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# CTC SENTINEL

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## About the CTC Sentinel

The Combating Terrorism Center is an independent educational and research institution based in the Department of Social Sciences at the United States Military Academy, West Point. The CTC Sentinel harnesses the Center's global network of scholars and practitioners to understand and confront contemporary threats posed by terrorism and other forms of political violence.

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# Bin Ladin's Killing and its Effect on Al-Qa`ida: What Comes Next?

By Bruce Hoffman



A Pakistani man reads about the death of Usama bin Ladin at a stall in Lahore. - Photo by Arif Ali/AFP/Getty Images

CONFRONTED WITH THE sudden death of a leader, terrorist groups become cornered animals. When wounded, they lash out. Not only in hopes of surviving, but also to demonstrate their remaining power and continued relevance. Al-Qa`ida is no different. As its statement issued on May 6, 2011 confirming Usama bin Ladin's death declared, "The soldiers of Islam, groups and individuals, will continue planning without tiredness or boredom, and without despair or surrender, and without weakness or stagnancy, until they cause the disaster that makes children look like the elderly!"

Al-Qa`ida will thus keen for its leader by killing. It will not necessarily attack soon. Yet the United States should brace itself once the 40-day mourning period that some Muslims observe ends. The

dual prospect of punishing the United States and re-igniting fear and anxiety following a time of celebration and relief must surely figure prominently in al-Qa`ida's calculus. This is what happened in Israel 15 years ago.

### Past Decapitation Precedents

On January 5, 1996, Israeli agents assassinated Yahya Ayyash, a senior Hamas field commander whose bomb-making skills earned him the sobriquet the "Engineer." A deceptive quiet then ensued as Hamas licked its wounds and plotted its revenge. Retribution came 40 days later with the first of a series of four bus bombings that continued for two months. By the time the bombings ended, more than 60 people had been killed. This bloody spate of attacks, moreover, is credited with having decisively influenced the outcome of the Israeli general elections that March.

Al-Qa`ida will strive to emulate Hamas' example in this respect. Its ability to avenge Bin Ladin's death will likely prove to be a defining moment for the organization. Failure to do so would likely spell the demise that some are now prematurely predicting. For al-Qa`ida, now is the time to "put up or shut up" as the remaining leadership will surely attempt to prove that the movement retains its vitality and viability despite the death of its founder and leader.

In this respect, history unfortunately may be on al-Qa`ida's side. Decapitation has rarely provided a decisive end to a terrorist movement. During Algeria's war of independence in the late 1950s, for instance, the French apprehended the National Liberation Front's (NLF) core leadership cadre. Yet, they found that the FLN was much more networked than had been imagined and therefore resistant to even the decapitation of its entire leadership. As the French counterinsurgency theorist and practitioner par excellence David Galula observed shortly afterward, the "five top leaders of the rebellion, including [Ahmed] Ben Bella, had been neatly caught during a flight from Rabat to Tunis. Their capture, I admit, had little effect on the direction of the rebellion, because the movement was too loosely organized to crumble under such a blow."<sup>1</sup> The FLN, of course, went on to triumph and attain independence for Algeria just four years later.

Similarly, in 2004 the Israelis delivered a seemingly devastating one-two punch against Hamas: killing the equivalent of Bin Ladin and his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, when they assassinated in succession Shaykh Ahmed Yassin, the founder and leader of Hamas, and then a month later Abdel Aziz Rantisi, his deputy and successor. Yet Hamas is today stronger than it was seven years ago as a new generation of militants continues to prosecute its struggle against Israel.

In 2003, of course, the United States captured Saddam Hussein, and many assumed that the insurgency in Iraq would end. In fact, it continued; indeed, for another four years it escalated.

Admittedly, the killing of the leader of al-Qa`ida in Iraq, Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi, in 2006 was an important setback to al-Qa`ida's ambitions in Iraq. Yet even that signal American accomplishment did not sound the group's death knell as it continues to fight today.

#### **Al-Qa`ida's Response: Scenarios**

Given both the less than benign historical record of decapitation's long-term effects on terrorist organizations coupled with al-Qa`ida's stated determination to punish the United States, what should Washington prepare for in the near and further-off future in terms of possible scenarios and potential terrorist attacks?

First, there should be concern about planned al-Qa`ida attacks already in the pipeline. Just days before Bin Ladin's killing, German authorities disrupted a planned al-Qa`ida attack in Berlin. It must be assumed that additional plots are already in motion—or soon will be.

Second, Washington needs to worry about al-Qa`ida harnessing the social networking tools that facilitated the "Arab Spring" to spark a transnational spate of spontaneous terrorist acts. These lower-level incidents would thus preoccupy and distract intelligence agencies in hopes that a spectacular al-Qa`ida attack might avoid detection, succeed and thereby dramatically shatter American complacency.

Third, as the May 6, 2011 al-Qa`ida statement indicates, the group will seek to further strain Pakistan's relations with the United States. By summoning both its jihadist allies and ordinary citizens there against the Pakistani government, al-Qa`ida will thus hope to undermine Pakistan's fragile democracy by creating a popular backlash against the United States. The surviving leadership was explicit on this point in the statement acknowledging Bin Ladin's death. "We call upon our Muslim people in Pakistan," it declared,

on whose land Shaykh Usama was killed, to rise up and revolt to cleanse this shame that has been attached to them by a clique of traitors and thieves who sold everything to the enemies of the *umma* [worldwide Muslim community],

and disregarded the feelings of this noble jihadi people. We call upon them to rise up strongly and in general to cleanse their country from the filth of the Americans who spread corruption in it.

Fourth, the possibility of another major Pakistani jihadist attack in India should not be discounted—either encouraged by al-Qa`ida or designed to provide the movement with breathing space at this critical moment in its history. Such an attack along the lines of the 2008 Mumbai incident would prompt a major Indian military reaction. This, in turn, al-Qa`ida would hope, might trigger a broader regional conflict and destabilize the entire region—with attendant profound repercussions on U.S. interests and military operations in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Al-Qa`ida would see in such a scenario an ideal opportunity to regroup and reorganize precisely when the world is distracted by a major escalation of tensions or indeed an armed clash between India and Pakistan.

Finally, al-Qa`ida affiliates like its Yemen franchise, al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula, will remain largely unaffected by Bin Ladin's death. They will, however, likely embrace vengeance to further burnish their terrorist credentials as rising stars in the movement's firmament.

Al-Qa`ida has been compared to the archetypal shark in the water that must keep moving forward—no matter how slowly or incrementally—or die. Whether al-Qa`ida can in fact do so, and thereby prove that it can survive its founder and leader's demise, is surely the most pressing question of the moment.

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<sup>1</sup> David Galula, *Pacification in Algeria, 1956-1958* (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 2006), p. 233.

## Special Operations Forces and the Raid Against Bin Ladin: Policymaker Considerations in Combating Terrorism

By Michele L. Malvesti and Frances Fragos Townsend

SINCE SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) have experienced their most extensive use and greatest transformation of the modern era.<sup>1</sup> From conducting operations in Iraq and Afghanistan to combating terrorism across the globe, these forces have played leading roles in addressing the nation's most pressing security threats and challenges. Yet policymakers have not always employed SOF—the nation's most strategic counterterrorism (CT) military assets—to maximum effect.<sup>2</sup>

On May 1, 2011, however, a team of Special Operators crossed into Pakistan, infiltrated a residential compound in the city of Abbottabad, and killed Usama bin Ladin. The daring raid to bring to justice the man ultimately responsible for the murder of nearly 3,000 people on 9/11

is a brilliant illustration of painstaking intelligence work and interagency collaboration. It also exemplifies the optimal use of SOF.

In deciding to authorize the raid against Bin Ladin—arguably the most significant CT success in U.S. history—President Barack Obama and his national security team took into account multiple political and operational considerations. Four issues that likely weighed heavily on their minds are discussed herein.<sup>3</sup> These issues are tied to the broader challenge of using force in general, and SOF in particular, in countries with which the United States is not at war—a challenge that will continue to define U.S. CT efforts for years to come. The article concludes by highlighting three recommendations policymakers should consider when using SOF to combat terrorism in the future.

### Issue #1: Sovereignty

Terrorist threats to U.S. interests will continue to emanate from beyond traditional warzones. Often the first consideration policymakers will weigh when deciding whether to authorize a Special Operation in these situations is the issue of sovereignty. Respect for sovereignty, the associated norm of non-intervention, and the formal equality of states remain the basis of today's international order. Not all states, however, are treated equally in practice. One factor affecting the decision to violate another country's sovereignty is whether the country in question is a failed, functioning, or quasi-functioning state. CT officials tend to be more inclined to approve an operation inside a failed state such as Somalia, for example, than they are inside a functioning one that is based on the rule of law, has the ability to extend its writ, and shares a common approach with the United States in combating terrorism. In the case of such functioning states, U.S. officials often will rely on that state, likely a partner nation, to take the lead in addressing terrorism within its own borders.<sup>4</sup> In

contrast, the United States often lacks a reliable partner, or any partner at all, in combating terrorism inside failed states. The United States also risks drawing little international condemnation for conducting CT operations in a place like Somalia, a country that has virtually no functioning state institutions and is assessed to be the most vulnerable to collapse or conflict in the world.<sup>5</sup>

Yet the more problematic states for the U.S. CT community are not truly failed ones but rather those states that have undergoverned territories that are being exploited by terrorists and yet are functioning “just enough” to help the United States combat common threats. These include Pakistan and Yemen, and should another international terrorist attack occur on U.S. soil, it most likely will have its origins in one of these two countries, if not both. Through the years, the United States has worked with these and similarly affected countries, often conducting joint CT operations with them. Yet even the direct involvement of a host nation in a given CT operation does not entirely mitigate the potential downsides of operating on the sovereign territory of another state. Many CT operations demand secrecy or low visibility. Yet if an operation becomes public—as operations often do—the involvement of U.S. forces could embarrass that host nation's leader (especially if that leader had not previously disclosed to his population, or even to others within his own government, that U.S. forces were operating inside their country). This could empower that leader's opposition, unleash or increase internal unrest, and lead to a backlash against U.S. strategic interests.

highly functioning states. For example, they can leverage virtual safe havens that exist in the insufficiently strong or inadequately protected financial, legal, or cyber systems of stable countries and the similar systems of international organizations.

<sup>5</sup> “Failed States Index 2009,” *Foreign Policy*, June 22, 2009. Somalia also was listed as the preeminent failed state in the 2010 Index, making it the number one failed state three years in a row. It also should be noted that there are other policy reasons why the United States might decide against conducting certain operations inside a failed state, including not wanting to “Americanize” the problem.

<sup>1</sup> This article dates the modern SOF era to the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 and the Nunn-Cohen Amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act of 1987. For details on SOF's use and transformation, as well as additional recommendations to optimize SOF for the future, see Michele L. Malvesti, “To Serve the Nation: U.S. Special Operations Forces in an Era of Persistent Conflict,” Center for a New American Security, June 2010. This article is derived, in part, from “To Serve the Nation.”

<sup>2</sup> Counterterrorism is just one of several core activities for SOF. The U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) currently lists 12 core activities as they relate to Special Operations: direct action; special reconnaissance; unconventional warfare; foreign internal defense; civil affairs operations; counterterrorism; military information support operations (once referred to as psychological operations); information operations; counterproliferation of weapons of mass destruction; security force assistance; counterinsurgency operations; and activities specified by the president or secretary of defense. See “2011 Fact Book: United States Special Operations Command,” U.S. Special Operations Command Public Affairs, 2011, p. 7. It is important to note that while the authors of this article do not refer to any specific SOF units or commands, the SOF community comprises many tribes—service components and mission forces—that have niche areas of specialization across these 12 core activities.

<sup>3</sup> At the time of this writing, information is still being released on the decisions and factors that led to the Bin Ladin raid. In discussing these four issues, the authors draw primarily from their own experiences in developing CT policy and strategy, including decisions to use SOF to combat terrorism.

<sup>4</sup> Terrorists and other violent extremists can operate in



These consequences are often magnified if a country is unwitting of the U.S. action, as was the case with the Bin Ladin assault. There are two categories of unwitting states. The first is a state that has been cooperating on CT to some degree, but whose actions are ineffective or insufficient. In some instances, the CT relationship begins to sour entirely, with that putative partner no longer sharing a common view of the terrorist enemy, the urgency of the threat, or how to address it. Accordingly, U.S. officials might decide to move beyond

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those CT activities already approved by or acquiesced to by the host nation. In the example of the operation against Bin Ladin, U.S. officials also certainly feared that any indication of the impending mission to the government of Pakistan could have alerted the al-Qa`ida leader, negating the chances of success and placing the lives of the commandos at further risk. A second category of unwitting states involves hostile countries, including state sponsors of terrorism. The unilateral conduct of CT operations within the territory of either type of unwitting state—a putative partner or a hostile nation—could prove detrimental by strengthening the narrative of the terrorists, inciting international censure against the United States, and impeding America’s ability to act in the future. In the case of a hostile state, that country could very well perceive U.S. violations of its territory, particularly SOF “boots on the ground,” to be a grave provocation, even an act of war. In the case of an unreliable or unresponsive partner, the

United States risks hampering future CT cooperation with that country. The Bin Ladin operation will be instructive in this regard. The U.S. partnership with Pakistan on CT has been less than optimal, if not broken, for quite some time. Cooperation with Pakistan on CT and other strategic geopolitical issues remains important for U.S. national security interests, but the relationship will be severely tested going forward.

#### **Issue #2: Casualties and Operational Failure**

President Obama and his senior advisers likely considered at least three significant operational downsides associated with sending SOF across the border into Pakistan. The first is the possibility that innocent bystanders would be unintentionally killed. In general, such collateral damage is tragic in and of itself, but it also can quickly inflame political ramifications. More important is the potential for American casualties. When asked about the most difficult part of the decision to authorize the commando mission, President Obama answered, in part, “[M]y number one concern was: if I send them in, can I get them out?”<sup>6</sup> In the past, the possibility that an operator could be captured weighed heavily on the minds of senior CT officials when deciding whether to approve a proposed SOF mission, since an enemy could use that individual as public leverage against U.S. interests. Finally, SOF are the country’s most elite and highly trained and equipped military forces. The Bin Ladin assault was an impressive success, made all the more extraordinary that not one single U.S. life was lost during the operation. But had the mission failed—either in operational reality or public perception—it would have, *inter alia*, empowered Bin Ladin and strengthened the myth of his invincibility; undermined perceptions of U.S. power and credibility on the world stage; and demoralized the American people, who could have lost faith in their government’s ability to avenge the 9/11 terrorist attacks and further protect them from terrorism.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> “Obama on bin Laden: The Full ‘60 Minutes’ Interview,” CBS News, May 8, 2011. The interview was conducted on May 4, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> If the Bin Ladin raid had failed, it could have produced consequences similar to those that occurred in the wake of the 1980 attempt to rescue more than 50 U.S. citizens held hostage in Iran that was authorized by President Jimmy Carter: after the assault force commander aborted

#### **Issue #3: Assessing Effectiveness**

Another issue policymakers consider when deciding whether to approve a Special Operation is its likely effectiveness—not only will it tactically succeed and help to produce strategic effects, but also are these worth the potential downsides if something goes wrong? Such assessments are not necessarily objective; rather,

**“The use of SOF will always be inherently risky. But at the end of the day, their tactical use has helped the United States achieve some of its most strategically significant CT successes.”**

policymakers are influenced by their prior experiences, subjective perceptions, and comfort with the operational organization. For example, today’s SOF units are more operationally experienced and combat-capable than at any other time in modern history; in many ways, they have been practicing for the moment to kill Bin Ladin for nearly 10 years. Some policymakers, however, hold a perception that SOF create more problems than they solve when they enter a country with which the United States is not at war. While not altogether accurate or representative of SOF today, a few negative reputational issues have been earned through the years. Some officials thus have developed a “learned vulnerability” that has led them to be cautious when it comes to authorizing

the rescue attempt when mechanical problems reduced the number of helicopters that were available to complete the operation, a helicopter and an aircraft collided during departure preparations, killing eight U.S. servicemen. Commonly referred to as Desert One, the name given to the rendezvous site in Iran where the tragedy took place, the failed operation also produced acute political ramifications. Not only did it inflame international and domestic perceptions of American impotence in resolving a crisis of national embarrassment, it ultimately contributed to Carter’s re-election defeat at the polls later that year. The failure at Desert One also became a watershed moment for SOF; the first two decades of the modern SOF era were primarily dedicated to reforming Special Operations in the wake of the failed raid.

Special Operations in politically precarious situations.<sup>8</sup> A second issue is sometimes raised in assessing effectiveness. While SOF have gained unprecedented combat experience on the fields of Iraq and Afghanistan, some might question if SOF have been at risk of growing too accustomed to operating in relatively permissive and highly enabled environments. SOF's flawless execution of the country's most important CT operation to date will go a long way in assuaging many operational concerns. It also likely will give policymakers greater comfort when considering the use of SOF in the future. That said, SOF cannot take this for granted. They must continue to demonstrate their value and equip policymakers with ways to employ the spectrum of their capabilities in support of U.S. security objectives.

#### Issue #4: The Risk Not Taken

The three preceding considerations focus on the potential negative consequences that could occur if policymakers approve an operation. Yet U.S. officials also consider the ramifications of not taking action. Certainly in the decade since 9/11, the United States has transformed the way it combats terrorism. By pressuring the al-Qa`ida network with all instruments of national power, enhancing its CT architecture and interagency processes that are focused on the threat, developing an array of international partnerships, and educating a more active and informed citizenry, the United States has—by design and a little luck—disrupted several plots and attempted attacks, as well as degraded the capabilities of al-Qa`ida. But for nearly a decade the United States had failed to bring

<sup>8</sup> James Q. Wilson wrote about avoiding learned vulnerabilities in order to minimize rivals and constraints on an organization. Although he did not focus his comments on SOF, they are highly applicable here. He stated, in part, "Every organization, like every person, learns from experience what behavior will create big problems; but compared to people, organizations have longer memories and are more risk averse. Once burned, forever shy...When something goes badly wrong at a high political cost the incident enters the agency's memory as a legendary horror story. A great deal of the time and energy of agency officials is devoted to creating mechanisms designed to insure that the horror never recurs." See James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), pp. 191-192.

to justice the man responsible for the deadliest terrorist attacks on U.S. soil.

In general, capturing and killing terrorists, especially senior terrorist leaders, is difficult to accomplish. They are adept at hiding in politically sensitive and physically challenging environments, avoiding locations where they are susceptible to targeting by foreign forces. Capturing or killing terrorists requires a level of detailed, actionable intelligence that often proves

**“Both SOF and the Intelligence Community should embrace their niche roles, and policymakers should continue to leverage these comparative advantages, drawing on what each does best in combating terrorism beyond traditional warzones.”**

elusive to acquire and highly perishable once in hand. When then-Senator Obama was campaigning for president, he stated, “If we have actionable intelligence about high-value terrorist targets and President Musharraf won’t act, we will.”<sup>9</sup> When he announced the death of Usama bin Ladin to the American people, the president stated, “[S]hortly after taking office, I directed Leon Panetta, the director of the CIA, to make the killing or capture of bin Laden the top priority of our war against al Qaeda, even as we continued our broader efforts to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat his network.”<sup>10</sup> The information on the terrorist’s precise whereabouts the moment the raid commenced was not

<sup>9</sup> Barack Obama, “Remarks of Senator Barack Obama: The War We Need to Win,” As Prepared for Delivery, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, August 1, 2007, available at [www.wilsoncenter.org/events/docs/obamasp0807.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/events/docs/obamasp0807.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President on Osama Bin Laden,” May 1, 2011, available at [www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/02/remarks-president-osama-bin-laden](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/02/remarks-president-osama-bin-laden).

100%.<sup>11</sup> But if it had publicly leaked that the United States had that level of actionable intelligence and decided against conducting a mission to bring Bin Ladin to justice, it could have had severe political consequences for the president.

#### Policymaker Considerations for the Future

Al-Qa`ida is not yet strategically defeated, and other terrorist threats remain. As the United States continues its CT efforts, it should consider the following:

##### *Recommendation #1: Keep SOF Special*

U.S. Special Operations Forces are truly special—only they could have conducted the raid on Bin Ladin. In light of the flawless execution of the mission, the SOF community will likely experience increasing demands from stakeholders who are witnessing great returns on their investment in SOF. In general, demands for greater employment in combating terrorism should be embraced, given SOF’s value to the nation in this regard. But SOF and the policymakers who employ them should be on guard against potential downsides of expanded use beyond those operations that require strategic effect. Simply because SOF can do just about anything does not mean they should do everything. The community should identify and shed any work that is of marginal value or has the potential to divert SOF from maintaining readiness for those missions only they can conduct. For example, arguably the gravest threat to U.S. national security is weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the hands of terrorists. While there is some overlap in their counterterrorism and counterproliferation missions, SOF must remain fully resourced and ready to locate, capture or destroy, or render safe WMD under the unique set of conditions in which they have been trained to operate and complete such tasks.

<sup>11</sup> In his interview with Steve Kroft, President Obama noted the lack of certainty regarding Bin Ladin’s whereabouts: “This was a very difficult decision, in part because the evidence that we had was not absolutely conclusive. This was circumstantial evidence that he was gonna be there.” See “Obama on bin Laden: The Full ‘60 Minutes’ Interview.”

### *Recommendation #2: Leverage Comparative Advantages*

Since 9/11, SOF have invested heavily in strategic and operational partnerships across departments and agencies in Washington, as well as achieved forward, on-the-ground success through various Joint Interagency Task Forces (JIATFs). These relationships, which helped to establish trust and confidence among those interagency players who ultimately were charged with planning and executing the Bin Ladin operation, paid huge dividends for the nation on May 1, 2011. Policymakers should capture key lessons from this highly successful interagency collaboration. While all the details are not yet publicly known, it appears that the Intelligence Community and SOF were operating very much within their traditional lanes, with the former collecting, analyzing, and assessing the intelligence and the latter conducting the operational assault. Both institutions have overlapping capabilities in some areas that are important to preserve, but it seems that everyone's core capabilities carried the day in the mission to get Bin Ladin. Both SOF and the Intelligence Community should embrace their niche roles, and policymakers should continue to leverage these comparative advantages, drawing on what each does best in combating terrorism beyond traditional warzones.

### *Recommendation #3: Guard Against Complacency—And Remain Willing to Take Risks*

President Obama and his national security team took a very large risk in authorizing the assault on Bin Ladin—and it paid off. The death of the 9/11 mastermind helps to bring closure to one chapter in the book on counterterrorism, but the conclusion has yet to be written. The United States still faces terrorist enemies who remain capable and intent on attacking the homeland again. When President Obama informed his fellow Americans of Bin Ladin's death, he cautioned, "There's no doubt that al Qaeda will continue to pursue attacks against us. We must—and we will—remain vigilant at home and abroad."<sup>12</sup> The U.S. CT community certainly remains focused on the threat. Others,

such as some international partners, parts of the American public, and even a few throughout the larger U.S. government, might question either the investments that are still necessary to protect and defend the homeland, or the need to continue risky CT operations abroad given Bin Ladin's death. Any decision to downshift in the wake of this impressive success would be a mistake. The use of SOF will always be inherently risky.<sup>13</sup> But at the end of the day, their tactical use has helped the United States achieve some of its most strategically significant CT successes: the capture of Saddam Hussein, the death of Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi, the rescue of the *Maersk Alabama* captain off the coast of Somalia and, now, the death of Bin Ladin. The country must guard against any sense of complacency in combating terrorism. Senior CT officials must seize the moment, build on this position of strength, and continue to be forward leaning against the nation's terrorist enemies, especially by using SOF to maximum effect.

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## How Bin Ladin's Death Will Affect Al-Qa`ida's Regional Franchises

By Camille Tawil

AL-QA`IDA WILL SOON announce a successor to Usama bin Ladin. It is an open question whether the new leader of al-Qa`ida, likely to be Ayman al-Zawahiri, will be able to command the same influence over the group's various regional franchises. If Bin Ladin's replacement is considered a weaker authority figure, it may result in al-Qa`ida's central leadership—based in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region—having less influence over its various branches, including al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI).

During his 23-year reign as the head of al-Qa`ida, Bin Ladin's authority was never seriously challenged. He was the figure behind the creation of al-Qa`ida in 1988 and was one of the group's main financiers. Even objections from senior al-Qa`ida leaders over the legality of executing the 9/11 attacks did not prevent Bin Ladin from approving the operation.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, despite the heavy losses inflicted on the group by the United States and its allies in the "war on terrorism," Bin Ladin managed to become a symbol to many in the Muslim world for one who stood against American hegemony. The failure to capture or kill him for nearly 10 years also afforded him the image of invincibility.

Indeed, not only did Bin Ladin survive the war on terrorism for a decade, but he managed to expand his organization into multiple theaters of conflict. Instead of being largely confined to Afghanistan as the group was before 2001, al-Qa`ida is now able to operate

<sup>13</sup> One theory of decision-making under risk, Prospect Theory, predicts that people tend to be cautious and averse to risk when they perceive themselves to be operating in a good situation, or a domain of gains, and accepting of risk when they perceive themselves to be operating in a losing situation, or a domain of losses. A forthcoming CTC report by Michele L. Malvesti examines risk-taking in combating terrorism and argues that the U.S. counterterrorism decision-making domain is currently one of gains; this will affect the nation's propensity to take CT risks in the future.

<sup>12</sup> Obama, "Remarks by the President on Osama Bin Laden."

<sup>1</sup> For details, see the 9/11 Commission's report regarding the objections made by the head of al-Qa`ida's religious committee, Abu Hafis al-Mauritani (Mahfouz Ould al-Walid). Noman Benotman, a former leader of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, also alleged that other prominent leaders of al-Qa`ida objected to the attacks. For details, see *The 9/11 Commission Report* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004). Also see "The Other Face of Al-Qaeda," a series of articles published by this author in the London-based newspaper *al-Hayat*.



across the Muslim world. Bin Ladin achieved this by allowing al-Qa`ida to become a franchise—ceding some authority over strategy and tactics to regional affiliate groups. This article briefly identifies the weaknesses in al-Qa`ida's franchise model, and then assesses how Bin Ladin's death may affect the group's regional affiliates in the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa and Iraq.

### The Franchise Model

Since the 9/11 attacks, al-Qa`ida has employed a franchise model, which has allowed the group operational access to multiple countries, largely through local affiliates. Yet the franchise model is not without its weaknesses. Al-Qa`ida has to manage its franchises carefully to ensure that they pursue the general modus operandi of al-Qa`ida's central leadership. Bin Ladin's stature has been critical in ensuring that al-Qa`ida's affiliates follow the group's general targeting guidelines and rules of war. Without Bin Ladin at al-Qa`ida's helm, it is possible that the group's regional franchises will pay less attention to the directives of al-Qa`ida's new leader.

The case of AQI is an important example of the challenge Bin Ladin's successor will face in overseeing the group's multiple affiliates. Even under Bin Ladin's leadership, al-Qa`ida was largely unable to control the actions of AQI's leader, Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi.<sup>2</sup> Al-Zarqawi's targeting strategy was so expansive that he not only attacked members of the U.S.-led coalition, but also Iraqi Shi`a, members of other Sunni resistance groups, and Sunni tribal leaders who did not agree to his methods or demands.

Al-Qa`ida's central leadership wanted to give al-Zarqawi deference to conduct the war as he saw best. Yet as al-Zarqawi's violence escalated with time, al-Qa`ida's leaders could not allow AQI to slaughter hostages on camera, blow up Shi`a religious sites, assassinate Sunni tribal leaders and anger Iran by killing their co-religionists in Iraq (Iran is holding some key al-Qa`ida leaders

in custody). Additionally, al-Zarqawi sought to expand his sphere of influence outside Iraq's borders, sending suicide bombers to hotels in Amman in 2005—attacks that resulted in many civilian casualties and widespread outrage in Jordan. From al-Qa`ida's perspective, al-Zarqawi's actions risked alienating much of the Muslim world, turning al-Qa`ida sympathizers or potential recruits into passive observers or enemies.

Unfortunately for al-Qa`ida's central leadership, by the time they were able to "tame" al-Zarqawi, the Iraqi jihad was damaged irreparably. Even after al-Zarqawi allowed Iraqis to take the lead in the conflict, it did not change al-Qa`ida's fortunes in Iraq. Although Bin Ladin and al-Qa`ida ultimately prevailed in restraining al-Zarqawi, it was not an easy task.

The case of AQI shows the challenge faced by al-Qa`ida's new leader. Al-Qa`ida's new chief will have to strengthen al-Qa`ida's grievance narrative and prevent the group's franchises from over-reaching and turning Muslims away from its message.

### Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula

In line with al-Qa`ida's franchise model, AQAP has been allowed to pursue its tactics and target set against the Gulf rulers without any public interference from al-Qa`ida's central leadership. AQAP's leader, Nasir al-Wihayshi, has launched assassination attempts against Saudi officials, bombing campaigns against local and foreign targets inside Yemen, and even twice attempted to attack the United States itself.<sup>3</sup> Al-Wihayshi may have consulted with al-Qa`ida's central leadership before launching the Christmas Day attack against a U.S. airliner in 2009, but this is not clear from public statements issued by AQAP as it has not hinted at the need to consult Bin Ladin's leadership group before launching attacks inside or outside the Gulf.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> A Nigerian man, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, allegedly carried out the failed attack on a Northwest Airlines flight over Detroit after being trained at AQAP camps in Yemen.

<sup>4</sup> Based on open source information, there is no evidence that AQAP and al-Qa`ida's central leadership consulted each other regarding these attacks.

It is unlikely that al-Wihayshi will challenge the new leader of al-Qa`ida. Al-Wihayshi, however, will expect the new al-Qa`ida *amir* to continue Bin Ladin's policy of allowing regional franchises the freedom to operate as they see best, whether in the Arabian Peninsula or in the wider world—including in the United States.

In the wake of Bin Ladin's death, however, AQAP could take a more prominent role in the overall jihad against the United States. This development is already in progress, evident from AQAP's attempted attack on a U.S. airliner over Detroit on Christmas Day in 2009, as well as its more recent plot to send parcel bombs on cargo planes bound for the United

**“From AQAP’s perspective, if it were to launch a revenge attack against U.S. interests for the killing of Bin Ladin, it would secure itself as the preeminent al-Qa`ida affiliate operating today.”**

States in October 2010. Moreover, AQAP is also sheltering Yemeni-American cleric Anwar al-`Awlaqi, who has contacted a number of Western Muslims inciting them to attack U.S. and European targets. Many analysts already consider AQAP the most serious threat to the United States. From AQAP's perspective, if it were to launch a revenge attack against U.S. interests for the killing of Bin Ladin, it would secure itself as the preeminent al-Qa`ida affiliate operating today.

### Al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb

Unlike AQAP, in the case of AQIM al-Qa`ida's core leadership has played a more visible role in the group's activities recently. This role, however, may have come at AQIM's request. For years, AQIM has been involved in kidnapping Western hostages in the Sahel region to earn ransom payments, or to force some countries to meet its demands (such as freeing AQIM members held by regional governments). The ransom “business”

<sup>2</sup> Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi was not a member of al-Qa`ida during his presence in Afghanistan, where he lived until the end of 2001. Once in Iraq, it was a “marriage of convenience” that led al-Zarqawi to join al-Qa`ida and pledge allegiance to Bin Ladin in 2004.

is viewed as being highly profitable for AQIM, and the group has reportedly made millions of dollars.<sup>5</sup> It is not clear if AQIM's kidnap-for-ransom strategy upset al-Qa`ida's leaders, who have been under increased funding pressure due to government sanctions and other efforts. It is also unclear if al-Qa`ida's central leadership wanted to receive a share of AQIM's profits. Regardless, the head of AQIM, Abdelmalek Droukdel (also known as Abu Mus`ab al-Wadud), announced in December 2010 that if France wanted to free five French hostages in AQIM's custody, it had to negotiate directly with Usama bin Ladin.<sup>6</sup> The demand marked the first time that AQIM asked the country to which the hostages belong to negotiate with Bin Ladin directly. Bin Ladin subsequently demanded that France withdraw its troops from Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup>

Droukdel may have wanted Bin Ladin to negotiate with the French to show that he follows the orders of al-Qa`ida's senior leaders. Droukdel's motivation may have been to secure his role as the leader of AQIM, or to demonstrate that the group does not kidnap hostages for money alone. Droukdel may have been under pressure to justify why he switched his policy to kidnap-for-ransom in the Sahel region in the south, instead of continuing the military jihad against the Algerian government in the north. Yet it is also possible that al-Qa`ida's central leadership requested AQIM to allow them to play a larger role in North Africa. If this latter scenario is the case, Droukdel would not have been in a position to reject the request of Bin Ladin, the overall *amir* of al-Qa`ida.

If al-Zawahiri takes command of al-Qa`ida, it could give Droukdel's AQIM more influence within al-Qa`ida's central leadership. It was through al-Zawahiri that the former Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) became al-Qa`ida's franchise in North Africa in January

2007.<sup>8</sup> It is also alleged that al-Zawahiri himself has intervened in the work of AQIM by "setting limits" on where it can operate. For instance, well before the recent North Africa unrest, al-Zawahiri reportedly asked AQIM to refrain from taking action in Libya.<sup>9</sup> Today, however, al-Zawahiri has called publicly for attacks against NATO troops should they be deployed on the ground in Libya—even though NATO forces would be fighting on the side of the rebels against the Libyan regime.

#### Al-Qa`ida in Iraq

When al-Qa`ida appoints a new leader, it will likely only have a marginal effect on the Iraqi jihad. AQI has been in decline ever since the United States killed its leader, Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi, in 2006. Today, al-Qa`ida's central leadership is already playing a much smaller role in Iraq. Both AQI and the Islamic State of Iraq are currently squeezed by the Iraqi government. Neither group has any major figures known across the Arab world, which also means that their leaders are unlikely to challenge the authority of the individual who replaces Bin Ladin.

#### Conclusion

Based on the preceding analysis, it appears that Bin Ladin's death will have little effect on al-Qa`ida's regional franchises. AQI is already seriously weakened, and al-Qa`ida's central leadership seems to have largely accepted their fate in the Iraqi jihad. AQAP is aggressively

pursuing its strategy in Yemen, and it has now reached a level of operational effectiveness to target the U.S. homeland. AQAP achieved this success through the work of its leader, Nasir al-Wihayshi, not through Bin Ladin. Regardless of who takes over the mantle of leadership in al-Qa`ida, AQAP will likely continue its current course. As for AQIM, it may take a more prominent role in al-Qa`ida should al-Zawahiri succeed Bin Ladin. More importantly, Libya is within AQIM's reach, and should that country descend into a long civil war, AQIM may try to deploy fighters and build cells inside Libyan territory. It could also attempt to launch attacks against Western targets in Libya or in the wider region.

The main variable to this outlook is if Ayman al-Zawahiri is captured or killed in the near future. Without both Bin Ladin and al-Zawahiri, al-Qa`ida will struggle to appoint a leader of their caliber. In this scenario, it is possible that one or more of the al-Qa`ida franchises could challenge the authority of the new appointed head of al-Qa`ida, or at least consider themselves an equal-weighted partner. This would become especially true if one of the franchises succeeded in executing a large attack on a similar scale of 9/11, the USS *Cole* strike, or the East Africa embassy bombings.

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8 It was Ayman al-Zawahiri who announced in a videotape released by al-Qa`ida on September 11, 2006 that "the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat" has joined the al-Qa`ida organization. Also see this author's interview with the former head of the GSPC's media committee, Abu Omar Abd al-Birr, describing how the Algerian group contacted al-Zarqawi in Iraq in 2004, a process that eventually led to the merger with al-Qa`ida in 2006, and becoming the North Africa franchise in 2007. This interview is available at [www.camilletawil.blogspot.com/2009/03/abu-omar-gspc-media-chief-speaks-to.html](http://www.camilletawil.blogspot.com/2009/03/abu-omar-gspc-media-chief-speaks-to.html).

9 Camille Tawil, "The Other Face of Al-Qaeda," *al-Hayat*, October 2010. By limiting the role AQIM can play in Libya, al-Zawahiri was trying to please a faction of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which agreed to merge with al-Qa`ida in 2007. The Libyan jihadists had a negative experience with AQIM's cadre who were previously part of the Armed Islamic Group, which killed some LIFG fighters who went to Algeria in the 1990s to help in the jihad against the Algerian government.

5 Algerian officials allege that AQIM has made millions of dollars from the kidnap-for-ransom trade in the Sahel region. For details, see "Al-Qaeda Hostages: Spain has Paid the Highest Ransom," *Ennaharonline*, September 13, 2010.

6 For details, see Abdelmalek Droukdel's audio recording released on December 19, 2010.

7 "Bin Laden Threatens France," *al-Jazira*, January 21, 2011.



## The Impact of Bin Ladin's Death on AQAP in Yemen

By Gregory D. Johnsen

YEMEN'S BRANCH OF al-Qa`ida, more than most affiliates, is modeled closely on the main network Usama bin Ladin built in Afghanistan in the late 1990s. The head of the Yemeni organization, Nasir al-Wihayshi, served as Bin Ladin's personal secretary and aide de-camp for nearly four years until the two were separated during the Battle of Tora Bora in late 2001. Years later, after he escaped from a maximum security prison in Yemen, al-Wihayshi put the lessons of his apprenticeship into practice. He painstakingly pieced back together an organization that had been all but destroyed by a critical drone strike and years of arrests, ultimately resurrecting al-Qa`ida's Yemen chapter.

In January 2009, he merged his Yemeni cadre with a group of Saudi exiles, who had fled south, calling the new group al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Like his mentor Bin Ladin, al-Wihayshi required that members of the organization swear loyalty to him by taking an oath known as a *bay`a*. Since then, AQAP has transformed itself into a serious international threat, nearly assassinating Saudi Arabia's top counterterrorism official and attempting two attacks on U.S. domestic targets. Earlier this year, Michael Leiter, the director of the National Counterterrorism Center, told a Senate hearing that AQAP was "probably the most significant threat to the US homeland."

Bin Ladin's death is unlikely to seriously alter AQAP's day-to-day operations. AQAP is already active fundraising in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, and it will likely seek to increase its efforts to capitalize on any outpouring of emotion in the weeks after Bin Ladin's death. More international recruits may find their way to Yemen in the aftermath of the Abbottabad raid, but the core, local recruits will continue to be driven to swear allegiance to al-Wihayshi by domestic grievances.

### Al-Wihayshi Firmly in Charge of AQAP

Nasir al-Wihayshi, with input from a senior council of advisers, is the individual who approves suicide strikes in Yemen and authorizes attacks abroad. Fighters in Yemen take their orders from him. Even before al-Qa`ida branched out into a series of worldwide affiliates, Bin Ladin favored what he called "centralization of decisions and decentralization of execution," leaving the details of any given attack up to his men on the ground. Over the years, as Bin Ladin went into hiding after 9/11 and had to communicate with lieutenants through a series of couriers, his philosophy continued to evolve. Bin Ladin's local *amirs*, the commanders in charge of affiliates, had the operational freedom to largely chart their own course. They knew the enemy, and they had years of precedents and previous al-Qa`ida attacks upon which to draw. Bin Ladin left the details to them, while providing a broad set of instructions. Only in extreme cases, such as Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi's orgy of violence in Iraq, did the al-Qa`ida commander attempt to rein-in his men.

For nearly two decades, Bin Ladin lived with the certainty that intelligence agencies around the world wanted him dead. Their assassination plans and spies were a constant part of his life. Every decision he made in building al-Qa`ida was taken with the knowledge that he might be killed at anytime. The organization had to be able to survive his death. In his years at Bin Ladin's side, al-Wihayshi took this truth to heart.

Underscoring the lesson was al-Qa`ida's initial failure in Yemen after 9/11. In November 2002, a U.S. drone strike killed Abu Ali al-Harithi, the top al-Qa`ida commander in the country. Al-Harithi's death decapitated the organization. Without its leader, al-Qa`ida in Yemen withered. Al-Wihayshi wanted to avoid this outcome the second time around. He adapted Bin Ladin's blueprint to fit the local context, appointing local *amirs* in different governorates across the country. Al-Harithi never accomplished that level of organization and delegation. Just like Bin Ladin, al-Wihayshi constructed a durable infrastructure that was designed to survive the loss of key leaders.

By the time the United States targeted AQAP with airstrikes in late 2009 and early 2010, al-Wihayshi's strategy and contingency plans were well entrenched. The United States managed to kill several key commanders, but unlike in 2002 al-Qa`ida did not fold in Yemen. Instead, due to brand control and careful positioning, which portrayed it as the defender of Muslim lands against U.S. aggression, AQAP is actually stronger today in terms of recruits than it was in late 2009, when it dispatched a suicide bomber who was able to board a U.S.-bound plane.<sup>1</sup>

Part of this is attributable to a botched U.S. bombing raid in December 2009 that killed a number of women and children in the southern Yemeni village of al-Majalla.<sup>2</sup> The U.S. strike, AQAP argued in its public statements, demonstrated that Yemen was no different from Iraq or Afghanistan; just like those two countries, its ideologues wrote, Yemen is under Western military attack. The al-Majalla "massacre," as AQAP referred to it, not only permitted fighting in Yemen, but actually compelled it. The attack confirmed Yemen as an active theater of jihad. More recent U.S. strikes, such as the one on May 5 that killed two AQAP suspects, fits into a similar narrative.

### AQAP Remains Entrenched in Yemen

Bin Ladin's death will have little effect on AQAP's strategic goals. Indeed, the seeds of AQAP were sown years ago in the late 1990s, when leaders such as al-Wihayshi graduated from religious institutes in Yemen and headed to Afghanistan. During the past decade, many more have followed their path, coming of age in an even more radical environment than the one that produced AQAP's current crop of leaders. The only world many younger members of AQAP have ever known

<sup>1</sup> This argument is based on the number of new authors that appeared in AQAP's Arabic journal *Sada al-Malahim* (Echo of Battles), as well as the sharp increase in local attacks by AQAP in 2010 and 2011. Both of these suggest that AQAP gained recruits in the aftermath of the al-Majalla attack, which featured prominently in its Arabic-language propaganda throughout 2010. AQAP particularly played up the fact that a number of women and children were killed in the U.S. airstrike, arguing that Yemenis had to defend their country against Western military attacks.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

is one in which the United States is at war in two different Muslim countries. The largely peaceful protests that are threatening long-serving rulers across the Arab world could be an antidote, but that is far from guaranteed. New governments will have to deal with artificially inflated expectations and will have to make difficult decisions in countries that have been mismanaged for years.

In Yemen, President Ali Abdullah Salih has refused to step down, stubbornly clinging to power through weeks of protests that have split his security forces. The crisis at the center has opened up a great deal of space for AQAP, which has reportedly acquired cash and armaments from deserted military posts. In the absence of outside pressure, AQAP is likely taking this opportunity to regroup and continue plans for future attacks. The longer the stalemate continues, the better positioned AQAP will be for the future. Whether Salih stays or goes, AQAP is a long way from being crushed. This time it will take more than the deaths of a few key leaders to make sure it stays defeated.

#### **The Role of Yemeni-American Cleric Anwar al-`Awlaqi**

Especially concerning is how AQAP has begun to target the United States directly. AQAP's success in smuggling a bomb through airport security nearly a decade after 9/11 and the ensuing media frenzy helped push Yemen toward the top of the world's jihadist hotspots. Along with renewed U.S. attention came the rise of Anwar al-`Awlaqi, an American citizen of Yemeni descent, who speaks fluent, idiomatic English. Even before Bin Ladin's death, U.S. House Representative Jane Harman of California called al-`Awlaqi the "number 1 terrorist threat against us." Numerous Western terrorism experts and media pundits have followed Harman's lead, suggesting that the former imam of a Virginia mosque is well positioned to replace Bin Ladin as the new head of al-Qa`ida. In al-`Awlaqi they have found a recognizable adversary, someone who speaks their language and whose name they already know. Yet al-`Awlaqi's media profile in the West has overshadowed his role within AQAP. He is often mistakenly said to be the head of AQAP or its

spiritual leader. Neither is true. It is not even clear if al-`Awlaqi has a place on AQAP's Shari`a council, which is headed by Adil al-Abab.

There is no doubt that al-`Awlaqi is a significant threat, but not as a successor to Bin Ladin. Personal relationships matter in al-Qa`ida, and al-`Awlaqi did not have one with Bin Ladin. He never studied under him, and there is no record of the two ever meeting. Instead, it is al-Wihayshi, the student of the shaykh, as Bin Ladin was affectionately known, who will continue to lead AQAP, while al-`Awlaqi grows into his role as al-Qa`ida's voice to the Muslim diaspora in the West. This is a new direction for the terrorist organization that it believes will yield great results. Previously, al-Qa`ida's leaders had to rely on Western Muslims to come to them. Now, al-`Awlaqi and others such as Samir Khan, who edits AQAP's English-language magazine *Inspire*, are building a major recruiting effort focused on Muslims in the West.

#### **Conclusion**

Despite Usama bin Ladin's death in Pakistan, AQAP will continue on the course it has set for itself, aiming to attack local, regional, and Western targets. Shortly after Bin Ladin's killing, the organization released a statement threatening revenge. Similar wording will also be used as a rationale for future attacks, but this is post facto rhetorical gloss. AQAP would target the United States regardless of whether Bin Ladin survived the raid in Abbottabad.

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## **The Impact of Bin Ladin's Death on AQIM in North Africa**

By Geoff D. Porter

AL-QA`IDA'S NORTH AFRICA affiliate, al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), has always had a tenuous relationship with al-Qa`ida's central leadership. As a result, Usama bin Ladin's death presents little downside for the organization. To the contrary, his death and the pending change in al-Qa`ida's leadership could present AQIM with an opportunity to strengthen its ties with its "parent" organization and potentially resolve suspected leadership disputes within AQIM.

Bin Ladin's death, and the likely ascension of Ayman al-Zawahiri to lead al-Qa`ida, is unlikely to cause significant changes in AQIM's strategy of targeting both the near and far enemies. It is also unlikely that AQIM would revert to being a strictly "Algerianist" organization like its predecessor, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), because the reasons for the GSPC's dissolution and its transformation into AQIM persist.

#### **The Merger of the GSPC with Al-Qa`ida**

Efforts to link the Algerian Salafi-jihadi movement with al-Qa`ida began in 2004, when Abdelmalek Droukdel (also known as Abu Mus`ab al-Wadud) took over leadership of the dispirited GSPC. Bin Ladin was initially reluctant to recognize and ally with the GSPC, which had a strong "Algerianist" orientation. Droukdel established contact with Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi in Iraq and was then steered to Ayman al-Zawahiri.<sup>1</sup> There was no formal al-Qa`ida acknowledgement of the GSPC until the June 2005 GSPC raid on a Mauritanian military outpost, which Bin Ladin acknowledged approvingly. This, however, did not equate with full al-Qa`ida recognition, which only occurred on the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks when al-Zawahiri announced the formal incorporation of the GSPC into al-Qa`ida. According to Droukdel, Bin Ladin was initially wary

1 Souad Mekhennet et al., "Ragtag Insurgency Gains a Lifeline from Al Qaeda," *New York Times*, July 1, 2008.

of renaming the GSPC as an al-Qa`ida affiliate, but eventually acquiesced, perhaps being convinced by the GSPC's attack on a bus carrying employees of the Sonatrach-KBR joint venture, Brown and Root-Condor, in December 2006. Bin Ladin's approval cleared the way for the GSPC to change its name to al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb in January 2007. From 2007 onward, AQIM carried out spectacular attacks in Algiers, including against the parliament building, the United Nations headquarters, and the Constitutional Court, as well as against military installations.

Despite ideological affinities, AQIM's relations with al-Qa`ida's central leadership are similar to those of al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI) and al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in that they do not seem to reach the operational level. AQIM appears to carry out its operations without the guidance of al-Qa`ida's central leadership; instead, it pursues al-Qa`ida's modus operandi and target set. Moreover, in recent years there is no evidence of Algerian fighters traveling to train in al-Qa`ida camps in Afghanistan or Pakistan and then returning to fight in the Maghreb.<sup>2</sup> It does not appear that al-Qa`ida's central leadership has provided AQIM with financial support, but given AQIM's successful kidnap-for-ransom campaign since 2009, it has not needed any outside funding.

From 2008-2010, the ties between Bin Ladin and AQIM appeared to weaken. This may have been due to a fevered debate among jihadists about the types of attacks that al-Qa`ida and its affiliates were carrying out, the emergence of AQAP as the leading al-Qa`ida franchise, and transitions within AQIM itself. During this time period, AQIM was challenged by a reinvigorated Algerian counterterrorism campaign in northern Algeria and it was forced to reorient itself geographically. It also faced internal competition among different units in the Sahara as well as potential contestation of Droukdel's ongoing leadership.

<sup>2</sup> There are, however, reports from Algerian newspapers that fighters who had trained in GSPC/AQIM camps went to Iraq to fight with Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi. Also, some GSPC fighters, who then became AQIM fighters, did have prior experience fighting in Afghanistan.

Following the capture of seven employees of French mining giant Areva in September 2010, Droukdel tried to reinforce the linkages between AQIM and al-Qa`ida's central leadership. In November 2010, two months after the Areva hostages were abducted, Droukdel said that "any form of negotiations on the hostages in the future will be conducted with nobody except our Shaykh Usama bin Ladin and according to his terms." This was the first time AQIM made such a statement. While this could be interpreted as a sign of AQIM and al-Qa`ida's central leadership moving closer, it could also be an indication of Droukdel's attempts to revive a faltering relationship. Subsequent messages related to the fate of the Areva hostages focused on France's involvement in Afghanistan, reinforcing the linkage between AQIM and al-Qa`ida's own struggles.

#### **Will Al-Zawahiri Improve Ties with AQIM?**

If Ayman al-Zawahiri succeeds Usama bin Ladin as the new head of al-Qa`ida, it is possible that ties between AQIM and al-Qa`ida will strengthen. AQIM appears to have always had more interaction with al-Zawahiri than Bin Ladin. Al-Zawahiri handled the GSPC's incorporation into al-Qa`ida, which fit with his strategy of widening the scope of jihad around the world. In addition, AQIM's hostility toward France dovetailed with al-Zawahiri's own grievances against France. As Jean-Pierre Filiu noted, al-Zawahiri went on a virulent anti-French tirade in 2009 that was followed three days later by an unsuccessful AQIM attack against the French Embassy in Mauritania.<sup>3</sup> Since then, AQIM's hostility toward France has only deepened, with France declaring war on AQIM and vice versa in July 2010.

Al-Zawahiri may also reach out to AQIM to contribute financially to al-Qa`ida's core leadership. Al-Zawahiri has historically been a fundraiser for al-Qa`ida, and he may tap AQIM to contribute funds to al-Qa`ida now that Bin Ladin is dead. AQIM reportedly earned tens of millions of dollars through its lucrative (although slowing) kidnap-for-ransom operations.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Zawahiri, France and Napoleon," *Jihadica.com*, September 10, 2009.

Al-Zawahiri's ascension in al-Qa`ida could have implications for the leadership of AQIM itself. Droukdel's leadership has reportedly been challenged intermittently since he announced the alliance with al-Qa`ida. There has been occasional chatter on Algerian blogs and chat rooms, such as Forum Algérie Bladi-dz, that Droukdel has been replaced as head of AQIM or has been killed. There is also a lively debate about the degree to which leaders of AQIM units in the Sahara are committed to Droukdel's leadership (particularly Katiba al-Mulathimin, headed by Mokhtar Belmokhtar) and there has been speculation that the leader of another Saharan unit, Abdelhamid Abu Zeid of the Katiba Tariq ibn Ziyad, has sought to usurp Droukdel's leadership. If al-Zawahiri takes command of al-Qa`ida and Droukdel strengthens ties with al-Qa`ida's new leadership, it could bolster Droukdel's power within AQIM itself. It is important to note, however, that many analysts and those in the intelligence community have argued that there are, in fact, no leadership disputes within AQIM.

There is also the possibility that al-Zawahiri's leadership will exacerbate tensions within AQIM, especially if speculation that Abu Zeid is trying to usurp power from Droukdel is true. For example, in March 2011 al-Zawahiri called on al-Qa`ida's affiliates and sympathizers to attack NATO forces in Libya. Al-Zawahiri's announcement was followed in mid-April by a video released via AQIM's media arm showing still photographs of four French hostages captured by AQIM in September 2010. In the video, the captives are coerced to read statements demanding France's withdrawal from Afghanistan. Yet al-Zawahiri's incitement to attack NATO targets in Libya is ignored.<sup>4</sup> It is possible that this reflects a disconnect between al-Zawahiri and AQIM or at least the faction within AQIM led by Abu Zeid, who is presumably holding the hostages. The oversight could also have reflected a desire by the kidnappers, led by Abu Zeid, to curry favor with Bin Ladin himself instead of al-Zawahiri, who has been Droukdel's

<sup>4</sup> While it is possible that the video was taped before al-Zawahiri's statement on Libya, the hostages cite dates between April 11 and 13.



contact within al-Qa`ida's central leadership. This could prove to be a miscalculation now that Bin Ladin is dead.

#### AQIM Likely to Continue Present Strategy

Apart from the political implications of Bin Ladin's death for AQIM, the North African group's strategy will likely remain the same. AQIM will continue to adhere to the jihadist ideological imperative to attack both the near and far enemies. This means that it will continue to try to attack European and U.S. targets within its reach. It will also aim to build capacity to both protect itself from U.S. and European counterterrorism efforts as well as to expand its reach beyond the Sahara, which would ostensibly include more populated regions of the Maghreb and targets within Europe. AQIM was already at pains in the beginning of 2011 to maintain the momentum it had generated in 2010. The overall perception that the al-Qa`ida "brand" is weakened by Bin Ladin's death only underscores the need for AQIM to undertake a "spectacular" attack that will demonstrate that both it and the al-Qa`ida agenda for global jihad are still relevant.

Significantly, AQIM denied any involvement in the April 28 attack in Marrakech that killed 17 people.<sup>5</sup> Why AQIM denied involvement in the deadliest single terrorist attack in North Africa in more than three years is still an open question. There is speculation, however, that negotiations between France and AQIM regarding the release of the four French hostages from the Areva attack are close to concluding and they would be entirely derailed were AQIM to have carried out an attack that caused eight French casualties. AQIM has reportedly demanded more than \$100 million in ransom for the hostages. At this juncture, it appears that AQIM is more concerned with collecting the ransom money than proving its Salafi-jihadi credentials.

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<sup>5</sup> "Suspect in Moroccan Cafe Bombing Leads Police through Crime Scene Reenactment," Associated Press, May 10, 2011.

## Bin Ladin's Death Through the Lens of Al-Qa`ida's Confidential Secretary

By Nelly Lahoud

THE IMPACT OF Usama bin Ladin's death on the morale of his supporters is best analyzed through the lens of al-Qa`ida insiders. This article explores Bin Ladin's leadership and the impact his death might have on global jihad through the lens of Fadil Harun (also known as Fazul Abdullah Mohammad), a native of the Comoros Islands, who was a key planner of the 1998 bombings that targeted the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. His two-volume autobiography (1,156 pages) is an intimate account of his life story, the inner workings of al-Qa`ida and his role as its *amin sirr*, "confidential secretary," since 1998.<sup>1</sup> Harun's account has a "wikileaks" aura to it, except that he is volunteering the information in the interest of transparency and to exonerate al-Qa`ida from the charges of indiscriminate killings leveled against it. Harun continues to be committed to al-Qa`ida and its mission. Much to the chagrin of U.S. and Kenyan authorities, he remains an active al-Qa`ida operative at large. At present, he is believed to be in Somalia. Some media reports claim that he is the leader of al-Qa`ida in the Horn of Africa.<sup>2</sup> As an al-Qa`ida insider who has worked closely with its many leaders since 1991, Harun's reflections on the leadership of Bin Ladin, the man he most admired, provide a more faithful insight into how his death might impact his supporters than the speculations by outsiders.

Harun's account makes clear that the devotion he and other al-Qa`ida members had to Bin Ladin was not driven by loyalty to his person, but to the ideals for which he stood. On the basis of Harun's account and a study

<sup>1</sup> Fadil Harun, *al-Harb `ala al-Islam: Qissat Fadil Harun* (War Against Islam: The Story of Fadil Harun), volume 1, January 2009. The author would like to thank colleagues at the Combating Terrorism Center who brought Harun's autobiography to her attention and to Vahid Brown for the fruitful conversations shared with the author. The author would also like to thank colleagues at SOCOM for their assistance with materials relevant to Harun's autobiography.

<sup>2</sup> OSC, November 21, 2009.

of jihadist ideology, this article argues that it would be a mistake to assume that Bin Ladin's death represents a fatal blow to al-Qa`ida and global jihad.<sup>3</sup> Such an assumption would risk misunderstanding jihadism on two fronts. First, to exaggerate the impact of Bin Ladin's death is, counter-intuitively, to diminish his contribution to the phenomenon of jihadism. He and other jihadist ideologues and leaders succeeded in rallying militants behind them not on account of loyalty to themselves, but by empowering them to assume ownership over the interpretation of Islamic teachings of social justice and to take up jihad on their own initiative. Second, it would be a mistake to homogenize the jihadists as if they are all part of al-Qa`ida and as if Bin Ladin ever united them all. As Harun asserted, "al-Qa`ida is but a small group of the Islamic *umma's* youth," and some of them present a liability to al-Qa`ida's objectives.<sup>4</sup>

#### "We Do Not Worship Men"

"[The Zionists and Americans] should understand that the death of Usama bin Ladin does not mean that Islam and jihad come to an end. No, a thousand times no. Muslims superior to Usama bin Ladin died...all are heroes who departed [this transient world], but Islam is eternal."<sup>5</sup> The preceding quotation is not in response to Bin Ladin's death on May 1, 2011. It is from Fadil Harun's autobiography, a hypothetical reflection that crossed his mind in 1996, when he was tasked by Sayf al-Adl to investigate and confirm the death of the co-founder of al-Qa`ida, Abu `Ubayda al-Banshiri, who was killed when he was traveling on an overloaded boat that sank in Lake Victoria in Africa.<sup>6</sup>

In the eyes of al-Qa`ida members, Abu `Ubayda had no superior. According to Harun's account, Abu `Ubayda fought

<sup>3</sup> On jihadist ideology, see Nelly Lahoud, *The Jihadist's Path to Self-Destruction* (New York/London: Columbia University Press/Hurst, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Harun, p. 13. Distinguishing al-Qa`ida from the broader jihadist landscape is part of a larger forthcoming project by this author.

<sup>5</sup> Harun, p. 265.

<sup>6</sup> Abu `Ubayda al-Banshiri's real name is `Ali Amin al-Rashidi. According to Abu `Ubayda's brother-in-law, whom Harun quotes, the boat sank on May 21, 1996, within 13 kilometers of reaching Mwanza, Tanzania. See Harun, p. 261.

alongside the Afghan mujahidin from as early as 1983, a year before Bin Ladin set foot in Afghanistan. His alias, “al-Banshiri,” stems from his military heroism, enduring the inhospitable territory of the valley of Banshir during the Afghans’ war against the Soviet Union. In the mountains of Jaji, he and Bin Ladin co-founded *ma’sadat al-ansar*, the embryonic entity from which al-Qa`ida emerged in 1988.<sup>7</sup> Abu `Ubayda assumed the leadership of the Military Committee of al-Qa`ida, the most important portfolio in the organization,

**“The paradigm al-Qa`ida and other jihadist ideologues and leaders have promoted is premised not on loyalty to individual leaders, but on ideals that seek to right wrongs they perceive to be committed against Muslims.”**

and the position of deputy leader to Bin Ladin.<sup>8</sup> It was Abu `Ubayda who oversaw the financial investments that funded al-Qa`ida’s military projects and provided the vision and strategy for its operations.<sup>9</sup> Bin Ladin recognized Abu `Ubayda’s seniority; it was to him that Bin Ladin turned before taking any decision on behalf of al-Qa`ida.<sup>10</sup>

Notwithstanding Abu `Ubayda’s critical role in al-Qa`ida, especially his untimely death when he was preoccupied with strengthening al-Qa`ida’s presence in East Africa in an effort to strike against U.S. and Israeli interests in the region, the work of al-Qa`ida continued despite his passing. Harun appreciated that Abu `Ubayda’s death would negatively impact al-Qa`ida’s activities, but he was

equally certain that it would not bring it to a halt: “We do not worship men,” he wrote, “whenever a leader dies, another will succeed him,” by which he means that unlike mortals, ideals are eternal.<sup>11</sup>

It was Harun who would play a key role in attacking U.S. interests in East Africa. He led the operational side of the attacks that targeted the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam on August 7, 1998.<sup>12</sup> When Harun returned to Afghanistan after he completed his mission, the Advisory Council (*majlis al-shura*) of al-Qa`ida appointed him as its “confidential secretary,” thereby entrusting him with sensitive information pertaining to al-Qa`ida’s operations, including the planning of the 9/11 attacks. It did not cross Harun’s mind that his new position afforded him any entitlements; on the contrary, “I understand very well al-Qa`ida’s working [philosophy]: there are no ranks (*manasib*) [assigned to high dignitaries], but rather designations (*musamayyat*) [denoting specific tasks]. Al-Qa`ida values the work of the individual and his contributions to the *umma*.”<sup>13</sup>

#### On Leadership

Al-Qa`ida’s ideology seeks to effect a divorce from all forms of political and religious hierarchies. Far from seeking to instill a spirit of obedience to individual leaders in the minds of their followers, al-Qa`ida (and other jihadist) ideologues promote obedience to ideals that outlive leaders and indeed cannot be tainted by corrupt leaders, including those who recant their jihadist views. This spirit characterizes Bin Ladin’s statements; in one of them, he called on the youth to rebel against authorities: “wherever you are,” he said, “you must roll up your sleeves, prepare for jihad, and follow the truth. Be sure not to follow those who are victims of their own desires and are a burden on the land or those who submit to the oppressors, spread lies about you, and hold you back from the blessed jihad.”<sup>14</sup>

The same spirit of dedication to ideals rather than to individual leaders is echoed by other jihadist leaders. For example, in response to Dr. Fadl’s recantation, Ayman al-Zawahiri warned his fellow jihadists that in the event that he (or any other al-Qa`ida leader) should fall captive and be forced to renege on his previously avowed jihadist principles, jihadists should ignore any instructions that he might thereafter give.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, al-Qa`ida operative Abu Yahya al-Libi promotes loyalty to ideals rather than blind imitation of individual leaders: “we have never pursued the truth through [emulating the behavior] of men irrespective of their excellence and high ranking. Rather, the orbit in which our cardinal [principles] rotate is guided by [divine] proof.”<sup>16</sup>

This commitment to jihadist ideals is clearly reflected in Harun’s account: both his profound respect for Bin Ladin and his ability to separate the man from the ideals he represents reflect the limited scope assigned to individual leadership in the ideology of al-Qa`ida. Harun’s affection to Bin Ladin is unmistakable: he relates that the best day of his life was when he first met Bin Ladin in 1992,<sup>17</sup> and takes pride in the fact that Bin Ladin entrusted him with shaving his head.<sup>18</sup> Yet Harun is also keen to stress that it is because Bin Ladin stood up to “the infidel aggressors of his time” that he admired him; more importantly, for sacrificing his wealth in the service of principles. “He was given the keys [to a safe filled with treasure], yet he chose to sacrifice his wealth in the service of God’s path [rather than indulge in the pleasures of this transient] world,” Harun said.<sup>19</sup> Harun is thus categorical that his loyalty is not to Bin Ladin the person but to the ideals he espouses:

The reader may well ask me as to my opinion concerning Usama bin Ladin [and his status as leader]. The answer is that I believe him to be a man like other Muslims. He is [subject] to being wrong

7 The meaning of “*ma’sadat al-ansar*” designates a breeding ground for powerful men, fearless like lions, who are the “helpers” of fellow Muslims. “Helpers” invokes the early generation of Muslims of Medina who helped the Prophet Muhammad and the *muhajirun* (émigrés) who were persecuted in Mecca on account of their belief in the One God.

8 Harun, pp. 65, 91.

9 Ibid., pp. 146, 187.

10 Ibid., p. 91.

11 Ibid., p. 265.

12 Harun answered to Abu Muhammad al-Misri, but he was in charge of all the logistics that went into the operation.

13 Harun, p. 380.

14 Bruce Lawrence ed., *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden* (London/New York: Verso, 2005), p. 208.

15 Ayman al-Zawahiri, *al-Tabri’a, Minbar al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad*, available at [www.tawhed.ws/a?a=3i806qpo](http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=3i806qpo).

16 Abu Yahya al-Libi, *al-Tabdid li-Abatil Watbiqat al-Tarsbid*, available at [www.tawhed.ws/a?a=hv5znv47](http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=hv5znv47).

17 Harun, p. 109.

18 Ibid., p. 393.

19 Ibid., p. 110.

and [open to being] right. He raised the banner of jihad against the infidels who have attacked us and occupied our countries... so we entered into a covenant with him (*ta`abhadna ma`abu*) [to commit to jihad]. He is not an imam and there is no *bay`a* (pledge of allegiance) between us and him as people generally assume. It is a *ta`abhud* (covenant). Whoever wishes to leave al-Qa`ida is free to do so. I can at any time withdraw my *ta`abhud* if [I come to believe that] what we've agreed upon has changed or if I see that the politics of al-Qa`ida's leadership no longer serves the interest of the *umma*.<sup>20</sup>

In effect, the paradigm al-Qa`ida and other jihadist ideologues and leaders have promoted is premised not on loyalty to individual leaders, but on ideals that seek to right wrongs they perceive to be committed against Muslims. When jihadist ideologues argue that jihadists today are waging a defensive jihad (*jihad al-daf`*) and therefore jihad is the individual duty

**“As Harun explained, al-Qa`ida did not create a generation of men who worship men. Rather, it created ‘God’s lions on earth,’ a generation of ‘jihadists without borders,’ and jihad is their ‘tourism.’”**

(*fard`ayn*) of every Muslim, they do not claim any credit for articulating original legal doctrines. Instead, they believe they are merely highlighting classical/medieval legal doctrines that provide oppressed Muslims today with alternatives to the political processes that serve their unjust leaders and the Western powers that support them. In doing so, jihadist leaders have downplayed the status of religious and political leadership, including their own, and empowered jihadists to assume ownership over

the interpretation of Islamic teachings of social justice and to take up jihad on their own initiative.

#### The Symbolism of Bin Ladin’s Death

Notwithstanding the skill and valor that went into the Navy SEALs’ operation, in the minds of Bin Ladin’s supporters, the sophistication of the mission is seen as a testament to the heroism of Bin Ladin whose “martyrdom” will now serve to advance the cause for which he died. In the eyes of jihadists, as far as an ending to the career of a mujahid is concerned, Bin Ladin could not have hoped for a more honorable death or made a better career move. As `Abd al-Hayy Yusuf, a religious scholar in Sudan, put it, the manner in which Bin Ladin was killed and the response of the American public to his death represents the ultimate honor to be bestowed upon a mujahid. “It was an ideal death,” he proudly stated. “It is astonishing that a nation that sings the praises of freedom and [claims to enforce] human rights, [its people] should walk out joyfully to the streets [to celebrate] that they killed a man; an entire nation confronting a single man.” Yusuf concluded that “this does not in any way indicate that America is powerful nor that it possesses exceptional strengths; rather it shows that it is weak, base, despicable and lacking any values and morals.”<sup>21</sup>

Similar sentiments are echoed in al-Qa`ida’s official announcement confirming Bin Ladin’s death, with an additional reminder to those who overestimate the impact Bin Ladin’s death might have on al-Qa`ida and its mission:

Shaykh Usama bin Ladin was not a prophet who was sent in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Rather, he was [merely] a Muslim man from this illustrious *umma*. He had an unwavering commitment [to the teachings] of the Qur’an; he sold his life in this world in return for the eternity in the hereafter. He sought [martyrdom] and we assume that he achieved it. God elevated Bin Ladin’s rank [among men] on account of [his struggle to] elevate his religion; God bestowed upon him esteem on

account of the esteem he held for God’s Word. Through Bin Ladin, God instilled fear in unbelieving nations, because he feared nobody but God...The university of faith, Qur’an and jihad that graduated Shaykh Usama bin Ladin has not and will not shut its doors [and will continue to graduate men like him and superior to him].<sup>22</sup>

For jihadist ideology students who can relate to the ideals that move the jihadists, it would be difficult to fathom that Bin Ladin’s “martyrdom” will weaken the zeal of his supporters. As Harun explained, al-Qa`ida did not create a generation of men who worship men. Rather, it created “God’s lions on earth,” a generation of “jihadists without borders,” and jihad is their “tourism.”<sup>23</sup> Yet it is important to distinguish between correlation and causality. If al-Qa`ida’s narrative today is weakened, it will have far less to do with Bin Ladin’s death than with the fact that the uprisings in the Middle East may prove that in the long-term non-violence rather than jihad holds the key to bringing down the dictatorships that gave birth to the phenomenon of jihadism.

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20 Ibid., p. 57.

21 This statement can be viewed on YouTube at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dRpbwOgE2g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dRpbwOgE2g).

22 This statement is available at [www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=38472](http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=38472).

23 Harun, pp. 279, 146, 153, 56, 154. “Tourism” should be understood in the context of the hadith that extols Muslims to leave their homes to take up jihad in the service of their religion (*siyahatu ummati al-jihad*). In Harun’s parlance, al-Qa`ida’s jihadists are ready to fight anywhere.



## Bin Ladin's Location Reveals Limits of Liaison Intelligence Relationships

By Charles Faddis

FOR DECADES, U.S. counterterrorist operations in the Middle East and South Asia have been built on the foundation of liaison relationships with other country's police, intelligence and security forces. No matter what the popular conception of the role of organizations such as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the truth is that the bulk of the actual work of intelligence collection against terrorist targets is completed by foreign services cooperating with the U.S. government. The CIA may provide funds, training and other assistance, but they do not run the sources.

The attractions of such a methodology are obvious: it is the officers of the foreign service who run the physical risk of meeting with often dangerous and unpredictable agents. There is no need to worry about language qualifications or other considerations involved with deploying American officers on the street. There are no dicey issues of national sovereignty to navigate and no danger of messy diplomatic flaps.

The ultimate example of this type of relationship is that between the Jordanian General Intelligence Directorate (GID) and the CIA. In many ways, this relationship has become the template against which all others are measured. Across an entire region, therefore, Washington has focused most of its energy not on expanding the collection of its own human intelligence on terrorist targets, but on creating and supporting foreign services to do the bulk of this work.

Yet along with the death of Usama bin Ladin, much of the U.S. counterterrorist modus operandi perished with him. This article reveals why liaison relationships cannot be overly relied upon for U.S. intelligence collection, focusing on the case of Pakistan. It argues that the future of counterterrorism must focus more on direct, unilateral action when U.S. national interests are at stake.

### The Disadvantages of Foreign Liaison Relationships

U.S. foreign liaison relationships will remain vital to counterterrorism intelligence gathering and operations. Yet there are a number of disadvantages of being overly reliant on foreign intelligence agencies for gathering information or conducting counterterrorist operations.

Intelligence is power, and he who possesses it can better control outcomes. He who does not is blind and easily manipulated. Even assuming that a foreign intelligence service has information wanted by the United States, that does not necessarily imply that they will provide that data. They may withhold it to shape American perceptions or out of fear for how Washington will react if aware of an impending threat. They may choose to shade the truth or "cherry pick" the facts, telling Washington those details they want it to know and hiding those that they do not.

Beyond this, reliance on foreign liaison services necessarily means, even assuming complete transparency, that U.S. collection efforts are only as good as theirs. The best that can be hoped for is to know what they know. If they are efficient, professional and aggressive, collection may be good. If they are lazy, incompetent, or only devoting limited resources to a problem Washington considers important, then U.S. intelligence will suffer from a wide range of blind spots.

Washington's overreliance on its relationship with the Jordanian GID came into stark focus in December 2009 with the attack on the CIA base at Khost in Afghanistan. The double agent who perpetrated that attack and murdered seven serving CIA officers had been recruited and was being run not by U.S. intelligence personnel, but by the Jordanians. Washington accepted the Jordanians' judgment as to the agent's trustworthiness in lieu of conducting its own operational testing and evaluation. The Jordanians assured Washington of the source's reliability. They were wrong, and American officers paid the ultimate price for that miscalculation.

### The Case of Pakistan

Pakistan is one of the starkest examples of the limitations and dangers associated with excessive reliance on the capabilities of foreign intelligence services in the realm of counterterrorism. The United States has spent the better part of the past decade working with the Pakistani

**“The United States cannot afford to rely on the ISI and the Pakistani government. Bin Ladin's death was the product of bold, decisive, unilateral action. Washington acquired the intelligence, put together the plan and executed it successfully. The Pakistanis played no role.”**

government and its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to capture or kill al-Qa`ida operatives in that country and to end the use of Pakistani territory as a safe haven by Taliban forces engaged against U.S. and allied military units in Afghanistan.

The results of this cooperation have been limited and uneven. Cooperation, when extended, has produced some incremental gains, but it has never reached a level that was even arguably satisfactory. Recent events have shown that the already unsatisfactory relationship is deteriorating rather than improving and that even Washington's guarded assessment of the intentions and capabilities of its erstwhile allies may have been far too optimistic:

- In April 2011, U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen acknowledged, publicly, that the ISI had a relationship with and supported the Haqqani network, one of the components of the coalition of insurgent forces engaged against the U.S. military in Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> According

<sup>1</sup> "Pakistan's ISI Has Links with Haqqani Militants:

to Mullen, "The ISI has a long-standing relationship with the Haqqani network. That doesn't mean everyone in the ISI, but it's there."<sup>2</sup> In other words, not only was Pakistani intelligence not doing everything it could to combat the use of its territory by the Taliban, but it was actively assisting at least one element of the enemy.

- For almost two months earlier this year, Pakistani authorities held an alleged CIA operative in custody despite repeated U.S. requests for his release and despite the assertion of diplomatic immunity on his behalf by the U.S. government.

- Throughout most of March and April 2011, a succession of Pakistani officials, from the prime minister to the army chief of staff, lodged official complaints against the CIA's alleged covert drone campaign targeting al-Qa`ida and Taliban militants hiding in the tribal areas along Pakistan's border with Afghanistan. The officials demanded an end to the campaign and bemoaned the "violation" of Pakistani sovereignty, but provided no alternatives and made no offers of concrete Pakistani action to address the use of the border region as a safe haven by militants. In contrast to previous rounds of complaints, which seemed intended primarily for domestic consumption, these comments appeared to reflect a great deal of genuine anger and a real desire to bring U.S. drone attacks to an end.

- Recent press reports and evidence developed as the result of an ongoing Indian investigation also now suggest strongly that the ISI may have had some connection to the November 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, in which 10 well-trained Pakistani militants coordinated a bombing and shooting attack at several Indian landmarks. At a trial slated for May 16, 2011, David Headley, the Pakistani-American accused of assisting in the reconnaissance for the attack, is expected to implicate the ISI.

- In late 2010, the name of an individual identified as the CIA station chief in Islamabad was publicly revealed in court documents, an unheard of

occurrence in a society in which the security and intelligence services wield great power and routinely act to prevent the publication or disclosure of information they want to remain out of the public domain. That action was widely considered to have been a deliberate response by the ISI after it was named as a defendant in a lawsuit filed in New York regarding the 2008 Mumbai attacks. Death threats to the individual identified following this revelation prompted his recall. Less than six months later, the replacement CIA station chief in Islamabad also had their name aired in Pakistani media. U.S. officials believe that the latest disclosure was a deliberate action by the ISI in response to the raid in Abbottabad that killed Bin Ladin.<sup>3</sup>

The preceding points, as well as the past 10 years of frustration on the ground in Pakistan, was just a preamble for the discovery that the world's most wanted man, Usama bin Ladin, was hiding not in a remote mountain redoubt, but in a luxury home in Abbottabad, 30 miles from the capital city of Islamabad. Abbottabad, a pleasant hill town, is populated by large numbers of active and retired Pakistani military and is home to the country's military academy. It is located well within what are referred to as Pakistan's "settled areas" and is not in a "lawless region." It is an area under the tight control of Pakistani authorities and as secure as anywhere in the country.

The enormity of the revelation that Bin Ladin was living at this location can hardly be overstated. Efforts to find him were at the heart of absolutely everything the United States did with the Pakistanis and consumed the energy of thousands of American personnel for a full decade. All of Washington's cooperation with the Pakistanis was, ultimately, centered on the goal of finding Bin Ladin and either capturing or killing him.

After all of this effort, not only was Bin Ladin in Pakistan all along, but he was living in an area to where the ISI had ready access and where it enjoyed the support of a broad array of other Pakistani security services. How

exactly Bin Ladin managed to reside unmolested at this location remains unclear. Perhaps he enjoyed the active protection of members of the ISI. Perhaps the ISI was not looking hard for him. Perhaps Pakistan's intelligence agents are simply grossly incompetent.

Regardless, the lessons learned are the same. The U.S. intelligence community expended countless man-hours and billions of dollars working with the Pakistanis to find Bin Ladin. If this was the level of Pakistani assistance received in regard to Washington's highest priority target, the United States cannot expect better assistance in the future regarding targets of less significance.

### Conclusion

The war against al-Qa`ida is not over. Al-Qa`ida will move forward, plan future attacks and attempt to get revenge. In the face of this, the United States cannot afford to rely on the ISI and the Pakistani government. Bin Ladin's death was the product of bold, decisive, unilateral action. Washington acquired the intelligence, put together the plan and executed it successfully. The Pakistanis played no role. In fact, in tacit recognition by the White House of the scope of the liaison problem, the Pakistanis were deliberately kept in the dark in the lead-up to the operation.

This is the future of counterterrorism, particularly in Pakistan. Liaison relationships serve an important purpose, but they are not a replacement to direct, unilateral action.

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U.S.," Reuters, April 20, 2011.  
2 Ibid.

3 Jane Perlez, "Leak of C.I.A. Officer Name is Sign of Rift with Pakistan," *New York Times*, May 9, 2011.

## What the Experts Say...

IN LIGHT OF these historic events, the Combating Terrorism Center reached out to former national security officials and key counterterrorism experts to place Usama bin Ladin's death in context. The following represents their views on the implications of Bin Ladin's death in Pakistan.

\* \* \*

*Juan C. Zarate is a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the senior national security analyst for CBS News, and the former U.S. deputy national security adviser for combating terrorism (2005-2009)*

It was impossible to imagine the end of al-Qa`ida without the death of Usama bin Ladin. Now, with his killing at the hands of Navy SEALs, we have reached a strategic moment in the Long War. We must now unleash a full-throttle counterterrorism campaign to ensure al-Qa`ida's demise.

Bin Ladin's death comes at a time of great stress for al-Qa`ida. Its core leadership bench is thin; its financing depleted; and its moral, theological, and strategic legitimacy under question in most Muslim communities. In the Arab world, al-Qa`ida's ideology has been sidelined by the secular, democratic, and non-violent spirit of the Arab Spring.

Despite the realities of an al-Qa`ida Hydra—the rise of affiliates like AQAP in Yemen, the witches' brew of terrorist groups in western Pakistan, and the flow of Westerners drawn to al-Qa`ida's Siren's Song—al-Qa`ida is on the ropes.

Now is the time to redouble efforts to destroy core al-Qa`ida once and for all. This means decimating its remaining leadership, denying it safe haven, and undercutting its alluring narrative and ideological underpinnings. This includes moving surely with allies against key al-Qa`ida members and affiliates globally, pressuring Pakistan to help unearth other al-Qa`ida and Taliban leaders who have burrowed in their country, and refocusing attention on Iran's role in housing and now

releasing key al-Qa`ida leaders like Sayf al-Adl.

This campaign should be matched by a counterterrorist financing campaign and a narrative assault on Bin Ladin's image and al-Qa`ida's narrative based on documents, videos, and information recovered from the Abbottabad compound.

But this classic counterterrorism campaign must be matched by an equally vigorous effort to ensure the survival of the democratic revolutions of the Arab Spring. The forces of authoritarianism in Tripoli and Damascus are fighting back, and the revolutionary experiments in Cairo and Tunis have yet to be resolved. This requires American, allied, and non-state support to ensure Arab civil societies and democracy flourish. If not, the violent forces of extremism and authoritarianism will take advantage of the disillusionment, discord, and chaos that may result when the protesters' dreams are not realized.

The concept of the Long War against violent Islamic extremism has become embedded in our national security strategies and consciousness. Terrorism will not end now that Bin Ladin is gone, nor will the demographic, resource, and economic pressures that will help fuel growing radicalization in Muslim communities.

But the killing of Usama bin Ladin provides a strategic window to imagine an end to this chapter of the Long War. We must act now to defeat this movement and prepare for what lies beyond al-Qa`ida.

\* \* \*

*Brigadier-General (ret.) Mark Kimmitt is the former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs*

The death of Usama bin Ladin was, without doubt, an important moment. As a consequence, key policy decisions will emerge and one can only hope that the United States will not make unwise decisions leaving the situation worse, rather than better. One should expect that the entire AFPAC and counterterrorism portfolio will be assessed, and a few points should be considered.

1. The Long War is not over. The death of Bin Ladin does not end the Long War against radical extremism. Bin Ladin was, and may remain, the iconic symbol of this war, but his death may have little effect on its affiliated movements. Some hope that Bin Ladin's death will cause internal infighting and implosion, but al-Qa`ida in Iraq was defeated by continued and unrelenting pressure after the death of Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi, not through internal dynamics. Any diminution of effort against al-Qa`ida in the wake of Bin Ladin's death would be a mistake. This is a generational fight.

2. We cannot walk away from Pakistan. There will be pressure to end operations against al-Qa`ida in Pakistan, and disagreement on aid levels. Unfortunately, the United States is an instrumental actor in the stability of Pakistan and this is no time to walk away. Ending or reducing operations, funding or aid is counterproductive and irresponsible. There remain significant extremist elements which seek the overthrow of the government, and the death of Bin Ladin does not change a simple fact—Pakistan has over 100 nuclear weapons, and these cannot fall into the wrong hands.

3. We must not accelerate withdrawal from Afghanistan. Bin Ladin's death will create pressure to follow George Aiken's advice on Vietnam: "Declare victory and go home." To many, *casus belli* no longer exists and withdrawal is not only an option, but a responsibility. We have overstayed our welcome, and a rapid withdrawal will be seen as the most appropriate policy to reduce the perception of U.S. occupation and war against Islam. In this case, the administration must take a longer view and not repeat the policy mistakes made in the wake of the Soviet withdrawal.

None of these issues should take away from our admiration for those professionals that toiled for years to develop the intelligence picture, for the policy professionals that made the tough recommendation to execute an operation fraught with fog and friction, and for those extraordinary special operators who carried out the mission. We, indeed, "sleep soundly



in our beds because rough men stand ready in the night to visit violence on those who would do us harm.”

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*Elliott Abrams, who served as a Deputy National Security Adviser in the George W. Bush Administration, is a senior fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations*

The spectacular news of Usama bin Ladin's killing by U.S. forces could not have come at a better time. Al-Qa`ida's message that violence, terrorism, and extremism are the only answer for Arabs seeking dignity and hope is being rejected each day in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, and throughout the Arab lands. Al-Qa`ida and its view of the world are being pushed aside in favor of demands for new governments, free elections, freedom of speech and assembly, and an end to corruption. Bin Ladin's death weakens al-Qa`ida and Salafist movements further by taking away their most powerful symbol.

Al-Qa`ida may redouble efforts to commit acts of terror, but its prestige and power in the Arab world are on the decline. The Administration should turn back now to the cases of Libya and Syria above all, pushing further to end the vicious and violent regimes that rule those countries. As the republics of fear fall, al-Qa`ida's message will fall further into disrepute and the message of freedom that is now spreading in the Middle East will grow stronger.

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*Michael F. Walker was former chief of the CIA's Near East and South Asia Division and is currently an adjunct professor at Georgetown University*

The termination of the world's most wanted terrorist, Usama bin Ladin, seriously damaged the al-Qa`ida leadership structure, degraded its operational capabilities and affected the morale of the organization. The lethal raid in Abbottabad was the most significant of many successful, but not publicized, counterterrorist operations against the al-Qa`ida leadership in recent years and it again demonstrated

that U.S. intelligence and military services continue to conduct successful unilateral operations against al-Qa`ida worldwide. In the weeks and months to come, analysts will be busy with sensitive site exploitation which will lead to identifying, locating and neutralizing more al-Qa`ida operatives.

In spite of Bin Ladin's death, however, decentralized al-Qa`ida affiliates in Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula, the Maghreb, Europe and in the United States will continue to espouse al-Qa`ida's Salafist-Wahhabist ideology and may move forward with plans to attack U.S. citizens and facilities. But I am optimistic that we will continue to disrupt or thwart these terrorist plots and will capture or kill those involved.

On a final note, the killing of Bin Ladin is the result of a special 10-year close partnership between CIA and the U.S. military. Over the course of many years, it has been my honor and privilege to have been part of this special relationship.

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*Ambassador Frank Taylor was the U.S. State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security (July 2001 to March 2005)*

The U.S. military operation that resulted in the death of Usama bin Ladin culminates a decade of effort by the U.S. counterterrorism community to bring justice to the person most responsible for the horrific events of September 11, 2001. It is a testament to the commitment that our country made to pursue those responsible and to bring them to justice. We will pursue all the others until they too are brought to justice. No terrorist can ever believe that their acts of violence will go unpunished. This was a great day for the United States of America and the world that another brutal criminal will not have the opportunity to harm innocent people again. I am sure that others will try to use this event to "revenge" his death, but their revenge will be diminished by the fact that Bin Ladin's brand of Islamic extremism is dying and a new wave of change is on the verge of blossoming in the Middle East. Popular discontent and non-violent protest have

done more to transform the Islamic world than all the crimes perpetrated by al-Qa`ida over the past 15 years.

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*Professor Roban Gunaratna, Head, International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, Singapore, is the lead author of Pakistan: Ground Zero Terrorism (Reaktion, London, 2011)*

No terrorist leader has influenced the contemporary wave of terrorism more than Usama bin Ladin. Bin Ladin built not only al-Qa`ida, "the vanguard of the Islamic movements," but a global movement. Like a politician, he forged enduring links with different leaders and disparate groups. Unlike his predecessors, he crafted an ideology that has global appeal. Muslims suffering from perceived and real injustices formed his support base. Bin Ladin's biggest strength was his ability to communicate complex ideas into simple words. A master communicator, he was able to politicize, radicalize and mobilize a segment of the Muslim community globally to hate America, its European allies and friends. As his soft spoken words met with his destructive actions, he captured the imagination of resentful Muslims worldwide.

Within al-Qa`ida, Bin Ladin groomed a highly capable leadership that has been running its day-to-day affairs. Although U.S.-led global counterterrorism efforts steadfastly eroded al-Qa`ida's capabilities, Bin Ladin was able to maintain the spirit of his followers and motivation of his fighters. Of the leaders of the six committees of al-Qa`ida, only Bin Ladin, who led the Political Committee, and Ayman al-Zawahiri, who led the Information Committee, survived. While the heads of the military committee Abu Hafs al-Masri and administration and finance committee Shaykh Saeed were killed in Afghanistan and Pakistan respectively, the heads of the religious committee Abu Hafs al-Mauritani, and security and intelligence committee Sayf al-Adl were captured in Iran. Bin Ladin's deputy and his personal physician, Ayman al-Zawahiri, was his designated successor. While al-Qa`ida's numerical strength is estimated at a few hundred fighters mostly located in North Waziristan Agency in Pakistan, an estimated

several million Muslims worldwide still support Bin Ladin.

Reducing the future global threat of terrorism will depend on the U.S. ability and willingness to work effectively in the Muslim world. Although Pakistan was the steadfast sponsor of the Taliban, after 9/11 the government of Pakistan provided unprecedented support to the United States. More than 600 al-Qa`ida leaders and members were killed or captured in Pakistan. After the U.S.-led coalition intervention in Afghanistan in October 2001, Pakistan inherited a huge terrorist infrastructure that previously flourished in Afghanistan. Both the location of the residences of Bin Ladin (Abbottabad, north of Islamabad) and Khalid Shaykh Muhammad (West Ridge, Rawalpindi) demonstrates that the threat has spread from tribal Pakistan to mainland Pakistan. Rather than criticize Pakistan, it is paramount for the United States to continue to work with their Pakistani intelligence, law enforcement and military counterparts. In addition to working with Pakistan to dismantle both the physical and the conceptual infrastructures of terrorism and extremism in Pakistan, the United States should help Islamabad develop the economy of Pakistan, especially in the tribal areas.

Until al-Qa`ida attacked America's most iconic landmarks on 9/11, Bin Ladin sustained and survived due to international neglect. He should have been killed or captured immediately after al-Qa`ida attacked the U.S. embassies in Africa in 1998 or the USS *Cole* in 2000. The killing of Bin Ladin is an emotional victory for the United States, its allies and its friends. Had the United States killed Bin Ladin in Afghanistan before or immediately after 9/11, the United States would have deterred an escalation in global threat. Had the United States not been distracted and intervened in Iraq, Bin Ladin would have been killed or captured much earlier. Both al-Qa`ida and the wider, global movement Bin Ladin built is likely to pose an enduring threat in the foreseeable future.

\* \* \*

*Ambassador (ret.) Dell L. Dailey was the U.S. State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism (2007-2009)*

The American people went to bed on May 1, 2011 realizing something big had happened in the global war on terrorism, or whatever it was now being called. President Barack Obama's announcement came forth with certainty and assurances proclaiming Usama bin Ladin was killed by U.S. Special Operations Forces in Pakistan. We now have an intelligence success. Later, we find out we have a great counterterrorism success. Should we bask in that success or capitalize on it?

Once the low level facts get accepted, such as, he is dead, SEALs did it, President Obama was involved in the decision process, relations with Pakistan will suffer and photos will not be released...What is next for the Coalition in Iraq, Afghanistan and the U.S. government around the world to do? More importantly do we have a political opportunity to move forward the proposition that the United States is justified in its efforts against al-Qa`ida, associated movements and those countries that support al-Qa`ida?

Follow-on actions by the U.S. government could be: accelerate the departure of troops from Afghanistan, further minimize cooperation with Pakistan, tie the Arab Spring to greater U.S. support, or message to the world the correctness of U.S. actions.

Every kinetic action or "targeted killing" should come with a powerful message regarding justification. More importantly, the message should be more relevant than the kinetic action itself. There is an opportunity to relate this "targeted killing," the death of Bin Ladin, to the horrendous murders, killings, butcheries, and maiming of thousands of innocent Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan. We are talking about old men, women, and children dead on the streets of the world. From Tanzania and Kenya in 1998 to New York City in 2001 to bombings and attacks in Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Spain and Somalia—the world needs to know al-Qa`ida did it and Bin Ladin was its leader.

The U.S. government has been particularly slow in persuading or influencing the world on the righteousness of its global efforts. Always one more bureau, agency, or department to get to agree, and for some obscure reason they "non-concur" and the initiative stalls. Nothing goes out over the airways, blogs, radio stations, print media, or conferences. Silence from the U.S. government. Deafening silence. Another opportunity embarrassingly missed.

How to do it? Direct the National Security Council (NSC) to lead it. Assign selected authorities to the NSC office that compels them to direct the "messaging" agencies of the U.S. government. Routinely meet with key messaging elements like DoD Public Relations, State Public Diplomacy, CIA office for messaging, Broadcasting Board of Governors and the numerous bureaus, agencies and departments that inform the public—both domestic and international. What we say must certainly be truthful, but said enough times and in different ways that it persuades and influences the foreign audiences who continually detest and despise the United States.

Let's use the death of Bin Ladin as our first powerful message to the world. He was hunted down and killed by U.S. forces to stop his murderous actions against innocent people, Muslim and Christian.

\* \* \*

*Honorable Thomas W. O'Connell served 27 years as an Army Infantry and Intelligence Officer, many with Special Operations units. He served as Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict from 2003-2007*

Meetings among the National Security Council (NSC) deputies and Working Groups during the period 2003-2007 tended to assume a low key battle rhythm focusing on Iraq and Afghanistan as well as domestic threats and threads of allied concerns. Yet, the mastermind of 9/11 was always in the thoughts of the deliberative bodies. Each meeting held the promise that some link to Bin Ladin would surface. It was not to be.

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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not of the U.S. Military Academy, the Department of the Army, or any other agency of the U.S. Government.

But through it all, I sensed superb confidence that the United States would prevail against him. Never heard any doubters. Intelligence, Law Enforcement, Military, Diplomats and NSC officials were of one mind. Some day the noose would close.

Was it frustrating? Absolutely. I could not count the number of times an associate, friend, or media member asked a form of the question: "Where, When, Why Not?" I am pretty sure I never gave a response that offered anything less than confident optimism. I had good reason.

Sincere congratulations to all who pulled this off. Thanks to many who worked tirelessly and never lost sight of a critical objective.

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