has been, to some degree, in the East, but we have also seen deconfliction and cooperation.

I would note again in the Charlie Hebdo attack in France, that included networks both with an ISIS connection. That is Coulibaly, as well as with Kouachi, who had trained with al-Qaeda. So there was cooperation in a major Western attack.

I think what it does suggest is when we have local groups in these wars, whether it is Iraq or Syria or Afghanistan filling this vacuum, these groups will fill it. That is my concern.

Miss RICE. Well, I have gone well over my time. I am hoping we are going to have a second round because I have a lot of other questions, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Mr. KING. Mr. Perry.

Mr. PERRY. Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to the panel for being here. There seems to be a great deal of pushback, at least in some circles politically, against the idea that the war on terror, if we can still use that terminology, is a clash of civilizations, but that is exactly how our enemies frame it.

I think it is interesting that we choose our enemy's framing of things when it suits our purposes, like the travel ban, which to me is geographic and very pointed. It has nothing to do with religion,

but it is geographic. Then we disregard it when it doesn't suit our purposes.

But I think a fair view of the two sides see that the two cultures, our culture and their culture, is diametrically opposed. I think that we probably at least can agree on that. In any case, toxic religious ideology, in my opinion, can't be apologized for without sacrificing lives on the altar of political correctness.

So my question for you is this: How important to victory, to eventual victory—and like you said it is gonna be around for a long time, I think we recognize that as well—but how important is it to victory in that we acknowledge and effectively repudiate the toxic ideology, whether it is al-Qaeda or ISIS and all the various different groups?

It is an ideology they are talking—ISIS to me, and al-Qaeda or Boko Haram, that is methodology, right, not ideology?

But how important is it in repudiating the ideology fueling radical or fundamentalists? Maybe it is not even radical? Some people don't consider it radical, right? Fundamentalist, right?

These people are the ones that are following the Quran and the radicals are the ones that are more secular in their mind, right? So I would use fundamentalist Islamic terrorism. How important to victory is that we acknowledge and effectively repudiate? That is the question. Anybody? Everybody?

Mr. JONES. I think it is absolutely essential. I think the challenge that the United States faces right now is that the most talked about tool continues to be the military tool, which is an important one. But I think this ideology will die, and I think it will die eventually, only when it fails to recruit individuals and bring them into its fold as supporters.

I think when you look at polling data for both ISIS and al-Qaeda, what you see even in the Arab world, is very limited and in most cases declining support for its extremist views across large-scale populations. That is why I think it is important to distinguish between these organizations and ideologies which are a minority and larger populations.

But I think where there has been some success against these groups, French efforts in Mali, and Rand has done some work on that, Saudi efforts against al-Qaeda in the 2003, 2004 period and then some efforts, including by the Jordanians to keep them at bay. They have been effective at leveraging locals to push back on the ideology and denigrate it.

I think that has been important, including getting former members of the group to talk about what life was like while they were members, or for those people in Mosul or Fallujah and Ramadi who had to live under the Islamic State. I think that stuff needs to get out there more.

Mr. PERRY. Why doesn't the U.S. Government have its own counterpart to something like *Inspire* or *Dabiq,* including those things that we send out to those very same populations? Is that a consideration? Do you know?

I mean maybe you are not the person to answer that question, but it seems to me, that that would be like a minimum part of a strategy that is outside of the military component.

Ms. CAFARELLA. Sure. I would add simply that I do think countering the ideology is a necessary component of our strategy. But I think it is far from sufficient, and I actually would argue that it shouldn't be the main effort.

Look, the reason why ISIS and al-Qaeda have resurged—I am going to focus on the Middle Eastern theater because that is where I have studied this most closely.

The reason why ISIS was able to resurge in Iraq is not first and foremost because of its ideology. It has because of residual military capability that ISIS held on to when the United States withdrew.

It is because the government of Nouri al Maliki executed a series of very sectarian policies that alienated the Sunni population. ISIS only actually resurged to the level of strength to take major cities after a Sunni protest movement against the government emerged, which was not ideological in nature. But it was about countering repression and demanding basic rights.

That is what ISIS hijacked. That is the core problem. It is a reality problem at the root of even the ISIS phenomenon. I don't mean to discount the importance, again, of engaging with the ideology, but only to say that if we focus solely on the ideology, we will fail to address the roots of the actual problem.

Mr. PERRY. So I am almost out of time for round one, but since, in my opinion—and you are the expert, I am not. But since ISIS didn't necessarily—the genesis isn't necessarily in Iraq, but it is more in Syria, right, and then moved into Iraq, didn't that sectarian situation with Maliki and the oppressive policies toward the Sunnis just offer the opportunity for ISIS to move into Iraq, take the territory, and continue with the ideology as opposed to being that—I think in your argument you are somewhat contending that that is the genesis of ISIS, where I would contend it is not.

Ms. CAFARELLA. Sure, yes. So I would clarify only to say that I do agree with you that the genesis of ISIS and why ISIS is fighting is an ideological war. I am arguing that in order to defeat ISIS we need to deprive it of civilian support——

Mr. PERRY. Concur.

Ms. CAFARELLA [continuing]. Or civilian tolerance.

Mr. PERRY. I——

Ms. CAFARELLA. And that that is decisive.

Mr. PERRY. Just to clarify, there are folks that will tell us as Americans that the reason the ideology exists is because these people are impoverished and they don't have work——

Mr. KING. Mr. Perry.

Mr. PERRY [continuing]. Or they, you know?

Mr. KING. I was going to give Ms. Zimmerman another chance if she wanted to reply.

Mr. PERRY. I just want to reject that theory. But thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Zimmerman.

Ms. ZIMMERMAN. Thank you. I reject that theory as well, Congressman. So I think that to answer both of your questions, one, the United States shouldn't have the counter to *Dabiq* or *Inspire* because it is not our role to inform what ideology is correct.

I think that that voice is actually quite strong in the Muslim majority world, where mainstream Islam rejects the tenets held by these groups, by al-Qaeda and ISIS almost entirely.

We are treating this ideology like it is new, and it is not. It has been in existence since the 1960's. But it has really only threatened the United States at the scale that it has in Europe as well for the past 6 years, since the Arab Spring and since we saw al-Qaeda and then the rise of ISIS catapult Salafi-jihadism forward.

I actually have a report that I will leave with you. But it looks at the reasons why this ideology is existing and how it has been rejected repeatedly by Muslim societies for decades. You can look at North Africa as a great example of societies that had very strong groups that were pushed out once the population was given a choice.

I think that this is where we do need to be looking at countering the ideology for its foreign fighter recruitment. We do need to be looking at the sectarian policies, but it is really taking our strategy and reorienting it not on the enemy. What can we do against the enemy? How can we prevent the enemy from attacking us?

But how do we orient on the population? How do we make the population free to choose again to reject this enemy? Because it has rejected it time and again. That is why the Anbar Awakening was successful.

That is why the Egyptian Islamic Jihad was pushed out of Egypt. It is an ideology that is counter to what these Muslims want. The reason it is gaining attraction is because they feel like they are under threat.

Mr. PERRY. So my time has expired.

Mr. KING. OK.

Mr. PERRY. I thank the Chair for his indulgence and hope for Round 2. But I am going to contend some of your points, but thank you for your input.

Mr. KING. Ms. Jackson Lee.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Sorry. Let me thank the witnesses for their testimony. There might be two of us on this panel that were here during the Iraq War. I would say, Ms. Cafarella, you are right, if I pronounced your name correctly, it was the aftermath of the Iraq War that some of us opposed.

But the removal of Saddam, that was a given, but then his guard, who some might say desired to just work. When that was completely banished and forbidden by our policies they were driven in quotes, and I will use this terminology, "into the underground" and became the fodder for ISIL or at least the armored individuals for ISIL.

But as Sunnis you are right. The leadership of Iraq, rather than try to embrace all of the Iraqi people, including the Shiites and the Sunnis, get them working and got rid of all of the civil servants that happened to be Sunni. Certainly there probably should have been some vetting.

That added to, I think, what the mixture is that has carried forward. Am I correct in your assessment on that or your thoughts on that?

Ms. CAFARELLA. Yes, I would largely agree.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. So let me say that my interests, both in this committee and the work that we have to do, is the protection of the homeland. I think that is our focus, albeit that we are connected to the world. So I am going to ask questions that if you will be kind enough to just yes or no.

Then I want to pursue some line of re-questioning Dr. Jones with you. I thank all of you for your testimony.

Is it your belief that focusing our policy such that we create the framework for protecting the homeland is crucial. Ms. Zimmerman? I just need the yes on the record or no.

Ms. ZIMMERMAN. Yes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. All right.

Ms. Cafarella.

Ms. CAFARELLA. Yes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Dr. Jones.

Mr. JONES. Yes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you. So I want to ask the question. Under the present climate that we have, hopefully, the success that we have now with Mosul and moving ISIL out, though I think they will find another cave to be in.

Dr. Jones, what is the extent of the potential of recruitment on our shores? How active would ISIL attempt to be on our shores with recruitment? Would they find that to be an effective tool that they could penetrate some of our populations and make them recruits?

Mr. JONES. Well, I think there is no question when you look at what ISIS leaders have said, including what they have published, that they would love to recruit individuals in the U.S. homeland for either inspired or directed attacks. I think their comments on this are unambiguous.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Let me not leave out al-Qaeda. Would they also be in there because there are a number of subs—I call them subsets or subcommittees, subgroups. Would they likewise potentially engage in that?

Mr. JONES. Again, I think there is no question, like ISIS, al-Qaeda would like to inspire attacks. I would just note that the name of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's magazine is *Inspire* for this very reason. It is written in English for this very reason.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Then we have a point that I will be getting to. I am on the Subcommittee on Cybersecurity. We have been talking about it for a decade, as I know some of my colleagues have as well. That is the new weaponry from my perspective.

Right now, we are engaged in a vigorous discussion of Russia's large footprint on this whole question of cyber weaponry which is, obviously, taking resources not from—but our intelligence community has to utilize resources what—for an entity, a KGB, that we would normally just want to know that we disagree, know that we have different political philosophies.

We would like to find a common path, I assume, that we could work on certain issues. But we are ramped up to shore ourselves against a cyber weaponry that Russia is using, elections and others.

Can you comment on the threat of cybersecurity, and the imbalance or the difficulty of trying to shore up against Russia's intru-

sion that then makes us either, and I don't want to suggest it, but less attentive maybe on the issue of the cyber weaponry that can be used by the likes of these various known terrorist groups?

Dr. Jones.

Mr. JONES. Sure. I am not an expert on Russian cyber operations. But the broader issue, there have been some efforts by jihadist groups, including ones we are discussing here, to conduct operations, cyber operations.

I still think the more serious threat along this line is the inspiration or the attempted inspiration through social media of individuals in the West, including in the United States.

In part I think, happy to go in this direction if you want, there is a much more serious partnership with the private sector, I think, that needs to occur. Both on the attempted inspiration, on the cyber side, as well as on communications between groups through encrypted apps that is critical as well.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Well, what I would—I know that you would not have all the expertise, but what I was suggesting is with the resources that our intelligence community has being now having to focus on Russia's attacks on us, then we have these known terrorist groups that we should be focusing on as well. You would agree with that?

Mr. JONES. I would certainly agree and think that there are threats to the United States coming from both state and, in this case, extremist actors.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. My last question is, and I think you made mention of this, and I think this is a very astute point that you made. First of all, we cannot fight this with a—how should I say it—a nonmilitary terminology, boatload of weapons or fight conventional wars to end terrorism.

So the idea of countering violent extremism, both in terms of potential recruits here in the United States, so young people, or social network, how crucial is that that we not abandon that in terms of protecting of the homeland?

Mr. JONES. I think it is absolutely an essential component to protect the homeland. I have a piece in *The Wall Street Journal* yesterday, which looks at the ISIS threat in Iraq. And notes that ISIS has a Plan B and C to use some of the Sunni grievances to continue to inspire people to conduct attacks.

So the military instrument is certainly a part of this. But I think efforts by the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, and not just for monitoring individuals, but for working with local communities in the United States to identify potential extremists and to work with the United States to protect their own cities and communities is essential.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Well, let me thank you very much. I look forward to working with you because I think that that, the spreading across this Nation in terms of provokers, provoking Muslims, then the idea of people buying into I have to go for the fight or I have to be part of this fight against America, I think it is crucial that we engage in countering violent extremism.

Thank all the witnesses for their work.

Mr. KING. The gentleman, from Texas, Mr. Hurd.

Mr. HURD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also would like to thank you. There are many things that I have to do in the course of a day. This was something that I wanted to do because I follow and read all of our panelists and what they write about. So thank you all for being here.

My first question is to you, Ms. Cafarella. When you talk about how in Syria al-Qaeda is proving or showing that they are the only group supporting the local population, I saw similar things with Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad during my time in Muzaffarabad, Pakistan.

That the United States needs to have an anti-Assad strategy because Assad is the reason that there was a civil war. Assad is the reason that ISIS grew in Syria. In your opinion, what should be the tenets of an anti-Assad U.S. strategy?

Ms. CAFARELLA. Sure. Well, this is something that we have explored in depth at the Institute for the Study of War because, you know, I don't mean to imply actually that there is an easy way forward. There is not.

We have allowed the situation to deteriorate so far that there simply are no good options left. The Iranians have forward-deployed to an unprecedented level, for example, inside of Syria now, in addition to the Russian deployment.

So this is a very difficult problem to unriddle. All I can say is that doing nothing has led us to where we are now. So the status quo is simply not an option.

I actually would argue we are not currently on a path to defeat ISIS. Because in Syria, for example, our partnered force against ISIS, the Syrian Kurdish YPG and some associated Arabs, are pursuing a political ideology that is antithetical to what actually the local population was originally pursuing.

Raqqa was the first provincial capital to be liberated from the Assad regime. We are now helping the Kurdish force in placing new political ideology that it is an open question whether the locals will even accept.

So we need to begin. But I would submit to you that we actually need to begin by rectifying our on-going efforts against ISIS as the first place. We are currently doing more harm than good.

We need to reorient our anti-ISIS effort and develop a larger regional, actually, and global strategy to contain the Russians and Iranians in order to create opportunity, actually, to set the kind of conditions we need to inside of Syria to ever set conditions for either a negotiated end to this war or some kind of interim, you know, actual cessation of hostilities that endures. We have never been close to that outcome.

Mr. HURD. Thank you. Did either one of the other panelists have an opinion? Then great.

Then Dr. Jones, I will turn it over to you, or ask this question. You talk about one of the things that will ensure al-Qaeda's return to prominence is Arab Spring, you know, or the collapse of another government in the Arab worlds.

Where are you most concerned of that happening? Where do you think that is most likely to happen? I recognize the answer may be the same for both but I am curious in your opinion there.

Mr. JONES. Well again, I think it would be a concern to see a second round. I don't think it would guarantee the return or the resurgence of al-Qaeda, but would certainly increase the probability of a resurgence by al-Qaeda or other groups.

I think there are a number of countries I am concerned about, or would be concerned about, the war spilling over into Jordan, but I think they have been pretty good so far, Egypt in part, economic and other conditions triggering broad unrest.

The one I would highlight though would be based on its next door and proximity to Libya is Tunisia. It is a country that the United States has spent some efforts trying to stabilize.

It is the first and potentially the most important. It is the first democratic country as part of the Arab Spring. It has been under severe strain because of its location next to Libya and the large number of returning foreign fighters coming there from Iraq and Syria.

I think it is a very fragile situation right now. It would be concerning. I think it would be headlined as the first democratic state in the Arab Spring destabilizing.

Mr. HURD. Thank you. I am going to slip in a final question to you, Ms. Zimmerman. A question I often ask of folks that are experienced in this area, what day do we celebrate when it comes to the global war on terrorism or ending, I should say, the global war on terrorism?

Ms. ZIMMERMAN. Congressman, that is a very difficult question, as you know. I don't think that we celebrate at the defeat of ISIS. I don't think we celebrate at the defeat of al-Qaeda in whatever form it is.

I think we celebrate when we have enabled the Muslim world to stabilize and to reshape what is legitimate and responsive governance in the failed states that we see, where that is the de-escalation of conflict inside of Mali, inside of Libya, in Somalia, in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan.

Preventing the collapse or the disintegration of the states in Egypt, in Niger, in Tunisia, watching Algeria very closely, looking at the Indian subcontinent because it is incredibly restive but not reported on and, you know, recognizing that we have key interests in the broader stability of the region.

I think that once we reduce the grievances, the popular grievances that are different in all of these contexts, I recognize. I am advocating a very complex and challenging solution.

But once we recognize that those grievances are reduced, I think then Salafi-jihadi movement moves back into the shadows and then we can celebrate victory.

Mr. HURD. I thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back the time I do not have.

Mr. KING. Thank you, Mr. Hurd, at least you acknowledge it.

The gentleman from Massachusetts, Mr. Keating.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to thank the witnesses.

Dr. Jones, in your written testimony, you, in your conclusion, you said al-Qaeda is a different organization today than it was a decade ago. It is less centralized, less focused on external operations.

One point you put in parentheses, at least for the moment, and second, less popular. Can you first give us some examples of what you think has made them less popular? Something that we should be aware of and maybe try and build on?

Mr. JONES. Sure. The available—and it is limited polling data from places, including Pew, indicates decreasing popularity. So the question is why?

That may be partially a result of what some perceive as the successes, at least up until recently, of ISIS in establishing territorial control and declaring a caliphate, that unlike al-Qaeda some had gravitated toward ISIS because they had territory and substantial amounts of territory to show for it. That may be one key reason. Obviously that is changing quickly.

Mr. KEATING. Right. Well, thank you. A question, you know, I traveled to Tunisia not too long ago. But I also have had conversations anecdotally with non-government citizens, just to try and get their view on things.

When it came to the Islamic State and pro rata, they are probably the leading country in foreign fighters in terms of their population, this person explained to me that there really wasn't initially any radicalized view.

That the economy is so bad that there are no alternatives and that ISIS would come in and be able to say, "Well, we are going to take care of your family if something happens to you. We are going to support you."

Do you think that that is—what is your opinion, all the panelists, generally? Do you think that oftentimes it is really the economic issues, no radicalization, and then that comes later on when they are, you know, connected with these groups, either al-Qaeda or ISIS in that respect?

I mean, how much of that is what your research shows what happens? What comes first do you think?

Ms. ZIMMERMAN. I don't think that radicalization comes first for most of the fighters, with the exception of, I think, Western foreign fighters where they are radicalized before they leave. Within the context of the Arab Muslim fighters that flow into ISIS and al-Qaeda, some have radicalized, some haven't, but you are right to point out the differences.

I wouldn't say that poverty or unemployment or a youth followage is actually causing the draw and the radicalization. I think that both ISIS and to some degree al-Qaeda exploit the gaps. They are able to use different ways to draw people in where it is——

Mr. KEATING. What kind of ways do you——

Ms. ZIMMERMAN. It is the lack of opportunity, so it is the salary. It is the ability for Boko Haram to pay fighters, young males, enough money so that they can then leave Boko Haram and get married.

Mr. KEATING. Are they making good on those promises?

Ms. ZIMMERMAN. They are, and this is, you know, there are different reasons why people fight. It is to defend their community, to defend their livelihood, and in Syria and Iraq many times it is to defend their lives.

Ms. CAFARELLA. I would simply add that to say, you know, one of the reasons why al-Qaeda is powerful on the ground is often because it is viewed as less corrupt. In many instances it is. So the Free Syrian Army suffered a lot of corruption and mismanagement actually that provided an open door for al-Qaeda.

But the real rift, I think, in terms of transitioning from pragmatic support to ideological support in Syria is actually the sense of profound injustice that many Syrians feel for what they have endured for the past over 6 years.

My concern is not first and foremost that al-Qaeda is going to convince the entirety of the Syrian opposition to go to war with America, but rather that the next step that al-Qaeda will make is to convince Syrians not to fight against global attacks——

Mr. KEATING. You mean, like——

Ms. CAFARELLA [continuing]. That the Syrians do perceive——

Mr. KEATING. Yes, with the AQAP, for instance, it was a breakdown of local services and then al-Qaeda has been moving into that offering that stability. Is that——

Ms. CAFARELLA. Absolutely.

Mr. KEATING [continuing]. A concern in Syria, too, as things break down?

Ms. CAFARELLA. Absolutely. So al-Qaeda does provide that kind of civilian services, everything, but the thing I am worried about in Syria is al-Qaeda resuming external attacks at some point. And Syrians saying, well, we have been suffering attacks for 6 years and nobody cared, so why should I care whether al-Qaeda attacks abroad?

Mr. KEATING. Yes. Just a quick question that hasn't been I don't think asked, quickly, Bangladesh. What are your concerns with Bangladesh? We don't hear that much about that, but I think it is a concern.

Mr. JONES. I think there is no question it is a concern if you look at the increasing levels of violence that have been perpetrated by groups associated with al-Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent, as well as ISIS in Bangladesh.

We have a range of the conditions. We have already talked about on this committee, on this panel, weak governance, economic challenges, opportunities for fighters, and its proximity to both Pakistan and Afghanistan active war zones that make Bangladesh of concern.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you. Any other comments?

Ms. ZIMMERMAN. I just want to offer one anecdote, which is the centrality of the Syrian conflict in all of these war zones where an NGO worker relayed to me a story of why he asked Muslims in Bangladesh why there is radicalization.

The response they got back was not jobs or unemployment or questions about the government. But the question was what is the United States doing in Syria? I think that we do need to recognize the ripple effect that our actions have had in terms of the perception that we have abandoned the Sunni inside of Syria.

Mr. KEATING. Well, thank you. I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Mr. KING. Thank you, Mr. Keating.

We will go for a second round of questions. Is that OK with you? Great, OK. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and certainly in

several years afterwards, al-Qaeda was definitely the center of the jihad world.

Today, assuming ISIS, you know, continues to decline, what is al-Qaeda's relationship with AQAP, with Boko Haram, with al-Shabaab and other groups that may be in the jihadist world?

Mr. JONES. Well, I can start. I mean, the core has clearly been weakened. I think there has been some movement of some of the key people from Pakistan into Afghanistan to take advantage of some territory that has been taken by the Taliban and other groups.

I would say there is a fair amount of autonomy that exists with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. There are still some strategic guidance, I would say, from senior leaders in South Asia, including Ayman al Zawahiri. al-Shabaab, very concerning links between its intelligence and external operations unit the Amniyat and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

Al-Shabaab is mostly regional, but it continues to have a close relationship with al-Qaeda to some degree and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

Boko Haram is an interesting story. It has been, more recently it has rebranded itself as ISIS in West Africa, but Boko Haram is—there are a lot of divergences there. Bin Laden had historically, we know, had conversations with senior Boko Haram leaders.

Whether Boko Haram switches at some point is an interesting question. But the bigger picture, I would say, is that the role of a core or a central al-Qaeda is, in my view, fairly limited right now.

Most of the operational planning and the day-to-day activity is handled in Yemen. It is handled in Somalia. It is handled in Syria and other locations, rather than being guided, certainly implemented like a screwdriver from the Afghan-Pakistan region.

Mr. KING. Yes, Ms. Zimmerman.

Ms. ZIMMERMAN. I would like to echo Seth's thoughts and lay out that the way that I see the al-Qaeda affiliate nodes today is somewhat mirroring and replicating the capabilities that the core once had where they are all able or seeking the capability to conduct external attacks. They do run day-to-day.

There are relationships that run between the groups, not just al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Yemen and al-Shabaab in Somalia, but from al-Shabaab across the Sahara into the Maghreb and the Sahel. There is a self-supporting network where there is movement of personnel, resources, funding, expertise throughout the al-Qaeda network.

That is something that our strategy of pushing hard against one group, the group that is the most threatening to the United States has not recognized. That a lot of the resources move elsewhere.

Right now, the resources are flowing into Syria and that is why the Syrian jihad has been so strong from the al-Qaeda perspective, but we are looking at conditions where it will be able to use the safe havens it has in Africa in particular to reconstitute globally and push forward.

I think there is resilience within the network that we just haven't recognized.

Ms. CAFARELLA. I would simply add briefly that the affiliates are also coordinating with each other so you often get joint statements

actually by Sharia figures and, you know, religious clerics within AQIM, AQAP, and Nusra inside of Syria. So they are also developing out that echelon and enabling it to communicate and coordinate with less oversight and input, actually, from the senior leadership echelon.

Mr. KING. Thank you. I don't have much time left, and you may want to get back to me in writing on this, but we talk about Syria and if ISIS is defeated or if ISIS is vanquished there, what is the optimal realistic result for Syria?

I don't want to be impinging on the turf of the Department of Foreign Affairs Committee, but from the extent of marginalizing al-Qaeda, of reducing al-Qaeda, what is the most we can realistically hope for if there is such a thing as a final settlement in Syria?

Ms. CAFARELLA. Sure. I would say briefly it depends first and foremost on what time line you are talking. So I think my concern is that the United States will try to pursue a Syria-wide outcome in the next 5 years that I do not assess is possible, actually, to achieve. So I think we have to be very humble about how much influence we currently have.

Mr. KING. Are you saying—OK. Even in 5 years you don't see it?

Ms. CAFARELLA. Even in 5 years, yes, because look, we still have a ground war against ISIS, which is going to take years, and we haven't even started operations against al-Qaeda. We haven't even started operations to contain the Iranians or undertaken any effort really to do that. So we are a very long way.

But I do want to leave you with a hopeful note, which is that it took over——

Mr. KING. I have been waiting all morning for one.

[Laughter.]

Ms. CAFARELLA. Yes. It took over 6 years of absolutely horrific violence——

Mr. KING. Right.

Ms. CAFARELLA [continuing]. Against the Syrian population almost completely unchecked for us to have this big of a jihadist problem. That is good. This was originally a pro-democracy uprising. It took insane conditions that these populations were living under until these groups, these ideological groups, were able to grow this strong.

That does give me hope actually that it is possible to change this, recognizing how far we have come and how far we have yet to go, but giving, you know, giving that hope where it is due.

Mr. KING. OK.

Dr. Jones.

Mr. JONES. I think in terms of optimal cases, I think if one is looking at trying to dampen down the terrorist threat, so that is ISIS and to some degree al-Qaeda through Jabhat al-Nusra, a situation where U.S. efforts between Raqqa and Deir Ezzor along the Euphrates River Valley, that ISIS loses territory, and what gets put in place are organizations that are most likely to be sub-state actors, Kurdish, Sunni Arab, that effectively do not allow notable nodes of Jabhat al-Nusra or other fighters into that area.

The Syrian regime continues to operate against Idlib and other areas where we have al-Nusra. So that would mean a dampening both in the East and the West against ISIS.

The concern is that the United States will with its special operations forces continue to work with the SDF and then leave after ISIS loses its territory, and in its place we may go back to 2013 where we will see a pushback into that area from rebels that have been mostly focusing on the west of Syria, Nusra, or other organizations.

That would be my worst outcome is a move to fill that back into that vacuum. So part of this hinges on who stays in play along the Euphrates River Valley.

Mr. KING. OK.

Miss Rice.

Miss RICE. So the common theme here, and really this is not a political statement because I was, you know, pretty critical of the previous administration's lack of a plan in Syria. That is just continuing with this administration, so this is not a Republican or Democratic thing.

We have got to come up with a plan. But one of the overwhelming themes that, you know, I hear from this panel is that it is clear that terrorist organizations are able to flourish in areas that lack strong governmental institutions.

We are dealing with a budget now where the present administration wants to cut the State Department's budget by 30 percent, and we have a Secretary of State who is saying I am fine with that.

So that causes me great concern in a number of areas because here we are talking about—you know, Ms. Zimmerman, you talked before about how al-Qaeda is very, very good at going into local communities and providing them life services, right, water, food, electricity to gain their loyalty.

I juxtapose that to Dr. Jones, your comment before and your list of things that could actually make things worse is you quote a recurrent theme that large-scale conventional deployment of U.S. troops to a battlefield could aid in increasing the strength of these terrorist organizations.

So if that is going to make it worse, and a lack of American presence, i.e., money, personnel, nongovernmental organizations that are supported by our money, how do you square that?

I mean, you know, Mattis himself said if you take away the budget of the State Department and you decimate that, then I am just going to have to buy more bullets, basically.

Again, this is not a political statement. You know, we have to figure out exactly what the mix is. It is not just, solely either/or, right? You have to show that you have a strong and ready military.

But I think the first step should be investing like al-Qaeda is in these local communities so that we can strengthen them where they are and so we can address the issue that way.

So this is, like, that was just a mini therapy session right there, me just getting my confusion here about what we do? What do we do with this, and I would ask all three of you, who are all obviously very learned in this area, if you could just give us a little insight and your thoughts about that?

Ms. ZIMMERMAN. Well, you have laid out the challenges very well, and I think it is a big problem. It is part of the strategic weaknesses that I referenced that al-Qaeda is exploiting where U.S. personnel have withdrawn from areas that are insecure and

they are made insecure partially by the presence of these groups, or the departure of American personnel enables the arrival of these groups into the space.

I think that we do need to add some robust support to the State Department for its efforts. I think that we also need to pressure the State Department to start accepting more risk for its personnel.

We are in an era today where our diplomats are only active inside of an embassy behind a wall. It means that they are not talking to the power brokers that are involved in the conflict.

They don't understand what is going on on the ground. Our embassy for Yemen is, I have heard, fewer than 20 people. That means that we don't have enough people to talk to the Yemenis who are looking for a resolution to the civil war.

Everyone knows the conflict in Yemen doesn't have a military resolution to it. Everyone knows that the Yemenis are looking for that political solution and that meanwhile al-Qaeda is growing inside of Yemen. Yet we are not actively shaping the space for that dialog to happen.

In terms of addressing the places where al-Qaeda is delivering services, I think that I just want to reframe it from governmental institutions, which is obviously how our government works, state-to-state to government institutions and look at it from governance where a lot of these local communities have systems to mediate conflict, have systems to ensure that the population doesn't starve.

So the robustness and resilience within the community itself is reliant upon governance and not the government institution inside.

It needs to be a dual track where we both strengthen the governmental institutions because that is how we are able to transfer capabilities and fundamentally resourcing. One of the reasons Yemen didn't make it through the Arab Spring was because its own institutions were so weak it could only absorb so much aid.

The challenges that it had helped catapult it back into civil war, but also the governance at the bottom level where, you know, particularly in Yemen we saw local populations asking for support against al-Qaeda.

Because they were not the state there was no actor that stepped in besides al-Qaeda to support them. That is the place that we really need to find how to operate in that gray space.

Ms. CAFARELLA. I would add just briefly that it matters not just if we have, you know, a State Department effort, but also what we do with it. So I am going to give you one positive and one very negative impact that the United States has had inside of Syria through that effort.

The positive one is that we have been doing a lot of programming, actually, in rebel-held Syria to support civil society and local NGO's, you know, and political groups that are connected to the moderate opposition.

That investment is very important because it did slow al-Qaeda down. It was not enough to defeat al-Qaeda, but it was very important in keeping alive that thread within the opposition that al-Qaeda and Assad and the Russians and the Iranians have all been trying desperately to destroy. So that is a positive.

The negative thing is that the United States had been backing the Geneva process for a negotiated settlement of the war long

after it became clear that the Geneva process would never actually result in a negotiated settlement to the war because Assad has never had any intent to negotiate.

The longer he has held on, the more the terrorist threat has been real and the less power those opposition figures willing to come to the table have had.

Actually investing in the Geneva process as long as we did actually made true the al-Qaeda narrative that Syrians should never expect the West to be helpful even in negotiations, that Syrians can only expect to experience war. So I would highlight that actually as a damaging use of State Department resources.

Mr. JONES. Just briefly, I think State and USAID have made vital contributions. I have worked in past government lives with organizations like OTI and USAID that I think are very effective at local levels. I would add to several of the comments already being made that a range of the locations we are talking about right now, where we have al-Qaeda concerns, take Somalia, we don't even have an embassy.

Miss RICE. Right.

Mr. JONES. Our embassy is based out of Nairobi, Kenya, nearby. So this is risk aversion that if we are to get serious about this we need people on the ground in the range of these areas that aren't just military people.

My last comment is, again, I would also say that this does not always have to be us. I find it somewhat disturbing, for example, in Libya that our European allies have not stepped up as much as I think they can, particularly after connections between the Manchester attacks and Libya itself.

We have got the Italians, French, British equities at stake in Libya. So in some cases I think these are allies who should also, including their development agencies, that should be stepping up.

Miss RICE. Well, but I totally agree with you there, but this, what looks to be an American recession from Europe and NATO and engagement at all feeds right into what you are talking about. If we are not there, why should they be, you know—oy.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. KING. Mr. Perry.

Mr. PERRY. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. So, you know, I have to apologize up-front, but I have got to go into a little editorial before I ask you a couple of questions. I am thinking about, you know, the context of the conversation is al-Qaeda and ostensibly the Department of Homeland Security exists because of the actions of al-Qaeda.

Dr. Jones, you talked about we won't know the effects of the travel ban for some time, but there is this contention, so to speak, that the travel ban leads to recruiting.

I have got a news flash for everybody, but I don't really think it is a news flash for you folks. Everything we do, the fact that we are is a recruiting tool. So you can ascribe or assign any portion of anything we do as Americans to recruiting.

You know, I read a book called "America Alone" about 10 years ago about the demographics of Europe, right, and how it was already lost 10 years ago. Now we are seeing the fruits of the labor of their policies and their actions.

I think the travel ban seeks to—a geographic travel ban seeks to provide some time and space to ensure that the vetting process is correct so that we don't wholesale as Europe has done, import the essential elements, right?

You said that the attacks on America haven't come from the refugees or the people that have come directly. Well, in Europe, at some point they could say the same thing, but years on, years on, with Sharia courts, with no-go zones, this is what they have fostered. This is what they have sown, right?

So what America is saying and what the travel ban is saying, we want to take a breath, make sure we are doing the right things so we don't sow those seeds, right? That is to me what that is about.

Ms. Zimmerman, I couldn't agree with you more that America shouldn't be the one that provides the counter to *Dabiq* and *Inspire,* but your contention that the Muslim world is opposed to this and that they have been vocal in that, maybe they have been to some extent, but in my opinion it hasn't been successful or we wouldn't be here, right?

When I think about Saudi Arabia, Wahhabism, Salafism, and the wholesale exportation and funding of that, and let us not just pick on the Sunnis.

You know, the Shia and the Knife Intifada and the publications and so on and so forth, somebody has got to lead. Apparently these folks aren't, or if they are they are doing a poor job at it. We are suffering the consequences.

That is my point. But I get some of your points. I just wanted to give the counter to that.

Moving on to a couple questions here. Al-Qaeda in Iraq once there is a vacuum, once ISIS is fully defeated or generally defeated in Iraq and Iran's Shia component seeks to re-establish its network for guns and for ammunition and supplies through Syria and so on and so forth.

Is al-Qaeda going to play in that space? Did they care? Are they going to try and reserve some of that? Or are they just going to allow Iran to have that wholesale, just as a curiosity? What can we expect? Do you know?

Ms. CAFARELLA. I do expect al-Qaeda will attempt to exploit that because, look, we have defeated ISIS in Mosul. There remains a lot to go actually to defeat ISIS. It still holds cities.

But we haven't actually addressed the core grievances, again, that originally gave rise to ISIS. So it is unclear to me whether Muslawi Sunni civilians are going to trust the government in Baghdad now. That still remains to be seen.

That is still a vacuum, and al-Qaeda will attempt to exploit it. So you have al-Qaeda clerics, for example, in Syria already discussing the Iraqi government among the list of the enemies of the Sunni people. So I think that is a given. Where, how and when they are able to activate that capability I think remains to be seen.

Mr. PERRY. Fair enough. In the context of the whole hearing generally, we have the perception—I do at least, and I just want you to verify it if you can, because I have heard from other people in your community. Al-Qaeda is at least as strong if not stronger from an operation—maybe not operationally, but organizationally their

affiliates around the globe, et cetera, as it was on September 11, 2001. Is that true or not true?

Ms. CAFARELLA. I would say it is true and even worse because, again, at least in Syria they are perceived increasingly as having the moral high ground. That is a capability that they didn't have at the same scale.

Mr. PERRY. OK. Finally, al-Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood, does anybody want to make the connection? I put this in the context of the Holy Land Foundation investigation and trial, the unindicted co-conspirators and the fact that those folks were let go and in many respects, at least in many opinions, they have reconstituted themselves doing the same things under different names in Illinois.

So I just want to see if there is a context that you want to inform the audience about regarding al-Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood?

Mr. JONES. Yes, just briefly, two comments. One is most of the areas where I see al-Qaeda or its affiliates operate I don't see a major coordinated relationship, particularly between senior members of the organization and the brotherhood.

I have seen al-Qaeda operate with other groups, including Salafi-jihadist groups. But when I look around Iraq and Afghanistan and Syria and Libya, I don't see a notable, what I call, partnership.

But let me just say that there is, and I think all of us have said this here, a lot of fluidity among extremist groups across Africa, north, east, West Africa, the Middle East and into South Asia. So we do see partnerships among extremist groups, whether it is al-Qaeda, ISIS, the brotherhood and others.

Mr. PERRY. Like, just so in that context, even though it might not be the strongest of bonds and maybe it is fluid and maybe it is a little here and a little there, there is a stark difference.

There is a great contrast between people, whether they are in the Muslim Brotherhood who collaborate even loosely with terrorists and terrorist organizations and nations, nation-states, individuals, organizations, who eschew that, who don't get involved at all.

So my point would be even a loose connection is problematic because the Muslim Brotherhood, you know, we can't get a declaration that they are a problem here in Congress because, oh, I don't know. Not a big fan of the king of Jordan, but he has got to work with those people, like, you know, because they are in his, you know, in his government.

That is his problem. I think the United States ought to take a stand. They are wandering around our country and they have this loose affiliation. How long do we wait until there is a strong affiliation? Do we wait? How is that in our best interest?

That is my position, but if you have got something to countervail that, I would certainly like to hear that because I don't want to be wrong, but I think I am right. Do you have anything to offer?

Ms. ZIMMERMAN. I think that not directly on that point, I think the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaeda and ISIS disagree primarily on the means to achieve their end-state. So the advantage is that the Muslim Brotherhood seeks to use only political means.

When you look at the Salafi ideology that both groups are part of, that is a high minority within the Muslim world. There are very

few Salafis percentage-wise. The Muslim Brotherhood has not been able to gain additional support.

The risk that I see in isolating the Muslim Brotherhood, in removing the political track for resistance, is that you then give those who believe that this is what they should be doing the only option of violence. That actually drives support to the other end of the spectrum.

I think that we can look at the events in Egypt and the discussions that we are seeing, not at the old guard within the Muslim Brotherhood remain anti-, against the use of violence, but the younger generations that didn't see the failures that violence brings are starting to talk about it a little bit more.

Mr. PERRY. So I don't want to be difficult for the sake of being difficult——

Mr. KING. The time of the gentleman has expired, so if you could wrap it up, OK?

Mr. PERRY. Yes, sir, Mr. Chairman.

It seems to me that the critical and pivotal component was is that they all seek the same ends, but different means. I don't want to get to the end for any of them for Western civilization and for the United States and saying that if we isolate them it will push them toward violence.

I am not necessarily wishing to isolate them. I am wishing to identify them for what they are and what their means are.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield.

Mr. KING. OK. First I want to thank the witnesses for their testimony. This was one of the most interesting, and I think we will agree, hearings we have had. Just like you said that al-Awlaki in some ways is ruling from the grave and I think many people thought that al-Qaeda was in the grave. Actually they are alive and unfortunately well.

So I want to thank you for your testimony. Expect to be called back again in the future if you don't mind. We would love to have you back. Anyway, Members of the subcommittee may submit additional questions to witnesses, and I would ask you to respond to those in writing. Pursuant to committee rule VII(D), the hearing record will be held open for 10 days.

Without objection, the subcommittee stands adjourned. Thank you very much.

[Whereupon, at 11:41 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Question 1. Ms. Zimmerman, in your opening remarks you stated that al-Qaeda "has acted deliberately below the thresholds that would set off alarms in Washington." Doesn't the very nature of this threat mean that Washington needs to rethink what those thresholds are when it comes to the activities of transnational terrorist organizations?

Answer. Yes, the thresholds policy makers set to trigger an American response to transnational threat groups are insufficient. Smart adversaries such as al-Qaeda and even Russia understand and operate below the threshold, all the while strengthening and pursuing their own objectives. Al-Qaeda and others have learned to mask their threat to the United States by engaging in low-level activities that do not seem to affect American interests directly. However, the sum of these activities places these transnational groups directly in opposition to American interests.

The United States must both retain the thresholds that when met trigger an immediate and decisive response and lower its threshold against groups that are shaping an environment counter to American interests. Specifically, the United States should clearly identify and define as enemy all groups and individuals that subscribe to the Salafi-jihadi ideology and act to eliminate the threat they pose to the United States and the West as well as to limit their influence. The United States should work to prevent Salafi-jihadi groups from shaping the local environments to their benefit.

These actions must be part of a comprehensive strategy against the Salafi-jihadi base and are not necessarily defined as focused on the enemy or requiring the use of force. In fact, it is possible to weaken al-Qaeda, ISIS, and other like-minded transnational organizations by breaking their ties to local communities, which requires focusing on the people and not the enemy.

Question 2. While ISIS seeks to recruit followers of all stripes, al-Qaeda is known for having a stricter standard for recruiting members. How, if at all, has AQ changed its recruitment strategy in recent years? Do any of you believe AQ will need to change its recruiting to compete for influence with ISIS fighters in failed states like Libya and Yemen?

Answer. Al-Qaeda's strict standards for recruits remain, though al-Qaeda has adopted a battlefield posture that enables it to attract fighters who operate in its interest, but who do not become full-blown members. It fields insurgent force commanders who lead militias comprised of local fighters who do not necessarily subscribe to al-Qaeda's global vision, or in certain cases, its ideology. Ansar al-Sharia in Yemen is an example of one such insurgent force that included non-al-Qaeda fighters. The integration of al-Qaeda elsewhere into the local insurgency, such as Syria and Mali, creates a network of al-Qaeda operatives across multiple groups. These individuals help shape the group's actions to be in the interest of al-Qaeda, but group membership does not require the same sort of vetting that membership of al-Qaeda requires.

Al-Qaeda will increase its efforts to capture the foreign fighter flows to direct them to key battlefields—Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Libya—as ISIS weakens in Iraq and Syria. The influx of foreign fighters will strengthen al-Qaeda further and expand its capacity to conduct attacks in the West.

Al-Qaeda's recruitment in failed states like Libya and Yemen will increasingly target non-violent Islamists and Salafis in order to capture a broader segment of the population. The loss of political space coupled with targeted campaigns against political Islamists and Salafis threatens the prospect of these groups in any future state. They are threatened, and al-Qaeda will exploit their fears to recruit individuals into the Salafi-jihadi camp, where the slogan is "bullets, not ballots" for Islam.

Question 3. Does ISIS have the resources or willingness to challenge al-Qaeda in Yemen given the on-going exodus of ISIS fighters from Iraq and Syria?

Answer. ISIS does not have the resources to challenge al-Qaeda in Yemen. It is unlikely to be able to do so even should ISIS leadership prioritize the Yemeni theater. Skilled ISIS fighters from Iraq and Syria could surge ISIS' capabilities and resources in Yemen should they enter the Yemeni battlefield. These fighters would restore ISIS to at least the strength at which it was operating in 2015–2016, enabling ISIS to resume mass-casualty attacks, especially in southern Yemen. But ISIS did not pose a serious threat to al-Qaeda's position in Yemen even at its height.

Al-Qaeda's source of strength in Yemen is its relationship with local communities, which al-Qaeda has cultivated for over two decades. Al-Qaeda's composition as a Yemeni organization willing to defend and protect local communities makes the population more willing to tolerate al-Qaeda's presence, even while rejecting its ideology. ISIS is unlikely to generate popular support because it operates outside of customary law ('urf) and because it targets groups that the local communities do not necessarily see as legitimate targets, such as unarmed police recruits.

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