

IS THE SOUND BITE MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD?: STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATIONS AS A TOOL TO EXPORT THE GLOBAL JIHAD, 2001-2009

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This thesis is dedicated to Erika, who made it all better and
to Kevin, who made it all possible.

With My Gratitude,

Amy Buenning Sturm

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INTRODUCTION

Current efforts to quantify the defeat of Al-Qaeda's organization by the number of dead or captured terrorist leaders overlook the fact that Al-Qaeda has never been a conventional enemy that can be neutralized kinetically. Osama bin Ladin recognized this reality prior to 2002, when he explained to Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar, "It is obvious that the media war in this century is one of the strongest methods; in fact, its ratio may reach 90% of the total preparation for the battles."¹ If bin Ladin's prediction is accurate, assessments of U.S. progress in defeating Al-Qaeda are more ambiguous than body counts alone would suggest and must take into account the U.S.'s ability to counter Al-Qaeda's propaganda and to recruit followers to its cause. In 2006, then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld awarded the U.S. a grade of a "D or a D-plus" in the war of ideas, stating, "we have not found the formula as a country."² However, just two years later in 2008, CIA Director Michael Hayden assessed that Al-Qaeda was experiencing, "significant setbacks," globally, in the appeal of their militant ideology.³

Defeating the appeal of Al-Qaeda's propaganda is essential to breaking the cycle of recruitment and retention that replenishes its ranks. Bin Ladin's comment above refers to the ability to propagate his ideology, inspire followers, and expand Al-Qaeda's global jihad. Al-Qaeda's continued strength lies not in the number of jihadists considered to be

¹ United States Military Academy. Combating Terrorism Center., "Harmony and Disharmony: Exploiting Al-Qa'ida's Organizational Vulnerabilities." (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, Dept. of Social Sciences, United States Military Academy, 2006), <http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS69909>. All quotations from Al-Qaeda leaders and affiliate groups appear with their original text, including spelling errors.

² Donald H. Rumsfeld, "Remarks by Secretary Rumsfeld at the Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.," ed. Army War College (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: Office of the Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), 2006).

³ Joby Warrick, "U.S. Cites Big Gains against Al-Qaeda," *The Washington Post*, May 30, 2008.

part of its core, but rather on the organization's ability to "recruit, mobilize, and to animate both actual and would-be fighters, supporters, and sympathizers," from around the world through propaganda to sustain the movement.⁴ Al-Qaeda's endurance is largely thanks to its ability to adapt its appeal to promote jihad, both within the network and to external sympathizers.⁵ For instance, between 2001 and 2010, the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) formally and publicly petitioned to join Al-Qaeda and was welcomed by Al-Qaeda's core leadership as a franchise of the movement.⁶ Similarly, Al-Qaeda affiliates in Yemen and Saudi Arabia announced a merger in 2009, pledging their allegiance to Al-Qaeda and forming Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Factions of other radical Islamist groups, including the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), al-Shabaab, and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) also formally declared admiration for or affiliation with Al-Qaeda. To that end, Al-Qaeda senior leadership has dramatically increased its propaganda output from 2001-2009, dedicating significant resources to producing messages in greater volume and with greater speed than ever before.⁷

Understanding how Al-Qaeda's propaganda feeds the recruitment and retention cycle is the first step to disrupting Al-Qaeda's regenerative capacity. Therefore, this paper examines Al-Qaeda's strategic communications successes, particularly its ability to

⁴ Bruce Hoffman, "Al Qaeda, Trends in Terrorism, and Future Potentialities: An Assessment," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 26 (2003), 434.

⁵ ———, "The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 3 (2008).

⁶ Peter Chalk Angel Rabasa, Kim Cragin, Sara A. Daly, Heather S. Gregg, Theodore W. Karasik, Kevin A. O'Brien, and William Rosenau *Beyond Al-Qaeda: Part 1, the Global Jihadist Movement*, ed. RAND (Santa Monica, California: Rand Corporation, 2006), 73.

⁷ IntelCenter, "Al-Qaeda Messaging Statistics (Qsm)," ed. IntelCenter (Alexandria, Virginia: IntelCenter, 2007).

expand the global jihad to new locations and persuade new Al-Qaeda franchises to join the movement. It does so by tracking the geographic locales that Zawahiri's messages target over time. Zawahiri's strategic priorities are evident in the repetitive targeting of particular countries, rulers, and capitals reflected in communiqués, providing insight into the changing priorities of his implacable organization. Furthermore, it assesses whether the response in word and deed to Al-Qaeda's public statements from like-minded groups indicates that the global jihad movement is responding to Al-Qaeda's propaganda.

GLOBAL JIHAD

Before engaging in a detailed discussion of Al-Qaeda's strategic communications strategy, it is important to recognize Al-Qaeda's origins, not as a solitary organization, but rather as the product of various jihadist movements that merged in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Much like the sanctuary it enjoys in Pakistan,⁸ Al-Qaeda's ability to propagate its movement – made possible by its networked structure and the universality of its articulated goals – is vital for its survival. As Lawrence Wright points out in his acclaimed book *The Looming Tower*, from its inception Al-Qaeda was an international organization, created by combining and compromising the vision and life experiences of two committed jihadists—one Saudi and one Egyptian.⁹

Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri met in Pakistan, where both worked on behalf of the Afghan mujahidin under the guidance of Abdullah Azzam. The fact that they met was no accident of history: both men were drawn to Afghanistan to defend Islam, and both viewed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as a higher calling to expel the infidel government. Naturally, they traveled in overlapping circles. When the Soviet Union began withdrawing from Afghanistan in 1988, neither man perceived that his jihad had ended. On the contrary, the loss of the Soviet enemy prompted a re-evaluation of targets among the hodgepodge of committed – primarily Arab – jihadists that resided in Afghanistan in the late 1980s. As Fawaz Gerges argues in his book *The Far Enemy*, Al-

⁸ For more on Al-Qaeda's sanctuary in Afghanistan and Pakistan see Bruce Riedel, *The Search for Al Qaeda : Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 124-127.

⁹ Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower : Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 2006), 146.

Qaeda was an innovative iteration of jihadist thinking that emerged out of the discord within the jihadist community at the end of the Afghan War.¹⁰

The fall of communism, followed by the U.S. war with Iraq in 1990, presented the two men with a new enemy: the United States.¹¹ While bin Ladin had dedicated his work to the Arabs in Afghanistan under Abdullah Azzam, Zawahiri had led al-Jihad, an Egyptian organization dedicated to overthrowing secular Egyptian leaders, in favor of an Islamic state. According to Gerges's analysis, bin Ladin's emphasis on efficiency combined with Zawahiri's drive for vengeance resulted in a merger between the Afghan mujahidin and Zawahiri's Egyptian group al-Jihad, after the failure of Islamist insurrections in the Middle East and Egypt in particular.¹² The pressures of aggressive Egyptian counterterrorism efforts stymied funds for Zawahiri's group, prompting the merger with bin Ladin's comparably wealthy mujahidin movement. For bin Ladin, Zawahiri's strategic vision augmented his own operation, and provided a cadre of tested and well-trained Egyptian Islamists, who helped to form the core of Al-Qaeda.¹³

This merger, born out of strategic necessity, produced the lethal Al-Qaeda organization that attacked the United States on September 11, 2001 and created the precedent for combining Islamist groups under the Al-Qaeda banner to augment their capabilities. In fact, as Al-Qaeda's name, "the base," implies, Zawahiri and bin Ladin defined their struggle in universal terms – as a battle that unites all Muslims against a

¹⁰ Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy : Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹¹ For more on the founding of Al-Qaeda see Wright, *The Looming Tower : Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*.

¹² Gerges, *The Far Enemy : Why Jihad Went Global*.

¹³ Ibid.

common enemy.¹⁴ Their vision was not ‘Al-Qaeda’ the organization, but rather ‘Al-Qaeda’ the vanguard – a rallying point for like-minded groups to tap for strength, training, and guidance.

Therefore, from its inception Al-Qaeda was not a unitary actor. Prior to 9/11, Al-Qaeda was already a networked-organization, linking together individuals and groups in approximately 60 countries.¹⁵ A former State Department analyst, Stephen Cohen, characterized Al-Qaeda in its early years as “as the Ford Foundation of terrorism -- an organization that, at least in its formative period, sat back and listened to proposals for terrorist attacks from individuals and organizations.”¹⁶ Al-Qaeda’s visionary leaders created not a single corporate entity, but a social movement that united disparate followers and their grievances, who would otherwise have been divided by geography, language, nationality, and culture.¹⁷ It functioned as a conglomerate of institutions and individuals who came together for a common purpose.

Much like the fall of the Soviet Union forced a strategic recalculation for the Afghan mujahideen that resulted in the creation of Al-Qaeda, operational losses for the organization in the U.S. War on Terror have forced it to expand and adapt its network. Since 9/11, the United States and the international community have engaged in an effort to preempt, disrupt, and defeat Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other terrorist enclaves

¹⁴ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, Rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 93-94. For more on Al-Qaeda’s early years see Wright, *The Looming Tower : Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*.

¹⁵ Barry Posen, "The Struggle against Terrorism: Grand Strategy, Strategy, and Tactics," *International Security* 26, no. 3.

¹⁶ Terry McDermott, "New Plot Details Emerge," *Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 2004.

¹⁷ David Leheny, "Terrorism, Social Movements, and International Security: How Al Qaeda Affects Southeast Asia," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 6, no. 01 (2005).

around the world. In the the intervening period, the U.S. and its allies have captured or killed numerous Al-Qaeda high-value targets.¹⁸ Recent successes have been striking: a 2005 Congressional Research Service report claimed that since 9/11, over 3000 suspected Al-Qaeda members had been detained or arrested in 90 countries, 650 of which were remanded to U.S. control.¹⁹ In December 2008 *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor* further reported that over 30 missile strikes had occurred in Pakistan's tribal areas over the course of the previous year resulting the deaths of numerous Al-Qaeda linked militants.²⁰

Despite clear progress in disrupting Al-Qaeda's operational network, Al-Qaeda expert Bruce Hoffman argues that it would be "imprudent to write Al Qaeda's obituary just yet—much less discount its ability to mutate into new, more pernicious forms."²¹ U.S. policymakers remain concerned that counterterrorism pressure has not defeated Al-Qaeda, but rather, "transformed [it] into a diffuse global network and philosophical movement composed of dispersed nodes with varying degrees of independence."²² Rather than a departure from its original structure, it is more likely that Al-Qaeda has continued to augment its weaknesses through its network. According to terrorism expert Jessica Stern, despite operational losses, Al-Qaeda has retained the ability to attract new allies to

¹⁸ For example: Abu Zubaydah, Khalid Shikh Mohammad, Mohammad Atef, Ramzi bin al-Shibh, Sharib Ahmad, Abu Laith al-Libi, Abu Khabab al-Masri, and Khalid al-Habib. See "Al-Qaeda Vs. Predator," ed. Jane's Information Group (*Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, December 19, 2008).; C. Christine Fair and Seth G. Jones, "Pakistan's War Within," *Survival* December 2009-January 2010., 167; Kenneth Katzman, "Al Qaeda: Profile and Threat Assessment," ed. Defense Foreign Affairs, and Trade Division (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, August 17, 2005)., 9.

¹⁹ Katzman, "Al Qaeda: Profile and Threat Assessment.", 6.

²⁰ "Al-Qaeda Vs. Predator."

²¹ Bruce Hoffman, "Al-Qaeda, Trends in Terrorism and Future Potentialities: An Assessment," (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 2003)., 430.

²² John Collins, "Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy," (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, February 5, 2010)., i.

the jihadist cause, many from groups previously unaffiliated with Al-Qaeda.²³ The 2006 report on Al-Qaeda by the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence recognized this trend, stating, “Al-Qaeda’s ability to export its ideology to terrorist organizations around the world has created a second front in the war on terrorism.... we are now fighting a war against various entities inspired by Al-Qaeda and radicalized in various areas around the world, including the United States.”²⁴ Simply put, Al-Qaeda in 2010 is not the same organization that attacked the United States in 2001; it has adapted to counterterrorism pressures and expanded its reach to new locales.²⁵

Eight years after 9/11, Al-Qaeda’s ability to inspire jihad at both the individual and group levels is a testament to the power of its propaganda. While much of the radicalization and recruitment cycle that replenishes Al-Qaeda’s ranks remains outside of the purview of academic researchers, Al-Qaeda’s public statements provide a body of empirical evidence for researchers to study the group’s propaganda. With Al-Qaeda Central’s operational abilities in question, the recruitment cycle is now all the more dependent on Al-Qaeda’s strategic communications ability.²⁶ As C.J. Ciovacco pointed out in a recent article in *Studies of Conflict and Terrorism*, “Al Qaeda Central today has lost much of its bureaucracy, funding, and base of operations, it must rely on what

²³ Stern Jessica, "The Protean Enemy," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 4 (2003).

²⁴ U.S. House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, "Al-Qaeda: The Many Faces of an Islamic Threat," (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006)., 6

²⁵ Angel Rabasa, *Beyond Al-Qaeda: Part I, the Global Jihadist Movement.*, 73

²⁶ Al-Qaeda Central refers to the group’s operational leadership in Pakistan. For more information on Al-Qaeda central see Riedel, *The Search for Al Qaeda : Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future.*; and Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*.

remains: its message.”²⁷ Even in hiding, from 2001 until the end of 2009, Zawahiri released or appeared in over 75 audio or visual releases catalogued in this study—a risk not adopted without purpose.²⁸ Zawahiri’s statements are a public attempt to sell his plan, and the Al-Qaeda brand, to new locations abroad and cast his struggle in global terms. Riedel states, “The picture Zawahiri paints,” in his communiqués, “is one of an unprecedented assault on the Islamic world by its enemies: Crusaders, Zionists, and Hindus. But Zawahiri has devised a plan for repelling the attack, defending the ummah, and recreating the caliphate. Its key element is jihad.”²⁹ For Al-Qaeda, propaganda of the deed—the traditional definition of terrorism—can now be substituted for propaganda in the absence of the deed, when operationally necessary and strategically expedient.

²⁷ Carl J. Ciovacco, "The Contours of Al Qaeda's Media Strategy," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 10 (2009), 856

²⁸ IntelCenter, "Timeline of Ayman Al-Zawahiri Audio/Video Releases V1.0," (Alexandria, Virginia: IntelCenter, March 2009). See Appendix for a list of references for Zawahiri’s statements.

²⁹ Riedel, *The Search for Al Qaeda : Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future.*, 31.

MOTIVATING THE UMMAH: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

For Al-Qaeda, strategic communications is more than a message; it is a means to an end: to perpetuate the movement and harm its enemies.³⁰ Using captured Al-Qaeda documents, a Consortium for Strategic Communications team from the Arizona State University, led by communications expert Steven Corman, determined that Al-Qaeda strives to meet three key objectives through their messaging: 1. legitimate the global jihad; 2. proselytize to like-minded groups; and 3. intimidate the United States and its allies.³¹ According to Corman, legitimating the global jihad provides the religious justification for violence; proselytizing to like-minded groups aims to expand Al-Qaeda's struggle into a global movement; and intimidating its enemies serves to put the United States and its allies on notice and to force them to retreat.³² These priorities are consistent with Grant Wardlaw's argument that terrorists must continually strive to legitimate their actions and convince the public of the validity of their cause in order to survive.³³

For this study, Corman's second objective – Al-Qaeda's ability to proselytize to like-minded groups – is the most critical, as it is key to Al-Qaeda's ability to franchise its movement and threaten the United States. Zawahiri recognized this need in his now infamous letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, when he cautioned the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq to exhibit restraint in igniting sectarian tension as, "In the absence of popular

³⁰ Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*., 225.

³¹ Steven R. Corman, H. Lloyd Goodall, and Angela Trethewey, *Weapons of Mass Persuasion : Strategic Communication to Combat Violent Extremism*, *Frontiers in Political Communication* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008)., 70.

³² *Ibid.*, 76.

³³ Grant Wardlaw, *Political Terrorism : Theory, Tactics, and Counter-Measures*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989)., 6.

support, the Islamic mujahed movement would be crushed in the shadows.”³⁴ While all three objectives are self-reinforcing, objective two focuses most directly on recruiting new members to Al-Qaeda’s ranks and therefore poses the most significant threat to U.S. interests.

Corman argues that Al-Qaeda employs a two-way strategy to reach out to sympathizers that allows for information to be transmitted and received through a variety of means.³⁵ The purpose of the message in this model, named “strategic ambiguity” by Corman, is to motivate action on the part of the receiver, rather than to create common understanding between the sender and receiver.³⁶ The strategic ambiguity model allows for multiple senders, receivers, and interpretations of meaning. For example, Al-Qaeda often addresses multiple audiences and themes in its messages, maximizing the thematic, historical, and geographic coverage and leaves it up to the audience to internalize the message based on each individual’s background and experience. Bin Laden and Zawahiri embrace the concept of strategic ambiguity by illustrating the Muslim duty to wage jihad with vivid imagery from countless historical and geographic contexts, to personalize the struggle.³⁷ Their hope is to inspire like-minded followers worldwide to embrace their call to action.

Al-Qaeda’s innovative use of technology also allows its leadership to target audiences in a highly personal nature. Al-Qaeda’s embraces new technology and the

³⁴ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, "Letter from Al-Zawahiri to Al-Zarqawi," (Washington D.C. October 11, 2005)., 4.

³⁵ Corman, Goodall, and Trethewey, *Weapons of Mass Persuasion : Strategic Communication to Combat Violent Extremism.*, 30.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁷ Alia Brahimi, "Crushed in the Shadows: Why Al Qaeda Will Lose the War of Ideas," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no. 2 (2010)., 97.

accoutrements of globalization to enhance their communication and propaganda efforts.

Of the four original committees that made up Al-Qaeda prior to 9/11, one was devoted entirely to media and propaganda.³⁸ As Hoffman writes:

The weapons of terrorism are no longer simply the guns and bombs that they have always used. Now those weapons include the Minicam and videotape, editing suite and attendant production facilities; professionally produced and mass-marketed CD-ROMS and DVDs; and, most critically, the laptop and desktop computers, CD burners and e-mail accounts, and Internet and World Wide Web access that have defined the information revolution today.³⁹

After 9/11, the Internet has become a kind of virtual sanctuary for Al-Qaeda, providing efficient, effective, and anonymous communication with its network worldwide.⁴⁰ Terrorist groups developed their own media wings, with full editing capability and control over the entire production process, allowing messages to be targeted to specific audiences and circumstances, and empowering terrorists to reach their audience regardless of coverage by mainstream media.⁴¹ Al-Qaeda exemplifies this trend through their media wing as-Sahab (translation: The Clouds), which produces a new professional quality video or audio message every 72 hours.⁴²

New media allows Al-Qaeda to recruit, “one person at a time,” as terrorism expert Brian Michael Jenkins testified before the U.S. House of Representatives in April 2007.⁴³

³⁸ Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*., 214, Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda : Global Network of Terror* (New York: Berkley Books, 2003)., 57.

³⁹ Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*., 197.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 198-199.

⁴² Riedel, *The Search for Al Qaeda : Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future.*, 123.

⁴³ Brian Michael Jenkins, "Building an Army of Believers, Jihadist Radicalization and Recruitment," in *Testimony presented before the House Homeland Security Committee, Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing and Terrorism Risk Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: RAND Corporation, April 5, 2007)., 3.

For the individual and the group sympathetic to Al-Qaeda's cause, connecting the brand name in near real-time with local circumstances carries a seductive appeal:

Al-Qaeda's brand of jihad offers a comprehensive and uncomplicated solution—the possibility of adventure, a “legitimate” outlet for aggression, the lure of clandestinely, pride, camaraderie, and elixir to cure all ills, an antidote to anxiety, an achievable goal, a seemingly noble cause, a sense of direction and meaning in life, and the eventual promise of earthly pleasures in the hereafter.⁴⁴

Individuals and affiliates are presented, therefore, with a virtual buffet of rationales to prompt them to identify with Al-Qaeda's worldview and adopt it as their own. Furthermore, the rhetoric itself is carefully tuned to make it incumbent on every follower to wage jihad in his or her own way. According to Jenkins, “More than a military contest, the jihadist campaign is above all a missionary enterprise.”⁴⁵ Thus, for Al-Qaeda, propaganda is a call to action.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 2.

DIALOUGE WITH DR. JIHAD

Ayman-al-Zawahiri issues this call to action. He is the focus of this study because he has served as Al-Qaeda's chief ideologue and propagandist since the organization's founding.⁴⁶ Furthermore, Zawahiri has historically endorsed mergers between Al-Qaeda and like-minded organizations, beginning with his justification for its merger with al-Jihad in 2001⁴⁷, continuing through his most recent endorsement of AQAP's affiliation in December 2009. In fact, some analysts and commentators have debated whether he is actually subordinate to bin Laden or supersedes him through his role as the real ideological leader of Al-Qaeda.⁴⁸ Of the two men, Zawahiri has a longer resume of jihadist activism, dating back to his fifteenth year when he founded his first jihadist group.⁴⁹ Furthermore, a 2005 IntelCenter report suggested there was a correlation between Zawahiri media releases and "signature al-Qaeda style operations within 6-30 days," suggesting the Al-Qaeda leader was more tapped into the operations of Al-Qaeda's followers, or more readily available to comment on their activities, than his superior, bin Ladin.⁵⁰

This study assesses which audiences Zawahiri is targeting by tabulating the number of times he mentions a particular country, to include its name, capital, ruler,

⁴⁶ Daniel Benjamin, Steven Simon, "The Age of Sacred Terror: Radical Islam's War against the West." (New York: Random House, 2003), 104.

⁴⁷ Lawrence Wright, "The Man Behind Bin Laden: How an Egyptian Doctor Became a Master of Terror," *The New Yorker* (September 16, 2002), http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2002/09/16/020916fa_fact2, 2.

⁴⁸ See for example Youssef H. Aboul-Enein, "Ayman Al-Zawahiri: The Ideologue of Modern Islamic Militancy," in *Counterproliferation Papers Series*, ed. USAF Counterproliferation Center (Maxwell Airforce Base, Alabama: Air University, March 2004), who argues, "Egyptian physician Ayman Al-Zawahiri is considered by many to be the brains behind Al-Qaeda organization.", 1.

⁴⁹ Wright, "The Man Behind Bin Laden: How an Egyptian Doctor Became a Master of Terror.", 7.

⁵⁰ IntelCenter Zawahiri Media Releases Report. The report also acknowledged that this correlation is tempered by the increase

military or intelligence service, as indicators. While tallying references may seem an arbitrary distinction, al-Qaeda uses the same tabulation as an indication of U.S. strategic priorities. In a video release dated December 17, 2007, an as-Sahab interviewer asks Zawahiri to comment on American military progress in Iraq prompting, “they [the Americans] repeatedly talked about the ‘spectacular progress in al-Anbar,’ to the extent that the name of al-Anbar was repeated in the report more than 24 times...”⁵¹ If repetition of a particular locale emboldens Al-Qaeda’s own propaganda by illuminating American strategic thinking, then by Al-Qaeda’s own logic, this metric should suffice to provide a rudimentary glimpse into Al-Qaeda’s strategic priorities.⁵² All of the data used in this study is measured against Zawahiri’s written vision for holy war: *Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner*, the manifesto he released just after September 11, 2001, as a baseline for comparison.⁵³

The response to Zawahiri’s messages is evaluated qualitatively, as the disparate nature of the groups that Al-Qaeda aims to inspire do not constitute a comprehensive

⁵¹ IntelCenter, *Intelcenter: Words of Ayman Al-Zawahiri Vol. 1* (Alexandria, Virginia: Tempest Publishing, LLC, 2008), 344.

⁵² A note about the methodology: Al-Qaeda expands its recruits by vilifying governments and urging individuals to the defense of Islam. Therefore, references to the government can be equated with a condemnation from Al-Qaeda and can be interpreted as the authorization for legitimate action against the government, in accordance with their worldview, whereas reference to a population is more ambiguous. References to a particular country were indicated by the mention of capitals, current leader or ruling family, the country name, and government or military references because al-Qaeda’s justification for attacking targets is entirely dependent on proving that the governments are illegitimate.⁵² For example, “Afghans” was omitted, whereas “Kabul” was included—as one refers to the population of the country, and the other refers to the seat of government. Similarly, ISI was included as a reference to Pakistan, as was Musharraf (when he was in office), as both are clear representations of the Pakistani government. Additionally, references to a government’s military or intelligence service was tabulated, as Zawahiri uses these references to condemn the corrupt nature of his targets. Finally, tabulation was limited to proper nouns and names of countries and organizations in an effort to minimize variation caused by translation, thus historical references or unspecific allusions to countries were omitted.

⁵³ The translation of Zawahiri’s *Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner* used for this study was obtained from: Laura Mansfield, *His Own Words: Translation and Analysis of the Writings of Dr. Ayman Al Zawahiri* (TLG Publications, 2006).

volume of literature from which to draw data. News reports on declared affiliations, analysis from the U.S. government and subject matter experts, and public statements by insurgent leaders were compiled to provide a comprehensive picture of and context for Al-Qaeda's outreach to like-minded groups. Indicators of a response to Al-Qaeda's propaganda include: formally declaring support for Al-Qaeda's jihad or leadership, declaring an Islamic state in a previously localized insurgency, publicly announcing a merger with Al-Qaeda Central, and adopting an expanded target set to include U.S. or Western interests in a previously local conflict. In each of the cases below, Al-Qaeda's public propaganda resulted in some or all of these responses, indicating success for Al-Qaeda's recruitment and retention cycle. For clarity, the analysis of the ongoing conversation between Zawahiri and Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups is divided by organization and region, particularly: Al-Qaeda in Iraq, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Chechnya and the Caucasus, Somalia, and Sudan and Darfur. It concludes with additional observations on regional local conflicts Al-Qaeda may seek to exploit in the future, drawn from the quantitative analysis of Zawahiri's statements.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq

Al-Qaeda in Iraq provides the most transparent model for how Al-Qaeda recruits, uses, and guides the participation of affiliated groups in their movement. In a public letter on October 17, 2004, Zarqawi pledged his allegiance to Al-Qaeda, indicating that the declaration was made after eight months of private negotiations between the local

insurgent leader and Al-Qaeda Central.⁵⁴ This declaration was followed by a noticeable increase in attention from Zawahiri on the Iraq conflict from 2005-2007.⁵⁵ In fact, from 2001 until 2007, Zawahiri's public statements increasingly lavished attention on the Iraqi conflict.⁵⁶ This uptick in attention from Al-Qaeda's second in command also correlates to the increase in violence in Iraq in 2006, and the announcement of the U.S. troop surge by President Bush in January 2007.

The analysis of other affiliate groups necessarily depends more on the public dialogue between al-Qaeda and insurgent leaders, but a pivotal letter from Zawahiri to Zarqawi from 2005 also sheds light on the private interaction between Al-Qaeda central and its affiliates.⁵⁷ In it, Zawahiri blatantly articulated that his public statements are an attempt to reach out to the local leader, stating:

My dear brother, we are following your news, despite the difficulty and hardship. We received your last published message sent to Sheikh Usama Bin Ladin, God save him. Likewise, I made sure in my last speech-that Aljazeera broadcast Saturday, 11 Jumadi I, 1426h, 18 June 2005-to mention you, send you greetings, and show support and thanks for the heroic acts you are performing in defense of Islam and the Muslims, but I do not know what Aljazeera broadcast.⁵⁸

Zawahiri subsumes the Iraqi conflict under the umbrella of the larger Al-Qaeda struggle to establish an Islamic caliphate and lays out several long-term goals for the jihad in Iraq, including: expelling the Americans from Iraq, establishing an Islamic authority or emirate, nurturing it until it can be declared a caliphate, extending the jihad

⁵⁴ Dexter Filkins, "Wanted Rebel Vows Loyalty to Bin Laden , Web Sites Say," *The New York Times*, October 18 2004.

⁵⁵ See Appendix, Al-Qaeda in Iraq Chart.

⁵⁶ See Appendix, Al Qaeda in Iraq Chart.

⁵⁷ Intelligence, "Letter from Al-Zawahiri to Al-Zarqawi."

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

to neighboring states; and combating Israel.⁵⁹ Zawahiri is very clear that the mujahidin's, "ongoing mission is to establish an Islamic state, and defend it, and for every generation to hand over the banner to the one after it until the Hour of Resurrection."⁶⁰ He also prioritizes fighting the Americans in Iraq and establishing the emirate as intermediate goals of Al-Qaeda's strategy for Iraq. Finally, Zawahiri states that Al-Qaeda is striving for unity amongst the various mujahidin movements and across the ummah, cautioning that even the fighters who maintain some heretical beliefs must be included in Al-Qaeda's war, as "we must find a means to include them and to benefit from their energy."⁶¹

The evolution of Zarqawi's insurgent group, Tawid and Jihad, closely resembled the priorities established by Zawahiri in the private communiqué, despite the United States's aggressive counterinsurgency efforts. In January 2006, under increasingly pressure from local insurgents and U.S. forces, Zarqawi attempted to unify his foreign fighters and nationalist movements in Iraq under a single banner—forming the Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin (Mujahidin Shura Council).⁶² Zarqawi's group is also allegedly responsible for the attempted bombing of three hotels in Amman, Jordan, consistent with Al-Qaeda's push to expand the jihad outside of regional or local borders.⁶³ At the same time, Zawahiri increasingly focused his attention on Iraq, speaking about it almost as

⁵⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 7.

⁶² Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, "Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records," in *Harmony Project* (Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2007), 5.

⁶³ Hassan M. Fattah and Michael Slackman, "3 Hotels Bombed in Jordan; at Least 57 Die " *The New York Times*(2005), http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/10/international/middleeast/10jordan.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print.

often as Afghanistan and Pakistan during 2006, indicating that during this time Al-Qaeda continued its attempts to influence events there. By the end of 2007, Zawahiri spoke about Iraq almost twice as much as Afghanistan – Al-Qaeda’s attention was clearly consumed by the U.S. military’s surge in Iraq – to the point of distraction from all other fronts to preserve their newest battleground for jihad.⁶⁴

In June 2006, Zarqawi was killed by U.S. forces in Iraq and quickly replaced with Abu Hamza al-Muhajir (identified by the U.S. as Aby Ayyub al-Masri, an Egyptian). In October 2006, the Mujahidin Shura Council, led by Muhajir, announced the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), following Al-Qaeda’s agenda of establishing an emirate and then a caliphate, even absent Zarqawi’s leadership.⁶⁵ According to the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, “The ISI was meant to unify resistance to U.S. occupation, inspire support from al-Qa’ida’s global supporters by imposing Islamic law, and ensure that al-Qa’ida was prepared in case of a precipitous U.S. withdrawal from Iraq.”⁶⁶ Although consistent with Al-Qaeda’s goals for Iraq, as expressed by Zawahiri, CTC also points out that the ISI was “poorly conceived and is largely failing.”⁶⁷

After Zawahiri’s last statement in 2007, his focus on Iraq sharply declined although it did not disappear.⁶⁸ The drop in attention paid to Al-Qaeda in Iraq after 2007 may be indicative of the severing of ties between the AQI and Al-Qaeda Central, or it might illustrate a preference that Al-Qaeda’s ideological leaders prefer to highlight where their brand is successful, not where it is struggling. The loss of Zawahiri’s attention may

⁶⁴ See Appendix, Al-Qaeda in Iraq Chart.

⁶⁵ Filkins, "Wanted Rebel Vows Loyalty to Bin Laden , Web Sites Say."

⁶⁶ Fishman, "Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records.", 5.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁸ See Appendix, Al-Qaeda in Iraq Chart.

also be attributed to the death of Zarqawi in 2006, as numerous analysts have commented that the new leader of AQI does not seem to enjoy the full-support of Al-Qaeda Central, if he exists at all.⁶⁹ Zawahiri, however, contends that the Islamic State of Iraq, in his eyes, “is one of those movements with a pristine ideology and clear vision which at an early stage declared its observance of legal constants in fighting and politics and stated the bitter truth which others fear to speak,” indicating he perhaps feels the movement needs less guidance than other groups.⁷⁰ Regardless, of the affiliates examined in this study, Iraq is the only country that experienced a “tipping point” of this kind, where Al-Qaeda attention grew and waned, which could be interpreted as a sign of U.S. success in counterinsurgency in Iraq.

The Iraq case depicts the importance of strategic communications – both Zawahiri’s and the declarations made by affiliate groups – in establishing and maintaining links between Al-Qaeda Central and local insurgencies. It also provides a unique window into the private negotiations that occur behind the scenes as groups join Al-Qaeda’s jihad, eluding the existence of private discussions in the background of other declarations covered in this study. The Iraq model should therefore be considered the model for how Al-Qaeda instructs and guides local insurgencies to comply with their agenda and how affiliates aspire in return to join the movement, pledge allegiance to Al-Qaeda’s leaders, establish a unified Islamic state, and expand their target set. Moreover, while Al-Qaeda’s attention has focused on other regions since 2007, that does not

⁶⁹ Fishman, "Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records.", 5; Brian Fishman Jarret Brachman, Joseph Felter, "The Power of Truth: Questions for Ayman Al-Zawahiri," (Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2008)., 3.

⁷⁰ IntelCenter, *Intelcenter: Words of Ayman Al-Zawahiri Vol. 1.*, 361.

preclude it from renewing its focus on Iraq, particularly if AQI experiences a resurgence of its own following the withdrawal of U.S. forces.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

Zawahiri hardly spoke of targeting the Arabian Peninsula until mid-2006, after which there was a noticeable increase in the attention he devoted to the region.⁷¹ Yet, Al-Qaeda's roots in Yemen extend much further back in history. The Arabian Peninsula, Yemen and Saudi Arabia in particular, are the lands of Osama bin Ladin's heritage.⁷² During Al-Qaeda's formative years, Yemenis and Saudis traveled to Afghanistan and served as personal bodyguards to bin Ladin.⁷³ After the Soviet withdrawal, many Yemeni and Saudi fighters returned to the Arabian Peninsula and began targeting Saudi Arabia. In the years after 9/11, Saudi Arabia actively pursued Al-Qaeda members active in the Arabian Peninsula following a wave of terrorist incidents, which largely expelled the movement south to Yemen by 2007.⁷⁴ Yemen is also the site of Al-Qaeda attacks against a hotel in Aden, housing American military personnel, the *USS Cole* in 2000, and the French *Limburg* oil tanker in 2002.⁷⁵ Al-Qaeda's presence in Yemen and Saudi

⁷¹ See Appendix, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula Chart

⁷² Osama was formerly a citizen of Saudi Arabia, on his father's side, while his mother's family hails from Yemen. For more on Osama bin Ladin see Michael Scheuer, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes : Osama Bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America*, Rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 2006).

⁷³ Abdel Bari Atwan, *The Secret History of Al Qaeda* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 59.

⁷⁴ Second Session One Hundred Eleventh Congress, "Al Qaeda in Yemen and Somalia: A Ticking Time Bomb," ed. United States Senate A Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 21, 2010), 10.

⁷⁵ Gerald F. Seib, "Threat Persists in Yemen, Somalia," *Wall Street Journal - Eastern Edition*, October 13, 2009 2009.; see also Daniel Benjamin, "Testimony of Ambassador Daniel Benjamin, Coordinator for Counterterrorism," ed. Terrorism Unconventional Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee House Armed Services Committee (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 20, 2010).

Arabia is therefore not a new phenomenon, as the contemporary organization is building on and presumably learning from the failures of its predecessors.

Gregory D. Johnsen, an expert on Yemen, believes the February 2006 prison break in Yemen that allowed 23 suspected Al-Qaeda members to escape facilitated the reconstitution of Al-Qaeda's presence in the Arabian Peninsula, and likely explains Zawahiri's renewed attention to the region at the same time.⁷⁶ Many of the Al-Qaeda linked militants in Yemen are believed to have fought in Iraq, or were radicalized in the Yemeni prison system—linking them directly with Al-Qaeda's broader network.⁷⁷ The priority afforded to Yemen by Zawahiri after mid-2006 is particularly striking, increasing from 2 mentions from 2001-2004, to 9 in 2006, and to 10 in 2007.⁷⁸ Coinciding with the Saudi crackdown, in July of 2007, Zawahiri mentioned Saudi Arabia 65 times in a single statement, "The Advice of One Concerned."⁷⁹ By 2008-2009, Zawahiri was referring to Yemen up to 13 times in individual statements.⁸⁰ Given the increase in attention warranted to Yemen, it is reasonable to expect that Zawahiri was cognizant of the group's resurgence on the Arabian Peninsula, either through private channels or media reports.

In January 2009, the Saudi membership of Al-Qaeda officially merged with the Yemeni branch to form Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, following a bin Ladin audio release in which he indicated Al-Qaeda was, "in the process of opening new frontlines,

⁷⁶Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "Al-Qaeda in Yemen" (July 7, 2009)., 4; Andrew McGregor, "Al-Qaeda's Great Escape in Yemen," *Terrorism Focus* 3, no. 5, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=663&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=239&no_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=663&tx_ttnews[backPid]=239&no_cache=1).

⁷⁷ John Rollins, "Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy," (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, February 5, 2010)., 10.

⁷⁸ See Appendix, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula Chart.

⁷⁹ IntelCenter, *Intelcenter: Words of Ayman Al-Zawahiri Vol. 1.*, 281-323.

⁸⁰ See Appendix, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula Chart.

Allah willing.”⁸¹ In a January 2009 interview announcing his organization, Nasir Abd-al-Karim al-Huwayshi, the leader of AQAP and a former associate of bin Ladin, stated that he was part of “al-Qa'idah of Jihad Organization. We consider ourselves as the vanguards of the Islamic ummah,” before clarifying that he led, “the Al-Qa'idah of Jihad Organization in the Arabian Peninsula.”⁸² The AQAP leader also invoked the successive leaders of Iraq as the “emirs of jihad,” connecting the emergent organization to Al-Qaeda’s global network and explicitly tying himself to the legacy of Zarqawi. Huqayshi urged his AQAP followers to destroy the “Crusader interests spread out in the Arabian Peninsula, including Yemen,” a call that predicated an increase in AQAP operational activity.⁸³

Following the merger announcement, in August 2009, an AQAP magazine advertised the need for, “doctors, engineers and electricians,” and other mujahidin with special skills to “accelerate the pace of achieving our great Islamic project: establishing an Islamic caliphate.”⁸⁴ AQAP had, over the course of a year, declared itself in alliance with Al-Qaeda, declared they were working for the establishment of Al-Qaeda’s caliphate, and publicly expanded its target set to include Western interests, particularly the United States, following the model set by Al-Qaeda in Iraq. In December 2009,

⁸¹ NEFA Foundation, "Usama Bin Laden: "A Call for Jihad to Stop the Gaza Assault"," in *Terror Watch* (NEFA Foundation, 2009).

⁸² BBC Monitoring International Reports, "Amir of Al-Qa'idah in Arabian Peninsula Urges Targeting "Crusader" Interests," *AlJazeera.net*(2009).

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Sarah Phillips, "Yemen Asks for Aid to Ward Off Al-Qa'ida," *The Australian*, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/yemen-asks-for-aid-to-ward-off-al-qaida/story-e6frg6zo-1225841072141>.

Zawahiri officially recognized the merger and endorsed Abu Basir Nasir al-Wuhayshi as the emir of the regional AQ affiliate.⁸⁵

After the announcement of the merger, AQAP became increasingly brazen, attempting the assassination of Saudi Prince Mohammed bin Nayef in Saudi Arabia with a suicide bomber.⁸⁶ Reportedly, after the attack failed, bin Nayef personally warned the Obama administration that the same explosives Saudi officials failed to detect in August of 2009 could be used to attack commercial aviation, as the ambition of the regional group grew.⁸⁷ On December 25, 2009, AQAP became the first official AQ franchise to attempt to attack the U.S. homeland, and its Yemeni predecessor is responsible for the September 2008 attack against the U.S. Embassy in Sana'a.⁸⁸ The attempt to destroy Northwest Flight 253 from Amsterdam on Christmas Day 2009 pointedly demonstrated that Al-Qaeda affiliates can be just as interested in targeting the United States as their core benefactor is.⁸⁹ The Christmas Day plot was, "a nearly catastrophic illustration of a significant new threat from a network previously regarded as a regional danger, rather than an international one," and demonstrated that Al-Qaeda's attempts to draw affiliates into orbit and adopt its worldview can result in direct threats to the U.S. homeland.⁹⁰

⁸⁵Michael W. S. Ryan, "Al-Qaeda's Purpose in Yemen Described in Works of Jihad Strategists," *Terrorism Focus* 8, no. 4 (2010), [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=35964&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=26&cHash=443249b650](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35964&tx_ttnews[backPid]=26&cHash=443249b650).

⁸⁶ Eric Schmitt Eric Lipton, and Mark Mazzetti, "Review of Jet Bomb Plot Shows More Missed Clues," *The New York Times*, January 17, 2010.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Garry Reid, "Statement of Dasd Garry Reid," ed. Terrorism Unconventional Threats Regarding the Threats Posed by Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and Other Regions House Armed Services Committee (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 20, 2010).

⁸⁹ Eric Lipton, "Review of Jet Bomb Plot Shows More Missed Clues."

⁹⁰ One Hundred Eleventh Congress, "Al Qaeda in Yemen and Somalia: A Ticking Time Bomb.", 1.

AQAP issued a statement following the attacks claiming responsibility, congratulating bin Ladin and Zawahiri for what it deemed a successful attack, and again encouraged its followers to attack U.S. interests.⁹¹ Interestingly, Saed Elshari, AQAP's second-in-command, also praised Islamic militants in Somalia, demonstrating once again that Al-Qaeda offshoots not only perceive themselves as connected to the vanguard in Pakistan and Afghanistan, but also by extension to other affiliates associated with the movement.⁹² As the AQAP case study demonstrates, the increasing attention from Al-Qaeda senior leadership, particularly Zawahiri, afforded to Yemen in recent years directly correlates with deepening public ties between the two organizations, including blatant declarations of fealty, shared goals of establishing a caliphate, and a direct attack on the U.S. homeland. The AQAP case punctuates that Al-Qaeda central's strategic communications strategy is not an exercise in mere propaganda, but a strategy to enable new operations using their affiliate network.

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

Al-Qaeda's links to Algerian Islamists date back to the early 1990s, yet it was not until 2006 that the GSPC (Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat) formally merged with Al-Qaeda.⁹³ In 2003, the GSPC declared support for Al-Qaeda's jihad, stating, "We strongly and fully support Osama bin Laden's jihad against the heretic America as well as

⁹¹ "Yemen Al-Qaeda Leader Threatens Us," *AlJazeera.net*, no. February 9, 2010 (2010), <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2010/02/201028133549227780.html>.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Lauren Vriens Andrew Hansen, "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (Aqim) or L'organisation Al-Qaïda Au Maghreb Islamique (Formerly Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat or Groupe Salafiste Pour La Prédication Et Le Combat) " in *Backgrounder*, ed. Council on Foreign Relations (New York, NY2009).

we support our brothers in Afghanistan, the Philippines, and Chechnya.”⁹⁴ In 2006, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) formally joined Al-Qaeda, adopting the moniker al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in January 2007, with a public blessing from Zawahiri and bin Ladin.⁹⁵ Zawahiri had the distinction of announcing the merger on September 11, 2006, in his statement titled, “Hot Issues with Ayman al-Zawahiri.”⁹⁶ Two days after the formal announcement, a statement from AQIM’s declared leader, Abu Musab Abd al-Wadoud claimed, “We have full confidence in the faith, the doctrine, the method and the modes of action of [al Qaeda’s] members, as well as their leaders and religious guides.”⁹⁷ The careful timing of the announcement from AQIM and Zawahiri alludes to Zawahiri and Wadoud similar to private interaction between Zawahiri and Zarqawi, particularly as the timing of the merger coincided with the fifth anniversary of 9/11.

The GSPC did not adopt the decision to join Al-Qaeda lightly. A 2009 *USA Today* article indicated that a year of careful negotiations preceded the formal merger, citing reports by Western intelligence officials, consistent with other patterns identified in this study.⁹⁸ Rohan Gunaratna, who studies Al-Qaeda and affiliated movements, believes the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), another AQ affiliate, helped to arrange the

⁹⁴ "Algerian Group Backs Al-Qaeda," *BBC News*, no. October 23, 2003 (2003), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3207363.stm>.

⁹⁵ Riedel, *The Search for Al Qaeda : Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future.*, 126.; BBC Monitoring Africa - Political, "Maghreb Al-Qa'idah Expert Comments on Possible Assassination Motive," *BBC News*, no. June 4, 2009 (2009).

⁹⁶ IntelCenter, *Intelcenter: Words of Ayman Al-Zawahiri Vol. 1.*, 131-165.

⁹⁷ Scott Stewart and Fred Burton, "Algeria: Taking the Pulse of Aqim," *Global Intelligence and Security Report*, no. June 24, 2009, http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20090624_algeria_taking_pulse_aqim.

⁹⁸ Alfred De Montesquiou, "Official: Al-Qaeda Like a Fast Food Franchise 'for Terrorism'," *USA Today*, no. June 7, 2009, http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2009-06-07-al-qaeda_N.htm.

alliance between the GSPC and Al-Qaeda.⁹⁹ *The New York Times* further suggested that Wadoud sought help from Musab al-Zarqawi, the Al-Qaeda leader in Iraq from 2004 onward, to mold his struggling movement in the model of the Iraqi insurgency.¹⁰⁰ According to the article, effective Algerian counterterrorism had “nearly crushed the group,” prior to 2006.¹⁰¹ Adopting the Al-Qaeda moniker provided the group with additional funding and support and prevented a jihadist “brain drain” of Algerian fighters to Iraq, as the merger held the possibility of joining Al-Qaeda’s global movement closer to home.¹⁰²

The decision to affiliate brought new fighters to Algeria. The announcement that the GSPC had formally adopted the Al-Qaeda prompted “the instant support of tens of thousands of online jihadists,” according to Rita Katz, director of the Search for International Terrorist Entities (SITE Institute).¹⁰³ By 2009, British and European counterterrorism officials were expressing concern that battled-hardened foreign fighters were traveling to Algeria from Iraq to join AQIM.¹⁰⁴ As Katz states, the Algerian case demonstrates that, “Al Qaeda remains the most important brand name among jihadists,” particularly for struggling insurgent leaders seeking to raise their profile.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ "How Did Al Qaeda Emerge in North Africa?," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 1, 2007.; North African involvement is corroborated in Michael Moss Souad Mekhennet, Eric Schmitt, Elaine Sciolino, and Margot Williams, "A Ragtag Insurgency Gains a Qaeda Lifeline," *The New York Times*, July 1, 2008.

¹⁰⁰ Souad Mekhennet, "A Ragtag Insurgency Gains a Qaeda Lifeline."

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Souad Mekhennet, "A Ragtag Insurgency Gains a Qaeda Lifeline."

¹⁰³ "How Did Al Qaeda Emerge in North Africa?."

¹⁰⁴ Eric Schmitt and Souad Mekhennet, "Qaeda Branch Steps up Raids in North Africa," *The New York Times*, July 9, 2009.

¹⁰⁵ "How Did Al Qaeda Emerge in North Africa?."

Since the announcement of the merger, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb's propensity for violence against targets outside of the region have increased, including threats against Nigeria, the United States, France, and Spain in keeping with the trend in which groups announce their AQ affiliation and then adopt Western targets.¹⁰⁶ AQAP claimed responsibility for the May 2009 beheading of British citizen Edwin Dyer, citing the failure of British authorities to acquiesce to their demand to release Abu-Qatadah, a supporter of the Algerian jihadist movement, currently in British custody.¹⁰⁷ On April 11, 2007, a few months after the official announcement AQIM conducted its first suicide operations, killing 33 people in the most lethal attack in Algeria in five years.¹⁰⁸ On December 11, 2007, in keeping with their consistent date preference for attacks, AQIM executed a simultaneous car bombing attack in Algiers against the United Nations presence in the capitol, killing 67 people.¹⁰⁹

The British newspaper *The Independent* noted that the attack on the U.N. "marked a departure for Algerian militants," who had previously focused on domestic targets.¹¹⁰ AQIM also reached out to rebels in Nigeria, stating, "We are ready to train your people in weapons and give you whatever support we can in men, arms, and munitions to enable you to defend out people in Nigeria."¹¹¹ After repeated arrests of Algerian linked terrorists in Europe, including in France and Spain, Gilles de Kerchoue,

¹⁰⁶ Rollins, "Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy.", 14.

¹⁰⁷ Political, "Maghreb Al-Qa'idah Expert Comments on Possible Assassination Motive."; Martin Evans, "Kidnap Briton Is Beheaded by Al Qaeda Gang," *The Express*, June 4, 2009.

¹⁰⁸ Burton, "Algeria: Taking the Pulse of Aqim."; "How Did Al Qaeda Emerge in North Africa?."

¹⁰⁹ Claire Soares, "Algerian Bomb Blases Linked to Al-Qa'ida," *The Independent*, December 12, 2007.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ This Day (Lagos), "Nigeria; the Offer from Al-Qaeda," *Africa News*, February 8, 2010.

the head of counterterrorism for the European Union admitted, “their ambition is to attack in Europe,” but warned in 2008 that he would not “oversell” this goal.¹¹²

As the AQAP case study demonstrates, AQIM’s public declarations of alliance with and adherence to Al-Qaeda’s goals should not be interpreted as idle threats. For AQIM, adopting Al-Qaeda’s name has been a boon to the organization – and has prompted it to adopt its tactics and target set as well, trends consistent with both AQI and AQAP.

Libyan Islamic Fighting Group

The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) emerged in Libya in opposition to Muammar Gaddafi in 1995, but its roots extend back to a group of jihadists in Afghanistan at the end of the Cold War who sought to establish an Islamic state.¹¹³ The Gaddafi regime successfully expelled the movement by the end of the 1990s, but the LIFG persisted in pockets of Afghanistan, Britain, Europe, and Asia, although its operations focused on anti-regime propaganda rather than violence.¹¹⁴ LIFG in its early years was careful to, “distance itself from bin Laden,” preferring to align with the Mullah Omar’s Taliban, who provided the group protection. According to a Jamestown Foundation analysis of the group’s early years, the LIFG even “accused [Al-Qaeda] of trying to create a state within a state in Afghanistan,” and opted not to join the movement

¹¹² Souad Mekhennet, "A Ragtag Insurgency Gains a Qaeda Lifeline."

¹¹³ "Al-Qaeda Deputy Unveils Libya Wing," *AlJazeera.net*, no. November 4, 2007, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2007/11/2008525121253767733.html>.; Alison Pargeter, "Lifg: An Organization in Eclipse," *Terrorism Monitor* 3, no. 21, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=602&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=180&no_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=602&tx_ttnews[backPid]=180&no_cache=1).

¹¹⁴ Pargeter, "Lifg: An Organization in Eclipse."

when they were co-located in Sudan in the 1990s, when LIFG was focused on surging its capability to once again tackle the Libyan state. Yet, former LIFG leader Noman Benotman disclosed that despite their apparent independence, the LIFG relied on Al-Qaeda in its early days for practical reasons:

Once you start your own group, as a jihadi group, whether you like it or not, you have to communicate, to look for help, training knowledge, logistical support: you name it....That's why the LIFG had to communicate with all these leaders and all these groups, including bin Laden, al Zawahiri -- everyone, you name it.¹¹⁵

A study conducted by NEFA Foundation analyst Evan Kohlmann on the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group details a history that is rife with contact, assistance, and cooperation with Al-Qaeda prior to September 11, 2001.¹¹⁶

After the attacks on Washington and New York, an LIFG religious advisor issued a call of solidarity, declaring the War on Terror an attack on Muslim lands that should be repelled by “any means available, whether physically, financially, or simply by calling for jihad in order to spread fear among the infidels... By declaring war against the Muslims and occupying their countries, the United States of America has made all of its worldwide interests into legitimate targets for the mujahideen.”¹¹⁷ The LIFG was true to its propaganda, and has fought alongside the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan against the United States. Abu Zubaydah was captured in Pakistan in a safe house along with other LIFG operatives in 2002, and since 9/11 two Libyans have risen to prominent positions within Al-Qaeda--Abu al-Laith al-Liby and Abu Yahya al-Liby. Jihadist

¹¹⁵ Erick Stakelbeck, "Ex-Terrorist Takes Cbn News inside Al Qaeda," *CBN.com*, no. March 9, 2010, <http://www.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2010/March/Ex-Terrorist-Gives-CBN-Glimpse-Inside-Al-Qaeda/>.

¹¹⁶ Evan Kohlmann with Josh Lefkowitz, "Dossier: Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (Lifg)," in *Terror Watch* (NEFA Foundation).

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

propaganda expert Jarret Brachman believes the latter is poised to take over Al-Qaeda, should bin Ladin and Zawahiri perish.¹¹⁸ The intricate ties between the LIFG and Al-Qaeda prompted the State Department to declare it a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 2005.¹¹⁹

From 2006-2007, an ideological split occurred within the LIFG, that Zawahiri attempted to paper over with the repeated accolades he showered upon the group.¹²⁰ In January 2007, former LIFG leader Noman Benotman, on behalf of the Libyan government, convinced imprisoned members of the LIFG to recant their violent ideology. To counter this, on November 3, 2007, Zawahiri issued a joint statement with Abu al-Laith, apparently the new leader of the Libyan wing of Al-Qaeda, proclaiming, “we are joining al-Qaeda as loyal soldiers.”¹²¹ Immediately after the merger, Benotman released an open letter to Zawahiri, questioning Al-Qaeda’s worldview and criticizing their interpretation of jihad.¹²² His rebuttal to the Al-Qaeda leader was a precursor to the September 2009, revisionist work “Corrective Studies,” a condemnation and correction of Al-Qaeda’s violent ideology written by the imprisoned members of LIFG.¹²³ As Nic Robertson and Paul Cruickshank argued in their CNN report covering the historic turnaround, “the LIFG's about face may be an important step toward staunching al

¹¹⁸ Ibid.; Jarret Brachman, "The Next Osama," *Foreign Policy*, September 10, 2009.

¹¹⁹ START, "Terrorist Organization Profile: Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (Lifg)," (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism).

¹²⁰ Angel Rabasa, *Beyond Al-Qaeda: Part 1, the Global Jihadist Movement*, 128.

¹²¹ Laura Mansfield, *Al Qaeda 2007 Yearbook: The 2007 Messages from Al Qaeda Leadership* (TLG Productions, 2007), Unity of Ranks, 359-366.

¹²² Stakelbeck, "Ex-Terrorist Takes Cbn News inside Al Qaeda."; Nic Robertson and Paul Cruickshank, "New Jihad Code Threatens Al Qaeda," *CNN*, no. November 10, 2009, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/africa/11/09/libya.jihadi.code/>.

¹²³ Cruickshank, "New Jihad Code Threatens Al Qaeda."

Qaeda's recruitment.”¹²⁴ As part of an agreement between the Libyan government and the reformed jihadists, the Libyan government released more than 40 members of the LIFG from prison in March 2010, including three of LIFG’s key leaders: Abdullah Sadeeq, Abu Mundhir al Saadi, and Abu Hamza.¹²⁵ It remains to be seen if these ‘reformed’ jihadists maintain their revisionist philosophy outside of the walls of Libya’s prison system, or if they return to Al-Qaeda’s jihad.

Unlike the other examples in this study, the LIFG merger was not accompanied by a declaration of a caliphate or Islamic state, nor did it prompt an increase in violence. Rather, the imprisonment of a large contingent of LIFG fighters in Libya facilitated a direct rebuttal to the ideological influence of the merger with Al-Qaeda. It remains to be seen if the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group follows the pattern of other affiliate branches, expands its operations in North Africa, and continues to associate with Al-Qaeda. If the recantations by the LIFG members formally imprisoned in Libya are effective in deterring future jihadists, it may be a model worth adopting elsewhere to counter the declarations of Al-Qaeda affiliations by formerly nationalist insurgencies.

Jemaah Islamiyah

Jemaah Islamiya (JI) is the radical Islamist network that unites militants in Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand in pursuit of a pan-Islamic

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Nic Robertson and Paul Cruickshank, "In Bid to Thwart Al Qaeda, Libya Frees Three Leaders of Jihadist Group," *CNN*, no. March 23, 2010, <http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/africa/03/23/libya.jihadist.group/index.html>.

state in Southeast Asia.¹²⁶ JI, like many Al-Qaeda linked organizations, has ties to the central organization that date back to the early 1990s, when Hambali, a veteran of the Afghan jihad and associate of Osama bin Ladin, worked to establish JI operations cells across Southeast Asia.¹²⁷ According to a recent Congressional Research Service report, “In the years before and immediately following 2001, Al Qaeda used its Southeast Asia cells to help organize and finance its global activities—including the September 11 attacks—and to provide safe harbor to Al Qaeda operatives, such as the convicted organizer of the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, Ramzi Yousef.¹²⁸ Estimates place as much as 1/5 of Al-Qaeda’s organizational strength in Southeast Asia, under the auspices of JI, in 2002.

Following the bombing of a Bali nightclub in October 2002 that killed 190 people, aggressive counterterrorism efforts by Indonesian authorities largely disrupted JI’s original network.¹²⁹ At the same time, backlash from the death of civilians in the nightclub bombing led to internal disputes within JI’s network, resulting in the split off of Tanzim Qaedat al-Jihad, led by Noordin Top in 2003.¹³⁰ Top’s influence expanded as the net of Indonesian counterterrorism apprehended or neutralized the membership that orchestrated the 2002 Bali bombings, with the notable exception of Top.¹³¹ By the middle

¹²⁶ Angel Rabasa, *Beyond Al-Qaeda: Part 1, the Global Jihadist Movement.*, 147.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹²⁸ Rollins, "Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy.", 22.

¹²⁹ Christopher M. Blanchard, "Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology," ed. Defense Foreign Affairs, and Trade Division (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, June 20, 2005)., 8.

¹³⁰ "Who Was Noordin Mohammed Top?," *AlJazeera.net*, no. September 19, 2009 (2010), <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia-pacific/2009/08/2009885495465108.html>.

¹³¹ Fred Burton, "The Quiet Campaign against Al Qaeda's Local Nodes," no. June 20, 2007, http://www.stratfor.com/quiet_campaign_against_al_qaedas_local_nodes.

of the first decade of the new millennium, the original JI's links to Al-Qaeda had largely disappeared.¹³² Likewise, Zawahiri's focus on the Southeast Asia component of Al-Qaeda largely dissipated from 2001-2009. After April of 2008, Zawahiri only mentioned Indonesia once, likely because Al-Qaeda preferred not to highlight a floundering movement.¹³³

Yet, Top's faction continued to pursue Al-Qaeda's agenda. A May 2007 report by the International Crisis Group confirmed that Top's faction of JI, which he dubbed "Al-Qaeda for the Malay Archipelago," was the only faction out of a network of insurgent groups that was still aligned with Al-Qaeda's worldview.¹³⁴ Having gained notoriety for his involvement in the Bali bombings, Top redirected his groups' efforts and attempted to "impose a globalized, al Qaeda style ideology on his network instead of hewing to Jemaah Islamiyah's traditional goal of creating an Islamic state across Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and the southern Philippines."¹³⁵ Toward that end, Top claimed responsibility for the July 2009 bombing of two hotels in Indonesia in 2009, in the name of Al-Qaeda, citing the presence of Christian members of Britain's Manchester United team as part of the justification for the attack.¹³⁶ On September 17, 2009 Indonesian

¹³² Rollins, "Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy.", 23.

¹³³ See Appendix, Jemaah Islamiyah Chart.; "Indonesia: Jemaah Islamiyah's Current Status," (Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, May 3, 2007)., 15; This is also consistent of Zawahiri's treatment of Iraq after 2007.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 14. The author could not find a reference where Zawahiri used this name for Al-Qaeda's JI affiliate.

¹³⁵ James Hookway and Yuyu Yuniar, "Indonesia Says Top Terrorist Suspect Dead," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 18, 2009.

¹³⁶ "Who Was Noordin Mohammed Top?."; "Al Qaeda Group Said to Claim Jakarta Hotel Bombings," *CNN International*, no. July 29, 2009, <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/07/29/indonesia.hotel.explosions/index.html>.

counterterrorism forces killed Noordin Top, decapitating his organization.¹³⁷ After his death was confirmed, *The New York Times* reported that a search of Top's hideout revealed, "440 pounds of explosives, an M-16 rifle, a laptop computer and documents," that allegedly revealed a larger connection to Al-Qaeda.¹³⁸ A captured aid to Top by the name of Amir Abdillah testified to an Indonesian court, also indicating that Al-Qaeda, not Ji, was behind the July 17, 2009 attacks on the JW Marriott and Ritz-Carlton hotels, according to the *Jakarta Globe*.¹³⁹ Regardless of the intricacies of the relationship between Top and Al-Qaeda central, it appears Top had adopted al-Qaeda's worldview and target set absent a formal relationship—with just as deadly a result as the more formal alliances adopted by AQI, AQAP, and AQIM.

Chechnya

The ties between al-Qaeda and the Chechen conflict date back to the early 1990s, when Chechnya tried to break away from the Russian Federation, creating an opportunity for Arab mujahidin to relocate and continue their jihad against the former Soviet Union.¹⁴⁰ The Taliban was one of the first organizations to declare support for the Chechen conflict in 2000, although experts have long suspected links between Al-Qaeda

¹³⁷ Yuniar, "Indonesia Says Top Terrorist Suspect Dead."

¹³⁸ Peter Gelling and Seth Mydans, "Indonesian Police Kill Alleged Terror Mastermind " *The New York Times*, September 17, 2009.

¹³⁹ Ditulis Oleh Heru Andriyanto, "Al Qaeda, Not Ji, Behind Twin Hotel Bombings, Terror Suspect Says," *The Jakarta Globe*, <http://idsps.org/idsps-news-english/idsps-news/al-qaeda,-not-ji,-behind-twin-hotel-bombings,-terror-suspect-says/>.

¹⁴⁰ Angel Rabasa, *Beyond Al-Qaeda: Part 1, the Global Jihadist Movement.*, 105-110; Paul Tumelty, "The Rise and Fall of Foreign Fighters in Chechnya," *Terrorism Monitor* 4, no. 2, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=658](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=658).

and the Chechen insurgency.¹⁴¹ Zawahiri also displayed an early interest in the Chechen conflict, traveling there in 1998 to explore the opportunities for basing al-Jihad's training and support in Chechnya, but was apprehended by Russian authorities.¹⁴² According to the *Christian Science Monitor*, when Russian forces invaded Chechnya in 1999, they discovered 15 terrorist training camps using Al-Qaeda style instructors and manuals.¹⁴³ In his 2001 manifesto, Zawahiri mused about the potential gains for the mujahidin if Chechen Islamists were successful, "If the Chechens and other Caucasian mujahideen reach the shores of the oil-rich Caspian Sea, the only thing that will separate them from Afghanistan will be the neutral state of Turkmenistan. This will form a mujahid Islamic belt to the south of Russia that will be connected in the east to Pakistan..."¹⁴⁴

Zawahiri's focus on Chechnya has persisted; it ranks in the top ten most repeated locales for Al-Qaeda's jihad in his statements.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, Zawahiri's statements were remarkably consistent on the Chechen conflict, in contrast to other regions, issuing 14 statements that referenced the struggle through 2005, and 18 in 2006.¹⁴⁶ At the time, the Chechen conflict was undergoing an internal reformulation, slowly evolving from a nationalist movement that advocated for an independent Islamic state into a "pan-Caucasian, multinational Islamic resistance movement," under the leadership of Abdul-Khalim Sadullayev, who assumed control of the Chechen Republic Ichkeria (ChRI) in

¹⁴¹ Angel Rabasa, *Beyond Al-Qaeda: Part 1, the Global Jihadist Movement.*, 108; Tumelty, "The Rise and Fall of Foreign Fighters in Chechnya."

¹⁴² Wright, *The Looming Tower : Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11.*, 283.

¹⁴³ Fred Weir, "A New Terror-War Front: The Caucasus," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 26, 2002.

¹⁴⁴ Mansfield, *His Own Words: Translation and Analysis of the Writings of Dr. Ayman Al Zawahiri.*, 132.

¹⁴⁵ See Appendix, Chechnya Chart.

¹⁴⁶ See Appendix, Chechnya Chart.

2005.¹⁴⁷ In a departure from his predecessor, Sadullayev decreed the North Caucasus part of the Chechen front in May 2005, expanding the resistance activities of his fighters and paving the way for the more extreme Islamist elements within the Chechen movement to expand their influence and argue for a pan-Caucasus caliphate. After Sadullayev was killed in June 2006, Doku Umarov, his deputy assumed the position of ChRI President, part of the more radical elements of the Chechen resistance.¹⁴⁸

In 2007 Chechen leader Doku Umarov declared a Caucasian emirate, naming himself emir and the “sole legal authority on all the territories where the mujahudin have sworn their loyalty to me as leader of the jihad.”¹⁴⁹ At the same time, Zawahiri’s focus on the Chechen group skyrocketed, referencing Chechnya 26 times, 20 of which preceded Umarov’s declaration.¹⁵⁰ The Al-Qaeda’s leader’s attention to the Chechen conflict the same year as the formal announcement hardly seems coincidental, given the pattern exhibited in other merger announcements. Umarov was subsequently stripped of the title of ChRI president by the Chechen leadership in exile, although his group has continued to orchestrate attacks against Russia, presumably with assistance or inspiration from Al-Qaeda. The pacification of the formal ChRI from 2006-2009 prompted Russia to declare and end to counterterrorism operations in Chechnya in April 2009.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Liz Fuller, "Moderate Leader's Death Accelerated Transformation of Chechen Resistance " *Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty*, no. June 17, 2009, http://www.rferl.org/content/Moderate_Leaders_Death_Accelerated_Transformation_Of_Chechen_Resistance/1756530.html.

¹⁴⁸ Preceding adopted from Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Bill Roggio, "Doku Umarov Declares Islamic Caucasus Emirate," *Long War Journal*, no. November 26, 2007, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/11/doku_umarov_declares.php.

¹⁵¹ Rupert Wingfield-Hayes, "Chechen Problem Far from Over," *BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7974652.stm>.

Consistent with the pattern exhibited by other affiliates, Umarov's formal declaration of Al-Qaeda affiliation breathed new life into the group and expanded the objectives of the Chechen rebels. The leader of the fringe movement formally adopted Al-Qaeda's aims in his 2007 statement claiming, "Today in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Palestine our brothers are fighting," adding, "Everyone who attacked Muslims wherever they are our enemies, common enemies. Our enemy is not Rusnya only, but everyone who wages war against Islam and Muslims. And they are our enemies mainly because they are the enemies of Allah."¹⁵²

Two years later, on March 29, 2010, two female Chechen suicide bombers attacked the Moscow metro, killing 26 people. Umarov claimed the suicide attacks, stating that they were, "a legitimate act of revenge for the continued assassinations of civilians in the Caucasus," by Russian forces.¹⁵³ The simultaneous suicide bombing is a mark of Al-Qaeda inspired terrorism and was the deadliest attack in Russia since 2004, yet Umarov has not yet formally adopted the Al-Qaeda moniker. The rebel leader has nevertheless adopted two parts of Zawahiri's four step process: expanded target sets, at least rhetorically; and the declaration of an emirate. If the Chechen model follows the same progression as other groups in this study, it is reasonable to expect an announcement of a more formal merger or affiliation in the future.

¹⁵² "The Official Version of Amir Dokka's Statement of Declaration of the Caucasian Emirate," <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2007/11/22/9107.shtml>.

¹⁵³ "Profile: 'Caucasus Emir' Doku Umarov," *BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8089996.stm>.

Somalia

East Africa has long been the target of Islamic terrorist activity, including the 1995 attempt by Gama'a Islamiya to assassinate Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak; the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings in Tanzania and Kenya, and the November 2002 simultaneous terrorist attacks in Mombasa, Kenya.¹⁵⁴¹⁵⁵ Yet, Somalia did not appear in Zawahiri's statements until 2005.¹⁵⁶ Zawahiri's relatively recent focus on Somalia likely indicates that Al-Qaeda intends to bring Al-Shabaab more formally under its influence and prompt an expansion of its target set in the region consistent with Al-Qaeda's pattern in other formerly localized movements.

Somalia itself has been a failed state now for more than a generation, making it a likely hotbed for Al-Qaeda radicalization, similar to Afghanistan and Yemen. Following the collapse of the Somali government in 2001, a system of Islamic *shariah* courts known as the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) provided the only governing structure in Somalia. In 2006, the ICU defeated a consortium of warlords, allegedly backed by the United States and Ethiopia, which had previously governed Mogadishu.¹⁵⁷ At that time, the ICU also declared a holy war against Ethiopia in the style of Al-Qaeda.¹⁵⁸ After the ICU takeover, Ethiopia intervened in Somalia in December 2006, ultimately ousting the ICU from

¹⁵⁴ Rollins, "Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy.", 18.

¹⁵⁵ "The Resurgence of Al-Qaeda: The Bombs That Stopped the Happy Talk," *The Economist*, January 28, 2010.

¹⁵⁶ See Appendix, Somalia Chart.

¹⁵⁷ Marc Lacey, "Somali Islamists Declare Victory; Warlords on Run " *The New York Times*, June 6, 2006.

¹⁵⁸ Sunguta West, "Somalia's Icu Declares Holy War on Ethiopia," *Terrorism Focus* 3, no. 40, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=934](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=934).

power.¹⁵⁹ The loss of ICU authority created a political and security vacuum for a new generation of terrorists in East Africa, and the emergence of the Al-Shabaab insurgency, which opposes the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia.¹⁶⁰ While ostensibly the TFG is the leading authority of Somalia, the Ethiopian Army is, in the words of the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations, “the only organization on the ground with the ability to impose law and order in Somalia.”¹⁶¹

According to a 2008 International Crisis Group report, while the aims of al-Shabaab are both “local and national” – to overthrow the Ethiopian backed Somali government and return to *shariah* rule – it openly admires and models its young organization on bin Ladin’s Al-Qaeda.¹⁶² “Al-Shabaab militants do not hide their admiration,” the report states, “they revere bin Laden, identify with his dream of a Pax-Islamica, and there have been claims, mainly by Western governments and especially the U.S., of an al-Qaeda link.”¹⁶³ The potential of a formal Somali-Al-Qaeda link is especially troubling for the United States, as numerous American teenagers from Minnesota have traveled there to join the insurgency, potentially providing Al-Qaeda with a well spring of recruits who hold American passports.¹⁶⁴ These fears were

¹⁵⁹ Mike Pflanz, "Ethiopia Intervenes in Somali Civil War," *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 26, 2006.

¹⁶⁰ Rollins, "Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy.", 19.

¹⁶¹ Stephanie Hanson and Eben Kaplan, "Somalia's Transitional Government " in *Backgrounder*, ed. Council on Foreign Relations (New York, NY2008).

¹⁶² "Somalia: To Move Beyond the Failed State," (International Crisis Group, December 23, 2008)., 15

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁶⁴ Spencer S. Hsu and Carrie Johnson, "Somali Americans Recruited by Extremists, U.S. Cites Case of Minnesotan Killed in Suicide Blast in Africa," *The Washington Post*, March 11, 2009.

amplified when the first known American suicide-bomber, a 27-year-old Minnesotan named Shirwa Ahmed, blew himself up in northern Somalia in October 2008.¹⁶⁵

In 2009, Zawahiri paid unprecedented attention to Somalia, doubling his mentions of the troubled state in comparison to the previous year.¹⁶⁶ The expanded attention from Zawahiri coincided with the deepening of ties between Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda Central, documented in detail through the public communiqués both Zawahiri and bin Ladin. In September 2009, Al-Shabaab released a video pledging loyalty to bin Ladin, a direct response to his video addressing the Somali situation in March of the same year.¹⁶⁷ In the 48-minute video, the leader of Al-Shabaab addressed bin Ladin directly, stating, “We answer your call, our sheik and our emir,” adding, “we are awaiting your guidance in this advanced stage in the life of Jihad in which the challenges of fighting the occupiers have overlapped with the requirements of establishing the Islamic State.”¹⁶⁸

In February 2010, Al-Shabaab released another statement declaring its ambition to join Al-Qaeda claiming the “jihad of Horn of Africa must be combined with the international jihad led by the al-Qaeda network.”¹⁶⁹ Given the stages Zawahiri articulated to Zarqawi in Iraq, and the pattern established by similar affiliates who pass through multiple phases in declaring their alliance with Al-Qaeda, it is likely that Al-Qaeda will publicly announce that Al-Shabaab has earned the status of a formal Al-Qaeda affiliate in

¹⁶⁵“The Resurgence of Al-Qaeda: The Bombs That Stopped the Happy Talk.”; Johnson, “Somali Americans Recruited by Extremists, U.S. Cites Case of Minnesotan Killed in Suicide Blast in Africa.”

¹⁶⁶ See Appendix, Somalia Chart.

¹⁶⁷Khaled Wassef, “Somali Terror Group Vows Loyalty to Al Qaeda,” *CBS News World*, http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503543_162-5328722-503543.html;

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹“Somali Islamists Al-Shabab 'Join Al-Qaeda Fight' ”, *BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8491329.stm>.; Sarah Childress, “Somalia's Al Shabaab to Ally with Al Qaeda,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 2, 2010.

the near future. While in 2009, the threat of Somali terrorism was still considered “homegrown” by U.S. counterterrorism officials, the public outreach from Al-Qaeda to Al-Shabaab and the latter’s reciprocal declarations highlight a disturbing trend.¹⁷⁰

Bringing Al-Shabaab formally into the Al-Qaeda would facilitate future attacks on the United States that would be hard to disrupt. Zawahiri and bin Laden are likely as keenly aware of this as U.S. authorities are.¹⁷¹

Other Observations

The quantitative analysis of Zawahiri’s public statements also reveals his increasing focus on a number of additional locales. Egypt, the land of Zawahiri’s heritage and the initial target of his al-Jihad organization, trends upward in Zawahiri’s statements from an average of 3.5 mentions per statement from 2001-2006, to an average of 9.6 mentions per statement from 2007-2009.¹⁷² In 2006, Zawahiri announced the merger of the rival Egyptian Islamic Group (Gamaa Islamiya) with Al-Qaeda, inviting former members of the Egyptian jihadist milieu who had negotiated a cease-fire with the Egyptian government to re-join the fight.¹⁷³ Unlike other announcements of alliance, however, thus far this declaration has not produced a trend of increasing violence, nor the

¹⁷⁰ Johnson, "Somali Americans Recruited by Extremists, U.S. Cites Case of Minnesotan Killed in Suicide Blast in Africa."

¹⁷¹ Rollins, "Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy.", 21.

¹⁷² From 2001-2009, Zawahiri averaged a mention of Egypt or the Mubarak regime seven times per communiqué, according to the author’s data set, although he went as high as 31 mentions in an interview on May 5, 2007, IntelCenter, *Intelcenter: Words of Ayman Al-Zawahiri Vol. 1.*, 239-268.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 159; This statement, released on August 5, 2006 can be found in Laura Mansfield, *Al Qaeda 2006 Yearbook: The 2007 Messages from Al Qaeda Leadership* (TLG Productions, 2006)., 231-249.

emergence of a leader other than Zawahiri for the Egyptian elements of Al-Qaeda, perhaps because that role is filled by the ideologue himself.

In response to the 2006 Israeli-Lebanese war, Zawahiri suddenly began publicly referencing Lebanon as a part of his outreach campaign.¹⁷⁴ This was likely a targeted effort to reach out to Asbat al-Ansar, an Islamist movement in Lebanon was identified in 2005 by the U.S. State Department as a potential partner and supporter of Al-Qaeda.¹⁷⁵ Zawahiri's focus on Lebanon suddenly ramped up in his September 11, 2006 message, a focus that emerged just as the conflict was ending.¹⁷⁶ Zawahiri's statements on Lebanon, unlike those on other affiliate groups, lag behind events, as he continued to focus on Lebanon well into late 2008.¹⁷⁷ This may suggest that Al-Qaeda's focus on the Palestinian cause aims to capitalize on events, less so than to directly influence them.

Iran also ranks high on Zawahiri's list of repeatedly referenced states because of the threat the Islamic Republic poses to Al-Qaeda's worldview, and the Iranian regime's unpredictable behavior in hosting and incarcerating Al-Qaeda affiliates. As General Petraeus stated in written testimony to the Senate Armed Service Committee on March 16, 2010, "al-Qaeda continues to use Iran as a key facilitation hub, where facilitators connect al-Qaeda's senior leadership to regional affiliates. And although Iranian authorities do periodically disrupt this network by detaining select al-Qaeda facilitators

¹⁷⁴ See Appendix, Lebanon Chart.

¹⁷⁵ START, "Terrorist Organization Profile: Asbat Al-Ansar," (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism).

¹⁷⁶ See Appendix, Lebanon Chart.

¹⁷⁷ See Appendix, Lebanon Chart.

and operational planners, Tehran's policy in this regard is often unpredictable."¹⁷⁸ However, the lack of response from a like-minded Iranian insurgency indicates that Zawahiri's pleas have largely fallen on deaf ears, likely due the Iranian regime's effectiveness at stifling dissent within its borders. Interestingly, despite the contentious 2009 Iranian elections, Zawahiri was relatively mute on the subject of Iran over the course of last year.

In his public statements, Zawahiri also explicitly sanctions lone-wolf behavior, stating on February 3, 2009, "It is crucial for anyone who is able to fight to head to the open battlefields in Chechnya, Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Somalia, and Algeria. And the faithful need not wait for anyone's permission to go, because jihad today is clear obligation, and there is no need to wait for anyone's permission."¹⁷⁹ Another Al-Qaeda spokesman and ideologue, the American Adam Gadahn reinforced this message in his statement "A Call to Arms," on March 9, 2010, praising Major Nadal Hasan's individual act of terrorism and suggesting, "As the blessed operations of September 11th showed, a little imagination and planning and a minimal budget can turn almost anything into a deadly, effective and convenient weapon which can take the enemy by surprise and deprive him of sleep for years on end."¹⁸⁰ The official sanctioning of independent action by al-Qaeda central allows them to claim homegrown terrorism like Hasan's attack on Ft. Hood as part of their ideological struggle, providing a cheap and easy boon to their propaganda. It also suggests that unlike the formal pattern demonstrated by local

¹⁷⁸ Thomas Joscelyn, "Petraeus on Iran & Al Qaeda," *Weekly Standard*(March 17, 2010), <http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/petraeus-iran-al-qaeda>.

¹⁷⁹ NEFA Foundation, "Al-Zawahiri: "The Sacrifices of Gaza and the Plotting against It"," in *Terror Watch* (NEFA Foundation, 2009)., 3.

¹⁸⁰ _____, "Adam Gadahn: "A Call to Arms"," in *Terror Watch* (NEFA Foundation, 2010).

insurgencies aspiring to join al-Qaeda, individual terrorists have the option of a simpler path to join jihad.

FINDINGS

This analysis demonstrates, despite significant operational gains against Al-Qaeda since 2001, Zawahiri is still able to maintain the initiative in the information battle space and communicate effectively to Al-Qaeda's target audience. Moreover, the audience Zawahiri is addressing is ever-expanding as Al-Qaeda exports its movement abroad to new locales. Al-Qaeda affiliates and like-minded groups are actively responding to Al-Qaeda's advances and in word and deed, joining the jihad to serve as additional foot soldiers in bin Laden and Zawahiri's global war. As Hoffman wrote in the *Washington Post* after the Christmas Day attack, Al-Qaeda has adopted a "fresh strategy that plays to its networking strength and compensates for its numerical weakness."¹⁸¹ The strategy to which Hoffman refers is no accident, but part of a planned, coordinated campaign to expand Al-Qaeda's reach abroad while it is hampered operationally in its own backyard. The founding of Al-Qaeda offshoots since 9/11 is a testament to the organization's continued ability to shape the global jihad and motivate other groups, even those previously unaffiliated or loosely connected to Al-Qaeda, to comply with its vision. As Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair recently stated before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, despite counterterrorism pressure:

Al Qaida will continue its efforts to encourage key regional affiliates and jihadist networks to pursue a global agenda. A few Al Qaida regional affiliates and jihadist networks have exhibited the intent or capability to attack inside the Homeland. Some regional nodes and allies have grown in strength and independence over the last two years and have begun to project operationally outside of their region.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Bruce Hoffman, "Al-Qaeda Has a New Strategy. Obama Needs One, Too.," *The Washington Post*, January 10, 2010.

¹⁸² "Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on

For the insurgencies that opt to join, Al-Qaeda provides a unique ideological boon to amplify their rhetoric and importance far beyond their regional influence. Zawahiri peddles this notoriety, by highlighting what he perceives as mujahidin victories and struggles in his messages to the ummah, enticing and instructing localized jihadis to join Al-Qaeda's global movement. Moreover, as the AQI, AQIM, AQAP cases demonstrate, there is a semi-formal order in declaring a group an official Al-Qaeda affiliate, beginning with the declaration of an emirate in a previously localized insurgency, declaring support for Al-Qaeda's jihad or leadership; publicly announcing a merger with Al-Qaeda Central; and adopting an expanded target set or goals to include U.S. targets or extra-regional ambitions. As Zawahiri's public communiqués and his private letter to Zarqawi indicate, the public dialogue between like-minded groups and Al-Qaeda is not harmless rhetoric. Behind the rhetoric lies a coordinated strategic communications campaign too consistent to be mere coincidence: it is meant to motivate, pressure, and cajole groups to join Al-Qaeda's global jihad and threaten U.S. and Western interests.

Of the steps on the road to affiliation, the one most dangerous for the United States is localized insurgencies' decisions to target the United States and its interests. While the death of Al-Qaeda members undoubtedly hampers the group's ability to operate in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the recent attack by Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab demonstrates that when put under tourniquet-like pressure Al-Qaeda's network can and will encourage its appendages to expand their operations to threaten the United States. In

Intelligence," Dennis C. Blair, Director of National Intelligence, February 2, 2010., in Rollins, "Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy.", 2.

a globalized world, both Al-Qaeda and U.S. officials recognize that “all that is necessary,” to pose a threat to the United States, “are the most portable, least detectable tools of the terrorist trade: ideas.”¹⁸³

Moreover, the pattern of local insurgencies not only declaring allegiance to Al-Qaeda, but also expanding their target sets outside of their country or region demonstrates that Al-Qaeda’s propaganda is motivating localized insurgencies to think globally. The Christmas Day attack showed, as Ambassador Daniel Benjamin testified before the House Armed Services Committee, “At least one al-Qa’ida affiliates [sic] –not just the group’s core leadership in Pakistan—has the potential and interest to carry out strikes against the American homeland. We can no longer anticipate that such group’s sole focus will be on the government’s in their own countries and regions.”¹⁸⁴ Thus, operational gains made by the U.S. and its allies to disrupt and defeat Al-Qaeda must be viewed with skepticism, as long as Al-Qaeda can continue to threaten U.S. interests by recruiting new actors to accept its worldview and share its targets. Bruce Hoffman has consistently described al-Qaeda as the proverbial “shark in the water,” that must keep swimming and changing direction in order to survive. To extend the analogy, one might say that Al-Qaeda Central is the shark and its affiliates are remoras, attaching themselves to the larger fish, upon invitation, for the mutual benefit of both.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Quote from former U.S. counterterrorism officials Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon in Mueller John, “Is There Still a Terrorist Threat?,” *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 5 (2006), 3.

¹⁸⁴ Benjamin, “Testimony of Ambassador Daniel Benjamin, Coordinator for Counterterrorism.”

¹⁸⁵ Hoffman, “Al-Qaeda, Trends in Terrorism and Future Potentialities: An Assessment,” 435.

LIMITATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

At first glance, the limitations of any study on the strategic priorities of a hunted terrorist group are self-evident—the body of available evidence is limited to the captured documents that have been declassified and insights from scholars and practitioners who have studied or followed the group over the course of the last two decades. Additionally, while statistically the data presented by Zawahiri’s repetitive speaking style appear to provide a preponderance of evidence on his strategic thinking, I have taken the liberty of equating a numerical count with insight into Al-Qaeda’s priorities. Without the benefit of primary source material on Al-Qaeda’s strategic priorities, this is a necessary analytic leap in order to provide insight into the group’s agenda. Given the careful timing of announcements of Al-Qaeda affiliation and the advance notice the senior leadership seems to have before an announcement occurs, it is logical to suggest there is a formal process required to declare an alliance with Al-Qaeda. Having access to documents on these negotiations would greatly enrich this study.

Additionally, this study focused exclusively on the public statements made by Ayman al-Zawahiri, in order to delve deep into the strategic priorities of Al-Qaeda’s chief propagandist. It does not assess the priorities established in the communications of other Al-Qaeda leaders, or other Al-Qaeda productions. Further data from messages by Osama bin Laden, Abu Yahya al-Libi, and Adam Gadahn, would add credibility to the conclusions of this study. Furthermore, some experts, including Fawaz Gerges, have argued that all members of Al-Qaeda do not see the priorities of the near vs. far enemy with equity. The compromises bin Laden and Zawahiri both made to forge Al-Qaeda

may prelude differences in rhetorical focus between the two men and should be examined critically. This re-evaluation of the data is particularly appealing since, due to time constraints, references to the United States, Israel, and Palestine were not tabulated. While tabulating references to the United States would have provided valuable insights into Zawahiri's focus on the far versus the near enemy, it was outside the scope of the present inquiry.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Israel and Palestine were excluded because while a case can be made that Al-Qaeda is attempting to inspire an affiliate with a stake in the Israeli-Palestine dispute, many scholars who study terrorism argue that the lip service paid to the Palestinian issue by al-Qaeda is obligatory for the organization, not strategic.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Mapping the public discussion between Al-Qaeda's senior leadership and affiliated groups empirically demonstrates that despite operational losses, Al-Qaeda's strategy is malleable—it continues to systematically expand the global jihad to new battlefields, offsetting operational losses. Renewed efforts in Afghanistan must be focused not only on neutralizing Al-Qaeda operationally, but on preventing, disrupting, and defeating both ends of Cowen's strategic communications model: the sender and the receiver, thereby limiting their ability to export their movement.¹⁸⁷

In order to prevent Al-Qaeda from controlling its own communications strategy, the United States must first do a better job of disrupting and countering the messages emanating from Al-Qaeda Central. It is not enough to ignore and or offer no comment on the messages from Zawahiri and bin Laden, active measures must be taken to prevent the distribution of these key messages to their target audiences. While the Obama administration has done a better job at publicly denegrating the messages of Al-Qaeda than its predecessor, both administrations' public comments have consistently dismissed the Al-Qaeda leadership's public communiques as irrelevant.¹⁸⁸ Moreover, the colloquialisms used to dismiss Al-Qaeda's leadership such as the recent statement by White House spokesman Robert Gibbs that, "Everybody in this world understands that

¹⁸⁷ This point was also made by Hoffman, "The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism."

¹⁸⁸ For instance, on American television on Sunday, January 24, 2010 following a Osama bin Ladin release on AQAP Christmas Day attack, David Axelrod stated, "is message contains the same hollow justifications for the mass slaughter of innocence that we have heard before," on CNN's "State of the Union and State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said, "He is trying to continue to appear relevant." Quotes taken from Wall Street Journal Staff, "White House: Bin Laden Offers 'Same Hollow Justifications'," *Wall Street Journal*(January 24, 2010), <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2010/01/24/white-house-bin-laden-offers-same-hollow-justifications/tab/article/>.

this [bin Ladin] is somebody that has to pop up in our lives over an audiotape because he's nothing but a cowardly murderous thug and terrorist," ignore the reality that Al-Qaeda's propaganda works to inspire future terrorists.¹⁸⁹

The Obama administration should take concrete steps to not only capture or kill the ideological leaders of Al-Qaeda, but also prevent their messages from circulating to their target audience. As Bruce Ridel succinctly argued, as-Sahab should be shut down.¹⁹⁰ Zawahiri's expanding target set audiences demonstrates, even doggedly pursued by U.S. counterterrorism efforts, Al-Qaeda Central will continue to promote new venues for future operations. Preventing those messages from disseminating across the Internet may not be a palatable task for the U.S. government, but it is an essential one.

Beyond dulling the pen or microphone of Al-Qaeda's senior leadership, the U.S. and its allies must continue to make Al-Qaeda's world view and interpretation of history less appealing to its would-be followers. Part of making Al-Qaeda's worldview less palatable for like minded groups is emphasizing the cost to groups that adopt Al-Qaeda's terrorist ideology, chief among them the physical risk of taking on the United States and its allies by joining jihad. Furthermore, stark lines must be drawn not between U.S. policymakers and the Muslim world, but within the Islamic ummah as to what Al-Qaeda and its affiliates represent as a new world order. As Bruce Riedel argues, Al-Qaeda should be made to "answer to the vast majority of Muslims who never wanted their religion to be exploited to justify mass murder and carnage on a global scale."¹⁹¹ Corman

¹⁸⁹ Cruickshank, "New Jihad Code Threatens Al Qaeda."

¹⁹⁰ Riedel, *The Search for Al Qaeda : Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future.*, 148.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 153.

echoes this point by suggesting that the United States should redefine the “War on Terror,” in a legal sense and remove the religious justification for Al-Qaeda’s violence, thereby reducing Zawahiri and bin Ladin to the role of criminals.¹⁹² Where a religious justification persists, imprisoned jihadists like the issuers of the LIFG recantations can provide a bulwark against the expansion of Al-Qaeda’s ideology by writing detailed rebuttals.¹⁹³

Focusing on the criminal and violent elements of Al-Qaeda’s messages forces Al-Qaeda and its affiliates to justify their behavior to their audience, rather than promote it, as terrorism expert Daniel Byman argues in *The Five Front War*.¹⁹⁴ Byman states, “Any good politician knows it is easier to make your opponent hated than to make yourself loved.”¹⁹⁵ By the same token, making Al-Qaeda a less palatable choice for localized insurgencies by equating the choice of membership with an increase in bloodshed and civilians casualties can stir public outrage and deter potential followers from joining Al-Qaeda. Byman points out that Saudi Arabia was particularly effective at stoking a public outcry over the human cost of terrorism following the May 2003 attacks inside the Kingdom, a model that could be adopted elsewhere.¹⁹⁶ Going negative will blunt the effectiveness of Al-Qaeda’s propaganda and empower local populations to support their governments in preventing local insurgents from developing into global terrorists.

¹⁹² Corman, Goodall, and Trethewey, *Weapons of Mass Persuasion : Strategic Communication to Combat Violent Extremism.*, 135-138.

¹⁹³ Cruickshank, "New Jihad Code Threatens Al Qaeda."

¹⁹⁴ Daniel Byman, *The Five Front War : The Better Way to Fight Global Jihad* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2008)., 187

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 185

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 186.

The United States must not only counter the messages emanating from Al-Qaeda Central, it must attempt to influence Al-Qaeda's target audience to preempt their efforts to woo new members. First and foremost this requires admitting that the Al-Qaeda movement can and does spread like a contagion, and that U.S. policymakers cannot wait for another Abdulmutallab before anticipating Al-Qaeda's next move. As Bruce Hoffman argues, "While the United States remains preoccupied with trying to secure yesterday's failed state -- Afghanistan -- al-Qaeda is busy staking out new terrain. The terrorist network sees failing states as providing opportunities to extend its reach, and it conducts local campaigns of subversion to hasten their decline."¹⁹⁷ This study identified four steps on the road to Al-Qaeda affiliation that can help to identify emerging trends in insurgencies or movements looking to join the jihad: the declaration of an emirate, declaring support for Al-Qaeda's jihad or leadership, publicly announcing affiliation, and targeting the United States the international community. The United States should anticipate that future movements will look to join Al-Qaeda and follow the model of AQI, AQAP, and AQIM and be prepared to counter Al-Qaeda's predatory influence in unstable states.

Byman argues that the U.S. can also preempt Al-Qaeda's recruitment cycle by highlight the positive influence of the United States and its allies, principally in humanitarian missions throughout the Muslim world.¹⁹⁸ But, the U.S. should not be alone in this effort. As David Killcullen points out in his acclaimed book *The Accidental Guerrilla*, some of the best policy options available for counterterrorism or

¹⁹⁷ Hoffman, "Al-Qaeda Has a New Strategy. Obama Needs One, Too.."

¹⁹⁸ Byman, *The Five Front War : The Better Way to Fight Global Jihad.*, 183.

counterinsurgency involve an “indirect approach.”¹⁹⁹ Governments throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast Asia have an interest in preventing the emergence of an Al-Qaeda cell within their borders, no matter how tenuous their grip on power. The United States and its allies should engage in efforts to “woo nonviolent Islamists,” through amnesty programs or isolate them with the help of the moderate Muslim leaders.²⁰⁰ Byman points out that amplifying moderate voices also forces advocates of Al-Qaeda’s jihad to denigrate local leaders, causing a public relations problem for Al-Qaeda’s expansion efforts.²⁰¹

Finally, in order to mitigate the influence of Al-Qaeda’s propaganda the United States needs to carefully consider when and how to employ force, particularly in failed or failing states where the absence of legitimacy or law and order can allow Al-Qaeda to take hold. The Al-Qaeda influence in Yemen, Algeria, Chechnya, and even Iraq were all confronted with a military intervention by the state or an outside power. Al-Qaeda has mastered the art of taking advantage of similar situations and seeks to provoke large military commitments from the United States and brutal crackdowns national governments to incite resentment in the Muslim world and feed their movement.²⁰² Recognizing this reality and adopting an approach that mirrors a counterinsurgent strategy more than a counterterrorist strategy will allow the U.S. and its partners to apply force judiciously.

¹⁹⁹ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla : Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009)., 285.

²⁰⁰ Byman, *The Five Front War : The Better Way to Fight Global Jihad.*, 183-184

²⁰¹ Ibid., 184.

²⁰² Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla : Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One.*, 285.

CONCLUSION

Osama bin Ladin's observation to Mullah Omar was prophetic, suggesting that strategic communications could afford a virtual reserve of power to the embattled terrorism group.²⁰³ This study has demonstrated that Al-Qaeda Central retains the ability to communicate with other Islamist groups to inspire, guide, and direct action against the United States and its allies, despite U.S. counterterrorism efforts. Ayman al-Zawahiri empirically focuses on an ever-expanding and adaptive geographic target set for Al-Qaeda's radicalization and recruitment in his public communiques. His rhetoric is carefully timed and, in a number of cases covered in this study, corresponds to the deepening of ties between Al-Qaeda and like-minded groups. This study further illustrates that the relationship between Al-Qaeda and its affiliates is a fluid one, yet each group that declares a formal affiliation follows a series of steps: declaring an emirate as a step to the Islamic caliphate, declaring for the group and its leadership, formally aligning with Al-Qaeda, and adopting its vision and target set. Given that Zawahiri's clear goal is to generate action via his public outreach, the United States should continue to expect that out of the chaos of localized insurgencies, militant leaders will be seduced by Al-Qaeda's propaganda and look to Al-Qaeda to provide notoriety, training, and support.

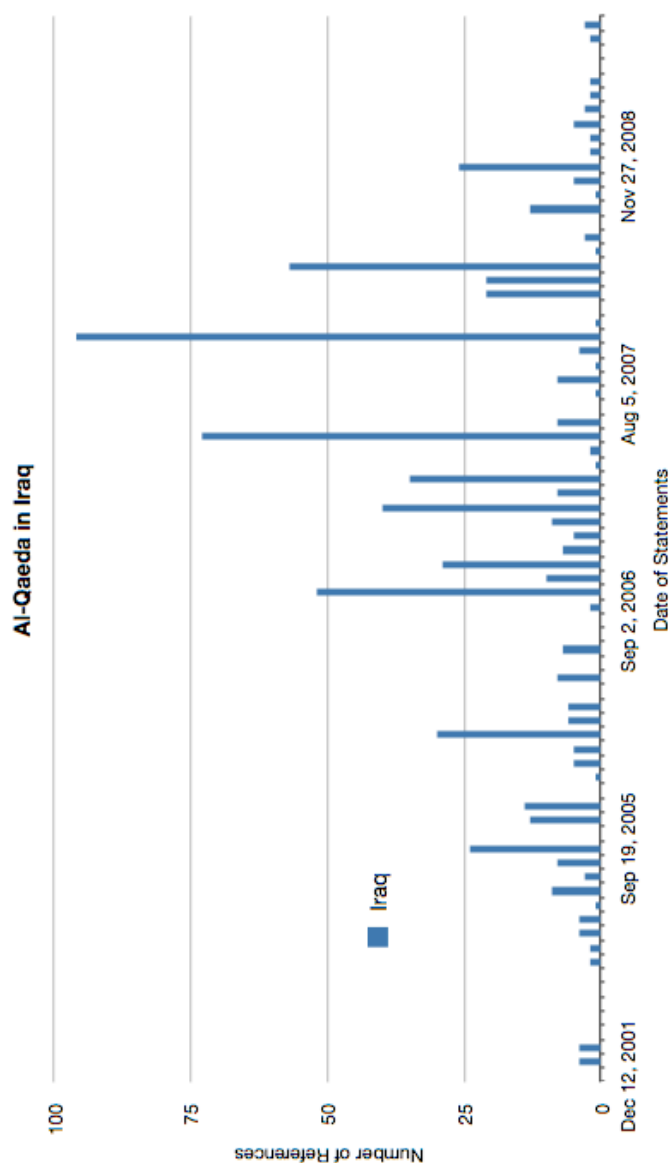
As this study has shown, the successive groups that are inspired to publicly join Al-Qaeda and align their goals to conform with Al-Qaeda's anti-U.S. and Western worldview pose a significant risk to the United States and allow the embattled group to survive, despite aggressive counterterrorism efforts aimed at disrupting their operations.

²⁰³ United States Military Academy. Combating Terrorism Center., "Harmony and Disharmony: Exploiting Al-Qa'ida's Organizational Vulnerabilities."

The December 2009 attempt to destroy Northwest flight 253 from Amsterdam on Christmas Day pointedly demonstrated to detractors of Al-Qaeda's influence that localized affiliates can and do pose a significant threat to the United States. Moreover, as the evolution of allegiances detailed in this study indicate, the assessment that a like-minded group is either incapable or unwilling to attack the United States is not an immutable conclusion. Al-Qaeda affiliates demonstrate consistent patterns in the process of joining the global jihad, patterns that the U.S. can and should exploit to prevent the continued spread of Al-Qaeda's militant ideology. Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, while not necessarily ordered by Al-Qaeda Central to attack the United States, was still granted the status of Islamic hero by Osama bin Ladin in early 2010—a fact not likely to escape future insurgent leaders looking to think and act globally.²⁰⁴

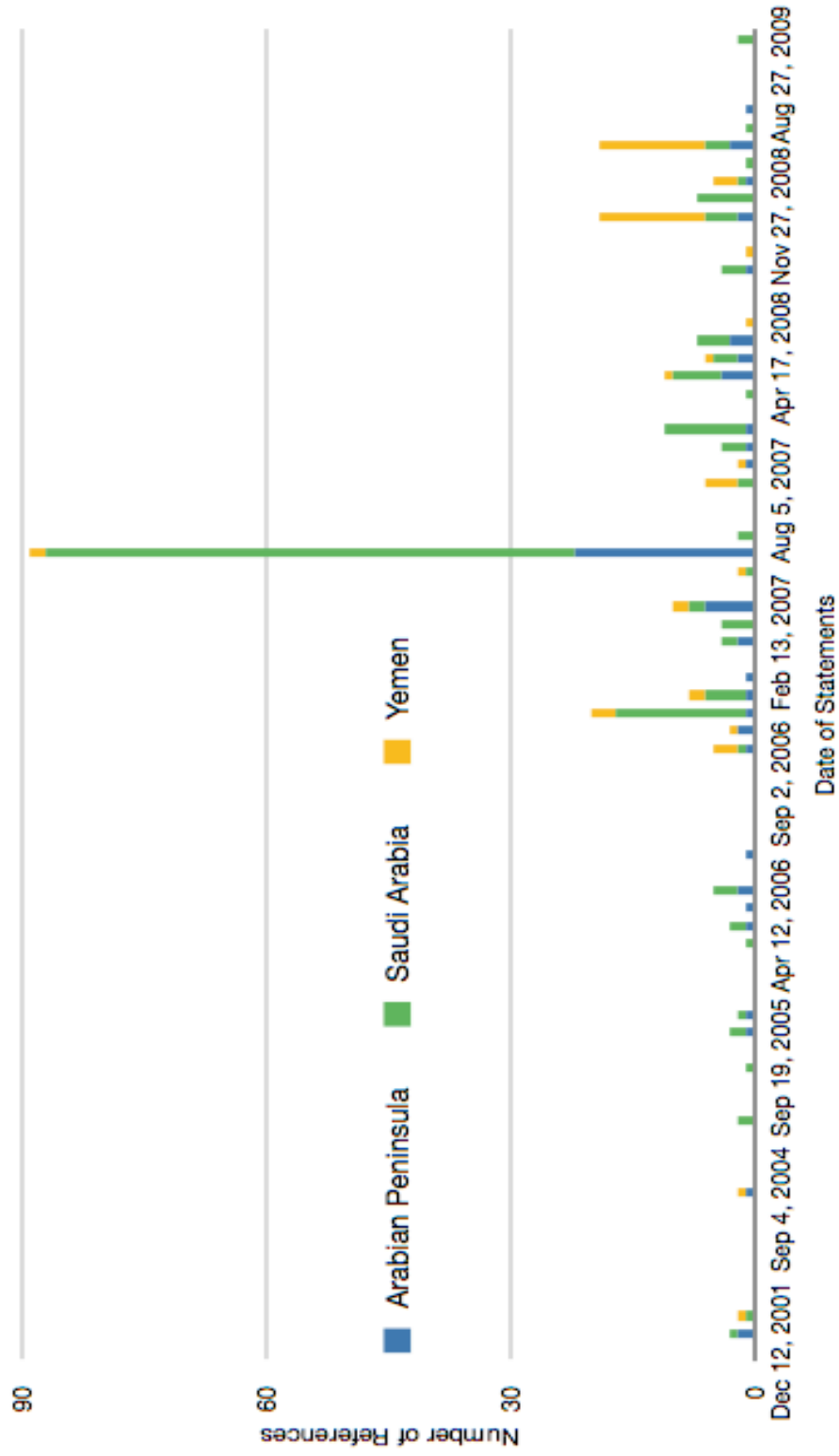
²⁰⁴ NEFA Foundation, "Usama Bin Laden: "From Usama to Obama", in *Terror Watch* (NEFA Foundation, 2010).

APPENDIX: AYMAN AL-ZAWAHIRI'S PUBLIC STATEMENTS, 2001-2009²⁰⁵

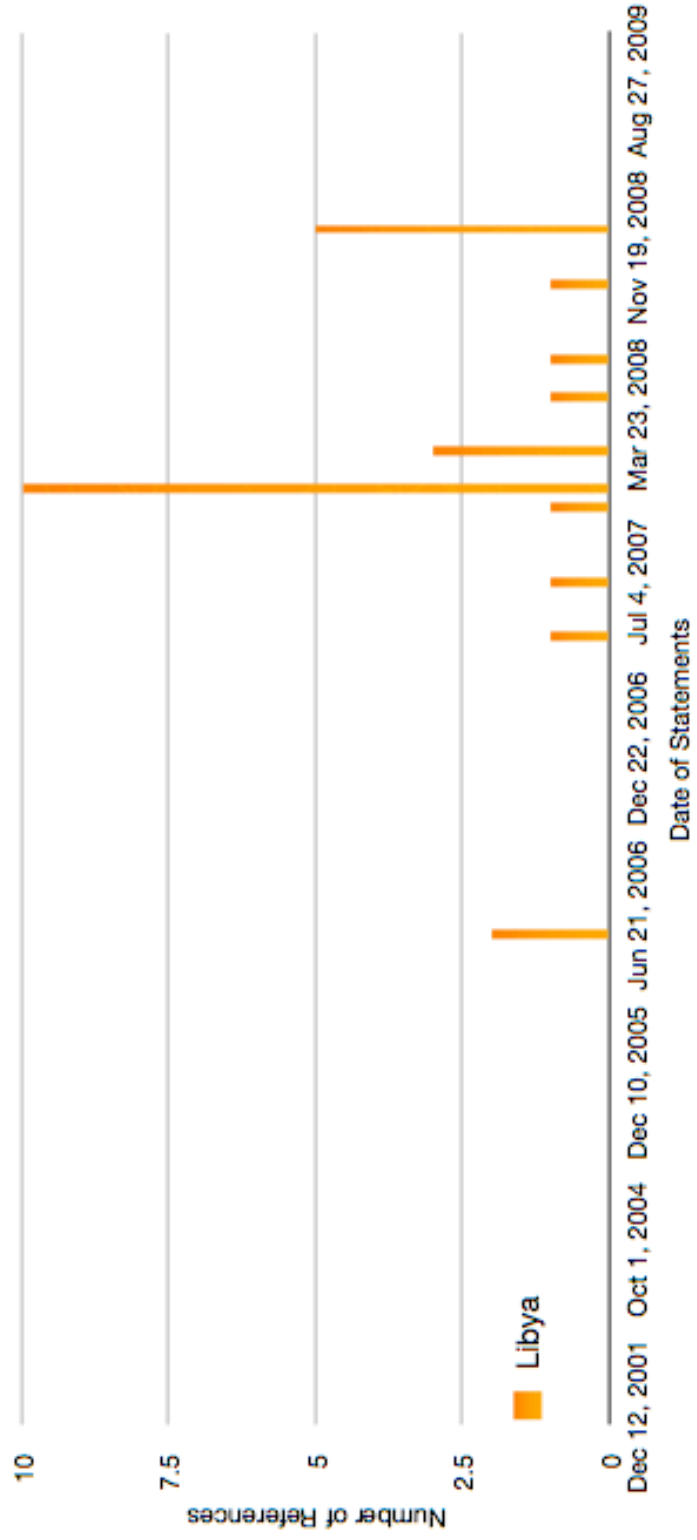


²⁰⁵ All of the data used to compile these charts, and for the analysis in the preceding paper was compiled by the author from the following sources: IntelCenter, *Intelcenter: Words of Ayman Al-Zawahiri Vol. 1*, Mansfield, *His Own Words: Translation and Analysis of the Writings of Dr. Ayman Al Zawahiri*; Mansfield, *Al Qaeda 2006 Yearbook: The 2007 Messages from Al Qaeda Leadership*; ———, *Al Qaeda 2007 Yearbook: The 2007 Messages from Al Qaeda Leadership*; Laura Mansfield, *Al Qaeda 2008 Yearbook: The 2008 Messages from Al Qaeda Leadership* (TLG Productions, 2008).; and NEFA Foundation, "Translations/Transcripts of Statements by Al-Qaida Leadership," (NEFA Foundation, 2010). The author also compiled news articles to confirm statement dates and check for translation consistency. Despite consistent attempts, the author was unable to locate complete statements for the following dates: September 28, 2003; December 19, 2003; February 24, 2004; and March 25, 2004.

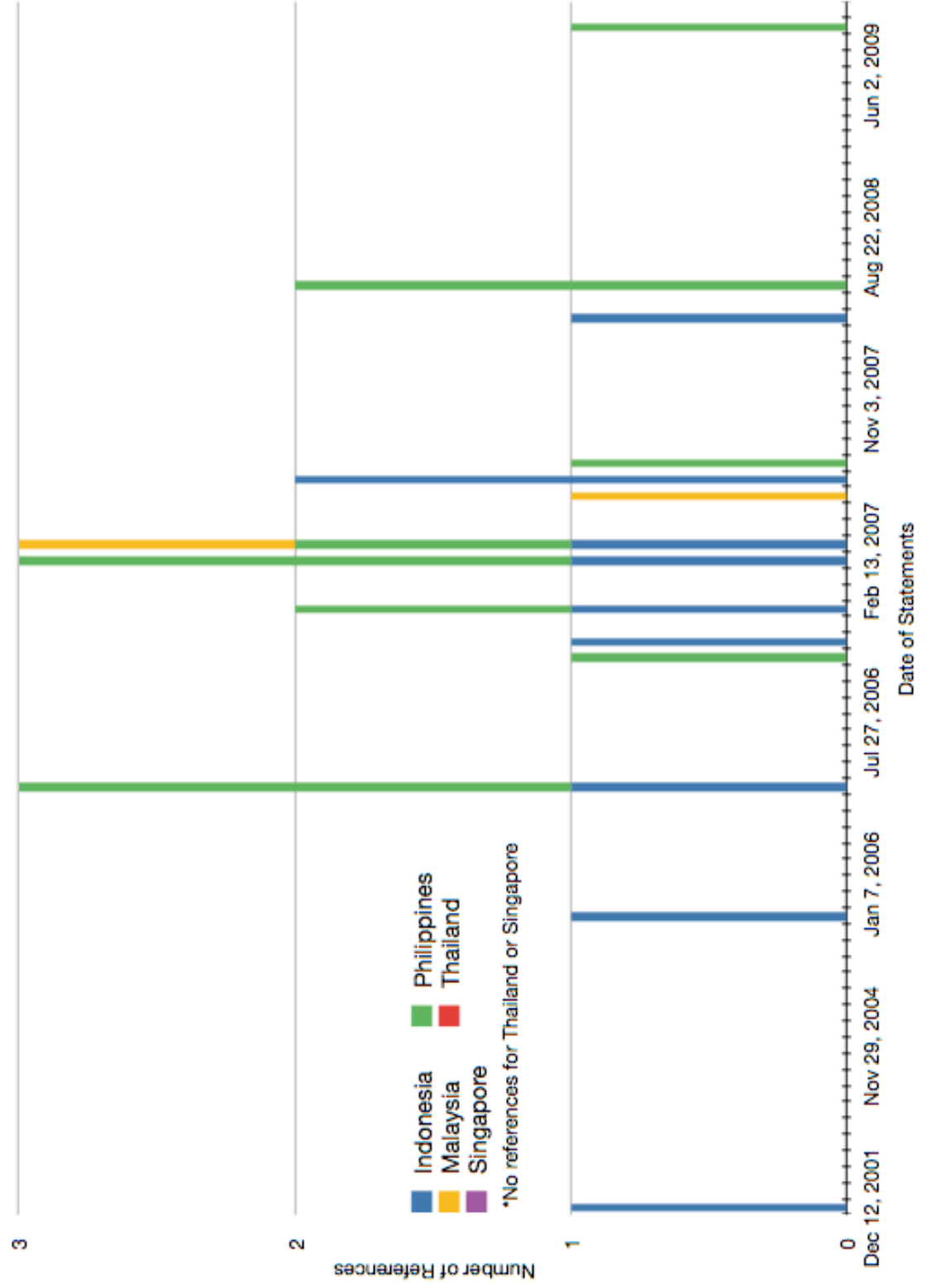
Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula



Libyan Islamic Fighting Group



Jemaah Islamiyah



Chechnya

15

10

Number of References

Chechnya

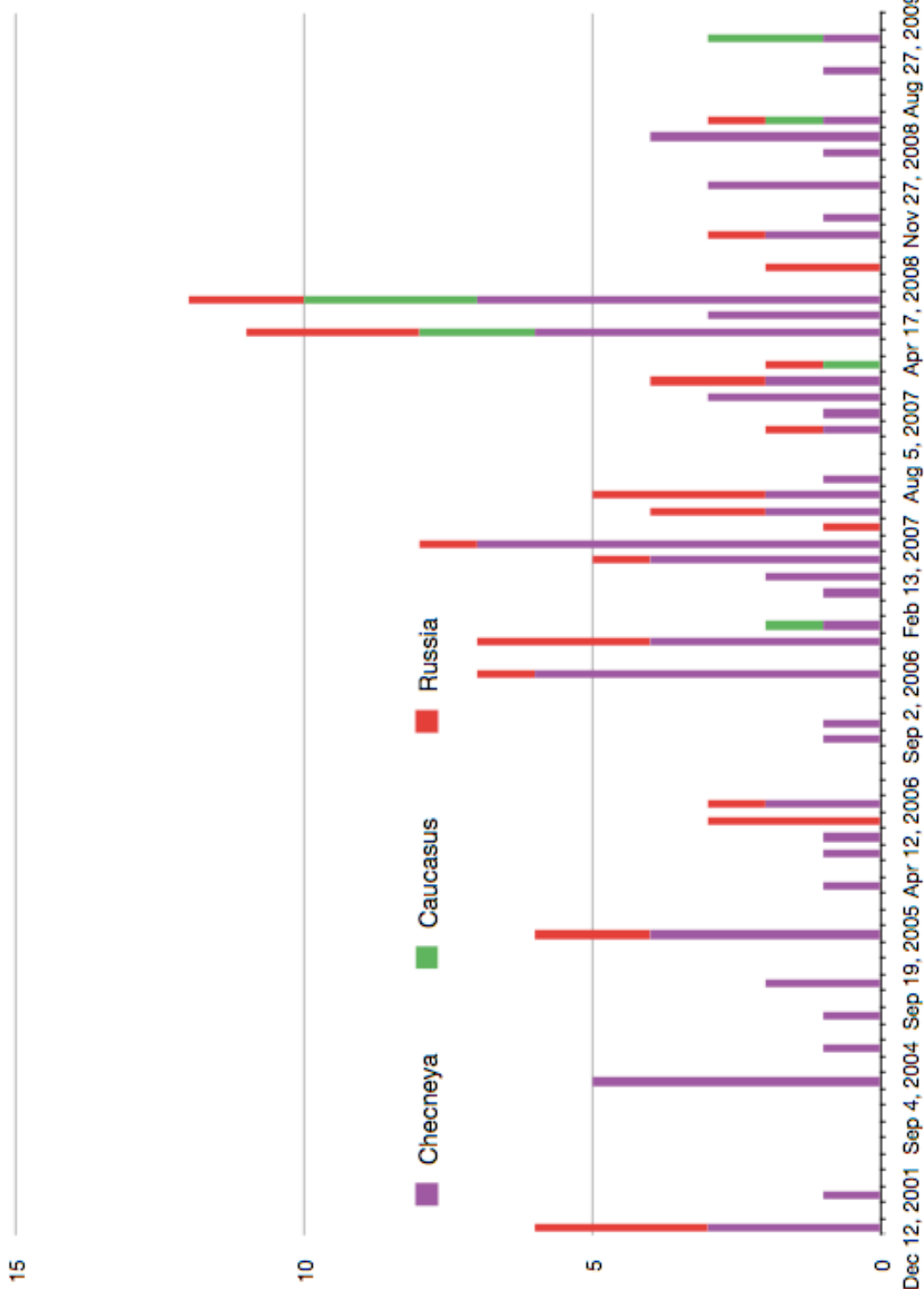
Caucasus

Russia

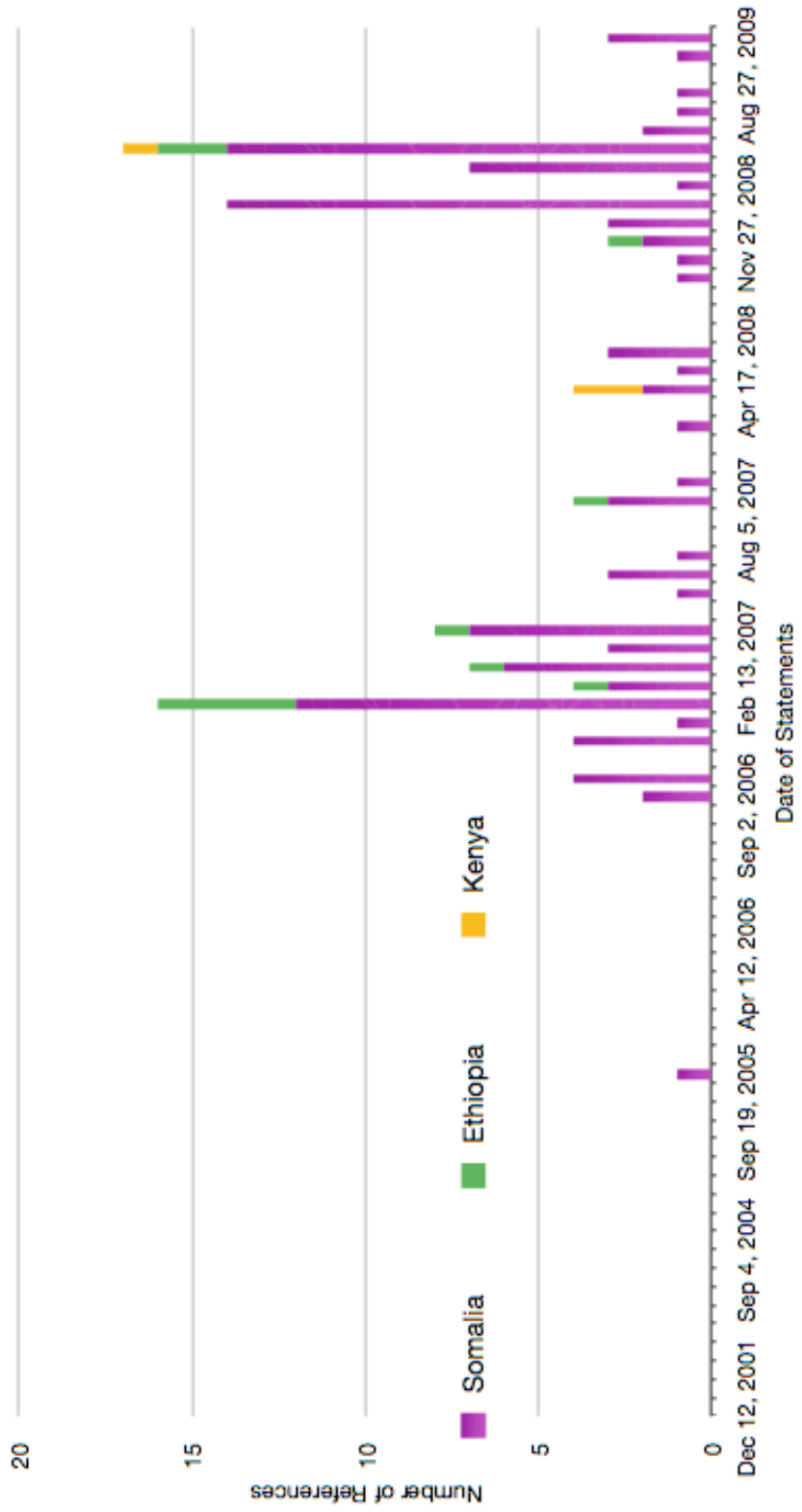
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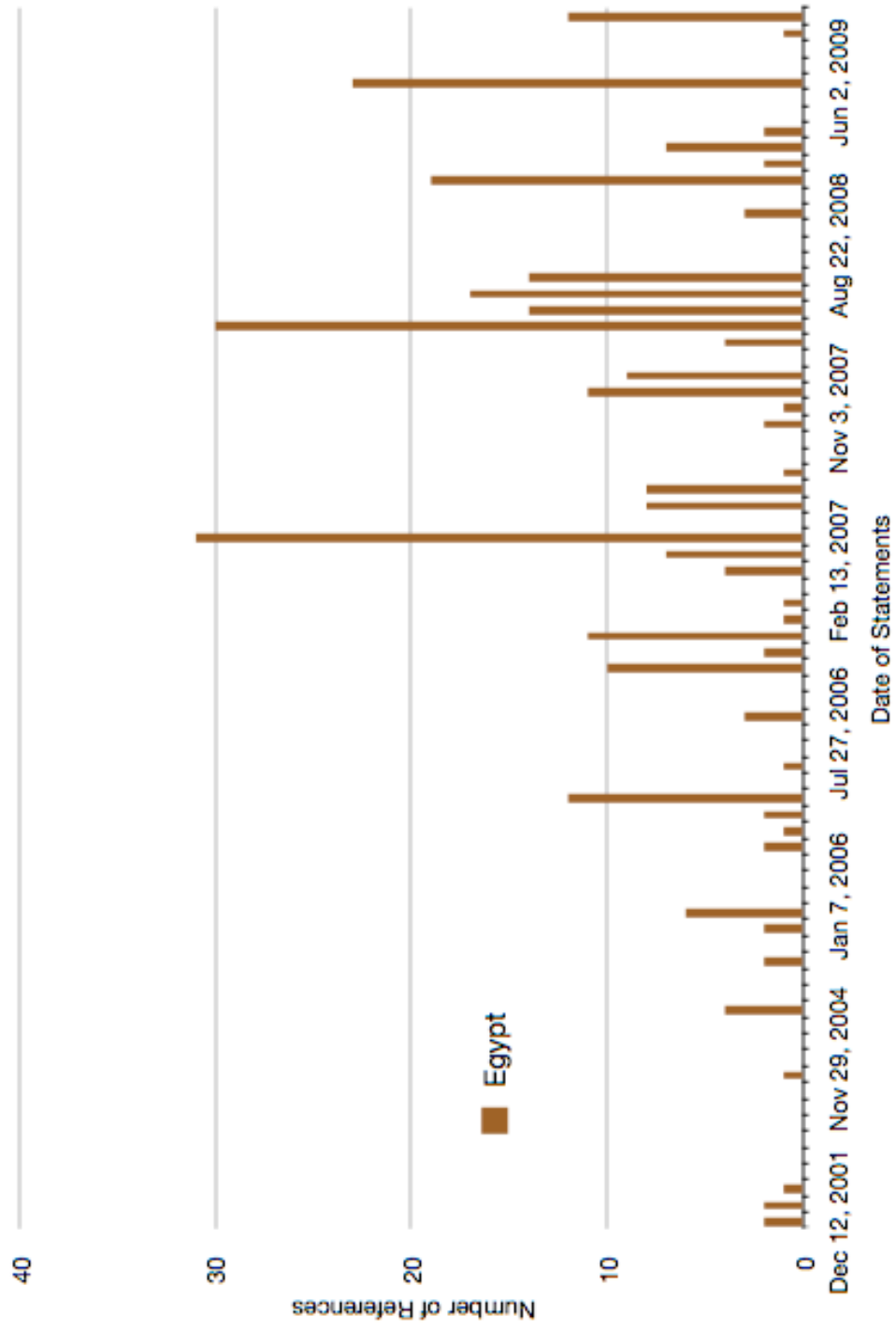
Dec 12, 2001 Sep 4, 2004 Sep 19, 2005 Apr 12, 2006 Sep 2, 2006 Feb 13, 2007 Aug 5, 2007 Apr 17, 2008 Nov 27, 2008 Aug 27, 2009

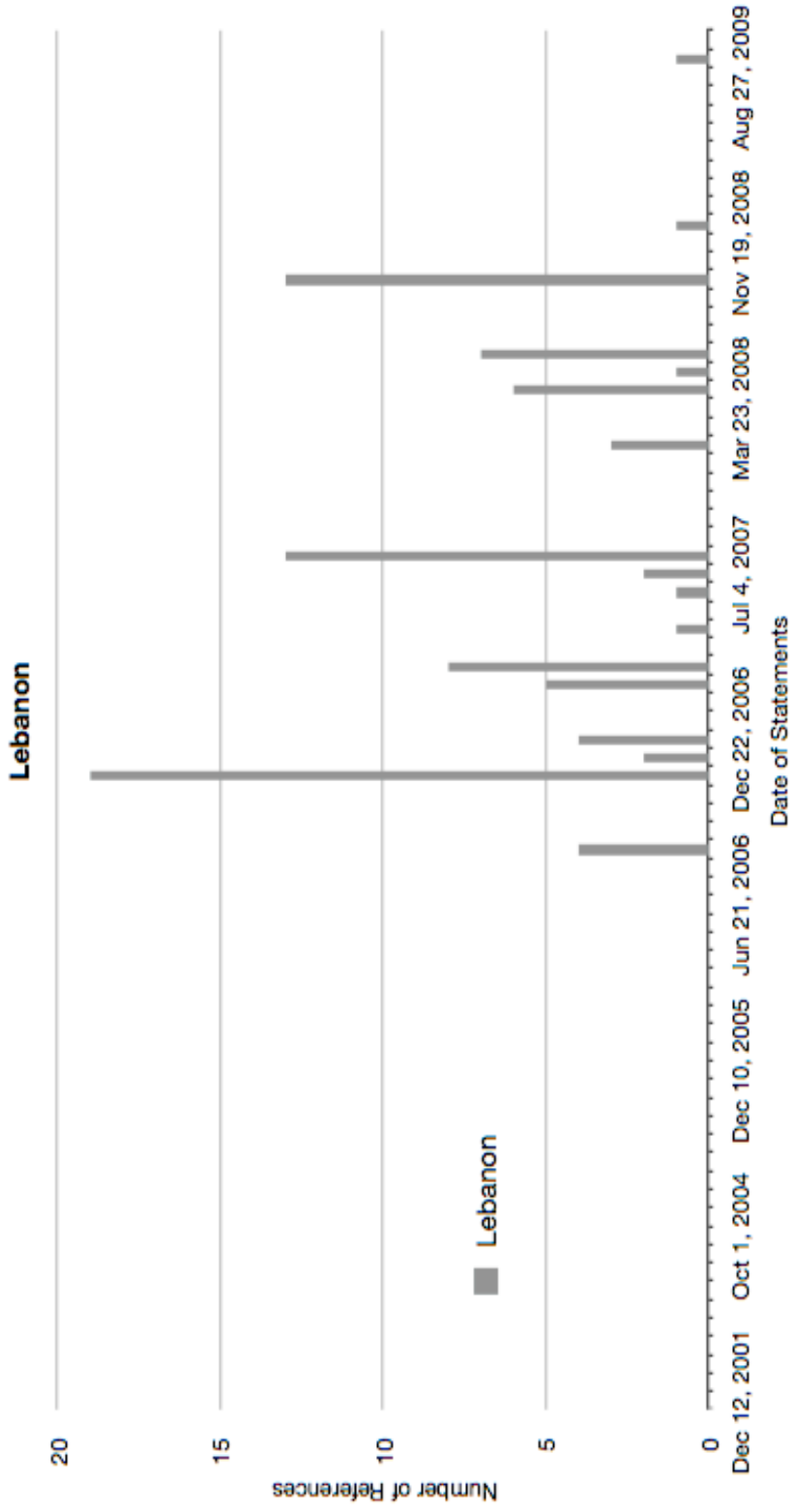


Somalia



Egypt





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