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On September 11th 2001 19 men hijacked four passenger aircraft and changed the course of history. On 2 May 2011 the man responsible for those events was killed in a daring raid on his villa in Abbottabad, Pakistan. Both events frame a long decade of violence, upheaval, fear, anxiety, and profound change. Throughout this period, the attention of both Europe and the U.S. remained fixated on the terrorist group that had carried out the attack, al Qaeda; and the man behind it, Osama bin Laden. Although terrorist attacks and plots were perpetrated by other groups, including secular left wing organizations, right-wing fanatics, Shi'a militants, and single-issue entities respectively opposed to legalized abortion or championing environmental and animal rights causes, the threat posed by al Qaeda was judged the most consequential and compelling for at least five reasons:

- its profound animus towards the West in particular and the prevailing world order and international states-system in general;
- its global orientation and unprecedented geographical reach;
- its unique capabilities in terms of resources, money, manpower, planning, and sheer imagination;
- its geographically diverse constellation of associated and affiliated like-minded terrorist organizations; and,
- its success in inspiring, motivating and animating individual adherents (e.g., "lone wolves") and independent cells to execute terrorist attacks entirely on their own but even still in broad support of the movement.

Al Qaeda's operational flexibility in simultaneously exercising "top down" command and control over one aspect of the movement's operations combined with its "bottom up" approach of radicalizing individuals thus posed the most formidable and vexatious challenge to intelligence and security services and law enforcement agencies across Europe and in the U.S. throughout this time period.

TRENDS SINCE 9/11

In response to the September 11th 2001 attacks, President George W. Bush declared a global war on terrorism. The invasion of Afghanistan followed: as a result of which the Taliban was overthrown and al Qaeda's operational bases and training camps in that country were destroyed. But, although al Qaeda had clearly been weakened, it had not been completely defeated and acts of terrorism linked to the organization continued. During 2002, for instance, there were terrorist attacks in countries as diverse as Tunisia, Pakistan, Jordan, Indonesia, Kuwait, the Philippines, Yemen, and Kenya. Targets included German, Australian, and Israeli tourists, French engineers and a French oil tanker——as well as American diplomats and servicemen. Al Qaeda also continued to use suicide bombing tactics——both at sea and on land. And, in Pakistan, it kidnapped and subsequently executed an American journalist named Daniel Pearl.

Al Qaeda attacks continued in 2003 with significant terrorist operations occurring in Saudi Arabia and Morocco that May. In August, a known Al Qaeda affiliate, Jemaah Islamiya, took credit for a suicide attack on the Marriot Hotel in Jakarta, Indonesia and, in November, a Turkish cell funded and directed by al Qaeda staged simultaneous suicide attacks against two Jewish synagogues in Istanbul and then less than a week later against the British Consulate and the local offices of the London-based Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank Corporation (HSBC) also in that city.

It is still unclear whether al Qaeda was responsible for the most significant terrorist attack of 2004. In one of the worst terrorist incidents since September 11th 2001, a cell of jihadi radicals in Spain——with suspected links to the al Qaeda movement——killed more than 200

persons and injured over 1,600 others in the simultaneous bombings of four commuter trains approaching Madrid's Atocha rail station. Throughout both that year and the two succeeding ones, al Qaeda's affiliate in Iraq (aQI), plunged that country into disarray, variously attacking American and Coalition military forces, Iraqi security forces, and the country's Shi'a population. However, in May 2006, aQI's founder and leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, was killed in a U.S. air strike. The so-called "Anbar Awakening" followed that autumn, when Sunni tribes in violence-plagued al Anbar Province, rose up against aQI, and with American support began to roll back the tide of violence that had submerged the province. The U.S. "surge" of an additional 30,000 troops to Iraq began in early 2007 and cemented the gains in al Anbar province so that by 2008 aQI was on the verge of defeat.

Meanwhile, the fortunes of what is variously known as al Qaeda Central, Al Qaeda Senior Leadership (AQSL), or core al Qaeda, the surviving rump of the movement expelled from Afghanistan in 2002, were improving. America's preoccupation with the worsening insurgency in Iraq between 2003 and 2006 provided the movement with the breathing space and opportunity that it required to re-group and re-organize in its newfound sanctuary along the lawless border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The revitalized al Qaeda that emerged was but a mere shadow of its pre-9/11 self. It did not have the freedom of movement, massive personnel numbers, robust network of training camps and operational bases, functioning international infrastructure, and considerable largesse that it possessed when it was comfortably situated in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. But, despite the comparatively far more modest amenities and confining nature of Pakistan's FATA and surrounding provinces, al Qaeda was nonetheless able to partly reconstitute its global terrorist reach. In no Western country was this development as worrisome as in Britain. Both the 7 July 2005 suicide attacks on London transport, that killed 52 persons and injured over 700 others, and the foiled August 2006 plot to bomb simultaneously upwards of 17 American and Canadian passenger aircraft shortly after they departed from London's Heathrow Airport, revealed the existence of a significant al

Qaeda infrastructure in Britain. According to the then Director-General of the British Security Service (MI5), Dame Eliza Manningham-Buller, British Muslims operating at al Qaeda's behest were responsible for nearly 30 other terrorist plots in that country between 1999 and 2006. What was especially alarming about the airlines plot was that it was not directed against softer, more accessible targets like subway and commuter trains, hotels and tourist destinations that it was believed a diminished and de-graded al Qaeda was only capable of: but rather arguably against the most internationally-hardened target set since the 9/11 attacks——commercial aviation. This incident thus raised profound questions about the West's ability to deter al Qaeda from attacking targets it deems the most lucrative in terms of lethality, adverse economic impact, and publicity and attention.

Al Qaeda's survival was largely facilitated by a loose organizational structure that continues to employ both top down and bottom up approaches. On the one hand, the late Osama bin Laden, as al Qaeda's Emir, acted much like the president or chief executive officer of a large multinational corporation: defining objectives and issuing orders to ensure their implementation. A *shura majlis* (consultative council) functioned as al Qaeda's board of directors: addressing important policy and strategy issues, approving *fatwas* (religious edicts) and authorizing major terrorist operations. While on the other hand, bin Laden also operated as a kind of venture capitalist: soliciting ideas for attacks and supporting activities from below, that is, encouraging creative approaches and "out of the box" thinking from both al Qaeda operatives and its vast network of sympathizers, supporters, and radicalized individuals around the globe. Bin Laden in turn provided them with support——material and spiritual——as well as assistance with planning and intelligence gathering. In this respect, unlike most other terrorist groups that tend to be organized hierarchically——in a rigid pyramidal fashion with a commander at the top, issuing orders to the individual cells arrayed below——al Qaeda has long functioned as a flatter, more linear and predominantly networked movement.

Although al Qaeda therefore may have a less cohesive membership than more traditionally and rigidly organized terrorist groups, this flatter, more diffuse and amorphous structure emerged as a key strength that likely has ensured the movement's longevity despite the unprecedented global campaign directed against it. Al Qaeda accordingly, can perhaps be usefully conceptualized as comprising four distinct, but not mutually exclusive, dimensions. In descending order of sophistication, they are:

1. **Al Qaeda Central**. This category comprises the core al Qaeda organization. It remains centered in or around the Afghanistan and Pakistan borders region and continues to exert coordination, if not some direct command and control capability; commissioning attacks, directing surveillance and collating reconnaissance, planning operations, and approving their execution. It also is responsible for al Qaeda's media outreach efforts
2. **Al Qaeda Affiliates and Associates.** This category embraces formally established terrorist and insurgent organizations that over the years have benefited from bin Laden's largesse and/or spiritual guidance and/or have received training, arms, money and other assistance from al Qaeda and whose objectives and ideologies are closely aligned with al Qaeda.
3. **Al Qaeda Network.** These are dispersed cells of al Qaeda adherents who have or have had some direct connection with al Qaeda——no matter how tenuous or evanescent. They appear to fall into two sub-categories. One sub-category comprises persons who have had some prior terrorism experience——having been blooded in battle as part of some previous jihadi campaign in Algeria, the Balkans, Chechnya, and perhaps more recently in Iraq, or who may have trained in some al Qaeda facility whether in Afghanistan or Yemen or the Sudan before September 11th 2001. The other sub-category, conforms to the profile of the four British Muslims responsible for the 2005 bombings of mass transit targets in London. None of the four London bombers had previously fought in any of the contemporary, iconic Muslim conflicts. Rather, the ringleader of the cell and an accomplice were brought to Pakistan for training in an al Qaeda

facility and then returned to their homeland with both an attack plan and the knowledge of how to implement it.

4. **Al Qaeda Galaxy**. These are home-grown Islamic radicals——whose parents emigratef from North Africa, the Middle East, and South and Southeast Asia——as well as local converts to Islam resident in Europe, Africa, and North America, who may have no direct connection with al Qaeda (or with any other identifiable terrorist group), but nonetheless are prepared to carry out attacks in solidarity with, or support of, al Qaeda's radical jihadi agenda. Like the al Qaeda Network they too are motivated by a shared sense of enmity and grievance felt towards the U.S. and West in general and their host-nations in particular. In this specific instance, however, the relationship with al Qaeda is more inspirational than actual, abetted by a profound rage over the U.S. invasion and "occupation" of Afghanistan and Iraq and the oppression and degradation of Muslims occurring elsewhere. Critically, these persons are neither directly members of al Qaeda or any known, organized terrorist group nor necessarily even a very cohesive entity unto themselves. An example of this category is the so-called Hofstad Group in the Netherlands, a member of whom, named Mohammed Bouyeri, murdered the Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh in Amsterdam in November 2004.

Indeed, one of the most significant developments in international terrorism during the last decade has been the ability of Qaeda and its allies to establish at least an embryonic terrorist recruitment, radicalization, and operational infrastructure in a variety of European countries——including (among others) Britain, Spain, Germany, and the Netherlands——as well as in the U.S. itself. At one point, three of the al Qaeda movement's top operational commanders were either American citizens or former residents of the U.S.——the late Anwar al-Aulaqi, a senior officer in the Yemen-based al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP); Omar Hammami, the U.S.-born field commander of al Shabaab in Somalia; and Adnan Shukrijumah, an important figure in the surviving al Qaeda core group in Pakistan. The movement's abilities to radicalize and recruit so-called home-grown terrorists were evident in the plot to stage simultaneous suicide bombings on the New York City subway system

that was foiled in September 2009; the failed suicide bombing of a U.S. airliner en route from Amsterdam to Detroit on Christmas Day, 2009; and the attempted car bombing of New York City's Times Square in May 2010.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND CURRENT THREATS

Although bin Laden's death inflicted a crushing blow on al Qaeda, it is not yet clear whether it has been a fatal one. Similarly, while the mostly non-violent, mass protests of the "Arab Spring" that have continued to unfold across North Africa and the Middle East since February 2011 were successful in overturning hated despots and thus appeared to discredit al Qaeda's longstanding message that only violence and jihad could achieve the same ends, serious terrorist threats and challenges throughout the region and elsewhere remain.

First, al Qaeda is still strongest at the geographical periphery of the dramatic events of the past year. Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen remain key al Qaeda operational environments and sanctuaries. Moreover, the number of failed or failing states and the geographical expanse of ungoverned territory that is the oxygen that al Qaeda and its associated organizations breathe has arguably been increasing rather than shrinking over the past year: thus potentially providing the movement with new potential sanctuaries and safe havens.

Second, al Qaeda's core demographic has always been disenfranchised, disillusioned, and marginalized youth. There is no evidence that the potential pool of young "hot heads" to whom al Qaeda's message has always been directed has dissipated because of the "Arab Spring." Moreover, it may likely grow in the future as impatience mounts and many who took to the streets find themselves excluded from or deprived of the political and economic benefits that the upheavals in their respective countries have promised. The losers and disenchanted of the "Arab Spring" may thus provide a new reservoir of recruits for al Qaeda in the near future. In this respect, it can be argued that al Qaeda's strategy is not to compete with the stronger and better organized Muslim Brotherhood in these countries, but rather to hope to feed off its malcontents and thereby attract new recruits into al Qaeda's ranks.

Third, continued instability in Pakistan. The increasing activity of militant groups (often affiliated with al Qaeda), coupled with the deterioration of relations with the U.S., currently threatens to undermine the progress achieved in recent years against the spread of terrorism in South Asia and therefore has direct implications for potential attacks further afield in Europe and the U.S.

Finally, the likely continued fragmentation of the jihadi movement as a result of bin Laden's killing and core al Qaeda's weakening will doubtless present new challenges and may create different threats of varying magnitudes in a variety of countries. The repercussions and impact of a fragmented jihadi movement that will be smaller and less capable but more difficult to identify, track, and predict, is arguably still poorly understood at this time.

CONCLUSION

History has shown that al Qaeda is nothing without a physical sanctuary or safe haven. Indeed, this is why al Qaeda has invested so much of its energy in recent years to strengthening the capabilities of its allied, affiliated or associated movements in Pakistan, Yemen, North Africa, and Somalia. Al Qaeda has thus created a networked transnational movement in order to ensure its survival. Accordingly, rather than the single, monolithic, entity of a decade ago, today there are several al Qaedas, not just one: each of which has different capabilities and presents different, often unique, challenges. This effectively negates a "one size fits all" strategy. Instead, countermeasures have to be tailored to the specific conditions and realities in each of those countries and regions where al Qaeda and its franchises have taken root and in some cases have flourished. At a time of successive international monetary crises, declining national budgets and a diminishing national will to be at war with terrorism, the implications of the movement's fragmentation are unclear and, as yet, cannot be prudently or safely discounted.

The al Qaeda movement's broad appeal, transnational agenda, global reach, and grandiose ambitions were arguably without parallel compared with the variegated threats that all other terrorist groups have

presented over the past century. The extent to which other manifestations of terrorism from right-wing, left-wing, nationalist, separatist, or issue-specific movements will emerge to challenge our preoccupation with al Qaeda also remains unclear——but none is likely to acquire the international networks and global reach of the al Qaeda movement or be able to radicalize and recruit on any kind of a sale similar to al Qaeda. For these reasons, al Qaeda will likely remain the preeminent global terrorist threat well into the second decade of the 21st Century.