DOES AL-QAEDA MATTER FOR AFRICA?
HOW AFFILIATION WITH AL-QAEDA INFLUENCES THE BEHAVIOR OF
AFRICAN SUNNI EXTREMIST GROUPS

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to investigate the frequently alleged trend that al-Qaeda is growing and becoming more dangerous in Africa. The study uses data from 2004 to 2009 provided by the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) on attacks and targeting by African jihadist groups to compare the behavioral trends of those that have joined al-Qaeda and those that have not. The data are interpreted to assess to what extent joining al-Qaeda seems to bring about behavioral changes in African Sunni terrorist organizations. The study finds that membership in the al-Qaeda organization correlates to drastic increases in activity levels and harm caused to victims in Africa. It also finds that groups that join al-Qaeda tend to increase their targeting of Western symbols and assets, although only moderately. From the insights gained through this analysis, the paper offers policy recommendations for the U.S. government.

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1. Introduction, Background, and Literature

1.1 The Hype about al-Qaeda in Africa

Despite the well-documented fact that al-Qaeda has been operating in Africa for decades, its seemingly growing presence there has generated a great deal of anxious dialogue in recent years. Indeed, the United States government, other governments around the globe, elite academic institutions, and news media venues have all addressed both al-Qaeda's observed expansion on the African continent since 9/11 and its enormous potential for future growth in the region. Many prominent scholars and officials have claimed that Africa's al-Qaeda problem is worsening. For instance, in testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee in March 2009, General William E. Ward, Commander of United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), told lawmakers:

> "Al-Qaeda increased its influence dramatically across north and east Africa over the past three years with the growth of East Africa Al-Qaeda, al Shabaab, and Al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)."[1]

This sentiment is not uncommon. Military and intelligence leaders frequently express a fear that Africa's vast, weakly-governed spaces and underemployed young male Muslim populations could make much of the continent highly vulnerable to the influence of al-Qaeda. Some analysts believe that the geographic and governance attributes of the region have made it both attractive to jihadists and difficult for African and Western

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[1] William E. Ward. *Statement Before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, March 17, 2009. Available at http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2009/March/Ward%2003-17-09.pdf (Accessed February 22, 2010).

governments to monitor and address.[2] For example, for the Sahel region south of the

Maghreb, scholars assess that it could fall prey to al-Qaeda because it is:

> "…home to some of the poorest people, institutions are brittle, and the United States has a low profile. The Sahara plays an overriding role, not least because of the southern drift of the Algerian radical Islamist movement and the growing interest of the Wahhabist al Qaeda Organization in the Land of the Berbers movement."[3]

Sparsely populated and lawless regions of Africa, while lacking in the kind of basic

infrastructure a modern terrorist organization would want to exploit for high-yield

operations, could offer jihadist militants safe haven. Since 9/11, scholars have repeatedly

asserted that the Horn of Africa, the Sahel, the Maghreb, and other portions of the

continent could provide for terrorists and criminals alike many "convenient bases from

where to regroup."[4] Terrorism expert Bruce Reidel sees North and Central Africa as a

sort of "lawless bazaar" where the local governments' "lack of sovereign control and

general debility" has allowed al-Qaeda to thrive, although he also argues that so far, the

group has "used the region less to foment terrorism than to protect and expand its

finances."[5] Whether exploited for operational or financial ends, the region could pose a

serious threat to both local and Western governments.

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[2] Some argue that "the weakness of Sahelian states and the ineffective control of their territory have played a major role in the development of the current situation" regarding al-Qaeda activities in the region. See: Dario Cristiani and Riccardo Fabiani. "AQIM Funds Terrorist Operations with Thriving Sahel-Based Kidnapping Industry." Terrorism Monitor Volume: 8 Issue: 4, January 28, 2010. Available at http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35963&tx_ttnews[backPid]=13&cHash=7bda57e997 (Accessed March 13, 2010).
[3] Patrick M. Cronin, Ed., *Global Strategic Assessment 2009: America's Security Role in a Changing World.* Washington, DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University Press, 2009, p. 307. Available at http://www.ndu.edu/inss/docUploaded/19-GSA2009_Chpt%2014.pdf (Accessed February 24, 2010)
[4] Rita Abrahamsen. "A Breeding Ground for Terrorists? Africa & Britain's 'War on Terrorism'." *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 31, No. 102, Agendas, Past & Future (December 2004), pp. 677-684
[5] Bruce Reidel. "Al Qaeda Strikes Back." *Foreign Affairs*. New York: May/June 2007, Vol.86, Iss.3, p.24.

To a large degree, on-the-ground developments have substantiated the widespread fears about al-Qaeda's growth potential in Africa: the Algerian Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC) embraced al-Qaeda and morphed into a retooled entity known as al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in 2007, and Somalia's notorious al-Shabaab merged officially with al-Qaeda in early February 2010 after several years of enjoying a quasi-formal allegiance.[6] Although these groups were already known to be ideologically in line with al-Qaeda and linked through personal relationships, their formal absorption into the organization's ranks seems to signal that things are generally getting worse, not better, at least from a big-picture perspective.

As he announced formal acceptance of the GSPC, Ayman al-Zawahiri, widely seen as al-Qaeda's second in command after Osama bin Laden, said he hoped such new al-Qaeda offshoot groups would be able to become a "bone in the throat of the American and French crusaders."[7] Formal alliance was, in his view, the first step toward forming that "bone." Like other al-Qaeda affiliates, these groups conform neatly to a demonstrable "pattern of al Qaeda central and its affiliated groups operating synergistically with a nucleus providing ideological inspiration and constituent parts

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[6] News of al-Shabaab's formal declaration of joining was widespread in mainstream news sources on February 1-2, 2010. For a succinct overview of their al-Qaeda collusion prior to this, see an excellent STRATFOR report at http://www.stratfor.com/memberships/115985/analysis/somalia_al_shababs_leadership_links_al_qaeda?ip_auth_redirect=1 (Accessed February 23, 2010).
[7] Bruce Riedel. "Al Qaeda Targets France." Los Angeles Times, June 14, 2007. Available at http://articles.latimes.com/2007/jun/14/opinion/oe-riedel14 (Accessed February 23, 2010).

impelled to action."[8] By joining forces, these terrorists hope to increase the capacity and

prestige of both the affiliate group and the core al-Qaeda organization.

In addition to the now-formally recognized al-Qaeda affiliate groups based in

Algeria and Somalia, al-Qaeda in the Sahel region (literally meaning "the shore" to

describe its position on the inland side of the Sahara Desert) continues to gain

momentum. As Elizabeth Dickenson, an Africa expert, noted in 2009:

> "Countries in the Sahel region have long worried analysts as possible
> breeding grounds for terrorism or extremist organizations, because of their
> majority Muslim populations, prevalent poverty, and expanses of largely
> ungoverned geographical regions."[9]

Dickinson also quotes a spokesman for AFRICOM who succinctly described to her the

threat of the region; he observed:

> "Support for violent extremism and actual violent extremist activities are
> rising at an alarming pace throughout the Sahel. This region has been
> specifically targeted by the Al Qaeda network for 'liberation'. Recently
> we've seen unprecedented violent extremist organization activities in Mali
> and Mauritania. Violent extremist organizations continue activities in
> Algeria. We saw an alarming percentage of foreign fighters in Iraq
> originate from the Maghreb. The ideology that spawned those foreign
> fighters continues nearly unabated."[10]

Indeed, in early January 2010, the Al Jazeera news network reported that a new offshoot

of al-Qaeda closely linked to AQIM had announced its entry onto the global stage under

the name, "Al Qaeda in the Sahara Emirate." The group's area of operation, it claimed in

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[8] Anthony N. Celso. "Al Qaeda in the Maghreb: The "Newest" Front in the War on Terror." *Mediterranean Quarterly* 19:1, 2008, p.95.
[9] Elizabeth Dickinson. "Foreign Policy: Fighting Terrorism Out Of Africa." *National Public Radio*, September 2, 2009. Available at http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=112463825 (Accessed February 23, 2010).
[10] Ibid.

its communiqué, lies in "the border region of Algeria, Mauritania, Mali and Morocco."[11]

While the group appears to be, at the present time, little more than a roving band of

armed thugs, its emergence seems to corroborate recent reports of increasing al-Qaeda

operations on those lands and fits into a troubling trend of relatively rapid growth in

Africa's Muslim-majority areas.

Reflecting recent developments, today much of Africa is officially considered part

of al-Qaeda's main area of operation by intelligence services, as reflected in this NCTC

map from 2010:

Figure 1. Map: Al-Qaeda's Key Areas of Operation[12] in 2010 span across North Africa, the Sahel region, and much of coastal eastern Africa. Source: National Counterterrorism Center.

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[11] Mohammad Vall. "Al-Qaeda in 'Sahara Emirate'." Al Jazeera English, January 4, 2010. Available at http://english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2010/01/20101416350262841.html (Accessed January 6, 2010).
[12] Bin Ladin's "Pan-Islamic Caliphate" Source: National Counterterrorism Center, Calendar 2010, Group Profile. Available at http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/al_qaida.html (Accessed February 24, 2010).

While the ongoing geographic broadening of the al-Qaeda organization over the past decade seems to be a real and empirically verifiable phenomenon, there has been relatively little scholarship on the question of how this growth has changed actual experiences of terrorist violence in Africa. Terrorism matters only to the extent that it kills and injures people, destroys property, and garners public and government attention by causing disruptive and traumatic terror in people's minds. It is demonstrably accurate to say that al-Qaeda is expanding in Africa, both formally and informally - but does it *matter* in real terms? Is this growth truly resulting in greater lethality and destruction, or has it impacted headlines more than headcounts?

To address the deficiencies of existing anecdotal accounts of al-Qaeda's growth in Africa and complement the existing body of literature on this subject, this paper will present a systematic study that analyzes attacks in Africa by Sunni extremist organizations between 2004 and 2009, encompassing both groups that have joined al-Qaeda and those that have not. Consistent with the hype and conventional wisdom, this analysis finds that for African Sunni terrorist groups, joining al-Qaeda seems to correspond to a significant increase in both the number of attacks they perpetrate and the number of victims they harm. It also finds that Western persons and symbols appear to be increasingly targeted when a group joins al-Qaeda, but that in the vast majority of cases, non-Western victims remain the primary targets.

1.2 Historical Background: How al-Qaeda Evolved in Africa

Africa is not the region of the world most commonly associated with al-Qaeda, but the group has long seen Africa as one of its key areas of support and operation. Indeed, in the estimation of well-connected British journalist Abel Bari Atwan, editor of Arabic-language British newspaper *al-Quds al-Arabi*:

> "Al Qaeda's connections with the African continent are long-standing and deep-rooted. Many leading al-Qaeda figures, including Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, come from Egypt. Osama bin Laden himself lived in Sudan from December 1991 until May 1996, and many of the organization's fighters have roots in the Maghreb. From his base in Sudan, Osama bin Laden set about forging links with African-based Islamist groups and it was not long before he made his presence felt. […] In West Africa, Mauritania, Mali, Chad, and Nigeria all have active guerilla groups affiliated with al Qaeda."[13]

As Atwan highlights, bin Laden himself has called Africa home. After he moved his large family to a compound in Khartoum nearly two decades ago, he remained actively engaged with his terrorist allies in the Middle East and South Asia.[14] He used this time to "expand the al Qaeda organization and promote closer ties between it and like-minded Islamist groups," including some as far south and inland as Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda.[15] He also remained in close contact with his associates in the Middle East, the Gulf, and South Asia, for both business purposes and furthering jihadist goals, which were inextricably intertwined for bin Laden.

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[13] Abdel Bari Atwan. *The Secret History of al Qaeda.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

[14] This is according to both academic sources and his own family's account of their time in Khartoum. For fascinating details, see Jean Sasson, Omar bin Laden, and Najwa bin Laden. *Growing Up bin Laden.* NY, St. Martin's Press, 2009.

[15] Michael Scheuer. *Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America.* Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2006, pp.137.

Such interpersonal ties have had a considerable impact on advancing jihadist

organizations in Africa and keeping them in cahoots with bin Laden and his inner

circle.[16] Indeed, the pattern of spreading al-Qaeda's influence and uniting with exisiting

local Sunni extremist groups through veteran mujahedeen of the anti-Soviet conflict in

Afghanistan has been extremely prevalent throughout al-Qaeda's organizational

evolution, and the trend continues today. Many speculate that North Africans who return

home from the jihad in Iraq will serve a similar role in the near future.[17]

Certainly, Arab mujahedeen from the Soviet-Afghan war have been instrumental

in uniting al-Qaeda with the two prominent al-Qaeda offshoots that have emerged on the

African continent. In Somalia, bin Laden's closest comrades were present as early as

1992 and a wealth of evidence links bin Laden's close colleagues directly to the Islamist

violence that transpired soon thereafter, including the infamous "Black Hawk Down"

incident in Mogadishu in 1993.[18] In Algeria, evidence suggests that al-Qaeda was

indirectly involved in the Armed Islamic Group's militant activities as far back as 1991.[19]

They were also in close contact with the GSPC as it emerged in 2001, becoming more

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[16] For example, in the case of the now-defunct Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM for its French-language acronym): "Ties between the GICM and SJ and al-Qaeda, as in the case of many other North African terrorist groups, appear to have originated primarily through personal contacts that senior group leaders established during the anti-Soviet Afghan jihad in the 1980s ." See Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, Sara A. Daly, Heather S. Gregg, Theodore W. Karasik, Kevin A.O'Brien, Angel Rabasa, and William Rosenau. *Beyond al-Qaeda: The Global Jihadist Movement*. Washington, DC: RAND Corporation, 2006, p.121. Available at http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG429.pdf (Accessed February 23, 2010).

[17] Safa Salah Eddine. "Al-Qaeda Recruits Iraq War Veterans in Algeria." *Magharebia in Algiers* (sponsored by U.S. AFRICOM), November 11, 2009. Available at http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2009/11/20/feature-01 (Accessed March 23, 2010).

[18] Peter Bergen. *The Osama bin Laden I Know.* New York: Free Press, 2006, p.142.

[19] Craig Whitlock. "Al-Qaeda's Far-Reaching New Partner: Salafist Group Finds Limited Appeal in Its Native Algeria." *Washington Post*, October 5, 2006. Available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/04/AR2006100402006.html (Accessed March 28, 2010).

heavily involved when the group's current *emir* took the reins in 2004.[20] In both of these cases, frequent and ongoing contact with and support by members of the core al-Qaeda organization seemed to lead gradually and naturally to a culmination of formal allegiance.

Even in Kenya and Tanzania, which are not Muslim-majority states and do not have a formal al-Qaeda affiliate based in their territory, are known to host at least relatively small networks of operatives. As Princeton Lyman and Stephen Morrison noted in a 2004 article on African terrorism:

> "Al-Qaeda has a long-standing, indigenous infrastructure in coastal Kenya and the environs of Nairobi and the proven ability to transit in and out of Kenya via Somalia. It is suspected of having similar ease of access to Zanzibar, coastal Tanzania, and the Comoros Islands."[21]

Thus, absent population majorities of similar religious faith or Arab background, al-Qaeda has still been able to flourish in the chaos of under-developed African states. It is notable, however, that al-Qaeda has not yet spread significantly in some parts of Africa that one might deem easy targets due to sizable Sunni minorities and strong ties to other states where al-Qaeda has taken root. That al-Qaeda has not yet successfully asserted itself in those areas is heartening, but those territories could serve as potential refuges in the future should current al-Qaeda linked areas come under heavier counterterrorism pressure.

While full-blown al-Qaeda members and their colleagues have been known to operate throughout North and Central Africa, there have only been three high-profile

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[20] Abdel Bari Atwan, 2006, pp.232-233.
[21] *Lyman*, Princeton N., and J. Stephen Morrison. 2004. "The Terrorist Threat in Africa." *Foreign Affairs* *83*(1):75–86.

cases of terrorist organizations in the region that officially unified with al-Qaeda:[22] AQIM (formerly the GSPC), Al-Shabaab (which grew out of the Islamic Courts Union), and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG, which began in the mid-1990s as an anti-Kaddafi movement and aligned with al-Qaeda in 2007, only to publicly renounce it two years later.[23]) Because the LIFG has operated mainly outside the African continent and did not carry out any attacks in Africa during the 2004-2009 timeframe analyzed in this study, it will not be captured by the NCTC dataset used here and will therefore not be examined closely in this analysis. The other two groups, however, will serve as our two cases for comparison.

The Algerian GSPC entered into what al-Zawahiri dubbed a "blessed union" with al-Qaeda in September 2006, formally taking on the title of AQIM in January 2007.[24] Prior to its al-Qaeda activities, the GSPC focused primarily on ousting the "apostate regime" in power in Algeria, working to achieve mostly local and national objectives.[25] While it is not clear exactly what factors led the GSPC to join al-Qaeda when it did, many experts point to the group's leadership. Some say that "Abdelmalek Droukdel (a.k.a. Abu Musab al-Wadoud), the current amir of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), should be considered the real power behind the shift in focus of the Algerian

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[22] While other very small groups have at times claimed al-Qaeda ties or been known to have them, these are the only three widely-acknowledged cases, except for Egyptian groups. Since Egypt is generally considered part of the Middle East – as it is by NCTC, the source of this study's data – the cases of Egyptian groups joining al-Qaeda will not be discussed here.

[23] David Blair. "Extremist group announces split from al-Qaeda. Telegraph, July 9, 2009. Available at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/5788302/Extremist-group-announces-split-from-al-Qaeda.html (Accessed March 25, 2010).

[24] Anti-Defamation League. "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)," 2010. Available at http://www.adl.org/terrorism/symbols/al_qaeda_maghreb.asp (Accessed March 25, 2010).

[25] While the GSPC has long been in contact with al-Qaeda members, it should be considered as mostly distinct from al-Qaeda's "global jihad" prior to 2006.

jihad."[26] Today, the GSPC's newest incarnation, AQIM, is focused on expanding and has global aspirations, whereas previously the group's goals were mostly related to the governance of its home base state, Algeria. In this manner, jihad in the Maghreb has changed course with the formal arrival of al-Qaeda.

Several years after the founding of AQIM, a similar scenario unfolded in war-ravaged Somalia. Al-Shabaab, a well-established, highly active Sunni militant group, announced its formal merger with al-Qaeda in early February 2010, saying the move would "connect the horn of Africa jihad to the one led by al Qaeda and its leader Sheikh Osama Bin Laden."[27] The statement confirmed what government officials in the U.S. and Somalia have long known: "Militants in one of Africa's least stable places are sharing resources and merging agendas."[28]

Al-Shabaab grew initially as the youth wing of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), an extremist Sunni group that had been vying for power in southern and central Somalia since the early 1990s. The leaders of the Islamic Courts once denied that they had any connection to al-Qaeda and dared the world to prove otherwise.[29] Most savvy analysts knew better, however, insisting that the group had strong ties to al-Qaeda affiliated

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[26] Camille Tawil. "A Jihadist in the Sand: The Rise of Abdelmalek Droukdel, al-Qaeda's Amir in Algeria." *Jamestown Foundation Militant Leadership Monitor*, Volume: 1 Issue: 2, March 1, 2010. Available at http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=36094&tx_ttnews[backPid]=13&cHash=8069869f52 (Accessed March 25, 2010).
[27] Huma Yusuf. "Somali militant group Al Shabab aligns with Al Qaeda." Christian Science Monitor, February 2, 2010. Available at http://www.csmonitor.com/World/terrorism-security/2010/0202/Somali-militant-group-Al-Shabab-aligns-with-Al-Qaeda (Accessed March 17, 2010).
[28] Sarah Childress. "Somalia's Al Shabaab to Ally with Al Qaeda." *The Wall Street Journal*, February 2, 2010. Available at http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704107204575038674123215854.html (Accessed March 17, 2010).
[29] PBS Online NewsHour. "Islamist Control of Mogadishu Raises Concern of Extremist Future for Somalia." June 8, 2006. Available at http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/africa/jan-june06/somalia_06-08.html (Accessed March 8, 2010).

individuals dating back much earlier. Realistically, we can consider that al-Shabaab

began truly aligning itself with al-Qaeda in 2008, when al-Shabaab "spokesman"

Mukhtar Robow appeared with Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan (aka Abu Yusuf), a wanted al-

Qaeda member, in a widely-circulated video wherein they affirm a plan for their

respective organizations to work closely together.[30] Today, Al-Shabaab comprises an

extremely powerful group of well-armed militants that exert more control in most parts of

Somalia than the recognized government, which is now itself led by a reformed ICU

militant.

AQIM and Al-Shabaab have broadened both their reach and their aims by uniting

with bin-Laden's al-Qaeda organization. This trend was observed at a recent conference

on North African militancy hosted by the Jamestown Foundation. The participants,

including many prominent counterterrorism professionals, found that:

> "The Islamist insurgency in North Africa has entered its second phase, one
> that follows the failure and collapse of the first wave of Islamist militancy
> that rolled through this vast region in the 1990s. Having suffered defeat in
> Algeria, Libya and Egypt, a second wave of Islamist militants is
> organizing in North Africa. […]The new holy warriors are less interested
> in nationalism than in the "global jihad" espoused by al-Qaeda, an
> organization with which many of these fighters continue to maintain close
> ties."[31]

It is the behavior of this "second wave of Islamist militants" engaging in a globalized

jihad that this study will attempt to shed light upon.

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[30] Nick Grace. "Shabaab reaches out to al Qaeda senior leaders, announces death al Sudani." *Long War Journal*, September 2, 2008. Available at
http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/09/shabab_reaches_out_t.php (Accessed April 2, 2010).
[31] Jamestown Foundation. "The Changing Face of Islamist Militancy in North Africa." Executive Summary, March 17, 2009. Available at
http://www.jamestown.org/programs/recentreports/single/?tx_ttnews[swords]=8fd5893941d69d0be3f3785 76261ae3e&tx_ttnews[any_of_the_words]=schneller&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=34717&tx_ttnews[backPid]=7& cHash=3b080607f4 (Accessed February 28, 2010).

As we have seen, al-Qaeda's history in Africa is a long one, stretching back to its formative days in the late 1980s and continuing through a small but dedicated cadre of militants with direct ties to bin Laden, al-Zawahiri, and other al-Qaeda top brass. While the picture often painted in the media of al-Qaeda's march through Africa tends to be somewhat sensationalized, it is not entirely misleading; the group has gained ground in the region steadily and adeptly, overcoming a number of setbacks, such as the government of Sudan's sudden vacillations between supporting and rejecting al-Qaeda, and assassinations of key terrorist leaders.[32] In spite of such hardships, al-Qaeda has endured in Africa. It is unclear whether this trend signifies al-Qaeda's exponential potential to grow in the region, or whether the group's message has already exhausted most of the goodwill available to it on the continent. At any rate, looking at the past twenty-two years of al-Qaeda's history, it is reasonable to conclude that the group's presence in Africa has real staying power.

1.3 African al-Qaeda in the Context of the Global Jihad

To some extent, the increasing concern over Africa's susceptibility to the "global jihad" movement stems from a more general discussion of al-Qaeda's ability to franchise its brand and co-opt local Islamist causes in lands far removed from its core base located mostly in the mountainous Afghanistan-Pakistan border region. Analysts claim that the most feasible "explanation for al Qaeda's remarkable staying power is its willingness to

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[32] For example, the killing of GSPC leader Nabil Sahrawi (aka Mustapha Abu Ibrahim) in 2004 by Algerian security forces. See Julie R. Sirrs, Mahan Abedin, and Christopher Heffelfinger, Eds, *Unmasking Terror: A Global Review of Terrorist Activities, Vol. 4*. Washington, DC: Jamestown Foundation, 2004, p.60.

forge broad-- and sometimes unlikely – alliances."[33] Indeed, such offshoots as al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) have been quite active in recent years, often eclipsing al-Qaeda central in terms of media coverage garnered and victims harmed.

Some analysts argue that al-Qaeda's ability to diffuse its movement over the entire Muslim world (and beyond to regions with susceptible Muslim minorities) signifies its mounting threat to global security. For example, a RAND Corporation study from 2006, authored by a number of prominent thinkers on Islamic terrorism, argues that the U.S. and its allies must keep a close eye on:

> "…the extent and strength of the links between the global and local jihads. The clusters within the "al-Qaeda nebula" show the spread of the jihadist mindset throughout the Muslim world. The global jihadist movement gains strength to the extent that it can co-opt local struggles. If it cannot, the global movement loses coherence and focus."[34]

In this view of al-Qaeda's evolution, a networked expansion is crucial to success in achieving its globalized objectives. Similarly, New York Times terrorism correspondent Eric Schmitt argued recently that because of the increased activity of its network of "regional satellites," al-Qaeda's operations may be "taking a deadlier turn."[35] Schmitt cites statements by high-level politicians and intelligence officials who worry about al-Qaeda's trajectory in unifying and cooperating with new affiliate groups around the

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[33] Jessica Stern. "The Protean Enemy." *Foreign Affairs*. New York: Jul/Aug 2003.Vol.82, Iss. 4; pg. 27.
[34] Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, Sara A. Daly, Heather S. Gregg, Theodore W. Karasik, Kevin A.O'Brien, Angel Rabasa, and William Rosenau. *Beyond al-Qaeda: The Global Jihadist Movement*. Washington, DC: RAND Corporation, 2006, p.160. Available at http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG429.pdf (Accessed February 23, 2010).
[35] Eric Schmitt. "Jet Plot Shows Growing Ability of Qaeda Affiliates." *New York Times*, December 30, 2009. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/31/world/31offshoot.html?_r=1 (Accessed February 25, 2010).

world. They fear that a networked adversary may be more complicated to combat for relatively weak local governments and Western countries alike, a concern that reflects a sophisticated body of literature on network analysis.[36] Given the recent terror incidents linked to Yemen and AQAP, this viewpoint is especially resonant today.

On the contrary, some argue that al-Qaeda's increasingly decentralized and networked structure has weakened its capabilities and its relevance for the larger global jihad movement. In 2008, Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Calvert Jones addressed the issue of network structure and its specific implications for an evolving al-Qaeda organization. They cite some "serious organizational difficulties" commonly encountered by highly-networked illegal groups, including "problems of distance, coordination, and security."[37] They point out that "networks that group too large often find it difficult to sustain unity of purpose" and "their effectiveness declines as a result."[38] They conclude that "al-Qaida today operates less like a top-down structure and more like a loose umbrella group" to include African affiliates, making it more likely to fall prey to "the gamut of organizational dilemmas associated with a networked structure."[39] In other words, they argue that al-Qaeda's increasingly networked nature and reliance on affiliates

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[36] See, for example, Phil Williams' book chapter, "Transnational Criminal Networks" from *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*, John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt, Eds., Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001, pp.61-97. Williams contends that 'the advantages of criminal networks is that they are smart, future-oriented organizations locked in combat with governments that, by contrast, are often hobbled by a variety of constraints" – for instance, governments "still operate along hierarchical lines and are further hindered by bureaucratic rivalry and competition, interagency antipathies, and a reluctance to share information and coordinate operations." He argues that in response to the nature of its enemy, governments must "mimic network structures." (p.95) and become more agile and responsive to ever-changing circumstances.

[37] Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Calvert Jones. "Assessing the Dangers of Illicit Networks: Why al-Qaida May Be Less Threatening Than Many Think." *International Security*, Vol.33, No.2 (Fall 2008), p.9.

[38] Ibid, p.25.

[39] Ibid, pp. 35-36.

could do the group more harm than good. While neither side of the argument has definitively proven correct so far, the valid question of the ultimate impact of this transformation on al-Qaeda's capabilities is a matter of intense dispute amongst scholars.

The issue of what "joining al-Qaeda" means today has also been hotly debated by some of the most prominent scholars in the field of terrorism studies. The two primary partisans in this debate are terrorism gurus Bruce Hoffman and Marc Sageman, who have repeatedly sparred over the importance of top-down leadership in the al-Qaeda organization that re-emerged after the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Hoffman contends that al-Qaeda's core leaders are as important as ever, providing the networked organization its broad strategic direction and selling it to new allies – both groups and individuals.[40] Sageman, in contrast, argues that the real threat today stems from "bunches of guys" who, disgruntled and inspired by far-removed jihadists, independently take up arms against infidels and apostate governments.[41] To some extent, this study will speak to the question of core leadership's role in bringing about terrorism, specifically in Africa. Although this analysis is not predicated upon the assumption that formal membership is a necessary component to taking part in al-Qaeda's "global jihad," it will classify groups into two distinct categories ("joined" and "not joined") depending on the extent to which they are formally connected with the organization's leaders and their finite cabal of terrorists. The outcome of the study will not argue for or against either camp, but rather will seem to lend quantitative support to one perspective. In other

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[40] Bruce Hoffman. "The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism: Why Osama bin Laden Still Matters." *Foreign Affairs,* May/June 2008. Available at http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/63408/bruce-hoffman/the-myth-of-grass-roots-terrorism (Accessed February 27, 2009).
[41] Marc Sageman. *Leaderless Jihad.* Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.

words, if "joining" seems to impact behavior significantly, it may bolster arguments that the core leadership – and even indirect communication and collusion with it – is still the major driver of the movement.

Still others contend that regardless of leadership, al-Qaeda is becoming less and less relevant to the global jihad on the whole. Claiming al-Qaeda affiliation, they argue, has become almost meaningless, dragging academics into a debate that ultimately has little effect on terror outcomes. In February 2010, Lydia Khalil of the Council on Foreign Relations proposed that analysts sometimes fail to understand what al-Qaeda affiliation means and lack clear guidelines for categorizing how truly linked disparate groups are to al-Qaeda's core leaders. She argues:

> "Terrorism analysts have not been rigorous enough in their application of labels and definitions -- partly for good reason. In the past eight years, since bin Laden went into hiding, the jihadi landscape has become increasingly fractured. [...] As we struggle to understand the shifting political landscape of the jihadi movement, this intellectual framework may no longer help us explain the threats we face."[42]

Terrorism expert Paul Pillar agrees with the view that we may be placing too much importance on al-Qaeda membership and other "labels." In December 2009 he expressed the view that:

> "…terrorist threats, including ones that could involve significant harm inside the United States, are not primarily the work of any one group, be it al-Qaeda or any other. That reminder is contrary to much current discourse about terrorism, which posits al-Qaeda as *the* enemy. [...] The centrality of al-Qaeda in the common discourse has led to a division between

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[42] Lydia Khalil. "Al Qaeda's Six Degrees of Separation: When it comes to the world's most infamous terror organization, who decides who's in, and who's out?" *Foreign Policy*, February 10, 2010. Available at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/02/10/al_qaedas_six_degrees_of_separation?obref=obinsite (Accessed February 24, 2010).

terrorist plots and incidents we worry about and ones we don't, according to whether there are any "links" to al-Qaeda."[43]

While Pillar does not seek to downplay the danger of the al-Qaeda network, he proposes that by focusing so heavily on whether or not persons and groups are linked specifically to al-Qaeda, we may simply be asking the wrong questions. This author agrees that actual outcomes should be emphasized over formal terrorist affiliations or branding.

What does all this debate mean for Africa, and to what extent has the African experience informed this dialogue? Most scholars argue that the importance of Africa to al-Qaeda's expansion is significant, as is the case for other regions (e.g. Arabia, Iraq, and Southeast Asia) where jihadist activity has reached alarming levels. While "Africa may not rank with Iraq or Afghanistan"[44] in terms of the current threat to global security and Western interests, many see the future potential for growth as the most troubling aspect of al-Qaeda's presence on the African continent. Others argue that the parts of Africa most susceptible to al-Qaeda's expansionist agenda are those already firmly within its reach, while the rest of the continent is unlikely to welcome the organization's strict interpretation of Islam and its mores.[45] In order to understand what the future may hold, we must carefully examine and analyze its historical trajectory and understand what the impact of al-Qaeda in Africa has been thus far.

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[43] Paul Pillar. "The Al-Qaeda Fallacy." *The National Interest Online*, December 14, 2009. Available at http://www.nationalinterest.org/Article.aspx?id=22630 (Accessed February 25, 2010). (Accessed February 25, 2010).
[44] *Lyman*, Princeton N., and J. Stephen Morrison, 2004. "The Terrorist Threat in Africa." *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, Iss. 1, pp. 75–86.
[45] Abdelkérim Ousman. "The Potential of Islamist Terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 18, No. 1/2, Religion and Globalization, Fall/Winter, 2004, pp. 65-105.

1.4 Contribution to Existing Literature

A small number of analysts have attempted to address the question of what al-Qaeda's growth Africa means in terms of actual terrorism outcomes. For example, the topic was recently discussed by terrorism writer Nicolas Schmidle in the *New York Times*. Regarding Africa, he asserts that "terrorist attacks in the region increased in both number and lethality,"[46] and he posits that the region may increasingly be used as an anarchic sanctuary for al-Qaeda, much as Afghanistan has served them for decades.

In contrast, one rather contrarian account of the region's terrorist trends from 2006 claims that the threat of the GSPC and other al-Qaeda linked groups was mostly "fabricated" and at best, highly exaggerated.[47] These accounts epitomize the approach most writers have taken in addressing al-Qaeda's trajectory in Africa; many of their conclusions are based on unspecified data sources, expert speculation, and impressions about general trends. While certainly interesting, these data-deficient approaches are fundamentally incomplete.

At least one study has attempted to use attack data to examine the effects of al-Qaeda affiliated groups in Africa. A quantitative study of terrorism in Algeria was

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[46] Nicholas Schmidle. "The Sahara Conundrum." *New York Times*, February 13, 2009. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/15/magazine/15Africa-t.html?pagewanted=2 (Accessed February 24, 2010).
[47] Jeremy Keenan. "Turning the Sahel on Its Head: The 'Truth' behind the Headlines." *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 33, No. 110, Religion, Ideology & Conflict in Africa (September 2006), pp. 761-769.

conducted by Hanna Rogan of the Norwegian Defense Institute in 2008.[48] Rogan

compiled data extracted from Algerian news reports of terrorist incidents and used it to

determine to what extent the group was becoming more effective in wreaking violent

havoc as it drew closer and closer to the al-Qaeda organization. Rogan found that

violence appeared to be worsening – though only slightly - between 2001 and 2008.

However, because of the study's regional limitations and questionable dataset, its

conclusions are not appropriate to generalize for the rest of the region. While her work is

certainly an interesting start to analyzing the problem using hard numbers, there is a great

deal more work to be done in this area.

By conducting this study using NCTC's consistent and reliable data, I hope to

address some of the most glaring weaknesses of extant literature on the subject. This

analysis is designed to build upon the rather limited studies that have already been

conducted using data. However, this endeavor will base its findings on data that are far

more consistent and will encompass all groups in Africa in order to better contextualize

the events we can observe there.

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[48] Hanna Rogan. "Violent Trends in Algeria since 9/11." *CTC Sentinel*, November 2008, Vol.1, Iss. 12, p.16. Available at http://www.ctc.usma.edu/sentinel/CTCSentinel-Vol1Iss12.pdf (Accessed March 26, 2010).

2. Terms and Hypotheses

2.1 Definition of Terms:

1. "Joined al-Qaeda": For the purposes of this study, joining al-Qaeda will be defined as formal recognition by leaders of both the joining group and the core leadership of al-Qaeda. This information is generally available through many venues, including an array of reputable news sources (CNN, Al Jazeera English, AP, AFP, Reuters, BBC, etc). I will only accept unambiguous statements of alliance to qualify a group as officially "joined."

2. "Not joined al-Qaeda": This category will include groups that have not joined al-Qaeda but have at least some ideological foundation that would make them *potential* candidates for someday joining. Because al-Qaeda relies so heavily on religious mandates, I will consider adherence to a strict interpretation of Sunni Islam as a necessary characteristic of a group to be included anywhere in my data set. Therefore, the "not joined" category will encompass violent Sunni groups that have had only negligible contact with al-Qaeda and have not had leaders make public statements of unity with al-Qaeda and its global jihad leading toward the creation of a caliphate across the entire Muslim world.[49]

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[49] Establishment of a global Caliphate is the penultimate goal of al-Qaeda. See Anon."Al-Qa'ida (The Base) Qa'idat al-Jihad Islamic Army for the Liberation of the Holy Places, World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders, Islamic Salvation Foundation, Usama bin Laden Network." *Federation of American Scientists*, July 2009. Available at http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/ladin.htm (Accessed April 5, 2010).

2.2 Hypotheses:

i. Hypothesis #1: More attacks occur: after joining al-Qaeda, groups perpetrate attacks more frequently in Africa. Results in this section and subsequent sections will be measured quarterly, per three-month segment of the calendar year.

ii. Hypothesis #2: More deaths, wounded, and hostages: after joining al-Qaeda, groups' attacks become deadlier than observed during previous periods. They also affect more victims who are wounded and/or taken hostage per quarter.

iii. Hypothesis #3: Groups target the West: after joining al-Qaeda, targets attacked are increasingly Western symbols rather than local symbols.

For the purposes of answering this question, I will observe targeting of Americans, Europeans, and Western-backed charities and intergovernmental organizations, especially the United Nations. It is logical that this shift would occur for groups that joined, given al-Qaeda's global agenda and its focus on killing the "far enemy."[50] Al-Qaeda insists that the proper prioritization of imperatives should be striking the West first, since Western states support "apostate regimes" throughout Africa and the rest of the Muslim world, while more local issues (such as eliminating the Shi'a sects

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[50] Fawaz A. Gerges. *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

closer to home) should come second.[51] Thus, it is reasonable to presume that joining al-Qaeda should lead to an outcome of fewer locally-focused attacks and more incidents that intend to punish the West and dissuade it from continuing its "imperialist" involvement in the Muslim world.

2.3 Justification of Hypotheses

These hypotheses are designed to be testable and interesting, although they are not able to fully resolve the key inquiry of this paper. The most important question in this issue area, for decision-makers, is to what extent we should be worried about al-Qaeda's actions in the future. However, we cannot ultimately know what will occur next month, next year, or a decade from today. Observing trends to-date, combined with accessible knowledge of these groups' resources, can only allow us to make an educated guess about future events.

The questions this study asks regarding al-Qaeda's threat presuppose that the observable violence in Africa is indicative of groups' respective *ability* to pose a threat to Western interests and the local governments they oppose. This is not an entirely precise supposition, since ability is not always demonstrated, and certainly can be demonstrated outside of a group's immediate geographical area. For example, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group has transitioned into and out of al-Qaeda membership over the past 20

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[51] Christopher Henzel. "The Origins of al Qaeda's Ideology: Implications for US Strategy." *Parameters*, Spring 2005, pp. 69-80. Available at http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/parameters/05spring/henzel.htm (Accessed April 3, 2010).

years, constantly shifting its focus and its capabilities.[52] However, it has stayed largely inactive in Africa, operating mostly from abroad. The existing data on African terrorism does not properly encompass all the terrorist activity that is *related* to the region. Likewise, this data does not account for individual terrorists and small groups thereof who are recruited from Africa, either directly though personal contacts or indirectly via media communications, to travel to other places (such as Iraq) to carry out violent jihad.[53] This may be one of the region's most troubling contributions to the global jihad, yet its existence is tracked mostly on an individual basis and is difficult to study holistically. Decision-makers would be better served by a more consistent, systematic approach to studying these trends.

Despite the many issues that are not addressed by this study, testing these hypotheses will confirm or refute suspected trends, clarify how quickly the situation may be evolving, and elucidate the context of overall African Sunni militancy in which al-Qaeda exists and which it seeks to exploit. These findings represent a beginning – not a conclusion – to the research needing to be conducted in this area.

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[52] Camille Tawil. "Libyan Islamists Back Away from al-Qaeda Merger in Reconciliation with Qaddafi Regime." *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* Vol.7, Iss. 17
June 18, 2009. Available at http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35147 (Accessed March 27, 2010).
[53] The most current example of this is the "Christmas Day Underwear Bomber" Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab who traveled from Nigeria to Yemen before attempting to bomb and take down an American commercial aircraft on Christmas Day 2009. See: Steven Erlanger. "Yemen Says Bomb Suspect Met With Qaeda Figures." *New York Times*, January 7, 2010. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/08/world/middleeast/08yemen.html (Accessed March 14, 2010).

3. Methodology and Data

3.1 Data Sources and Classifications

i. National Counterterrorism Center Worldwide Incidents Tracking System (NCTC WITS).

The NCTC WITS database will be the primary source of the quantitative information I will analyze in this study. Specifically, their data will inform me as to the number and timing of attacks perpetrated, the victims and targets of attacks (and their Western or non-Western nature), the number of deaths and injuries caused in each attack and timeframe, and the number of hostages taken per incident. Some of the attacks attributed to each group are coded as such because they were claimed, while others are inferred by NCTC coders based on strong evidence. Although their inferences should not be assumed to be 100% accurate, they are the most consistent and dependable source of coding available to me at this time. NCTC is a highly professional U.S. government terrorism analysis center, and therefore the judgment of its coding personnel will be trusted by this study.

Because the NCTC WITS data begin in 2004, so too will this study. It would be ideal to be able to begin this study in 1990 to fully encompass the history of al-Qaeda in the region. However, the 2004-2009 timeframe is still quite suitable for analysis, as it encompasses a significant portion of the time during which al-Qaeda has maintained a presence in Africa, and includes several al-Qaeda status changes for groups in my

dataset. If, someday, the NCTC retroactively catalogues terrorist events prior to 2004, it would behoove me to re-run the data to paint a more complete analytical picture.

ii. News sources.

News reporting can be problematic for researchers, especially in parts of the world that lack an entrenched tradition of journalistic impartiality and professionalism. Newspapers – particularly those that lack skilled personnel - may miss out on important events, take liberties in assigning blame, sensationalize the damage done, etc. For these reasons, I do not believe that news sources should be a fundamental data source of this study. Rather, I will incorporate diverse news sources into my analysis to confirm group status changes and explore possible causal links, but the majority of my analysis will rely on the relatively consistent and reliable data of the NCTC WITS database, not on news reporting.

iii. Classification of groups.

This study assumes groups to be "not-joined" in the absence of any evidence that affiliation with al-Qaeda central occurred. After careful and thorough examination of academic literature, U.S. government counterterrorism documents, and news sources, the following classifications were established for this study:

Classification of Groups: Joined vs. Non-Joined		
Group	**Joined or Not Joined?**	**Date Joined (if applicable)**
ICU → Al Shabaab	Joined	September 2008
GSPC → AQIM	Joined	January 2007
Boko Haram (Nigerian Taliban)	Not Joined	N/A
Fulani	Not Joined	N/A
Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)	Not Joined	N/A
Armed Group of Free Salafists	Not Joined	N/A
Fursan al-Taghyir	Not Joined	N/A
Essedik Katibat	Not Joined	N/A

Figure 2. Classification of Sunni militant groups in Africa by author.

3.2 Means of Organizing and Interpreting Data

To track differences in behavioral evolution, I will record the deaths, injuries and

hostage victims caused by all known Sunni jihadist groups in Africa that were active in

2004-2009.[54] I will also keep track of the number of incidents and whether those attacks

targeted Western persons or property, as opposed to African or other non-Western

targets. I will be analyzing the data available from the beginning of 2004 through

September 2009. I believe that one-year increments are too large to capture some of the

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[54] Egypt will be omitted from my sample, as most authoritative governmental organizations and think tanks consider Egypt to be an integral part of the Middle East, not Africa. Being culturally and economically grouped with the Middle East makes sense for Egypt, so it will be considered outside my region of interest for the purposes of this study. However, if significant spillover of Egyptian Sunni militant groups began to occur into neighboring countries of Africa, it may be compelling to include Egypt in the sample for future studies.

more interesting nuances in terrorist group behavior over time, so I will analyze quarterly increments (four quarters of three months each per calendar year). Three-month increments will also allow me to be more precise in my analysis for groups that changed their al-Qaeda affiliation mid-way through a calendar year.

Simple charting of terrorist incidents and their targets will allow me to observe trends over time. However, I am interested in much more than that. I am interested in how these groups' behavior changed from before joining al-Qaeda to after solidifying this affiliation. Since groups have joined at different times, a simple activity-over-time charting will not suffice. Rather, I will need to record before and after trends for each group individually, and then compare averages in behavior before and after joining occurs. Once these groups' before and after behavior is understood on an individual basis, I can amalgamate them to look for general trends, which can then be compared to the control group, i.e. terrorist groups that did not join al-Qaeda. Any meaningful trends should be easily recognizable in data form and visible to the layperson's eye when charted and graphed.

4. Findings

4.1 Findings

Looking at the data for terrorist attacks in Africa by groups the NCTC categorizes as "Sunni Extremist," one basic fact is readily apparent: Somalia and Algeria dominate the data results. Of the 1,146 attacks recorded between 2004 and 2009, 851 of them occurred in Somalia (74%) and 249 occurred in Algeria (22%). Combined, these two countries' incidents account for 96% of all Sunni attacks experienced over that 6-year time period.[55] This is significant in and of itself; this finding seems to indicate that despite its best efforts across large swaths of territory in North and Central Africa, al-Qaeda has only been able to interject itself in a truly impactful way in the two countries that already had long-established militant groups and experienced high levels of violence. Thus, weakly-governed states without well-established bodies of experienced militants seem to have largely avoided domination by al-Qaeda during the timeframe of this dataset. This is positive, but does not bode well for African states that now see hundreds or thousands of their citizens returning home from the anti-American jihad in Iraq, a phenomenon which will likely make their states more vulnerable to al-Qaeda's spread.

If the data seem to prove the hypotheses correct, this study will posit that these trends exist because after groups affiliate themselves with al-Qaeda and its global jihad movement, they receive increased resources and guidance that leads to their increased activity. This study assumes that this kind of relationship, including resource and

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[55] All data here taken from NCTC WITS database as of March, 2010.

information transfers, would be the most likely reason for positive findings, although alternative explanations will also be considered in the next sub-section.

i. Hypothesis #1: More attacks occur: after joining al-Qaeda, groups perpetrate attacks more frequently in Africa.

This hypothesis was very simple to test by plotting the number of incidents carried out over time. Since we know that both the GSPC and al-Shabaab joined al-Qaeda between late 2006 and mid-2008, we would expect to see behavioral changes begin during those years, if joining al-Qaeda were an impactful event.
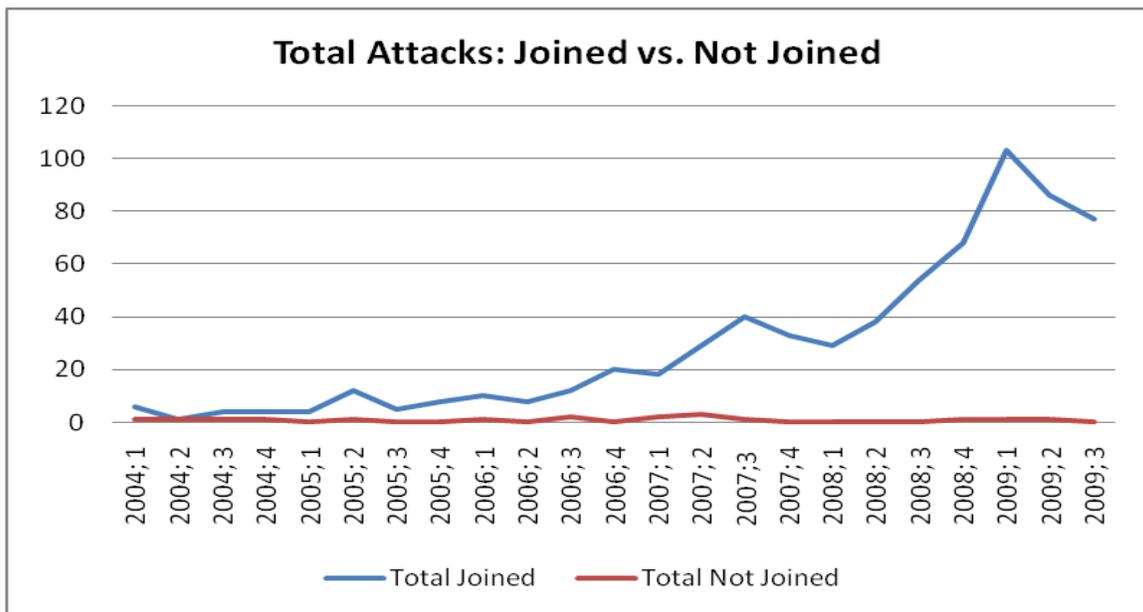

Figure 3. Graph of attacks perpetrated by AQ-joined groups versus not-joined groups over time. Compiled by author using data derived from the NCTC WITS database.

As clearly visible in Figure 3, late 2006 marks the beginning of a sizable increase in attacks, which became even more pronounced in the middle of 2008 as both the GSPC and al-Shabaab had committed to waging al-Qaeda's global jihad.

Over the same timeframe, non-al-Qaeda Sunni jihadist groups did not see any similar rise in frequency of attacks carried out. As shown in Figure 4, these groups remained relatively inactive between 2004 and 2009, with their highest quarterly attack rates reaching 3 in mid-2007. There was no readily observable trend in their behavior, which contasts starkly against the very clear and steady rise in attacks by al-Qaeda affiliated groups.
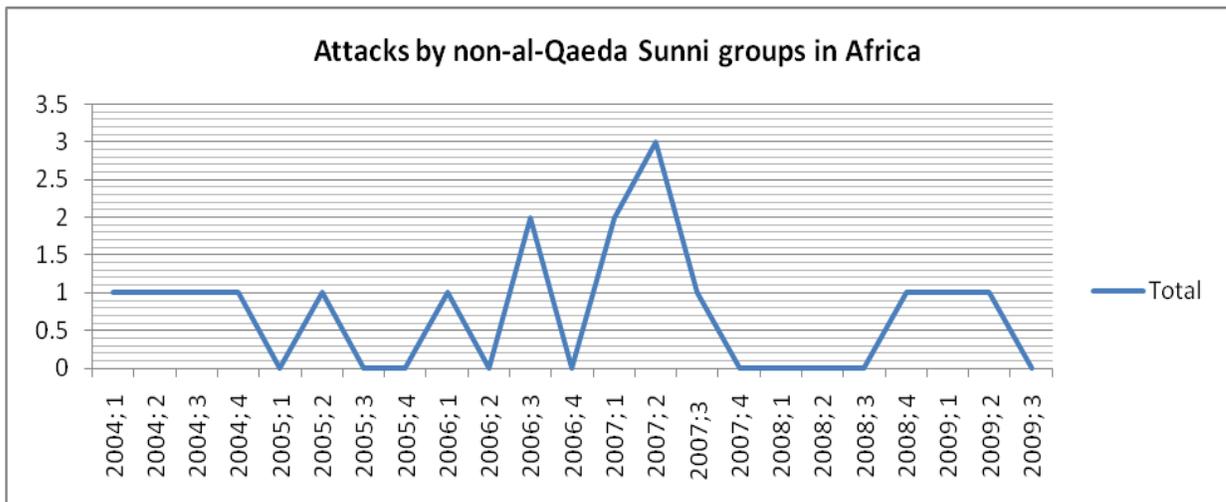

Figure 4. Graph of attacks perpetrated by not-joined violent Sunni groups in Africa over time. Compiled by author using data derived from the NCTC WITS database.

In addition to looking at trends over time, we are interested in observing the *average* rate of attacks per quarter a group perpetrates before joining al-Qaeda and in the years following their allegiance. Analyzing these numbers will allow us to not only

understand general trends, but also to assess to what extent they may have corresponded

with changes in al-Qaeda affiliation status.

The Figure 5 depicts the number of attacks committed by each group before and

after joining al-Qaeda, as well as quarterly averages:

BEFORE AND AFTER: QUARTERLY ATTACKS COMMITTED				
Group	Before joining	After joining	Average attacks per quarter before joining	Average attacks per quarter after joining
GSPC - AQIM	61 attacks 10 quarters	149 attacks 13 quarters	6.1	11.5
ICU - Shabaab	138 attacks 18 quarters	321 attacks 5 quarters	7.6	64.2

Figure 5. Table of attacks perpetrated by AQ-joined African groups comparing before and after attack frequency levels. Compiled by author using data derived from the NCTC WITS database.

As is readily apparent from the numbers in the above chart, both AQIM and al-

Shabaab greatly increased their average frequency of attacks committed per quarter after

aligning with al-Qaeda. In the case of AQIM, their quarterly attack average nearly

doubled, while al-Shabaab's attack frequency increased more than eight-fold. While we

do not have adequate information to conclude decisively that joining al-Qaeda made the

difference for these groups, this is a very significant increase and seems to signal that

African groups that join al-Qaeda become significantly more active after this decision.

ii. Hypothesis #2: More deaths, wounded, and hostages: after joining al-Qaeda, groups' attacks become deadlier than observed during previous periods. They also affect more victims who are wounded and/or taken hostage.

I tested this hypothesis by comparing rates of deaths, wounded victims, and hostages caused by terrorist attacks by each group in the dataset prior to joining and after joining al-Qaeda. I performed this analysis on a quarterly basis from 2004 to 2009. I then determined the average deaths, wounded, and hostage rates for each group to compare differences over time and during al-Qaeda affiliation status shifts.

The total number of victims affected by each group rose significantly over the timeframe of the NCTC dataset. For both groups, 2007 marked the beginning of these changes. For AQIM, this timing was consistent with its joining of al-Qaeda, whereas the trend's beginning preceded al-Shabaab's statements of alliance by roughly a year. However, it should be noted that the most marked increase in victims affected by al-Shabaab came in mid-2008 and later, which is consistent with their increased levels of closeness with al-Qaeda. Also notable is the fact that the peak of al-Shabaab's victim levels came late – in 2009 – shortly before finalizing plans to announce formal *unification* with al-Qaeda in 2010.[56] As shown in Figure 6, 2007 through 2009 saw much higher victim levels overall than previous periods for both AQIM and al-Shabaab:

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[56] While al-Shabaab publicly aligned its goals and operations very closely with al-Qaeda in 2008 and is therefore considered "joined" for the purposes of this study, 2010 marked the act of *unification*, which ostensibly marked the end of al-Shabaab's independence as a closely tied but organizationally distinct body.
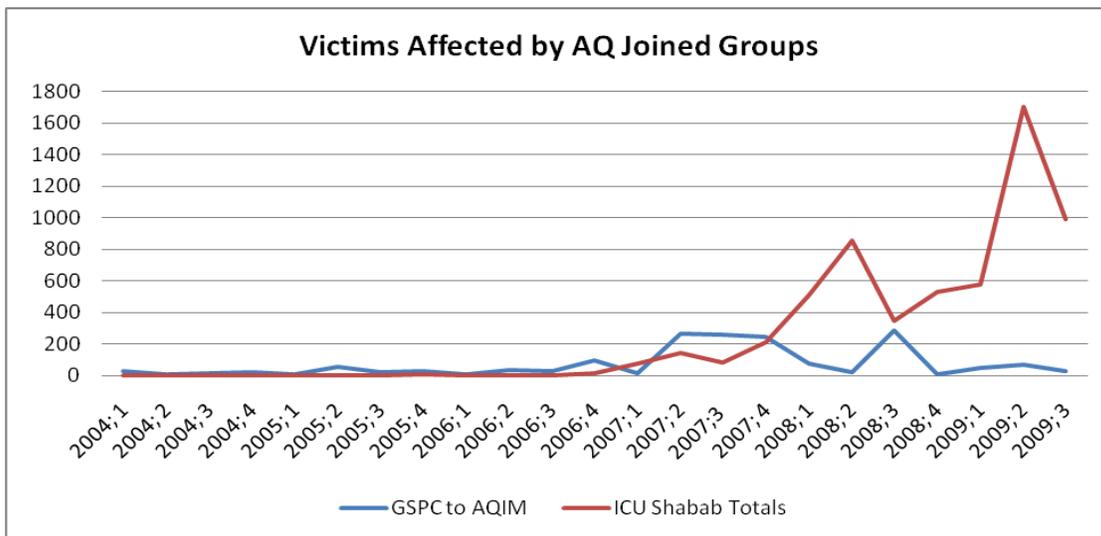
Figure 6. Graph of victims harmed by AQ-joined groups over time. Compiled by author using data derived from the NCTC WITS database.

One interesting trend to consider is that AQIM's victim levels peaked during its joining period in 2006-2007 and within the first year thereafter, but fell considerably again during 2009. Should this trend continue, it might indicate that while joining al-Qaeda provides an initial boost in activity for African jihadist groups, the burst of activity is short-lived and may not necessarily be sustained over the longer term.

As we did before with incidents data, we must also observe average victims data quarterly to compare before and after rates for the groups that joined al-Qaeda:

BEFORE AND AFTER: QUARTERLY VICTIMS AFFECTED				
Group	**Before joining**	**After joining**	**Average victims per quarter before joining**	**Average victims per quarter after joining**
GSPC - AQIM	**229 victims** **10 quarters**	**1449 victims** **13 quarters**	**22.9**	**111.5**
ICU - Shabaab	**1904 victims** **18 quarters**	**4142 victims** **5 quarters**	**105.8**	**828.4**

Figure 7. Table of victims harmed by AQ-joined African groups comparing before and after victim levels. Compiled by author using data derived from the NCTC WITS database.

As shown in the above chart, AQIM saw its quarterly victim average increase nearly five-fold, while al-Shabaab affected nearly eight times more victims per quarter after joining al-Qaeda than it had before aligning with the organization. Again, in both cases, joining al-Qaeda correlated with significant increases in victim rates. Again, we cannot conclude that membership in al-Qaeda was definitively responsible for these shifts, but the trends suggest that joining al-Qaeda may be driving African jihadist groups to kill, injure, and take hostages more often.

Efficiency of operations, or damage inflicted per attack, is also an interesting phenomenon to track using the available data. In doing so, we can try to ascertain whether or not joining al-Qaeda might result in some knowledge transfer that would bolster the operational effectiveness of the groups in question. To analyze efficiency, we can simply compare the data already listed above for the number of attacks carried out and the number of victims affected:

BEFORE AND AFTER: EFFICIENCY PER ATTACK				
Group	Before joining	After joining	Average efficiency before joining	Average efficiency after joining
GSPC - AQIM	61 attacks 229 victims	149 attacks 1449 victims	3.75 victims/attack	9.72 victims/attack
ICU - Shabaab	138 attacks 1904 victims	321 attacks 4142 victims	13.8 victims/attack	12.9 victims/attack

Figure 8. Table of per-attack efficiency by AQ-joined African groups comparing before and after joining efficiency levels. Compiled by author using data derived from the NCTC WITS database.

Interestingly, as we can see in Figure 8, while AQIM has nearly tripled its efficiency since joining al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab has not done so, and has in fact seen a diminishment in its victims per attack ratio since its official alignment with al-Qaeda. Perhaps this is due to the fact that al-Shabaab's efficiency in harming victims was already quite high prior to the embrace of al-Qaeda. This trend may also demonstrate that attack efficiency is not consistently impacted by membership in al-Qaeda's global network.

Over the same period of time analyzed previously for both attacks and victims, non-al-Qaeda groups also experienced several peaks of activity, which are observed in 2007 and 2009. These are clearly visible in Figure 9:
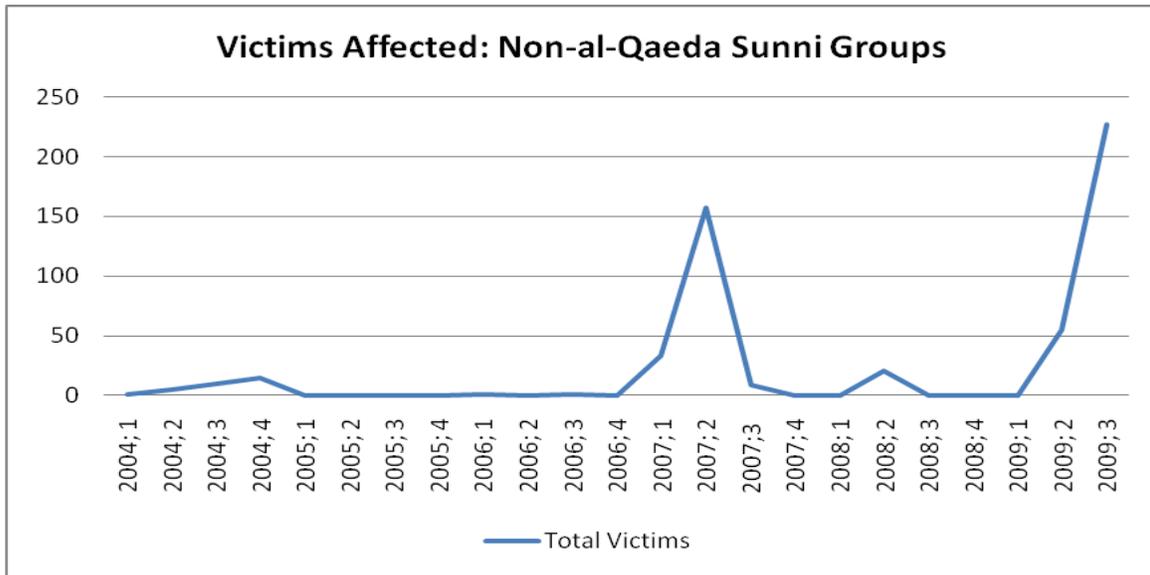
Figure 9. Chart of victims harmed over time by not joined AQ Sunni militant groups in Africa. Compiled by author using data derived from the NCTC WITS database.

Though certainly important, these numbers can mostly be attributed to a few large terrorist events. In 2007, the recorded spike in victims is almost entirely due to an attack by a group of Sunni Somali separatists called the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). In April 2007, the ONLF carried out a large-scale attack on a Chinese-owned oil rig, killing 74 people and wounding almost the same number.[57]

The victims spike for non-al-Qaeda groups in 2009, on the other hand, is primarily caused by the Nigerian Taliban, a radical jihadist group that claims to draw ideological inspiration from al-Qaeda but outright denies receiving any sort of leadership direction by Osama bin Laden or his inner circle.[58] The group, whose local name, "Boko

[57] Rebecca Bloom and Eben Kaplan. "Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) – Backgrounder." *Council on Foreign Relations*, November 1, 2007. Available at: http://www.cfr.org/publication/13208/ (Accessed March 27, 2010).
[58] Robyn Dixon. "A Nigeria 'Taliban' leader tells of a desire to fight the U.S." *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 2010. Available at: http://articles.latimes.com/2010/apr/01/world/la-fg-nigeria-taliban1-2010apr01 (Accessed April 4, 2010).

Haram" means "Western education is sinful,"[59] carried out an attack on Nigerian police headquarters and Christian churches, killing 36 people in July 26, 2009.[60] The same day, they took 180 people hostage. These two events resulted in a very high number of quarterly victims. It is unclear whether this represents the beginning of a trend or simply an isolated series of incidents, but the group has not been very active since these attacks, so for now this analysis assumes them to be isolated events.[61]

While the activities of the ONLF and the Nigerian Taliban demonstrate that al-Qaeda membership is hardly a prerequisite for operational success as an African jihadist group, their activities do not follow the same behavioral blueprint as their al-Qaeda counterparts, i.e. a long period of low activity followed by sustained growth in activity and victims. Thus, the activities of the "not joined" group serve as an effective contrast to demonstrate that al-Qaeda joined groups truly do seem to be demonstrating unique and worsening patterns of conduct.

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[59] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *Leader of 'Nigerian Taliban' killed in police custody*, 31 July 2009. Available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4a82b71cc.html (Accessed April 6, 2010).

[60] While NCTC data claims 36 victims, news sources report over 150 killed in this incident. However, this is because most of those killed were the attacking militants themselves. See Andrew Walker. "Is al-Qaeda working in Nigeria?" *BBC News*, August 4, 2009. Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8182289.stm (Accessed March 12, 2010).

[61] Although Boko Haram has not been especially active in operations since the summer of 2009, they have recently made statements suggesting they intend to become more deadly and deepen ties with al-Qaeda in the future. In March 2010, a spokesman for the group told media, "We see Mullah Umar and Osama bin Laden as the true champions of Islam who are fighting Allah's enemies and our allegiance and support go to them although we don't have any contact with them yet," implying that they intend to have direct contact with them someday soon. If such contacts were established and mutual recognition granted, it would be appropriate to begin coding this group as "Joined al-Qaeda" in a future iteration of this study. See Aminu Abubakar. "Nigerian Islamist sect threaten to widen attacks." Agence France Presse (AFP), March 29, 2010. Available through Google at http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5j1FA1NJrS-ES89YWeX4f—kcQGmA (Accessed April 6, 2010).

iii. Hypothesis #3: Groups target the West: after joining al-Qaeda, targets attacked are increasingly Western symbols rather than local symbols.

The data show that targeting of Western persons and symbols (such as buildings and people affiliated with the United Nations, or American and European tourists) increased moderately for groups that joined al-Qaeda. This moderate but noteworthy trend is illustrated in Figure 10:
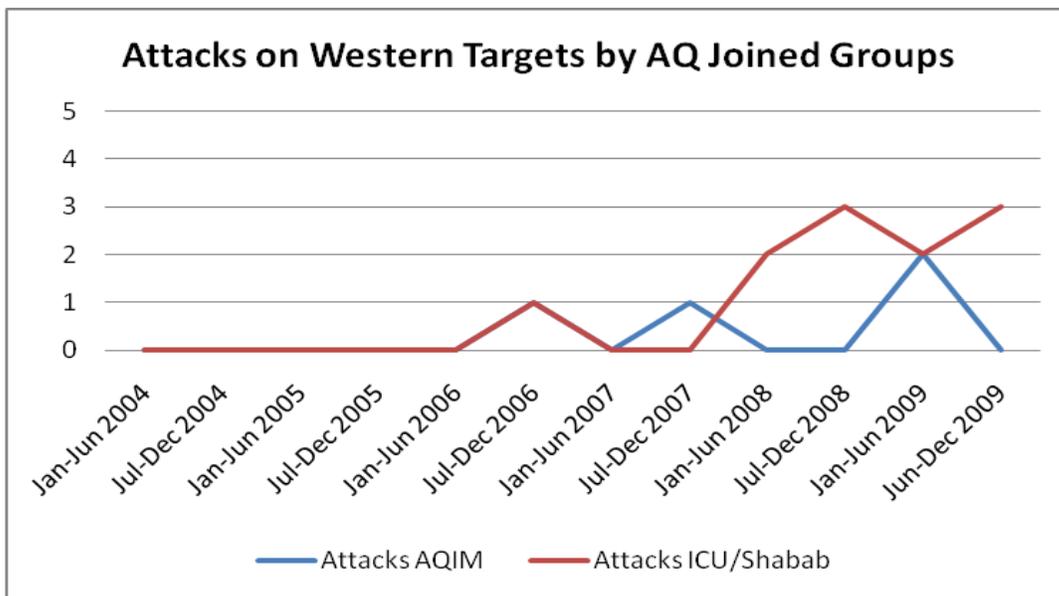

Figure 10. Chart of attacks on Western targets by AQ-joined groups in Africa over time. Compiled by author using data derived from the NCTC WITS database.

For each group that joined al-Qaeda, attacks on Western targets rose slightly during and after periods of transition to greater levels of al-Qaeda affiliation. For both groups, the trend begins in 2006. Therefore, it began during AQIM's embrace of al-Qaeda but several years before al-Shabaab's decision to align with the group. However, al-Shabaab's Western targeting increased most markedly in 2007-2008 as they were

becoming closer to al-Qaeda and preparing to unite causes. The timing of the trends for both groups seems to indicate that their affiliations with al-Qaeda – either accomplished or planned - may have driven them to target more Western symbols. However, it is important to keep in mind that the highest level reached in any given quarter, which was three Western targets attacked in 2008 and again in 2009 by al-Shabaab, is still a relatively low level of overall attacks and should not be blown out of proportion.

Given that al-Qaeda focuses primarily on the elimination of U.S. influence in Muslim lands, one would expect that any group committing fully to its cause would prioritize striking targets representative of the United States or its allies.[62] However, Somalia, Algeria, Mauritania, and the other primary areas of operation for AQIM and al-Shabaab are not particularly rich in opportunities to fulfill that targeting mission. These groups may find that the few symbols of the West available to them as targets – such as Western embassies – are well-protected and quite difficult to successfully attack. For this reason, it is not shocking that so few Western targets overall have been assailed in Africa by al-Qaeda affiliated groups. It is reasonable, therefore, to interpret a modest rise in attacks against Western targets as likely indicative of a much larger *desire* to harm the West and its assets. The number of attacks mounted against Western assets may simply be limited due to the dearth of possible targets in the region and their often inaccessible nature.

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[62] This focus on the "far enemy" – the U.S. – has been well-documented. See, for example, Fawaz A. Gerges. *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

4.2 Alternative Explanations

Some of the trends observed in the data used by this study could be explained by conditions other than al-Qaeda affiliation. For example, although the data show that al-Qaeda affiliation seems temporally linked with increased violence and Western targeting, there is no way of knowing for certain which variable may have caused the other (if the two are causally linked at all). This presents a "chicken and egg" problem that cannot be resolved through data alone. Did these groups become more active because of assistance or direction provided by al-Qaeda central? Or, instead, did al-Qaeda accept the GSPC and al-Shabaab as new members because they already had high capacity for violence and planned to carry out more attacks, including against more Western persons and assets? One must consider that while unlikely, the latter scenario could provide an alternative explanation for this correlative relationship.

An additional alternative explanation would be that AQIM and al-Shabaab have become more destructive because of recruitment and funding gains earned through the *name* of the "AQ brand" alone, not because affiliating with al-Qaeda necessarily entails accepting direction or other help from the core of al-Qaeda. While this pattern would be interesting in its own right, it would also diverge from this study's assumption of the causal mechanisms behind terrorist group behavioral changes.

4.3 Limitations of the Available Data

Terrorism data is often frustratingly imprecise. The most persistent data quality issue this study contends with is the high number of unclaimed and unattributed attacks.

Of the 1975 total attacks recorded in Africa from 2004 through the end of 2009, 1190 of them were unclaimed or unattributed, which constitutes roughly 60 percent of the total. Knowing who perpetrated those events would certainly make this study more accurate and robust.

Furthermore, terrorism studies almost always suffer from what one RAND study of terrorist group learning behavior referred to as, "difficulties linking observable indicators to terrorist group strategic progress."[63] This means that while terrorist organizations can be measured by their outwardly perceptible activities – such as attacks, targets, and tactics – these actions cannot be definitively linked to the group's actual capabilities at any given time. For example, the authors note that, "If, by evaluating its behaviors or pursuing new options or technologies, an organization gains knowledge that could improve its performance—even if it has not yet put that knowledge to use—it has learned."[64] Merely because the group has not yet acted on its newly gained knowledge, weapons, or targeting information does not mean the group has not changed in nature and capability. However, for the purposes of this study, we are mostly concerned with outcomes in terms of how they actually impact real operations that are observable. Group changes that do not observably impact group behavior are interesting to consider, but they simply fall outside the bounds of this particular quantitative study. However, it is important for analysts to keep in mind this distinction between observable actions and a group's true standing or status.

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[63] Brian A. Jackson et al. *Aptitude for Destruction: Organizational Learning in Terrorist Groups and Its Implications for Combating Terrorism.* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2005, p.65.
[64] Ibid, p.64.

An additional limitation to note here is this study's inability to measure changes that may occur more than a few years after joining al-Qaeda. If, for example, it takes four or five years for a group's al-Qaeda membership to have a particular impact on group behavior, this study would be mostly unable to detect those trends given that it only spans a total of six years and those groups that joined did not do so until at least mid-way through the data set. Perhaps several years from now the data will show something markedly different. However, given the current date and the timing of the events we are seeking to understand, this study encompasses as much as possible.

Lastly, this study shows correlation only, and any perceived causation in the data is merely speculative, even when that speculation is well-informed. The two variables – joining al-Qaeda and behavioral changes – may happen to appear causally linked when they are not. Alternately, we may wrongly assume that the causal mechanism works in one direction - where al-Qaeda membership drives group behavior - when in fact the two factors could be reversed to conclude that the groups' behavior and capability level actually determine its ability and willingness to join. Only by understanding the interpersonal exchanges that led to group membership can we make informed judgments about which factors led to joining, and which led to attack behavior.

5. Policy Recommendations

5.1 Recommendations of policy actions for the U.S. Government

The U.S. government's top priority regarding terrorism in Africa is to safeguard American lives and interests both at home and abroad. One weighty American interest lies in supporting pro-American and pro-Western African governments that are willing to engage with us in counterterrorism efforts. These efforts are intended not only to address existing problems with terrorism in the region, but also to prevent the situation from worsening. Strong enforcement should help to deter al-Qaeda militants from considering Africa an easy target or an easy operating space, potentially holding the problem in check compared to how it would evolve under more lax enforcement conditions.

Given the findings of this study detailed in the previous section, the following policies and approaches are recommended by the author:

A. Keep in mind that al-Qaeda ties influence behavior, and act accordingly.

Since the data has shown that al-Qaeda membership seems to correspond with African jihadist groups affecting more victims, perpetrating more attacks, and targeting more Western symbols, methods of combating terrorism in Africa should be crafted with an appreciation of the demonstrable importance of ties to al-Qaeda central. This simply means that any observed linkages to al-Qaeda should be seen as having the potential to increase the lethality and destructive power of the groups in question. This would entail robust efforts at impeding communication between the core of al-Qaeda and its African

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affiliates by making targeted arrests and/or disrupting electronic and physical mail communications. Also, since this study finds a likely influence of the core of al-Qaeda on its affiliates, damage done to the core should logically have a negative impact on the periphery. This means that continuing to combat the core al-Qaeda organization is crucial to halting the progress of its geographically distant African offshoots.

Furthermore, based on this study's findings, authorities should expect the emergence of more al-Qaeda members to mean more attacks on Western persons and assets. Therefore, the U.S. government should expect that al-Qaeda affiliates in Africa will target more American assets and the assets of our allies in the region, especially if they are not well-protected against terrorist tactics.[65] In this setting, Americans and other Westerners must be wary of providing African al-Qaeda affiliates with any easy targets, lest they be exploited at low cost to the terrorists.

B. Treat the problem holistically, as al-Qaeda does.

Whether crossing borders in the Sahel, the Maghreb, or the Horn of Africa, al-Qaeda operatives in Africa show little regard for established borders. AQIM operates in a vast swath of land that encompasses many states, and al-Shabaab terrorists regularly wreak havoc on neighboring states, such as Ethiopia and Kenya. This disregard for traditional concepts of sovereignty was summed up recently by a representative of the

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[65] For example, Western embassies are generally well-protected against car bombs, suicide attackers, etc. These may still be unattractive targets for African al-Qaeda terrorists, but any more accessible symbols of the U.S. may be increasingly targeted. Also, policy-makers must keep in mind that as targets are increasingly hardened against attacks, terrorists will tend to use extreme measures to circumvent security measures. See Eli Berman and David Laitin. "Hard Targets: Theory and Evidence on Suicide Attacks." *National Bureau of Economic Research*, Working Paper No. 11740, November 2005. Available for purchase at http://www.nber.org/papers/w11740.pdf (Accessed April 4, 2010).

Nigerian Taliban, Musa Tanko, who stated frankly to reporters, "Islam doesn't recognize international boundaries."[66] To counter a movement that does not respect international boundaries, the U.S. and its partners must also treat the region as a whole.

A holistic approach to African al-Qaeda would entail two specific prescriptions. One deals with the functioning of the U.S. government, the other with engagement of foreign governments involved in combating terrorism in Africa.

First, this approach would mean that the U.S. must integrate its counterterrorism efforts throughout the continent. While there will always be specific regional clusters into which analysts and diplomats are grouped – the Maghreb, the Horn of Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa, for example – these clusters should coordinate closely and maintain constant informational exchanges with their counterparts. This approach may already be reflected in some intelligence agencies and international organizations, but other components of U.S. national security infrastructure must also adopt this modus operandi.

Second, a holistic approach would entail helping African governments work more closely with each other. Since al-Qaeda rejects traditional concepts of sovereignty, and indeed presents a menacing transnational threat in the region, African governments should also emphasize the timely sharing of sensitive information on the movements, capabilities, and suspected plots of al-Qaeda linked groups and individuals. Such collaborative efforts would greatly improve their chances of success against local and distant jihadists alike. The U.S. should try to foster greater communication between

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[66] Aminu Abubakar. "Nigerian Islamist sect threaten to widen attacks." Agence France Presse (AFP), March 29, 2010. Available through Google at http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5j1FA1NJrS-ES89YWeX4f—kcQGmA (Accessed April 6, 2010).

African states by facilitating shared counterterrorism training programs for government and military officials from a diversity of states in the region. Some programs of this nature, including the Mali-based Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI) and the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), have set good examples for future cooperation-boosting programs, which should be expanded and improved upon. To help African states help themselves, the U.S. should conduct these programs in ways that empower them to work together, even independent of U.S. presence.

C. Address underlying causes of al-Qaeda sympathy and exploit cultural and religious incongruence between Africans and al-Qaeda's core.

Based on historical precedence, there is no reason to believe that a meager investment in local policing alone will suffice to uproot al-Qaeda, particularly while the conditions and widely-felt grievances that aide al-Qaeda's recruiting and fundraising remain almost entirely unaddressed.

While some argue that grievances do not fuel participation in terrorism and rebel movements in most cases,[67] American policy actions can help to take the wind out of the sails of terrorist propaganda by encouraging local governments to effectively counter al-Qaeda's grievance-based narrative. Of course, this prescription calls for continuing poverty-reduction programs and various kinds of aid supporting economic development,

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[67] For more on this, see: (1) Posner, Richard. "Equity, Wealth, and Political Stability." *Journal of Law, Economics, & Organization.* Vol. 13, Iss. 2, 1997 and (2) Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler. "Greed and Grievance in Civil War." *Oxford Economic Papers,* 2004, Vol. 56 Iss.4: 563-595.

which could, in turn, ease grievances. But additionally, the U.S. is fortunate to have many other weaknesses inherent to the al-Qaeda movement that are readily exploitable.

First, al-Qaeda has been known to be quite racist at times, with some senior members holding clear biases in favor of Arabs over South Asians, Africans, and other Muslims outside the Middle East.[68] The U.S. and African regimes can emphasize this reality to local non-Arab populations to help them understand that aligning with al-Qaeda may not ultimately gain them the respect and prestige they seek.

Second, al-Qaeda is founded upon an extreme and fundamentalist credo: Salafi Islam and its violent application, Salafi jihad. This school of thought is "a radical offshoot movement" that calls for using violence to mandate adoption of Salafi principles of living, including the obligation to reject man-made laws and return to a lifestyle of emulating the prophet Muhammad.[69] This interpretation of Islam may not jibe well with many African Sunni Muslims. Already, the extreme tactics and unreasonable lifestyle demands of some al-Qaeda Salafists has caused protests by outraged Africans.[70] The U.S. and its allies should educate Africans - Muslims and non-Muslims alike – on the true beliefs of al-Qaeda and the lifestyle changes their Salafi leadership would require of all its subjects. Imposition of harsh Sharia law and a return to the time of the prophet may

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[68] In addition to accounts of AQ leaders holding racist ideas about Afghans and black Africans, some racist behavior has drawn big attention. After the election of President Barack Obama in 2008, Zawahiri referred to the President-Elect as a "house negro," causing widespread outrage. See Caryl Murphy, "Al Qaeda No. 2 insults Obama with racial slur in new video." The Christian Science Monitor, November 20, 2008. Available at http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2008/1120/p25s19-wome.html (Accessed April 4, 2010).
[69] Assaf Moghadam. "Motives for Martyrdom: Al-Qaida, Salafi Jihad, and the Spread of Suicide Attacks." *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 3, Winter 2008/9, pp.62-63.
[70] Specifically, Somalis have recently taken to the streets to loudly reject al-Shabaab's message and means of spreading it. See: Mohammed Ibrahim and Jeffrey Gettleman. "Somalis Protest Against Shabab in Mogadishu." *New York Times*, March 29, 2010. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/30/world/africa/30shabab.html (Accessed March 30, 2010).

still appeal to some African Muslims,[71] but a large number might find this extreme

agenda objectionable and choose to abandon the movement.

To understand how best to undercut support for al-Qaeda's message in Africa,

U.S. counterterrorism leaders must keep a close eye on how Africans are reacting to

various aspects of al-Qaeda's vision for the future, exploiting all possible opportunities to

expose the distasteful aspects of their radical message and separating African jihadists

from al-Qaeda's core.

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[71] Murad Batal al-Shishani. "Salafi-Jihadis in Mauritania at the Center of al-Qaeda's Strategy." *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* Vol. 8, Iss. 12, March 26, 2010. Available at http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=36196&tx_ttnews[backPid]=7&cHash=1ec3a03f57 (Accessed April 3, 2010).

6. Conclusion

6.1 Areas for Future Study

This study is a preliminary attempt at carrying out evidence-driven, systematic research to complement the wide array of anecdote-based analyses currently available on the subject of African terrorism.

Future studies of this topic could be improved in several ways. First, they could use longer-term data, perhaps tracking trends back to the early 1990s when al-Qaeda first began its activities in the region. More data drawing from a larger variety of sources would also add rigor.

Second, they could do a more thorough job of controlling for large events that distort the data and accounting for potentially unique circumstances surrounding both unexplained periods of low activity and unusual periods of high activity.

Third and last, future studies of this topic could compare al-Qaeda affiliates to *all* militant groups in Africa – rather than just Sunni jihadists - to determine how Sunni violence fits into the larger picture of armed militancy in the region.

6.2 Concluding Remarks

Understanding the true nature of al-Qaeda's growth in Africa will help decision-makers around the world better address this phenomenon using the many tools at their disposal. This study has shown that militant groups in Africa, after joining al-Qaeda, tend to become more violent and more active. It has also shown that similar trends of steadily

increasing activity are not present in Sunni jihadist groups in the region that have remained outside of al-Qaeda's terrorist network. We cannot know for certain that it is al-Qaeda membership alone driving this shift in behavior, but we can logically expect to see similar patterns emerge if additional groups choose to affiliate themselves with the global jihad movement. Analyzing this study's findings, we have determined that al-Qaeda does indeed matter for Africa; the onus is now on the United States and African governments to keep pace.

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