FEATURE ARTICLE

Revisiting the Ideological Origin of the Islamic State

Tore Hamming

A VIEW FROM THE CT FOXHOLE

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Contents

FROM THE EDITOR

In our cover article, Tore Hamming revisits the ideological origins of the Islamic State. He argues that "despite its history as a local al-Qa`ida affliate in Iraq, the Islamic State developed from an ideological and cultural trend born in late-1980s Afghanistan that was always in tension with the core idea and identity of al-Qa`ida," setting the stage for the current bitter divide between the two groups and creating a significant obstacle to any reunification of the global jihadi movement.

Our interview this month is with Rebecca Weiner, the Assistant Commissioner for Intelligence Analysis at NYPD, and Meghann Teubner, NYPD's Director of Counterterrorism Intelligence Analysis. Despite the demise of the Islamic State's territorial caliphate, they have not seen much of a fall-off in jihadi terrorist plotting against New York City. While they assess Islamist terrorism remains the primary threat to the city, their focus on far-right terrorism is more intense than ever before.

With concern about violent right-wing extremism rising on both sides of the Atlantic, Graham Macklin examines the evolving far-right terror threat picture in the United Kingdom, focusing in particular on the terrorist group National Action.

In 2007, coalition forces captured Qais al-Khazali, the head of Asa`ib Ahl al-Haqq (AAH), an Iran-backed Shi`a militia group accused of killing U.S. soldiers in Iraq. Al-Khazali was released in 2010, continues to lead AAH, and has become a significant political player in Iraq. Bryce Loidolt outlines how the recently declassified interrogation reports from al-Khazali's time in custody reveal significant rifts between Shi`a militant power centers in Iraq and argues that such "rifts are likely to persist and will complicate Iran's ability to project its influence in the future." In 2018, al-Qa`ida's leader Ayman al-Zawahiri released more messages than in the previous year and ratcheted up his threat rhetoric against the United States. Jami Forbes warns al-Qa`ida's increased media outreach may signal both a revitalization and that it is readying to pivot back to attacking its far enemies.

Paul Cruickshank, *Editor in Chief*

The Hardline Stream of Global Jihad: Revisiting the Ideological Origin of the Islamic State

By Tore Hamming

The Islamic State has lost almost all its territorial control in Syria and Iraq and thus a central part of its claim to constitute a caliphate. As the international community takes stock, it is necessary to discard the myth of the group simply being a product of al-Qa`ida. Despite its history as a local al-Qa`ida affiliate in Iraq, the Islamic State developed from an ideological and cultural trend born in late-1980s Afghanistan that was always in tension with the core idea and identity of al-Qa`ida.

"The conflict between the Islamic State and the leadership of al-Qaeda is one of method ... This is the issue. It is not an issue of allegiance of whom to whom."

– Islamic State Spokesman Abu-Muhammad al-Adnani, May 2014

The Islamic State grew out of al-Qa`ida. The Islamic State's founding father, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and the leaders of al-Qa`ida initiated contact back in 1999 in Afghanistan, and five years later, al-Zarqawi's group 'Jamaat al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad' became an official al-Qa`ida affiliate. In February 2014, their common history ended, however, as the Islamic State was finally expelled from al-Qa`ida as a result of its disobedience and aggressive attitude toward other mujahideen.[1]

This trajectory and the Islamic State's 'origin' in al-Qa`ida is commonly accepted, but when looking closer, both seem to be too simplistic. Despite its history of being an al-Qa`ida affiliate, the Islamic State and its predecessors, as al-Adnani indicated, are in essence not al-Qa`ida. The differences may appear minimal to most observers, but that does not imply that they are unimportant. In fact, the ideological vision of the Islamic State developed in some ways in opposition to al-Qa`ida. And the Islamic State's predecessor group was later only incorporated into al-Qa`ida due to the strategic gains both groups hoped to benefit from as a result of a merger. However, as the Islamic State's caliphate has now crumbled, it is pertinent to re-examine the early history of the ideology and culture that it espouses and put it into context.

From late-1980s Afghanistan to 1990s Algeria and Afghanistan and in Iraq in the 2000s, this article will trace the distinctive ideology that most influenced the Islamic State and led to a critical ideological cleavage between the group and al-Qa`ida years later.

'The Jalalabad School'

To understand the Islamic State, it is necessary to go back to 1989 in Afghanistan. Not more than four months after the devastating defeat of the mujahideen in the battle of Jalalabad in July that year, Usama bin Ladin, already a prominent Arab-Afghan leader at the time, left Afghanistan for his native Saudi Arabia[2] to take care of family business in Jeddah. In November 1989, Abdullah Azzam, bin Ladin's mentor and the most influential figure among the Arab mujahideen, was assassinated. The departure of bin Ladin and the death of Azzam by late 1989 left a critical leadership vacuum among the Arab Afghans. This, in turn, facilitated the blossoming of a new jihadi trend mainly composed of Arab youth from the Gulf and North Africa, especially Algeria, that promoted a more doctrinally rigid view than al-Qa`ida's hitherto in addition to a vehement opposition to the authority of established jihadi leaders. As explained by the Australian scholar Leah Farrall, "Consequently, the youth looked elsewhere and found new 'leaders' who were still fighting or sought to fight. The youth followed them and saw them as not only effective, but also less restrictive. These new leaders established themselves in the surroundings of Jalalabad, setting up their own camps, and essentially followed an 'anything goes' approach to combat."[3]

The youth espousing these more radical ideas quickly became infamous within jihadi circles for the internal conflict (*fitna*) they caused. One of the earliest seeds of such *fitna* was, in fact, sown a few years earlier in 1986. An Algerian named Ahmed Abu Amra, a salafi in creed and doctor by profession, worked in a hospital in the Afghan province of Wardak. One day, an injured mujahid came into the hospital, but when Abu Amra saw that the man wore an amulet (*tamina*), he asked him to remove it as it was idolatry (*shirk*). Abu Amra told the mujahid he would not treat him until he removed it. The family of the wounded man reacted angrily, threatening to kill the doctor if he did not treat their family member. Whether Abu Amra eventually treated the wounded mujahid remains unknown, but after this incident, the jihadi doctor continued to preach his message of extreme doctrinal rigidity that was critical of many involved in the Afghan jihad and particularly against Azzam, whose Islamic interpretation Abu Amra did not find satisfactory, in the streets and guesthouses of Peshawar.[4]

The seed of Abu Amra grew during 1989-90 in the vacuum left by Azzam and bin Ladin. The atmosphere in the guesthouses and training camps of Peshawar was negative. People wanted to either fight or to return home. They were "angry souls," Azzam's son-in-law Abdullah Anas told this author.[5] In the decade that followed, one particular issue would be their refusal to fight alongside the Taliban[6] because of the movement's alleged deviance in matters of Islamic law, creed, and its reliance on tribal customs. The critique,

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however, did not stop with the Taliban, but extended to other Arab Afghans who were considered to be insufficiently pure of creed and doctrine. Mustafa Hamid, a former senior Egyptian figure in the Afghan jihad, recounts how during a lecture in 1990 he and Abu Musab al-Suri held at the al-Qa`ida-run Jihadwal camp, attendees started arguing fiercely and eventually proclaimed *takfir* on one another.[7]

In Afghanistan, the Jalalabad school—as the trend has been dubbed by Farrall and Hamid[8] due to its emergence as a reaction to the Jalalabad defeat—did not organize as a formal organization, but many of the adherents to the Jalalabad school spent time training at the Khalden camp in Khost province. In size, Khalden[9] was relatively small, providing mainly basic training in small arms, but its doctrinal influence has proven much greater than its limited size would suggest. This influence on the Arab community was only enhanced after 1992 as Khalden was just about the only training camp remaining that offered Arabs basic training.[10] Unlike other camps, it kept its independence from the large, established jihadi groups and welcomed recruits from all over,[11] although its main constituency was the Algerians.[a]

Hence, it was perhaps no surprise that Algeria, a few years later, would be the first place to witness an organized expression of the Jalalabad ideology. Under the leadership of camp emir Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi and Abu Zubaydah,[b] who was based in Peshawar and acted as a gatekeeper to the camp,[12] [c] Khalden became the strongest competitor to al-Qa`ida and for a period a strong pole of criticism for its alliance with the Taliban.

Perhaps the main reason behind this was the presence of the Egyptian Abu Abdullah al-Muhajir (Abdul Rahman al-Ali),[d] an important and understudied Egyptian figure who was critical of al-Qa`ida and bin Ladin during his time at Khalden after his arrival in Afghanistan.[13] At Khalden, al-Muhajir became the camp's sharia official (*mas'ul shara'i*) in charge of the religious Beliefs Battalion Institute.[14] As in other camps, the religious component was complementary to the military training and thus al-Muhajir's extreme ideology[15]—hostility toward others who either disagreed or simply differed—and his anti-Taliban[16] and anti-al-Qa`ida[17] discourse influenced the Arab recruits joining the camp. According to Mustafa Hamid, "The camp was distinguished by a Salafi methodology (*manhaj*) that was the most stringent of all Arabs."[18] Al-Muhajir harshly criticized bin Ladin for his alliance with the Taliban and his previous ties to the 'un-Islamic' Sudanese regime.[19] [e]

Al-Muhajir's ultra-hardline views would persist, and he would continue to be significantly more extreme than the al-Qa`ida 'mainstream.' But his criticisms of al-Qa`ida and the Taliban did not endure. He later joined bin Ladin's jihadi organization,[20] and by 1998, he had become dean of al-Qa`ida's Shariah College.[21] Nevertheless, his arguments at Khalden had a lasting impact on his students. According to Mustafa Hamid, "the most tolerant of [the graduates of al-Muhajir's Institute] saw the Taliban as infidels ... their stance was the most easily comprehensible, simple and contrarian; it began with excommunicating (*takfir*) the Taliban and ended with excommunicating everyone in their vicinity, from Arabs to the residents of Afghanistan."[22] The strong focus on an extremely rigid doctrine, and especially the issue of *takfir*, had put off some other jihadi groups present in Afghanistan at the time. For instance, the Uighurs from western China had initially trained in the camp but quit as the emphasis on *takfir* became too dominant. Similar concerns emerged among the Indonesian Jama'ah Islamiyya, themselves a doctrinally strict group, who refrained entirely from frequenting Khalden.[23]

The Jalalabad School Outside of Afghanistan

The Jalalabad School would eventually manifest itself in Iraq. However, its first organizational manifestation was in the 1990s Algerian civil war. In Algeria, the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA) showed traits similar to that of the rebellious youth in Afghanistan, especially concerning its attitude toward other jihadi movements in the years 1994-1996, during the terror campaign of its leader Jamal Zitouni. GIA had operated since 1992,[24] but was formally established in May 1994 when it merged with a faction from the Front

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a   If Abu Zubaydah's own account is to be trusted, then Algerians were no longer welcome at Khalden from 1997 onward because they were considered too extreme. "Verbatim Transcript of Combatant Status Review Tribunal Hearing for ISN 10016", p. 10. See https://web.archive.org/web/20090514035328/http://www.defenselink.mil/news/transcript_ISN10016.pdf

b   Abu Zubaydah is a Saudi national of Palestinian descent currently held in Guantanamo and whose real name is Zayn al-'Abd Din Mohammed Husayn.

c   Despite Abu Zubaydah taking on a leadership role running the Khalden camp in 1994, it is unclear whether he actually ever visited the camp as its administrator as he mostly remained in Peshawar, from where he managed recruitment and logistics. He was a trainee himself at Khalden in the early 1990s, according to a U.S. assessment.

d   There has been some confusion about al-Muhajir's real name. Kévin Jackson reported in 2012 that al-Muhajir's real name was Muhammad Ibrahim al-Saghir. Most sources now agree his real name is Abdul Rahman al-Ali. See Aimen Dean, Paul Cruickshank, and Tim Lister, *Nine Lives: My Time as MI6's Top Spy inside al-Qaeda* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2018), p. 90; Hassan Abu Hanieh and Mohammad Abu Rumman, *The "Islamic State" Organization: The Sunni Crisis and the Struggle of Global Jihadism* (Amman: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2015), p. 29; Ziad al-Zaatari, "Takfiri Literature Makes Headway in Lebanon," Alakhbar English, September 11, 2012; Maysara al-Gharib, "Zarqawi As I Knew Him," Al Furqan Media Foundation, distributed to jihadi forums in November 2007; Hassan Abu Haniyeh, "Daesh's Organisational Structure," Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, December 4, 2014.

e   Al-Muhajir was perhaps the main source of the ideological change in the Afghan jihadi environment, but the administrative change that facilitated the ideological trend that flowered for a period at Khalden was personified through Muhammad Abd al-Aziz al-Fakhri (better known as Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi) and Abu Zubaydah. It was around 1992 that Khalden came under al-Libi's leadership after he took over the camp from Abu Burhan al-Suri while Abu Zubaydah began working on behalf of the Khalden camp in late 1994 after he had spent most of that year as instructor at al-Qa`ida's training camp al-Farouq in the Jihadwal complex in Khost, according to a U.S. assessment. Abu Zubaydah had already spent several years training in Khalden prior to 1994, but this time, he would become a gatekeeper of the camp, mainly (if not exclusively) operating from Pakistan. While Abu Zubaydah once—reportedly in 1993—applied for membership in al-Qa`ida, which was eventually rejected, he never joined bin Ladin's organization. According to the former al-Qa`ida recruit-turned-British spy Aimen Dean, by mid-1997, the relationship between the Khalden leadership and bin Ladin had improved significantly and the criticisms had almost entirely disappeared. As noted in footnote A, according to Abu Zubaydah, Algerians were no longer welcome at Khalden from 1997 onward because they were considered too extreme. Mustafa Hamid and Leah Farall, *The Arabs at war in Afghanistan* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015), p. 177; Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), p. 166-167; Dean, Cruickshank, and Lister, chapters 2-6; "Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program," footnote 60, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, December 13, 2012; Paul Cruickshank correspondence, Aimen Dean, December 2018.

Islamique du Salut (FIS) and the Mouvement de l'État Islamique (MEI). One of the early influential figures of the group was none other than Abu Amra, the doctor who refused to treat the mujahideen patient years earlier in Pakistan.[25] The journalist Camille Tawil has described how a steady stream of Arab Afghans returning home for jihad in Algeria became central to GIA's establishment. It is likely that many of these Algerians had trained at Khalden as Algerians were the most dominant nationality at the camp.

Besides Abu Amra, prominent Afghan veterans like Qari Saïd and Abu Leith al-M'sili were among the founders of the movement while the Bayt al-Mujahideen guesthouse in Peshawar facilitated the transfer and training of GIA fighters.[26] Initially, GIA's main enemy was the Algerian state and its French patron, and in these efforts, the movement was supported by al-Qa`ida and other jihadi groups at the time. Jihadi authorities like Abu Qatada al-Filastini, Abu Hamza al-Masri and Abu Musab al-Suri either ran the group's weekly magazine *Usrat al-Ansar* or legitimized GIA's jihad through *fatwas*.[27] GIA's enemy hierarchy and its external support changed, however, when Jamal Zitouni took leadership and started a campaign of attacks against everyone less rigid in salafi doctrine than himself. And when Zitouni was killed in 1996, Antar Zouabri, a 26-year-old close associate of Zitouni, took over the leadership of the group and continued the escalating spiral of violence.[28]

The jihadi spiral into ever greater extremism during the Algerian civil war had its roots in Afghanistan. The ideology that developed among the Arab youth during the leadership vacuum of the late 1980s and early 1990s in Afghanistan was characterized by an extreme doctrinal rigidity, lack of respect for established authority, contempt for pragmatism in creed (*'aqida*) and methodology (*manhaj*), and enmity toward less puritanical groups.
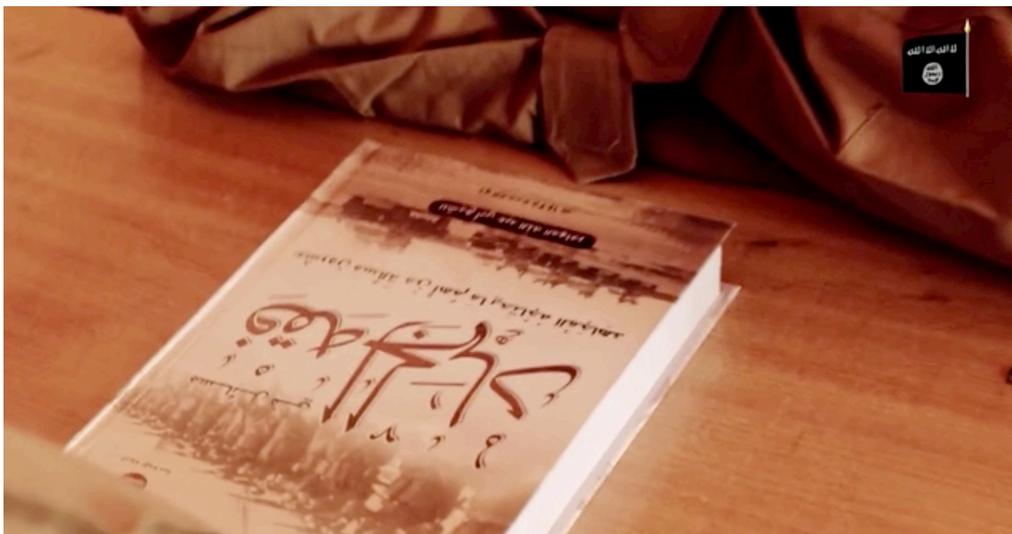
GIA's escalating extremism did not go unnoticed among supporting groups and ideologues, but when it started to launch attacks against fellow mujahideen who did not follow a similarly rigid jihadi-salafi doctrine, refused to join GIA, or simply disrespected the GIA leadership's extreme view of its own authority, jihadi groups and ideologues started to oppose it.[29] Tellingly, on June 6, 1996, the Egyptian groups al-Jihad and al-Jama'at al-Islamiyya, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, and the two ideologues Abu Qatada and Abu Musab al-Suri all withdrew their support, claiming Zitouni was deviating from a correct jihadi path.[30] Eventually, senior jihadi figures like bin Ladin and al-Zawahiri also began to consider GIA more as a harm to jihad. According to the account by Tawil, the final straw was when the GIA's senior sharia official, Redouane Makador (aka Abu Bassir), paid a visit to bin Ladin in Sudan and directly threatened the life of the al-Qa`ida leader if he were to get involved in the Algerian jihad.[31]

Al-Zarqawi and al-Qa`ida: Never Good Allies

The excesses of Zitouni in Algeria would be mirrored in the following decade by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq. It was in the fall of 1999 that al-Zarqawi first caught the interest of al-Qa`ida after he had traveled to Afghanistan after being freed from prison in Jordan.[32] It was specially Saif al-`Adl, a senior Egyptian al-Qa`ida leader, who saw the potential in allying with the young Jordanian. He eventually convinced al-Zawahiri and bin Ladin to provide seed money for al-Zarqawi to establish his camp in Herat despite all parties being well-aware of the ideological and theological differences between al-Qa`ida and the more hardline al-Zarqawi and the people around him.[33] This early cooperation was an illustration of how such differences could be overcome, at least temporarily.

Not long after al-Zarqawi arrived in Afghanistan, he was introduced to al-Muhajir by Abu Khabab al-Masri, an Egyptian jihadi explosives expert.[34] Al-Zarqawi was clearly impressed with the lectures and writings of al-Muhajir, and to capitalize on the Egyptian ideologue's knowledge, he invited al-Muhajir to his camp in Herat to teach a 10-day course.[35] Al-Muhajir began drafting his most important work, "The Jurisprudence of Jihad" (popularly known as 'The Jurisprudence of Blood'), while in Herat, and a mentor-mentee relationship blossomed. According to one of al-Zarqawi's close associates, "Our Shaykh al-Zarqawi, may Allah bless his soul, adored his Shaykh Abu Abdullah al-Muhajir … [al-Zarqawi] told me that he had studied [The Jurisprudence of Blood] under [his] supervision."[36] According to the recently published memoir of the al-Qa`ida recruit-turned-British spy Aimen Dean who spent time with the

An image captured from an Islamic State video showing Abu Abdullah al-Muhajir's book The Jurisprudence of Jihad *(popularly known as* The Jurisprudence of Blood*) "Blood of Jihad 4," Nineveh Province, February 2015*

cleric in Afghanistan in the 1990s, al-Muhajir's "teaching provided a sweeping justification for suicide bombings and argued it was justifiable to kill all infidels, including women, children and the elderly, and preferably by beheading them, unless Muslim authorities had granted them protection. He had an equally murderous disposition against the Shia."[37]

Despite al-Muhajir's service as the head of al-Qa`ida's sharia college (during which time, according to Dean, he provided theological justification for bin Ladin's organization's first suicide attack, the August 1998 bombings against U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam[38]), al-Muhajir's views were significantly more hardline on the questions of suicide bombings and with regards to the Shi`a than most al-Qa`ida leaders. As Charlie Winter and Abdullah al-Saud have argued, "Whereas other jihadists, most notoriously Zarqawi's erstwhile mentor Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, did not dismiss the permissibility of suicide operations out of hand, they did express serious trepidation about 'fling[ing] the door wide open' to the tactic. Al-Muhajir, on the other hand, casts theological caution to the wind."[39] According to one analysis of "The Jurisprudence of Blood," al-Muhajir encouraged the killing and punishment of Shia, claiming that they are a bigger threat to the nation of Islam than all enemies, and says, "those knowledgeable in Islam know that Shiites always side with the enemies of religion."[40]

According to one jihadi account, al-Zarqawi was so fascinated with al-Muhajir that had it been possible, he would have brought him with him to Iraq to head his sharia council after he decamped there after 9/11 and built up the operations of his group Jama'at al-Tawhid wal Jihad.[41] Instead of bringing the man, however, al-Zarqawi brought his ideas, especially concerning the legality of suicide, or martyrdom, operations. Once in Iraq, al-Zarqawi's group photocopied both of al-Muhajir's books and began teaching it to the group's members.[42] And as history shows, they came to have a major impact on al-Zarqawi's movement in Iraq and the Islamic State after al-Zarqawi's death. Indeed, after the group declared a caliphate in 2014, "The Jurisprudence of Blood" was a key part of the curriculum for Islamic State recruits.[43] [f]

Al-Zarqawi's increasing reliance on the ideas of al-Muhajir also widened the tensions and ideological cleavage between the Jordanian and al-Maqdisi. The tensions between the two are believed to have emerged as they were released from prison and al-Zarqawi decided in 1999 to leave for Afghanistan, a decision al-Maqdisi disagreed with. But the effective split between the two occurred after al-Zarqawi had established himself in Iraq and launched his extremely violent campaign against the country's Shi`a and im-

plemented the use of suicide bombings as his weapon of choice.[44] As already mentioned, it was not that al-Maqdisi was categorically against the use of suicide bombings—in al-Maqdisi's terminology such actions, however, are not considered suicide but martyrdom—or had warm feelings for the Shi`a, but he nonetheless differed with al-Zarqawi on the legitimate use of such a method and rejected the excommunication of an entire group. No doubt, al-Maqdisi had been an influential ideological figure for al-Zarqawi in the 1990s, but in the 2000s, al-Muhajir's extreme ideas would move the Jordanian leader away from his former mentor.

In Iraq, al-Zarqawi was joined by the Jordanian cleric (of Palestinian origin but born and raised in Kuwait) Abu Anas al-Shami.[g] Abu Anas was an old friend of al-Maqdisi from back in their early days in Kuwait where they used to go to the same mosques. Al-Maqdisi was clearly fond of Abu Anas, calling him "The Shaykh, the Mujahid, the Caller, the Man of Actions," and it was a relief for him that Abu Anas decided to join al-Zarqawi in Iraq.[45] Probably al-Maqdisi's hope was that Abu Anas as the head of the sharia committee in al-Zarqawi's group could rein in his former apprentice, but things would turn out very differently. Even though he only survived a year (from September 2003 to September 2004)[46] in Iraq before being killed by a U.S. airstrike, Abu Anas legitimized rather than moderated al-Zarqawi's brutal sectarian focus (one example is a 70-page anti-Shi`a tract),[47] and according to Turki al-Binali, a future prominent cleric in the Islamic State, Abu Anas mentored Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the later spokesperson of the Islamic State and the main protagonist of the group's criticism of al-Qa`ida in the mid-2010s. According to al-Binali's eulogy of al-Adnani, the latter once stated, "From our Syria is the lion of Iraq Abu Anas with his honour he makes the sad forget and become happy. In knowledge, he is deep. In wars, he is an engineer. In hadith, an expert. In politics, genius."[48] [h]

Al-Zarqawi's group finally joined al-Qa`ida on October 17, 2004, but it was, more than anything, a marriage of convenience. Already before the merger, senior al-Qa`ida figures had their reservations regarding the personality of al-Zarqawi and the ideology his group espoused.[49] For al-Zarqawi, given how much he had historically guarded his independence,[50] presumably the main concern was that the merger implied submitting to the authority of al-Qa`ida's leaders. Although part of the merger deal was some level of autonomy for al-Zarqawi,[51] this did not last long. Not even a year after joining al-Qa`ida, al-Zarqawi received a letter from al-Qa`ida's then deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri criticizing his actions (albeit in a friendly tone).[52] The Egyptian tried to explain to al-Zarqawi that his violent strategies in Iraq were unwise (though not necessarily theologically wrong) and that he should adjust to al-Qa`ida's guidelines. Al-Zawahiri told al-Zarqawi he should abstain from unnecessary takfir, collaborate more with other Sunni groups and prioritize the enemy

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f   The current status of al-Muhajir remains a mystery, just like the man himself has always been. It seems rather certain that he was imprisoned in Iran, but around the Arab Spring, he was released and traveled to Egypt. See Jackson. His next movements are far less clear. According to one account told to the author by a confidential source in 2017, al-Muhajir distanced himself from the jihadi movement entirely after returning to Egypt, opening up a bookstore in Cairo. Author interview, confidential source, 2017. But it cannot be ruled out that al-Muhajir returned to the jihadi fold instead of settling down in Egypt. According to Hassan Abu Hanieh, a Jordanian analyst of jihadi salafism, the Islamic State suggested in a video sometime after declaring a caliphate that al-Muhajir had died, suggesting the possibility, according to Hanieh, that al-Muhajir might have traveled to join the group. However, no official eulogy for al-Muhajir has ever been produced by the Islamic State. Author interview, Hassan Abu Hanieh, 2018.

g   Another key figure shaping al-Zarqawi in Iraq was Abu Ali al-Anbari, the emir of the Mujahideen Shura Council and later deputy to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. See Hassan Hassan, "The True Origins of ISIS," *Atlantic*, November 30, 2018.

h   The actual relationship between Abu Anas and al-Adnani may not be as close as described by al-Binali, however. Al-Maqdisi, who was very close with Abu Anas, claims that Abu Anas and al-Adnani spent very little time together and that al-Binali's eulogy should be considered an attempt at claiming support from martyred scholars. Author's correspondence, Abu Muhammed al-Maqdisi, December 2018.

Abu Anas al-Shami is shown in an undated posted online by jihadis and obtained by the author.

strategically (or in other words, act more like al-Qa`ida). Perhaps not surprisingly, as far as is known, al-Zawahiri never heard back from al-Zarqawi. As a result, al-Zarqawi received two new letters from senior al-Qa`ida figures—this time, Abu Yahya al-Libi[i] and

Atiyyah Abdel Rahman[j] (aka Atiyyatullah)[k] in November[53] and December[54] 2005, respectively. Similarly to al-Zawahiri, they critiqued al-Zarqawi's brutality and advised him on how to behave. Once again, it appears that al-Zarqawi never got back to the al-Qa`ida leadership, but a recent biography of the Islamic State senior leader, Abu Ali al-Anbari has revealed that al-Zarqawi "was very sad about the dealings of some of the leaders of al-Qaeda in Khorasan [Afghanistan-Pakistan] with him and their evil thoughts about him."[55]

By the end of 2005, senior al-Qa`ida figures including bin Ladin were getting increasingly tired of al-Zarqawi's disobedience, but this was probably nothing compared to al-Zarqawi's own frustration with the al-Qa`ida leaders telling him what to do. So while al-Qa`ida continued to occasionally praise al-Zarqawi and his group's military successes in Iraq publicly and privately as part of its diplomatic effort to unite the jihadi movement, al-Zarqawi was arguably planning for a future without al-Qa`ida. The first step was the establishment of the Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC), an Iraqi umbrella organization unofficially led by al-Zarqawi, in January 2006.[56] This has been interpreted by some as al-Zarqawi giving in to al-Qa`ida pressure,[57] but this contention seems rather unlikely. At no point between 2005 and 2014 (the year al-Qa`ida announced that the Iraqi group was no longer part of its network) did the group in Iraq change its behavior in response to commands from bin Ladin or other al-Qa`ida leaders. Generally, the Iraqi group appeared not to have cared about directions 'from above,' which makes it unlikely that the decision to establish the MSC was an act to appease the al-Qa`ida leadership. Furthermore, the leader of the MSC was none other than al-Anbari, who ideologically aligned with al-Zarqawi rather than the views espoused by al-Qa`ida.[58]

Al-Zarqawi did not live long enough to witness the second step in the process that effectively sealed the break from al-Qa`ida, if the Islamic State's version of the story is to be believed. After al-Zarqawi was killed by a U.S. airstrike on June 7, 2006, he was replaced by his deputy Abu Hamza al-Muhajir (aka Abu Ayyub al-Masri) who renamed the group Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in October 2006 and left the leadership of it in the hands of the mysterious Abu Umar al-Baghdadi. To the disappointment of al-Qa`ida, this change in leadership would not significantly alter the dispute between the al-Qa`ida senior leadership and what it considered its Iraqi affiliate. In 2007-2008, a new problem arose as Abu Sulayman al-Utaybi, chief judge in the Islamic State of Iraq, was fired and, in reaction, left Iraq for the Afghanistan-Pakistan region to complain to the

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i   Abu Yahya al-Libi's 20-page letter, authored four months after he escaped prison in Afghanistan, is the most subtle of the two al-Qa`ida letters. He emphasized that Iraq has now overtaken Afghanistan as the most important jihadi arena, and it was thus important to follow the correct methodology. The letter was structured into five points. The first point Abu Yahya raised was that the enemies of Islam are seeking to instigate fragmentation between groups from within and that it is the leader's responsibility to keep together his group and be open to pragmatic solutions. The second point was the importance of consulting other groups and actors. The third point was already raised by al-Zawahiri, but Abu Yahya reiterated it in much more subtle language. It was that jihadi groups needed to act and communicate in a manner that people understand, even though it means abstaining from actions that are correct according to religion. The fourth point was to remain focused on the important targets and not expand the struggle to include too many enemies as that risked causing the mujahideen to ultimately fail. In Abu Yahya's last point, he is opening a door for al-Zarqawi pointing out that the mujahideen must have the courage and the determination to go back from a mistake. But considering how the Jordanian perceived himself, such a request would likely have been perceived as very provocative by al-Zarqawi.

j   Atiyyatullah's letter to Zarqawi was more explicit in its critique than Abu Yahya's. Atiyyatullah congratulated al-Qa`ida in Iraq for posing the greatest threat to the enemy, but explained that such success is followed by lots of scrutiny and necessitates mature leadership. In the context AQI finds itself in, Atiyyatullah stressed that seeking support and advice from the overall leadership is imperative, and in a very explicit way, he told al-Zarqawi that "you need to keep in mind that you are leader in the field that is under a greater leadership that is more potent and more able to lead the Muslim nation." Echoing Abu Yahya and al-Zawahiri's letters, Atiyyatullah also stated that "policy must be dominant over militarism." Atiyyatullah did not want a repeat of what happened in Algeria and was beginning to see similar signs of this happening in Iraq. In Algeria, he stated, "their enemy did not defeat them, but rather they defeated themselves," and to prevent this, al-Zarqawi needs to change, even reform, his movement and exercise leadership.

k   Atiyyah was a key administrative figure at the time in al-Qa`ida while Abu Yahya was a rising ideologue within the movement.

al-Qa`ida central leadership.[59] Al-Qa`ida saw al-Utaybi's criticism as being directed toward the ISI leaders Abu Hamza al-Muhajir and Abu Umar al-Baghdadi. In a letter[60] to Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, in response to al-Utaybi's testimony, the al-Qa`ida leadership explained that:

> "*In our opinion, the most important thing and the biggest danger—if true—is the existence of the corrupt influential men who have become leaders in the [Islamic] State, and they are of corrupt method and religion, and they spread calls that deface al-Qaeda and its method.*"[61]

Were it not because of the dates in the letters, the message could just as well have been part of al-Qa`ida's criticism of the Islamic State in 2013-2014. In the years between 2006 and 2014, it was generally assumed that despite its name change, the Islamic State of Iraq was still al-Qa`ida's affiliate in Iraq. Even al-Qa`ida saw it that way, despite being ambiguous in its official communication on the group in Iraq.[l] However, it seems plausible that the Islamic State, when it branded itself by that name in 2006, from that point on considered itself to be independent from al-Qa`ida as it has been consistently arguing since the split in 2014.

In a May 2014 speech, a few months after al-Qa`ida had expelled the Islamic State from its fold, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani outlined how the Islamic State had historically viewed its relationship with al-Qa`ida.[62] Although it is possible the animosity caused by the split led the Islamic State spokesman to indulge in some revisionist history, the speech provides a window into the evolution of the relationship between the two groups. Al-Adnani made a key distinction between the historical deference his group had shown al-Qa`ida when it came to jihad *outside* Iraq and the right of the group after it had declared itself an Islamic State in 2006 to set its own agenda *inside* Iraq. He asserted that in matters beyond the borders of Iraq in the years that followed, "the emirs of the Islamic State" carried on "addressing al-Qa`ida as soldiers addressing their emir" "out of humbleness, humility and an act of honor and generosity from us to you" rather than out of obligation. He summed it up by stating, "The [Islamic] State is not a branch that belongs to al-Qai`da, and it never was for a day."[63]

Evidence for this, he said, was "our not responding to your repeated request to stop targeting the Rawafidh [a slur term for Shi`a] masses in Iraq due to the judgment they are Muslims whose ignorance pardons them. So if we had pledged allegiance to you we would have listened to your command, even if we did not agree with you." Addressing al-Zawahiri, al-Adnani stated, "What did you give the State if you were its Emir? With what did you supply it? For what did you hold it accountable? What did you order it to do? What did you forbid it to do? ... Neither you or anyone before you spoke to us as an emir to his soldiers or with the imperative."[64]

Al-Adnani's diatribe suggests when the Islamic State of Iraq on several occasions post-2006 praised al-Qa`ida (and the Taliban)

and addressed al-Qa`ida's leader as 'emir,' this was more likely a matter of strategy from the Islamic State of Iraq leaders as the time was not ripe to disclose the true nature of the relationship publicly.

Instead, they were likely waiting for the right political opportunity to challenge al-Qa`ida. As is now known, that opportunity finally occurred in 2013 with bin Ladin out of the picture and the potential offered by the escalating Syrian civil war. Despite the temporary alliance between the two in the 2000s, it is important to understand that the Islamic State core developed from an ideological and cultural outlook that was substantially different from al-Qa`ida's core, infusing a critical prospect for internal tensions into the inter-group relationship from the very beginning.

This was also the verdict of al-Adnani in his May 2014 speech. "The conclusion of the matter is that the conflict between the Islamic State and the leadership of al-Qaeda is one of method ... This is the issue. It is not an issue of allegiance of whom to whom." In his telling, it was only after the death of bin Ladin that the Islamic State's leaders began to see the two approaches as profoundly at odds, with the breaking point coming when al-Zawahiri and his top deputies sought to impose "their method, that had remained buried inside al-Qaeda, and only showed after al-Zawahiri took over."[65]

Distinct Streams with Different Tributaries

All this suggests that the Islamic State, rather than being an outflow of al-Qa`ida, had tributaries of its own whose sources were the pools of ideological extremism in 1990s Afghanistan, which first manifested itself in an organized fashion in Algeria before taking root the following decade in Iraq. This is not to say there were not significant ideological overlaps between al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State. After all, Abu Abdullah al-Muhajir, the hardline Egyptian cleric who mentored al-Zarqawi and whose writings became the set-text for new recruits to the Islamic State's 'caliphate,' spent the late 1990s working for bin Ladin's organization, providing theological cover for al-Qa`ida's first suicide attacks. Afghanistan was a melting pot of many different streams of jihadi thought that interacted in complex ways to influence the future course of global jihad. But as Hassan Hassan recently outlined in this publication, the rupture between the Islamic State and al-Qa`ida caused by their rivalry in Syria has been "hardening differences in approach and doctrine, creating the conditions for sustained competition and acrimony between the groups and a long-term schism between two different schools of jihad."[66] It is hard to imagine somebody like the mercurial al-Muhajir now being able to flit between al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State in places such as Syria or Afghanistan.

The thoughts and ideological legacy of al-Muhajir espoused in mid- and late-1990s Afghanistan remain crucial for the Islamic State to this very day and has become obvious from its behavior since 2013. Its unfettered brutality and sectarian bloodletting has stood in stark contrast to the relatively more restrained approach taken by al-Qa`ida.[67] While such ideological cleavage does not imply that relations cannot be cordial, nor does it rule out a future rapprochement, it has always been a central source of tensions between the two groups and will likely remain one of the key obstacles to once again uniting the global jihadi movement. **CTC**

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l In a statement titled "Review of Events" from December 16, 2007, al-Zawahiri acknowledges that there is no such thing as al-Qa`ida in Iraq. Interestingly, in the same statement, he says, "The signs of the caliphate has started to loom in the horizon."

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3   Hamid and Farrall, p. 296.

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6   Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman (eds.), *Self Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions within Al Qa'ida and Its Periphery* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2010). See also Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri* (London: Hurst, 2009).

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9   In his tribunal hearing, Abu Zubaydah described the Khalden camp. See https://web.archive.org/web/20090514035328/http://www.defenselink.mil/news/transcript_ISN10016.pdf

10   Anne Stenersen, *Al-Qaida in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 50.

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13   For an in-depth account of al-Muhajir's influence on Zarqawi, see Kévin Jackson, "Abu Mus'ab al Zarqawi under influence: one mentor?" alleyesonjihadism.wordpress.com, May 15, 2012.

14   Hamid and Farrall, p. 231.

15   Lecture series by al-Muhajir titled "Introduction to the jurisprudence of jihad in islam" presented in 14 lectures. Available at https://archive.org/details/FIFTH-SERISE-PRESENTAION-OF-FIQH-EL-JIHAD. Al-Muhajir's most famous work is "Issues in the jurisprudence of Jihad" (*Masa'il fi fiqh al-Jihad*) that was commonly known as "The Jurisprudence of Blood" (*fiqh al-dimaa*). He also authored a less-known piece titled "The Pioneers of Spreading the Sunnah in the Hallmarks of the Victorious Sect" (*A'laam al-Sunnah al-Manshura fi Ma'alim al-Ta'ifa al-Mansoura*).

16   Jackson.

17   In his account ("Abu Mus'ab al Zarqawi under influence: one mentor?"), Kévin Jackson writes that "during his time at Khaldan, the Egyptian scholar [al-Muhajir] was a strident opponent to Usama bin Ladin and known as being among the top adversaries of al Qa'ida['s] agenda." A similar description is given by Hamid and Farrall, p. 229.

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21   Dean, Cruickshank, and Lister, chapter 4.

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28   Tawil.

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A View from the CT Foxhole: Rebecca Weiner, Assistant Commissioner for Intelligence Analysis, NYPD, and Meghann Teubner, Director of Counterterrorism Intelligence Analysis, NYPD

By Paul Cruickshank

Assistant Commissioner for Intelligence Analysis Rebecca Ulam Weiner manages counterterrorism and cyber intelligence analysis and production for the New York City Police Department's Intelligence Bureau. She is one of the principal advisors to the Deputy Commissioner of Intelligence and Counterterrorism, and she shares responsibility for Bureau-wide policy development and program management. Assistant Commissioner Weiner coordinates and integrates intelligence analysis and operations and represents the NYPD in matters involving counterterrorism and intelligence. She was the first local law enforcement representative to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's National Intelligence Council, in the Office of Transnational Threats. She also served as Legal Counsel to the Intelligence Bureau's Intelligence Analysis Unit and as Team Leader for the Middle East & North Africa, overseeing intelligence collection and analysis related to threats associated with those regions.

Director of Counterterrorism Intelligence Analysis Meghann Teubner oversees strategic and investigative analysis for the New York City Police Department's Intelligence Bureau. In this capacity, she directs intelligence analysis and production on terrorism developments and trends around the world and potential threats to New York City in support of NYPD leadership as well as the counterterrorism missions of public and private law enforcement and security partners. Prior to joining the NYPD, Director Teubner was an analyst and senior representative with the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC). As NCTC's representative based in New York, she ensured the integration of effort between NCTC and its federal, state, local, and tribal partners in the northeast region, facilitating information sharing and collaboration in support of all partners' counterterrorism missions. As an analyst in NCTC's Directorate of Intelligence, Ms. Teubner developed strategic terrorism analysis on al-Qa`ida-related issues and the evolution of the terrorism threat landscape.

CTC: You head up counterterrorism intelligence analysis for the NYPD. What role does this play in the police department's wider counterterrorism efforts?

Weiner: Post-9/11, then-Police Commissioner Ray Kelly created a robust counterterrorism program, housed in two bureaus: the Intelligence Bureau, where Meghann and I work, and the Counterterrorism Bureau. At its most basic, the Intelligence Bureau is charged with intelligence collection and investigations, relationship building—through 14 liaison officers posted overseas and four domestic liaisons—and analysis, all for the purpose of prevention. The Intelligence Bureau's investigators gather intelligence in support

of terrorism investigations and have disrupted dozens of terrorism threats against New York City. The Counterterrorism Bureau supplies over 100 detectives to the FBI-NYPD Joint Terrorism Task Force, which focuses on prevention as well. These two entities work independently of one another, but collaborate and coordinate hand-in-glove. The Counterterrorism Bureau also deploys our frontline forces, the CRC [Critical Response Command] teams you see with the heavy vests and long-guns protecting key targets and the Bomb Squad. This is all through the lens of overt target hardening and preparedness, as well as response and mitigation.

The intelligence analysis components, which we oversee, are like the hub of a wheel, with all of the various collection mechanisms as the spokes. We have a team of civilian analysts and uniformed investigators whose job is to take in all the information that comes our way—whether it comes from our human sources and other investigative resources, our partners, or the public via our leads hotline—and turn it into intelligence, both tactical and strategic.

Teubner: Our intelligence products inform not only investigations but also the preparedness of the Department. If there's an incident domestically or overseas, we'll put out an analytic report that provides context and focuses on implications to the threat environment here in New York and that helps play into a preparedness response here. The analysts draw insight from information and expertise provided by our overseas liaison posts, who are stationed strategically in police departments across the globe. Even when we do not assess that an incident poses a direct threat to New York, we may put additional resources at similar targets locally, say, a transit hub. After an incident like the [December 11, 2018] Strasbourg Christmas market attack, we tend to deploy additional resources to send an overt message especially to New Yorkers that we're thinking strategically and tactically about what is happening globally and how that might impact New York. And we want to make sure that you feel safe going about your day-to-day business.

Weiner: While the core mission of our unit is informing the investigators and officers that we're partnered with about the threat landscape as it changes—which is ultimately a very tactical job at its core—it is also about informing our partners, and the public.

CTC: When it comes to the jihadi terrorist threat, how are you seeing that threat evolve when it comes to New York City?

Teubner: We've seen the threat evolve from al-Qa`ida, from the externally directed threat, which NYPD Deputy Commissioner of Intelligence and Counterterrorism John Miller has described as very deep, very complex, but very narrow[1] to a much more diverse threat across the ideological spectrum from a range of actors with

varying degrees of connectivity to groups or networks. And while the threat actors overseas became more dispersed, we saw a shift in the threat landscape via the use of propaganda—I'm thinking specifically Anwar al-Awlaki and the launch of Inspire magazine to encourage lone actors and provide specific guidance for successful attacks. ISIS took that model and exponentially intensified it through use of multiple social media platforms and range of messages to appeal to the widest possible audience.

We assess that that lone-actor threat is the most prevalent threat to New York City and will likely continue to be so. These lone actors consume extremist and violent content primarily online and on social media and construct their own narratives, which may include personal grievances, emotional stress, and violent extremism, to radicalize, to mobilize-to-violence. There is a vast amount of available propaganda, whether it's older or repackaged al-Qa`ida and Anwar al-Awlaki messages or the consistent propaganda that we see from ISIS and the group's sympathizers.

Weiner: We undertook a project earlier this year that looks backwards to 2001 at threats against New York City and from that projects forward to 2023—an Intelligence Estimate for New York City.[2] A couple dominant themes emerged. One is what Meghann was just describing, which is a shift from externally directed plots to lone, often local actors, which really starts in 2009-2010. The second is a marked uptick in pace.

We counted 29 publicly disclosed plots against New York City since 2001. From 2001 through 2009, there were 12. Two of them were the product of lone actors, and 10 were externally directed. Since 2010, we have seen 17—14 of which can be attributed to lone actors, versus three that were externally directed. That's a pretty dramatic flip-flop.

So far as the pace is concerned, since ISIS' declaration of the caliphate in the summer of 2014, we've had 12 disrupted plots and attacks in New York City. Four of the 12 were in some respects successful. You had Zale Thompson, who attacked a group of police officers with a hatchet in Queens in [October] 2014, which was a few months after the declaration. And then more recently, [September 2016 'Chelsea bomber' Ahmad] Rahimi, [alleged October 2017 'West Side Bike Path truck attacker' Sayfullo] Saipov, and [December 2017 'Port Authority' bomber Akayed] Ullah.

Accompanying the shift to lone actors, we see a blurring of ideology with other more idiosyncratic drivers. And often a blending of disparate, sometimes even mutually exclusive, ideologies. The idiosyncrasy of a lone actor plays out in the terrorism landscape more visibly now than it used to, and that's because individuals leave strongly imprinted social media footprints that give us insight into the nuance of their motivations more than ever. In many cases, the violence of lone actors is justified in their minds by ideology more than driven by it. That's why we see neo-Nazis become jihadists or [we see] black separatist extremist ISIS adherents.

CTC: Notwithstanding the attacks in late 2018 in Strasbourg and Manchester, there seems to have been from late 2017 some reduction in the threat from jihadi terrorism in Europe because of the demise of the Islamic State caliphate, the removal from the battlefield of many of the group's external operations plan-

NYPD Assistant Commissioner for Intelligence Analysis Rebecca Weiner

ners,[a] and perhaps, though it's difficult to measure, because of a diminution in the enthusiasm of Islamic State sympathizers in Europe. Have you seen a fall-off in plotting activity when it comes to New York City since the Islamic State lost territorial control of its caliphate?

Weiner: No, we haven't seen much of a fall-off, because of the rise in plots inspired by jihadi terrorist groups. And we expect that to continue in the near-term. It's important to note that the two terrorist attacks New York City suffered in 2017 were carried out *after* the liberation of Mosul and Raqqa. Even though directed and enabled terror plots can sometimes involve more dangerous capabilities, we need to treat the 'inspired' threat very seriously—look at the Pulse nightclub attack in Orlando in 2016. You don't need to have been trained by ISIS or to have been communicating with them to kill a lot of people using readily available weapons against soft targets of opportunity.

It is true, however, that we don't see as many ISIS members overseas who are enabling of the kind of plotting that we saw in 2015. What you do have is consistent guidance for people to stay home and carry out local attacks. The diminution in enthusiasm plays out much more in the traveler landscape for us than in the attack landscape. People are being actively discouraged from traveling, so

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a   Editor's note: In a summer 2018 report, the United Nations noted "a fall in the rate of terrorist attacks in Europe, which began in late 2017 and has continued into 2018. There may be a causal connection between this and the military near-defeat of the so called 'caliphate': ISIL command and control was damaged ... and many of the most active terror-planners and operatives were killed in targeted strikes." "Twenty-second report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities," United Nations, June 27, 2018, p. 6.

NYPD Director of Counterterrorism Intelligence Analysis Meghann Teubner

although the overall pool of mobilized recruits may be diminished, a higher percentage of those who remain want to carry out a kinetic attack locally.

CTC: Al-Qa`ida and its affiliates in the past few years seem to have focused more on building up its capabilities locally rather than on targeting the West. But in late December 2018, U.K. Security Minister Ben Wallace warned that, "Al-Qaeda are resurgent. They have reorganised. They are pushing more and more plots towards Europe and have become familiar with new methods and still aspire to aviation attacks."[3] In 2018, al-Qa`ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri appeared to ratchet up his threat rhetoric against the United States and released an increased number of statements.[4] A decade since the 2009 al-Qa`ida-directed Najibullah Zazi New York subway bombing plot was thwarted, is al-Qa`ida reemerging as a significant threat to New York City?

Teubner: We continue to assess [that] al-Qa`ida maintains the strategic intent to conduct an attack here in the U.S.—potentially in New York—underlined by disseminated official propaganda by the group and its affiliates. We remain concerned that the group's legacy plotting may continue to advance despite counterterrorism pressure and the removal of al-Qa`ida and affiliate leaders from the battlefield, leaders such as Ibrahim al-Asiri, AQAP's innovative explosives expert who allegedly died in late 2017. In recent audio messages, Hamza bin Ladin, Usama bin Ladin's son, stated that America remains the group's priority target and further encourages supporters to conduct attacks using any means necessary.[5]

In 2018, we saw the formation of Syria-based, al-Qa`ida-affiliated Hurras al-Din; we assess this represents a potential external operations threat to New York City due to its composition of experienced al-Qa`ida fighters, some with connections to veteran al-Qa`ida members with a legacy of planning attacks in the West, demonstrated battlefield bona fides, and access to foreign fighters in Syria.[6]

CTC: Switching gears, there's rising concern on both sides of the Atlantic and particularly here in the United States about extreme right-wing terrorism. There was that terrible attack on a synagogue in Pittsburgh in October 2018. There was the car-ramming attack in Charlottesville in August 2017. When you guys get to the office in the morning, how much part of your concern set now is that extreme right-wing terror threat to this city?

Teubner: When we're looking at the lone-actor threat, we specifically are looking at it agnostic to the ideology because what we have found is that a lot of the drivers are similar.

If you look at our numbers, we have experienced more salafi-jihadi extremism directed or inspired plots here in New York. That being said, is far right-wing violent extremism of concern to us? Absolutely. We've had two incidents here over the last two years of lone actors likely inspired in part by violent extreme-right rhetoric espoused online: James Harris Jackson who allegedly came from Baltimore to conduct an attack targeting African Americans in New York, specifically wanting to conduct his attack in New York to garner more attention for that attack;[b] and Cesar Sayoc's alleged mailing of multiple improvised explosive devices to victims across the U.S., with three specifically in New York City.

Extreme far-right and far-left networks or groups generally limit their activity in New York City to First Amendment-protected activities such as rallies and protests; however, we do assess a small number of those they inspire may conduct acts of violence in support of their respective ideologies. Our concern is that there is the same kind of echo chambers in the extreme right-wing terrorism ecosystem that we have in the ISIS and al-Qa`ida landscape, in that you have individuals that get on social media platforms, they share their violent ideology, they seek out like-minded individuals, and they radicalize and mobilize each other.

Weiner: What's interesting about both [the alleged Florida-based October 2018 package bomber Cesar] Sayoc and [the Baltimore-based] Jackson is that they were both lone actors who allegedly chose New York as a target in order to amplify their message. Sayoc didn't just choose New York, he chose a news organization here in the city, the media capital of the country. Jackson also specifically said he was seeking media attention in New York.

Online, we do see an increase in white-supremacist activity. And it has a different manifestation than the ISIS-inspired type, because you don't have the formal group structure that's at the basis of international terrorist organizations. The extreme-right environment

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b   Editor's note: James Harris Jackson faces trial on terrorism and other charges for allegedly murdering a black man with a bladed weapon in New York City in March 2017. Sean Picolli, "Sword Killing Was 'Practice' for Racial Terrorism, Man Told Police," *New York Times*, September 20, 2018.

is much more inchoate.

It's also worth noting that neo-Nazi propaganda actually increasingly looks like ISIS or AQ propaganda, with the same slick production value, the same themes, the same aesthetic styles.

All this being said, the threat landscape faced by New York City has been dominated by jihadi terrorism—26 of the 29 plots and attacks from 2001 have been in the al-Qa`ida/ISIS directed, enabled, inspired sphere. We had one Hezbollah plot recently, too, with the arrest of Ali Kourani in June of 2017,[c] and we are watchful over that potential threat, too.

When we say the threat landscape is diversifying, we mean across the ideological spectrum. And we assess that New York City will remain a draw for violent extremists across that spectrum.

CTC: So what I'm hearing is that still the majority part of the concern and attention here in New York City—given the metrics you're dealing with, the threats you're dealing with—is on the jihadi terror side of the ledger. But in recent months and years, extreme right-wing terror has become a greater concern and more analysis and resources are going into it. Would you say than ever before?

Weiner: More than ever before, absolutely. And responsive to the threat as it changes. And that's how our program was designed to be.

CTC: Given there is a large Jewish community in New York City, presumably the Pittsburgh attack only added to your concerns?

Weiner: I would say Pittsburgh is the manifestation of a lot of our concerns rather than the initiator of them. An attack of this sort is something that we've been protecting against for many years. We now have evidence of why that's been so necessary. We had the resources in place in the immediate aftermath of Pittsburgh to surge vehicles and officers and other target-hardening measures across New York City to protect the Jewish community. That's been what we've been doing and training for the past 17 years in response to incidents of terrorist violence regardless of the target.

Teubner: Our investigators and analysts have also had robust engagement with the Jewish community, sharing information on the current threat environment for situational awareness.

CTC: Do you assess the threat to media organizations has gone up?

Teubner: I think that the threat to news organizations has not necessarily increased, but the threat has become more diverse. The threat to media organizations has been relatively consistent and around for a while; we saw the targeting of the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* and the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*. Part of what is likely making the threat more diverse now is the

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c   Editor's note: According to U.S. authorities, Kourani allegedly conducted surveillance of potential targets in the United States, "including military and law enforcement facilities in New York City." See "Two Men Arrested for Terrorist Activities on Behalf of Hizballah's Islamic Jihad Organization," U.S. Department of Justice, June 8, 2017.

persistent and pervasive us-versus-them narrative that is playing out in the body politic of the United States and globally, which can potentially lead to radicalization when exploited by extremists to encourage violence.

CTC: And social media is creating an echo chamber for all spectrum of ideological motivation, right? And providing people with a sense that there are other people like them who think like them and might support what they might want to do, and this can propel people to action more quickly.

Weiner: I think that's true. Organized groups and lone individuals both realize that the best way to amplify a message is to attack the media. With social media, that's been even more easily done. In 2013-2014, we started to notice a trend that we call "dying live," where people look to social or conventional media to livestream their acts of violence, whether directed against themselves, others, or both. There was an incident in Virginia where a newscaster was killed on camera in the middle of a broadcast.[7] In France, a police officer was killed and his three-year-old son was on the couch while the perpetrator livestreamed his manifesto confession online.[8] The unhappy convergence of violence and social media has created a very ripe operating environment for groups to turn up the volume.[9]

CTC: Let's turn to the question of unconventional threats against New York City. Back in 2003, there was an aborted al-Qa`ida plot to launch a poison-gas attack targeting the New York subway.[10] With the rise of the Islamic State, we've seen a terrorist group that has used and developed chemical weapons.[11] In the summer of 2017, we saw an alleged terrorist plot thwarted in Sydney, Australia, by a cell that allegedly not only plotted to blow up a passenger jet but also was in communication with an Islamic State controller in Syria on how to make a poison-gas dispersal device.[12] And in June 2018 in Cologne, Germany, we saw the thwarting of an alleged plot involving an extremist who allegedly managed to make a significant quantity of ricin. The alleged Cologne plotter was suspected to be in touch with at least two Islamic State-linked figures overseas and to have received advice on how to make ricin, as well as most likely consulting an online jihadi video tutorial.[13] Is there growing concern from your perspective over the threat that terrorists could target New York City with such types of weapons?

Teubner: There is a lot of thought that goes into this threat within the Intelligence and Counterterrorism Bureaus. Disrupted plots and arrests in the U.S., Germany, and France over the summer of 2018 highlight continued interest in conducting attacks using ricin by extremists motivated by ISIS and the group's propaganda.[14] We've seen some propaganda posters and some propaganda messages that encourage chemical, biological type attacks, and in some cases we've seen that direct guidance on how to make ricin which allegedly occurred in the disrupted plot in Cologne, Germany.

The guidance for how to make ricin is out there and is relatively simple. When we're looking at this analytically, we think the best way to counter this threat is not only to track the propaganda and available guidance, but provide situational awareness for our customers, both internally and externally, for preparedness and resiliency against the threat. We prepare tactical assessment products that we push out for all uniformed members of service as well as our

private and other federal, state, and local partners.

When we're talking about the Sydney plot specifically, that's when partnership really comes into play and our relationships with foreign partners developed by our overseas liaison officers as well as the FBI and other partners through the Joint Terrorism Task Force; it's all vital for maintaining awareness of the overall threat environment and the plans and intentions of terrorist groups and their sympathizers.

Weiner: Within the American landscape, it's a pretty competitive marketing environment for terror. After Sandy Hook, after Parkland, after Las Vegas—and those aren't even ideologically driven acts of terrorism—how do you continue to up the ante to shock people and horrify them? A chemical attack has a potency in people's imagination wherever it's deployed that's unique. We saw that in the U.K. with Salisbury. ISIS understands that fully. If they can do DIY to chemical weapons the way they've done it with more conventional terrorism tactics, that would change the playing field substantially.

CTC: It seems that the 2017 Sydney plot, even though it was a bit of an outlier, was a potential game changer because according to Australian authorities the aviation attack dimension of the plot involved the Islamic State successfully arranging for bomb components—essentially a partially constructed device—to be airmailed to the cell in Australia.[15] I've referred to this new development as an IKEA-style of terrorism. Wannabe terrorists don't need to go off and get training in a jihadi encampment overseas if they can just get the parts sent to them. The combination of people in the West willing to carry out attacks and people able to get them the bomb parts could change the nature of the threat.

Weiner: We view Australia as one of those outliers that might be an augury of things to come. Whereas the average violent extremist will still take it upon him or herself to do something a lot more readily accessible than to make a mubtakkar device,[d] you have skilled folks out there who are able to take on this much more specialized knowledge, perhaps with the help of people overseas, and this poses a significant concern.

Teubner: The Australia plot in particular forced us to shift our thought on the threat of an external operation from ISIS, or any terrorist group; in this case a directed plot that does not involve deployed operatives but is instead extremists based in country receiving parts from overseas and possible online, remote communications. This could potentially increase an individual's capabilities and lethality, and further challenges law enforcement capabilities to detect and disrupt by obfuscating some of the indicators of an advancing plot.

CTC: Speaking of unconventional weapons, the Islamic State has developed and used drones within Syria and Iraq as weapons.[16] We have not yet seen a single attack in the West using drones. But there is rising concern about the potential threat that they could pose.[e] From a New York City perspective, what is the threat assessment from your office about drones and what can be done to mitigate the threat and to protect against it?

Teubner: The same way that we would put out awareness products for ricin or terrorist incidents, we do the same for the potential for weaponized remotely piloted aircraft (RPAs)/drones. There's a lot of work and information sharing between the analysts and the officers that are looking at this from the mitigation point of view. From the analytic perspective, we not only review reports of terrorist groups' use of drones in conflict zones but also reports of a variety of actors, from criminal gangs to opposition groups, who have attempted to use weaponized RPAs for violence. What we haven't seen yet from terrorist groups is the guidance for weaponization of drones, and we're consistently looking for it.

CTC: Guidance to do it or *how* to do it?

Teubner: How to do it. How to weaponize a drone, how to use a drone for violent incident. We've definitely seen the propaganda from the conflict zone demonstrating their capability, but less so in that package of specific step-by-step guidance, in the same way that we saw guidance for vehicle rammings, knife attacks, and IEDs.

CTC: According to one counter-CBRN specialist we recently interviewed, what is absolutely vital in terms of mitigating the impact of a potential unconventional weapons attack is educating the public about the threat[17] and that this can help prevent a dangerous stampede, or excessive panic and fear.

Weiner: Yes. We do extensive red-cell exercises, tabletop exercises, particularly around exactly what you've just described, which is how do you manage your incident response and marry that up with your outward-facing communication strategy. We do extensive training for just that, especially in an unconventional attack.

We have to have coordination. We have to make sure that information that is sensitive is protected, but that as much information as possible is disseminated to the public. The Department has done a really good job of toeing that line very carefully. Even if you look at what happened [on December 13, 2018] with the series of emails threatening explosions throughout the country, Bitcoin ransom demands, NYPD was one of the first to publicly say "this is our assessment of the threat. We don't view it as credible."[18] We recognize the need to speak to the public early and often in the course of an incident, in the aftermath of an incident, and in preparation for the next potential incident. That helps the public be more aware and more resilient and have the trust that we know what we are doing so they can focus on living their lives.

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d   Editor's note: The al-Mubtakkar al-Farid (which translates to "unique invention") was the name of a poison gas dispersal device developed by al-Qa`ida-linked jihadis in Afghanistan before 9/11. Al-Qa`ida planned to deploy the devices in an aborted 2003 plot targeting the New York subway. For more, see George Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm: The CIA at America's Time of Crisis* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), p. 273-274; Ray Kelly, *Vigilance: My Life Serving America and Protecting Its Empire City* (New York: Hachette Books, 2015), p. 212-213; Aimen Dean, Paul Cruickshank, and Tim Lister, *Nine Lives: My Time as MI6's Top Spy Inside al-Qaeda* (London: Oneworld, 2018), ch. 6-7.

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e   Editor's note: On December 23, 2018, the British newspaper *The Sunday Times* reported that "security sources say sketches of drones designed to deliver bombs were discovered during a recent terrorist investigation in the UK. British businesses have also been warned that Islamist terrorists are seeking to mount attacks using a drone armed with explosives or chemicals." Tim Shipman, "Al-Qaeda terror group returns to target airliners and airports," *Sunday Times* (U.K.), December 23, 2018.

Teubner: And we do assessments before all major events in the city. Our analysts consider the event in the context of the current threat environment, to include any recent incidents that may impact the security situation and think through the potential tactics that could be used against that event, to include CBRN. We get that assessment out to the uniformed officers for their awareness—and we also provide potential indicators of a threat that they might see beforehand. We also produce a version of that event assessment for our private-sector partners through the NYPD Shield website, so that that assessment gets out to the widest possible audience for their awareness and preparedness and also as a force-multiplier for potential early detection and disruption.

CTC: Women have played vital roles in U.S. counterterrorism efforts. You're both in senior leadership positions at the NYPD. What is your message to women who are thinking about embarking on a career in counterterrorism?

Weiner: My deep and abiding message would be one of encouragement. The counterterrorism mission—which keeps us up at night and wakes us up in the morning—is as rewarding as it is demanding. It is important for younger women who are starting out in their careers to recognize that they have female mentors and role models, more than ever before. It is, of course, challenging, as with any other busy job where you have to balance work life with home life. But to know that the work that takes you away from your family supports a mission that people's lives and loved ones depend on is intensely rewarding. There is no better career path, in my view.

Teubner: I agree. I strongly encourage young women to get into the field of national security, counterterrorism, and to recognize that there are different roles to play. I think that there are women that are going to want to be engaged at the very granular level, operational level, to be out in the field, engaging. And then there are women that will want to do the analysis and take a strategic look at the threat. And hopefully, as more women get into counterterrorism work, they will have role models in senior leadership and recognize that there are many different pathways to success in this field. Rebecca and I started out in different positions, and we have different backgrounds, but we ended up here working together and can show hopefully younger analysts and younger women that there [are] many different ways to break into this field. I have had the privilege of working for and with some really wonderful, smart, inspiring women throughout my career. It is a field in which there is a camaraderie that comes out of that that is, I think, hard to find in other careers. That sense of purpose is very rewarding and helps drive you every day.

CTC: What keeps you up at night?

Weiner: There are many ways to wreak havoc and import mayhem into our daily operating environment. You have your parade of terribles. At the far end of the spectrum would be a drone flying over New York City airspace that's been weaponized by some kind of chemical agent. At the other end of the spectrum is something we have already seen and expect to keep seeing—such as a vehicle ramming or edged weapon attack. The fact is that holistically, all of these elements have to be properly resourced to provide for mitigation opportunities, and we do that. We try to make sure that we spend our days thinking about this parade so that we don't have to spend our nights dealing with them.

CTC: What makes you sleep better at night?

Weiner: Something that really needs to be emphasized is that NYPD is unique—and particularly so among municipal law enforcement entities. It has two dominant strengths that have allowed us to understand threats as they evolve and mitigate them. First is the diversity of the Department, which became majority minority in 2006. This is unparalleled within similar agencies across the country. Second is the domain knowledge of the analysts and the investigators that support our operations—knowledge that enables us to understand cultural norms, differentiate signal from noise, and detect anomaly quickly enough to respond to it.

CTC: You're saying it's a police department that reflects and understands not just the city but the world.

Weiner: Exactly. And that's a really important part of the story of what we do and all of the efforts that support what we do analytically.

Teubner: Just to build on that point—because the threat is so diverse—we recognize the importance of partnerships, collaboration, and information sharing. It builds not only a better understanding of the threat environment here and globally, but it builds resiliency throughout the community, throughout the city. Having the trust of the community is important. We want to know what the community is sensing, what they're feeling, what they're seeing. That's why we stress so strongly "see something, say something." It helps us understand what's happening on the street in a much broader way, making us well-positioned to counter the threat. And we're always looking to adapt and evolve.

Weiner: The threat is diverse, but so are we. The threat is dynamic, and so are we.   CTC

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The Evolution of Extreme-Right Terrorism and Efforts to Counter It in the United Kingdom

By Graham Macklin

The murder of Jo Cox MP by a white supremacist on June 16, 2016, in the midst of the E.U. Referendum campaign catapulted the issue of extreme-right terrorism to the forefront of British politics. As the electoral fortunes of extreme-right political parties in the United Kingdom have declined, racist revolutionary violence has reemerged as a significant concern for British authorities. The focal point has been National Action—a small, overtly national socialist *groupuscule* that in December 2016 became the first extreme-right group to be banned in the United Kingdom since 1940 and the first ever such group to be proscribed as a 'terrorist' organization. British authorities were subsequently confronted with a new networked threat posed by clusters of activists who continued to operate clandestinely after the ban, as well as a larger and more nebulous threat from extreme right-wing 'lone actors' and have responded with an increasingly coordinated and multi-layered approach.

The electoral rise of the British National Party (BNP) from 2001 onward until its implosion in 2010 eclipsed the extreme right's violent, racist, revolutionary fringe. Yet, despite the BNP's 'quest for legitimacy' at the ballot box, violence and terrorism have remained a persistent feature of the broader extreme right landscape. The 1999 terrorist campaign by David Copeland, the so-called Soho nail bomber, which left three dead including a pregnant woman and her unborn child, was only the starkest example. In the 20 years since Copeland, British police have arrested numerous extreme-right motivated individuals for terrorism-related offences. However, the number of arrests has done little to alter the overall threat assessment, largely unchanged since 1999, that if an extreme-right terrorist attack came, it was 'more likely' to come from a 'lone actor' like

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Copeland than an organized conspiracy.

Anders Behring Breivik's bomb attack in Oslo, Norway, and the subsequent massacre on Utøya in July 2011 caused security services across Europe to revisit their assessment of the overall severity of the threat posed by extreme-right lone actors and to devote extra resources to the phenomenon. In Britain, then Home Secretary Theresa May informed the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy on December 17, 2012, that after Breivik, there had been an "increased focus upon" the extreme right. The government "enhanced" the capabilities of the National Domestic Extremism Unit and allocated more resources to the issue in general, which included ensuring the "Channel programme" adequately addressed violent right-wing radicalization, too.[1]

The increased seriousness of the threat was demonstrated by the murder of Mohammed Saleem, an elderly Muslim man who was killed on April 29, 2013, by Pavlo Lapshyn, a Ukrainian student on a work visa who had been in the United Kingdom for a mere five days. Lapshyn remained at large, his killing unrecognized as the opening shot in a one-man terrorist campaign. Following the murder of the British soldier Lee Rigby by two jihadis several weeks later, and though not directly connected to it, Lapshyn detonated several bombs outside mosques in the West Midlands between June and July 2013 in an effort "to increase racial conflict." Had he got his timings right (Lapshyn's third bomb, outside a Tipton mosque, exploded when the building was empty), his attacks could have been devastating.[2] After his arrest, Lapshyn confessed to Saleem's killing—"I have racial motivation and racial hatred"—leading the authorities, belatedly, to recognize the murder as an act of extreme-right terrorism.[3]

National Action

Lapshyn's actions again caused the authorities to review their responses to extreme-right violence just as a new threat was emerging. Politically, the extreme right was at a low ebb. The BNP had imploded amidst bitter internal strife while the English Defence League, the foremost anti-Muslim street movement, having lost momentum from 2011 onward, continued its atrophy with the resignation of its leader in October 2013.[4] Against this backdrop of organizational weakness—which has only increased with the passage of time—a small, overtly national socialist group called National Action (NA) appeared.[5] Founded in 2013 by two young activists, Ben Raymond and Alex Davies, who had met online, NA quick-

ly gained between 100 and 150 adherents.[a] Many were teenagers attracted to the group's distinct stylized aesthetic with its striking visual imagery and streetwear redolent of the German Autonomous Nationalists.[6][b] NA staged a series of "Hitler was Right" demonstrations and other provocative anti-Semitic stunts designed to court publicity and outrage in equal measure.[7] It gained national attention after an individual on the periphery of the group, Zack Davies, attempted to murder a Sikh dentist using a machete, in apparent revenge for Lee Rigby's murder. The fact that NA had also begun participating in outdoor training camps, including one allegedly led by Russian MMA fighter Denis Nikitin,[8] also heightened alarm concerning the group's trajectory.

On June 16, 2016, amidst the increasingly toxic rhetoric saturating the E.U. Referendum campaign, Thomas Mair, a far-right extremist, stabbed and shot Labour MP Jo Cox to death as she arrived at a constituency meeting in Birstall, West Yorkshire. He received a life sentence (without the possibility of parole) for his actions. Despite longstanding racist and white supremacist views,[9] Mair had little, if any, contact with domestic extreme-right organizations. He had, however, bought numerous publications directly from the National Alliance in the United States, including guides on improvised munitions, which he began purchasing 10 days after Copeland's 1999 bomb attacks.[10] How Mair, a reclusive and socially isolated individual, acquired his (stolen) firearm remains one of the investigation's unanswered questions.[11][c]

NA glorified Mair as a "hero." One NA Twitter feed threatened "Only 649 MPs to go #WhiteJihad." Asked to confirm his name in court after his arrest, Mair stated "My name is Death to traitors, freedom for Britain"—the only words he spoke after his arrest.[12] NA adopted it as a mantra, using it as a slogan on its now defunct website. Police were increasingly concerned by the numbers of young people either involved with the group directly or within its wider orbit. During the course of 2016, they arrested 22 NA activists.[13] This figure included Jack Coulson, a 17-year-old who, on the day in June that Mair murdered Jo Cox, had proclaimed on social media that "he's a hero, we need more people like him to butcher the race traitors."[14] Police arrested Coulson the following month after he

posted images of a homemade pipe-bomb on Snapchat.[d]

In December 2016, then Home Secretary Amber Rudd announced NA's proscription under section 3(3)(a) of the Terrorism Act, meaning that "belonging to or inviting support for the group" was now a criminal offense, carrying a sentence of up to 10 years' imprisonment.[15] NA thus became the first extreme-right group to be banned by the British state since 1940 and the first ever to be banned for being "concerned with terrorism." Mair's actions were frequently cited as a catalyst for the ban, though Rudd stated that the decision had already been taken prior to his trial but she did not table the debate in the House of Commons until after it had concluded to avoid prejudicing the outcome.[16]

Predictably, raising the legal stakes did little to deter a hardcore contingent of former NA activists from "high risk" activism. Initially, Raymond sought to circumvent the ban by reorganizing former NA militants under the umbrella of the National Socialist Network, which he conceived as a fluid, amorphous movement rather than as a distinct "entity." Raymond cited the British jihadi extremist grouping al-Muhajiroun and its flouting of successive banning orders as a template, believing such a model would enable activists to continue to operate, though his plans collapsed following their media exposure by anti-fascists.[17] Other activists founded new organizations, notably Scottish Dawn and National Socialist Anti-Capitalist Action (NS131), both of which were subsequently banned in September 2017 as synonyms for NA.[18]

Other former NA militants opted for clandestine activity.[19] On the eve of proscription, Raymond and Davies held a secure conference call with their regional organizers to determine their response. Christopher Lythgoe, the northwest NA leader who played a prominent role within the group, urged defiance. He sent a flurry of emails to other activists. "Long term we'll keep moving forward just as we have been," he wrote in one. In another he stated, "We're just shedding one skin for another."[20] Two hours after receiving this email, Alex Deakin, the West Midlands NA organizer, set up an encrypted Telegram group ("Triple KKK Mafia") as a channel for further activity and discussion. At its peak, 21 people were members while another, more select group, called "Inner" had seven subscribers. While the West Midlands group ceased public activity, militants continued to meet up, recruit, and propagate increasingly hardline messages calling for "race war."[21]

One prominent figure within both Telegram groups was Lance Corporal Mikko Vehviläinen, a professional soldier who had served with the British Army in Afghanistan.[22] "I'm only in to learn useful combat skills," he commented in one email. Of Finnish descent, Vehviläinen had been in contact with Pohjoismainen vastarintaliike (PVL),[23] the Finnish branch of the Nordiska Motståndsrörelsen (Nordic Resistance Movement), and was also active on both a racist Christian Identity forum and a leading white supremacist website, Stormfront. Obsessed by thoughts of a racial apocalypse and impending civilizational collapse, Vehviläinen stockpiled weapons at his home.[24] During his time in the British Army, he also drew other serving soldiers into his orbit while advising those involved in the

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a   Raymond, a University of Essex politics graduate, had worked as a double-glazing salesman and in a job center assisting claimants. Davies, a former Young BNP member, was a Warwick University student but failed to complete his studies as a result of his activism. After NA was banned, police arrested both men in September 2017 on suspicion of NA membership, though neither was ultimately charged. In "National Action: The new parents and the neo-Nazi terror threat," BBC, November 12, 2018, BBC reporter Daniel De Simone notes that Raymond was also arrested on suspicion of possessing terrorist material and remained under investigation at the time his report was filed.

b   The 'Autonomous Nationalists' represent a distinct sub-cultural youth trend within Germany's extreme right that copies the aesthetics and militancy of radical left and anarchist groups.

c   Mair's murderous actions seriously increased the cost of security assistance for MPs, which rose sharply from £170,576 in 2015/2016 to £2,550,954 in 2016/2017, a 15-fold increase. See "Cost of MPs security rises by £2m following murder of Yorkshire's Jo Cox," *Yorkshire Post*, November 17, 2017.

d   Coulson was given a three-year youth rehabilitation sentence but was arrested again in 2018 after downloading a terrorist manual. This time he was jailed. See "Four years for Nazi teen who downloaded terror handbook," BBC, July 19, 2018; "Neo-Nazi pipe bomb teenager given rehabilitation order," BBC, February 13, 2017.

Inner Telegram chat group that they should join, too. "If we get enough of us in the Army, we'll be in the right place when things start to collapse." At least four NA activists had been, or were, attempting to join the British Army when police intervened.[25]

Deakin's arrest in the spring of 2017, following a police investigation into racist stickers at Aston University in Birmingham, led to the discovery of the Telegram chat groups on his phone. Deakin's poor security led to three consecutive and interlocking trials that saw numerous activists jailed for NA membership.[26] Deakin and Vehviläinen were both convicted of NA membership for which they received eight years. Deakin was additionally convicted of possessing bomb-making manuals and instructions as well as a publication entitled "Ethnic Cleansing Operations," which he had sent to Raymond and several other contacts. Deakin was subsequently convicted of inciting racial hatred together with three other NA activists as a result of the Aston University case. The third and final trial in 2018 saw five more activists convicted of NA membership, including the stepson of a former musician with the seminal "white power" band Skrewdriver, who was also convicted for possessing a bomb-making manual.[27]

In the northwest, NA also continued to operate covertly. Here, Christopher Lythgoe, who harbored paramilitary fantasies, operated a private gym for "violent training sessions" at a disused Warrington warehouse set up with £1,000 from NA leader Alex Davies, who, according to the BBC, then visited it, together with other activists, after the ban.[28] Acting on information from a former member who had defected to an anti-fascist group, police arrested this northwest cell for conspiring to murder Labour MP, Rosie Cooper, and a local police officer.[29] Jack Renshaw, a former Young BNP activist who was allegedly part of this cell, later pleaded guilty to threatening to kill the police officer (who was investigating him for alleged child sex offenses) and preparing an act of terrorism, namely the purchase of a machete with which he intended to murder Cooper.[30] Lythgoe and another activist were convicted of NA membership, receiving sentences of eight and six years, respectively.[31] The jury failed to agree on a verdict as to whether Renshaw and two others were NA "members."[32]

A Central Node in an International Network
From the outset, NA has been a central node in a violent international militant network. Ben Raymond and other NA activists cultivated ties with militants in Germany, the Baltics, and Scandinavia, including the (recently banned) PVL with whom Raymond posed for photographs with guns. There is also evidence of NA activists visiting the Azov Battalion, formerly a far-right militia fighting Russia forces, in Ukraine.[33][e]

Through the now defunct Iron March forum, Raymond also encountered a young American activist, Brandon Russell who, after visiting NA in London during the summer of 2015,[34] returned to the United States to establish Atomwaffen Division (AWD)—an increasingly nihilistic, cultic group immersed in lurid race war fantasies and "anti-system" rhetoric that became increasingly influenced by veteran Nazi activist James Mason, an acolyte of the murderous 1960s cult leader Charles Manson.[35] AWD activists have since been involved in five murders.[36] Former NA activists have retained con-

Darren Osborne (U.K. Metropolitan Police)

tact with AWD—firstly, through the System Resistance Network (SRN), a small *groupuscule* that emerged during the summer of 2017, and thereafter, through an offshoot calling itself Sonnenkrieg Division (SKD), a racist and violently misogynistic group of former NA and SRN activists who style themselves as "atomwaffen with less guns." Three SKD activists, aged 17, 18, and 21, were arrested on terror charges on December 6, 2018. The two teenagers were subsequently charged.[37]

Lone Actors
The broader contextual drivers of extreme-right violence in the United Kingdom, particularly in relation to lone actors, appear to derive, at least in part, from a process of reciprocal radicalization. Max Hill Q.C., formerly the Independent Reviewer of Terrorist Legislation, stated that "in my clear view it [extreme-right terrorism] has grown in reaction to the [jihadi] terrorist atrocities on Westminster Bridge, London Bridge and at Manchester arena," which, between March and June 2017, claimed 36 lives and injured over 200.[38] Seemingly, the most obvious expression of this reciprocal dynamic occurred on June 19, 2017, when Darren Osborne drove a van into a crowd gathered outside Finsbury mosque in north London, killing a worshipper. Osborne had planned to drive his van into the annual Al Quds Day march in central London, but when that proved impossible, he drove around the city until a target presented itself. Reflecting the findings of academic research on lone-actor terrorism,[f] Osborne was, in hindsight, extraordinarily indiscreet. Observed to be "mentally agitated and disturbed," he leaked details of his intentions the night beforehand, telling drinkers in a Cardiff

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e   The Azov Battalion has since become a formal regiment of the Ukrainian National Guard.

f   In *Lone-Actor Terrorism, Policy Paper 4: "Leakage" and Interaction with Authorities* (London: RUSI, 2016), authors Clare Ellis and Raffaello Pantucci observe that extreme-right perpetrators were far more likely to post telling indicators online; 41% of their leakage occurred on the internet, reaffirming this as a crucial sphere for interdicting plots.

pub that he would "kill Muslims" and was a "soldier." Challenged by a fellow drinker—a serving soldier who asked which regiment he was in—Osborne replied, "You'll find out tomorrow."[39]

A note recovered from the van in the aftermath made clear, however, that Osborne harbored a range of anti-Muslim grievances beyond jihadi terrorism, including, most notably, the Rotherham child sexual exploitation scandal,[40] which has, arguably, played an equally large role in radicalizing and mobilizing extreme-right activists as has the threat of "Muslim" terrorism. Indeed, devices seized by police and testimony from his partner highlighted that in the weeks before the attack, Osborne had become "obsessed" with Muslims after watching the BBC drama "Three Girls" about "grooming" in Rochdale.[41] Thereafter, he immersed himself in anti-Muslim media produced by Britain First and former EDL leader Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (aka Tommy Robinson).[42] "Did the internet play a major role—yes it did," remarked Metropolitan Police Counterterrorism Command Commander Dean Haydon after Osborne was sentenced to life, with a minimum term of 43 years. "It was part of fueling a hate-filled agenda and that's what led him ultimately into committing these offences."[43]

Osborne was merely the most high-profile case, however. Despite the recent activity by the networked group National Action, when it comes to extreme right-wing terrorism, lone actors pose by far and away the greatest threat. RUSI's Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism dataset, which analyzed 120 cases from across Europe, highlights that a third of lone-actor attacks since 2000 have been motivated by right-wing extremism, a figure likely to be higher given underreporting of the phenomenon in many countries.[44] While the NA crackdown was intelligence-led, of concern is the fact that right-wing lone actors were less likely to be under active investigation by the authorities than their Islamist counterparts with a large proportion of plots being interdicted by chance as a result of police investigating other offenses or through the incompetence of the perpetrator.[45] In comparison to the jihadi threat, Commissioner Cressida Dick commented in July 2017, "We are dealing here with fewer individuals, less coordinated or organized. But every year we see some with lethal intent brought to justice. As I speak, there are 14 Domestic Extremist individuals in custody, who had lethal capability and intent."[46]

Since 2017, there have been several instances in the United Kingdom of vehicles being utilized to attack Muslims by racist and extreme-right actors, albeit without fatalities.[47] Police have arrested several would-be attackers armed with knives, petrol bombs, and explosives, including individuals as young as 15. To an extent, "far-right-wing ideology" also reportedly informed the worldview of Thomas Wylie, a 14-year-old school boy who, together with another pupil, was convicted in May 2018 of planning a school massacre in North Yorkshire, though the Columbine killers appeared their primary inspiration.[48] If a distinction can be made between the recent cohort of violent right-wing extremists and that of the previous decade, anecdotally at least it would appear to be relational. In other words, the bulk of contemporary lone actors appear 'peripherally' involved in extreme-right groups while earlier cases had involved individuals who, despite acting alone, were, to some degree, 'embedded' within the broader milieu. This currently constitutes a clear challenge for detection and interdiction.[49]

More worrisome for the authorities than the relatively minor public order problems associated with policing clashes between extreme-right activists and their opponents, at least at the present moment, is the broader effort by such groups to stigmatize and antagonize ethnic minority communities and, in so doing, to fragment community cohesion and fuel polarization. The wider impact of this is to erode trust in democracy and democratic institutions. For the authorities, the key challenge is to maintain, and to be seen to maintain, an evenhanded approach in its response to Islamist and extreme-right activism. "I think we don't have parity at the moment in the way that we look at things," observed Deputy Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu, the Senior National Coordinator for Counterterrorism Policing, in early 2018. "But we don't have parity because at the moment, the scale of the threat is not the same." Alive to the potential evolution of this threat, police took "robust action" against NA "because we were determined to stop this [from] becoming the next problem."[50]

Political polarization has undoubtedly been fueled by the degraded political rhetoric accompanying Britain's E.U. Referendum in June 2016, which led to a spike in racist and religiously aggravated offenses following the result.[51] The emotional temperature was further heightened after the 2017 jihadi terrorist attacks, following which several individuals were convicted for inciting violence against Muslims, typically through Facebook posts exhorting readers to "fight back" and to burn mosques and the Qur'an.[52] More broadly, there has been a rise in racially motivated offenses. Police in England and Wales recorded 94,098 hate crimes in 2017-2018, a 17% increase on the previous year. This figure represented a more than doubling in the number of offenses per year since 2012-2013 when 42,255 hate crimes were recorded. Worryingly, the volume of crimes detailed in the Home Office's statistics did not return to the same baseline after each spike.[53][g]

Responding to the Threat

NA represented a specific, networked threat, a dimension lacking from extreme-right terrorism in the United Kingdom since the late 1990s when a faction within Combat 18 (C18) embarked upon a letter-bomb campaign.[54] As Basu told this publication, with regard to the danger posed by NA, this "was the first time we saw anybody who was organized in the XRW [extreme right wing] space in a way that would represent a national security threat."[55] The government's revamped CONTEST strategy (June 2018) also reflected this understanding in its verdict that, prior to 2014, extreme-right activism had been "confined to small, established groups with an older membership, which promoted anti-immigration and white supremacist views" that represented "a very low risk to national security."[56]

While lone actors remain the broader, ongoing threat, what appears to have driven the recent increase in counterterrorism-related convictions has been the spate of NA-related prosecutions, predominantly for offenses related to "membership," which has been a criminal offense since the group itself was banned in December 2016. These arrests have undoubtedly contributed to the proportion

g   Third-party organizations reported sharp increases, too. Tell Mama, an independent hate-crime reporting service, recorded 1,201 verified anti-Muslim hate crimes and incidents in 2017, almost double the number in the previous year. See Tell Mama, *Beyond the Incident: Outcomes for Victims of Anti-Muslim Prejudice* (London: Faith Matters, 2018). Likewise, the Community Security Trust (CST), which affords communal protection to Britain's Jewish community, recorded 1,382 anti-Semitic incidents in 2017, the highest annual total it had ever recorded. *Antisemitic Incidents Report 2017* (London: CST, 2018).

of extreme-right activists in custody for terrorism-related offenses, which has also increased steadily over the past three years. For the year ending March 31, 2018, 29 (13%) of the 228 individuals in custody for terror-related offenses adhered to extreme-right ideologies. The number has more than doubled when compared to the previous year-long period (up nine to 29).[57]

While the bulk of the police and security operational resources remain focused, understandably, upon the jihadi threat, it is noteworthy that between 2017 and the time of writing (early January 2019), the authorities have disrupted four extreme-right plots compared to 12 Islamist plots during broadly the same period.[58] "I don't think we've woken up to it enough," stated Mark Rowley, the Metropolitan Police's outgoing counterterrorist officer, in August 2018. "Now I'm not going to say that it's the same level of threat as the Islamist threat … no pretense that it's exactly the same order of magnitude, but it's very significant and growing, and what I've seen over the last couple of years is a lack of recognition of that."[59]

Terrorist-related arrests were only part of the picture, however. Referrals to the Prevent counterterrorist program have also steadily increased since the Prevent strand of British counterterrorism efforts was retooled in 2011 to include a greater focus on right-wing extremism.[60]

Statistics for the year to March 2018, the latest for which there are figures, show that out of a record 7,318 Prevent referrals, 1,321 (18%) related to right-wing extremism. This represents a 36% increase compared to the previous year-long period. By contrast, Islamist referrals decreased 14% between the two periods. Discussions involving cases related to right-wing extremism at Channel panels, which are chaired by the local authority working with multi-agency partners who meet to collectively assess what intervention might be necessary to support individuals deemed vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism, increased 58%—from 271 individuals in 2015/2016 to 427 in 2016/2017. Of the 394 individuals who subsequently received specialist support from the Channel program, 174 (44%) were referred for concerns related to right-wing extremism—a 40% increase on the previous year's figures (from 124 to 174). For the first time, a similar number of individuals have received Channel support for concerns relating to Islamist and right-wing extremism.[61]

The authorities' evolving threat assessment was also mirrored in the changing institutional architecture of the bodies responsible for countering it. Two previous Independent Reviewers of Terrorist Legislation recommended that the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) extend its remit to include monitoring the threat of domestic extremism.[62] The government accepted this recommendation in September 2017.[63] A meeting of the government's Cobra emergency committee, convened in the wake of Darren Osborne's Finsbury Park attack earlier that year, also appears to have contributed to a wider restructuring. *The Independent* reported that when Prime Minister Theresa May asked for a security assessment of the perpetrator, she was "surprised to be told MI5 [the British security service] had no information and he was not their responsibility."[64] This soon changed. In October 2018, it was announced that MI5 was taking over as the lead intelligence agency investigating the right-wing terrorist threat, though, together with the police, it had, in fact, long monitored the trajectory of the milieu.[65] Within days, two men were arrested, one of whom was subsequently charged with plotting a bomb attack on a London mosque.[66]

Conclusion

While jihadism remains the overarching concern, the threat posed by extreme-right terrorism has increased not just in the United Kingdom but across Western Europe, too. In the 13 years to 2014, the Global Terrorism Index records 20 attacks by extreme-right terrorists, whereas in the three years to 2017, there were 61. Since 2011, 96 people have died in Western Europe during extreme-right attacks, though 77 of these were murdered by a single individual: Breivik.[67] While lone-actor terrorism continues to predominate as the principal concern, the security services have, with a few notable exceptions, successfully interdicted the majority of such plots long before they came close to fruition, although, at times, luck has played a role.[68] However, as the proscription of National Action highlighted, right-wing extremism and its violent potential has continued to evolve. So too has the official response.

The authorities have moved toward an increasingly active, coordinated, and indeed multi-layered response to right-wing extremism. This has involved legislation (for example, banning NA), increased Prevent/Channel work, and greater focus from police and security services, backed up by institutional changes that have put the intelligence agencies at the forefront of monitoring such actors. In short, the reprioritization of right-wing extremism and the increasingly joined-up nature of the response makes it harder to substantiate the claim, in Britain at least, that the authorities still have a "blind spot"[69] when it comes to extreme-right terrorism and political violence.   CTC

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Iranian Resources and Shi`a Militant Cohesion: Insights from the Khazali Papers

By Bryce Loidolt

In January 2007, an Iranian-backed Shi`a militant group known as Asa`ib Ahl al-Haqq (AAH) carried out an audacious attack on an Iraqi-American Provincial Joint Coordination Center in Karbala, Iraq. The head of AAH, a young cleric named Qais al-Khazali, was captured later that year. Declassified interrogation reports from al-Khazali's time in custody reveal new information about al-Khazali's rivalry with prominent Shi`a cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, suggesting that Iranian resources do not necessarily produce militant group cohesion. These intra-sectarian rifts are likely to persist and will complicate Iran's ability to project its influence in the future.

On January 20, 2007, roughly a dozen Shi`a militants infiltrated an Iraqi-American Provincial Joint Coordination Center (PJCC) in Karbala, Iraq. Wearing uniforms resembling those of the U.S. Army, the militants immediately opened fire on the U.S. soldiers' living quarters, killing one and severely wounding three others. The group fled the compound, eventually taking four other U.S. soldiers hostage and executing them in Babil later that evening.[1] The United States would eventually discover that the attack was the work of an Iranian-backed Shi`a militia group known as the League of the Righteous (Asa`ib Ahl al-Haqq or AAH), led by a relatively young cleric named Qais al-Khazali.[2] Al-Khazali was captured alongside his brother and a member of Lebanese Hezbollah and interrogated by U.S. forces later that year.[3] Today, al-Khazali not only continues to lead AAH, but has extended his reach into Iraqi politics. His Sadiqun political bloc garnered 15 of the 48 seats won by the Iranian-influenced Fatih Alliance in the May 2018 Iraqi parliamentary elections.[4]

Al-Khazali's political ascendance has deepened regional concerns about malign Iranian influences, from the Mediterranean coast in Beirut to Tehran through Iraq and Syria, that can destabilize the region.[5] Yet, the degree to which resources and direction from Tehran can effectively serve to consolidate what may be a diverse group of militia commanders representing a variety of political interests has considerable implications for U.S. policy. U.S.

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Central Command's declassification of al-Khazali's interrogation reports from his time in custody (March 2007-January 2010) and researcher access to these documents offer a unique opportunity to assess and evaluate the degree to which Iranian resources contribute to cohesion within the ranks of Shi`a militia groups.[6]

A closer look at al-Khazali's interrogation reports from his time in custody suggests that Tehran's influence may not always produce unity. Throughout the interrogation reports, al-Khazali discusses his personal disagreements with Muqtada al-Sadr, describing al-Sadr as an incompetent and deeply paranoid leader. Al-Khazali even offers to turn other prisoners against al-Sadr. Intra-sectarian divides like the one between al-Khazali and al-Sadr are likely to persist and may challenge Iran's ability to project its influence. Analysts advising the U.S. government on strategy toward Iranian-backed groups should avoid characterizing them as a monolithic bloc and instead show greater appreciation for factors that may lead these groups to diverge from one another.

Qais al-Khazali and Iranian Support

Al-Khazali once served as a trusted aide to Moqtada al-Sadr, the popular Shi`a religious cleric from Baghdad who won the highest number votes in the 2018 Iraqi election. They were once allied. Born in 1974, al-Khazali studied under Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr—Muqtada al-Sadr's father—in the al-Najaf Hawza, a prominent religious seminary. After the elder al-Sadr's assassination in 1999, al-Khazali helped preserve the Sadrist movement in Iraq, and, after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, he served as a trusted assistant to the young Muqtada al-Sadr.[7] Al-Khazali split from al-Sadr's movement after al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi's (JAM) poor performance during the 2004 uprisings in Najaf, which he criticized for not having "the plan, the power, or the weapons to sustain a fight." Al-Khazali then took on a leadership role managing the Iranian-backed "Special Groups," a particularly lethal group of Iranian-backed militias.[8]

Al-Khazali described accompanying a senior delegation of Sadrists to Tehran in 2003,[9] where they were hosted by senior Iranian officials, chief among them Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-Quds Force) Commander Qassem Soleimani and Hajji Yusif, a Quds Force deputy commander.[10] Al-Sadr facilitated the al-Khazali-Tehran link. "Self-conscious" about Iranian influence and seeking some distance between his movement and the Iranians, al-Sadr tasked al-Khazali to serve as a conduit for Iranian support.[11] At this point, Iranian backing for the Sadrists was primarily financial, consisting of $750,000-$1,000,000 but sometimes as much as $2-$3 million U.S. dollars per month.[12] During the 2004 Shi`a uprisings in Najaf, Yusif offered to train al-Sadr's JAM militia members so that they could be "more capable of fighting the occupiers."[13] Al-Sadr agreed, but asked al-Khazali to select individuals who would travel to Iran for training and identify regional commanders for what would become known as the Special Groups.[14]

During his late 2007 interrogations, al-Khazali also traced the finer points of Iranian support. He described Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah training—to include courses on light, medium, and crew-served weapons and Explosive Formed Projectiles (EFPs)—as well as the extent of Iranian direction to the Special Groups.[15] Interestingly, al-Khazali claimed that Iran was sometimes selective in determining which groups received certain types of training. For example, Iran was restrictive in its provision of Surface to Air Missile (SAM) training but was willing to give EFP courses to "anyone."[16] Al-Khazali described how funding made its way into the Special Groups' coffers, as well as the process for smuggling weapons across the Iran-Iraq border.[17]

Critically, al-Khazali admitted during interrogations that he provided "approval and authorization" for the PJCC attack that killed five U.S. soldiers, while also claiming to have been the "sole authorizing authority for operations performed by the 'Special Groups.'"[18] Chiding the coalition for "making a bigger deal out of it [the PJCC attack] than it was meant to be,"[19] al-Khazali disclosed that "the Iranians planned it."[20]

Disputes between al-Sadr and al-Khazali

Analysis of these now publicly available interrogation files confirms Iranian efforts to disrupt U.S. stability operations in Iraq and kill U.S. soldiers, as U.S. General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker highlighted at the time.[21] But a deeper look into these files also reveals the limitations of Iranian resources and support in fostering unity amongst Shi`a militants in Iraq. Instead of pointing toward a cohesive bond between al-Khazali and other Iraqi Shi`a militia leaders based on a shared ideology and benefactors in Tehran, the documents expose deep divisions between fellow Shi`a group leaders.

Under interrogation, al-Khazali was quite critical of his former Iraqi Shi`a militant comrades. When he was questioned about whether al-Sadr's JAM members were fighting in Lebanon, he "laughed and said that a JAM member would not last a second in that fighting."[22] Beyond their lack of military acumen, al-Khazali also claimed that "the followers of al-Sadr are somewhat confused, unstable both religiously and politically."[23]

Al-Khazali also discussed his personal and often petty disagreements with al-Sadr. He described al-Sadr as an incompetent, mercurial, unqualified, and deeply paranoid leader, and even offered to turn other prisoners against al-Sadr. "Sadr is not stable ... [and] he is constantly changing his mind," al-Khazali told his captors.[24] He also described al-Sadr as "not focused, organized, or competent" and a "self-centered" commander who is "famous for getting rid of his leaders as soon as they start to show a shred of competence."[25] In another instance, al-Khazali omitted the cleric from his list of top five "most respected Shi`a leaders."[26]

Al-Khazali further noted that personal enmity between him and al-Sadr, driven by what he perceived to be al-Sadr's jealousy of al-Khazali's apparently "growing popularity" and "gaining too much power," contributed to a rift between them.[27] The rift apparently boiled over when al-Khazali arranged for a prominent cleric to deliver a sermon at the al-Kufa Mosque that described an unqualified "calf"—presumably a metaphor for al-Sadr—running a country when a far more capable "bull"—presumably a metaphor for an Ayatollah—remained sidelined.[28] In the wake of this thinly veiled criticism of al-Sadr's qualifications, al-Khazali feared that al-Sadr was trying to have him assassinated.[29] The divide between al-Sadr and al-Khazali apparently led the latter to take more drastic steps to undermine al-Sadr's influence both prior to and during al-Khazali's incarceration. Al-Khazali told the coalition that before being captured, he had begun to form a committee to "end the dictatorship" of al-Sadr.[30] While in prison, he offered to "form a committee inside the prison to teach prisoners against MAS [Muqtada al-Sadr]."[31] Al-Khazali said he would speak with his fellow prisoners about how they remained imprisoned because of the "mistakes that Muqtada al-Sadr has made."[32]

Qais al-Khazali, center, the leader of Asa`ib Ahl al-Haqq, or League of the Righteous, speaks to his followers during a campaign rally in Baghdad, Iraq, on May 7, 2018. (AP/Hadi Mizban)

The depth of this disagreement laid bare during interrogation belies al-Khazali's attempts in recent years to downplay his differences with the Sadr movement in public. When asked in a 2015 interview about conflicts between his forces and the Sadrists, for example, al-Khazali noted, "There is much more that brings us closer to the Sadrist movement than anything that separates us. It is true that there are some disagreements but we would never go so far as to make them into real conflicts."[33] In an earlier interview, he had similarly claimed that "from our side we do not have a problem with his eminence Muqtada al-Sadr … [We] will not, from our end, allow the dispute to ever expand."[34]

Policy Implications

Taken together and examined in context, the al-Khazali interrogation reports are noteworthy because they expose critical fault-lines and fissures among Iraqi Shi`a militants in 2007. Iraqi Shi`a militants have their own parochial interests and rivalries that will likely shape their future behavior. Iraqi Shiite militia rivalries thus have implications for the development of Iraqi politics and for U.S. policy.

These disputes between al-Sadr and al-Khazali have continued to percolate after the latter's release from prison. In December 2011, al-Sadr called AAH a "group of religion-less killers."[35] In May 2017, al-Sadr also publicly accused al-Khazali and AAH of kidnapping and extorting Iraqi civilians.[36] Beyond these public statements, al-Sadr and al-Khazali's respective supporters have clashed in the streets. In the summer of 2013, fighting between the two groups escalated, with AAH members burning Sadrist-owned shops, followed by eventual gunfire.[37] These 2011-2017 episodes demonstrate that the rifts exposed during al-Khazali's interrogations endure. They are not merely relics of al-Khazali's period in detention.

Subsequent political maneuvers in 2018 suggest that al-Sadr will continue to resist the influence of al-Khazali and the Fatih alliance, at least in the short term. After the leader of Fatih, Hadi al-Amiri, nominated Falih al-Fayyadh, a chief of the pro-Iranian Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) militias, to Minister of Interior, al-Sadr in November 2018 publicly chastised al-Amiri for engaging in "deals … to buy ministries … with external support."[38] "I made an agreement with you, not the corrupt and militias," al-Sadr proclaimed.[39] Al-Sadr insisted on appointing independents as ministers of defense and interior—likely to the chagrin of al-Khazali and his Iranian-backed allies—in order to "preserve Iraq and its independence."[40] Taking passive aim at Iran, al-Sadr went on to proclaim that "our neighbors are our friends and not our masters."[41] This is not to argue that al-Sadr will be able to make a clean break from Fatih or even al-Khazali, however. The PMU remain militarily formidable, and al-Sadr will thus most likely need to engage his political rivals in dialogue and consider the effects his decisions may have on their behavior. Al-Sadr's consideration of these consequences, however, should not be confused as a warm embrace.

It may be analytically tempting to view recipients of Iranian support as uniform in their cooperation with one another. Yet, the al-Khazali interrogation documents reveal that foreign resources do little to preclude Iraqi Shi`a intra- and inter-group factionalism. If this is the case, the United States should consider a nuanced strategy toward Iranian-backed political and militant groups and avoid presupposing any unanimity in their outlook or cooperation with each other. These groups each face different sets of incentives and will thus not respond to U.S. policy instruments uniformly.

Understanding these differences and longstanding fissures among groups supported by Iran has significant implications for U.S. policies dealing with Iraq, Iran, and the Middle East. In May 2018, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the Trump administration's policy toward Iran's nuclear program and destabilizing regional activities. The announcement included a list of desired changes in Iranian behavior, to include calling on Iran to respect Iraqi sovereignty and to allow for the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of Shi`a militias.[42] As the United States implements its Iran strategy, analysts advising the U.S. government should avoid overstating any unifying effect of Iranian support for Iraqi Shi`a political and militant "proxy" groups. Iranian support for Shi`a militias is certainly dangerous and worthy of U.S. policy makers' attention. However, the case of Qais al-Khazali suggests that external support from Tehran may have limited ability to resolve internecine disputes between Shi`a militias within and beyond Iraq's borders.   CTC

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Does al-Qa`ida's Increasing Media Outreach Signal Revitalization?

By Jami Forbes

For several years after the emergence of the Islamic State, al-Qa`ida was overshadowed as the premier jihadi movement, seemingly giving way to a flashier, more adaptive, and more media savvy organization. However, al-Qa`ida appears to be attempting to revamp its public image—possibly signaling a revitalization. Since 2017, the group has significantly increased its media outreach and incorporated statements from al-Qa`ida heir apparent Hamza bin Ladin. This effort is likely to help al-Qa`ida roll back previous criticisms regarding limited communication from senior leaders and a lack of a coherent strategic vision. The outreach may also bolster al-Qa`ida's appeal to a new generation of fighters. In addition, the media statements help to illuminate al-Qa`ida's strategic intent and serve as a reminder to the United States and the West that al-Qa`ida has not abandoned its ambitions to target its far enemies.

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Acconding to the 2018 National Strategy for Counterterrorism, the United States has not been effective at targeting the means by which groups such as al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State inspire, radicalize, and recruit. As a result, the strategy directed that the United States must bolster efforts to "undermine the ability of terrorist ideologies to create a common identity and sense of purpose among potential recruits."[1] Central to any group's ability to draw support and project its ideology are media campaigns, which help to not only inspire action but direct overall strategy.

The Islamic State was particularly effective in the media domain. At one time, the group disseminated regularly-published magazines (Dabiq and then later Rumiyah), along with video productions (to include beheadings), and its "Cubs of the Caliphate" series.[2] The group mastered the use of imagery and historical narratives to inspire support for its movement. Conversely, media outreach has been a shortfall for al-Qa`ida—particularly following the 2011 death of its leader, Usama bin Ladin. The group has faced challenges from limited communication from senior leaders, a failure to vocalize a clear and focused strategy, and an inability to adapt to changing conditions in the Middle East (to include the emergence of its rival, the Islamic State).[3]

However, al-Qa`ida appears to be attempting to reverse these shortfalls. For instance, the group has significantly increased the pace of its statements from its current leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, gradually increased the pace of statements from Hamza bin Ladin (offering him up as a voice for the next generation), created greater cohesion amongst media efforts of its affiliates, and established a new website that provides a repository of speeches and reference materials.[4][a] These efforts suggest al-Qa`ida is attempting to reintroduce its movement to the world, and possibly rebrand its long-term strategy.

In addition, on several occasions in 2018, al-Zawahiri vocalized al-Qa`ida's intent to target the United States. This includes the labeling of the United States as the "first enemy" of Muslims worldwide.[5] Although criticisms of the United States are not new for al-Qa`ida, the pace at which al-Zawahiri is disseminating the messages has changed, providing the opportunity for greater saliency. In addition, these messages serve as a reminder that the group, for whom perceptions of its threat have been overshadowed by the Islamic State, has not abandoned targeting far enemies and its long-term ambition of establishing a caliphate.

Leadership Expands its Media Outreach

Ayman al-Zawahiri has served as the emir of al-Qa`ida since 2011. Al-Zawahiri, who was born and raised in a Cairo suburb, is a trained surgeon and the son of an aristocratic family.[6] As a young man, he was actively involved in efforts to protest the use of heavy-handed tactics against Islamists by the Egyptian government and founded a cell dedicated to replacing the secular Egyptian government with one he perceived to be Islamic when he was only 15 years old.[7] He later participated in the Afghan jihad, forged close ties with bin Ladin, and played an integral role in the development of al-Qa`ida and its overall strategy.[8]

Although al-Zawahiri technically possesses the credentials to lead the movement, he has been criticized for being a "black hole of charisma," and described as "pedantic" and "overbearing."[9] He has also been criticized for going long periods without issuing any public guidance or direction (almost certainly due to concerns such communication could compromise his personal security). For instance, between 2014 and 2015, he went nearly an entire year without making any type of public statement at all.[10]

Since January 2018, al-Qa`ida has released 15 statements attributed to al-Zawahiri, with the most recent released on December

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a   The al-Qa`ida-aligned As-Sahab Media Foundation announced the launch of a website via Telegram on November 6, 2018. The website contains both documents and videos of speeches from leaders and attack footage.

24, 2018.[11] While this may not seem like a significant amount of statements to Western audiences, it reflects a 67-percent increase over the pace of al-Zawahiri's media outreach in 2017. Although al-Zawahiri still lacks the charismatic persona of his predecessor, the increased outreach may help to diminish perceptions of his reclusiveness and to reintroduce him to al-Qa`ida followers and supporters. In addition, al-Zawahiri's unyielding position that the development of a potential Islamic caliphate must be slow and deliberate was likely validated by the apparent contraction of the Islamic State inside Iraq and Syria, helping to position him as the 'wise jihadi's statesman.'[12]

Starting in late 2017, al-Qa`ida also increased the pace at which it disseminated statements from Hamza bin Ladin, the third son of the former al-Qa`ida leader. For example, in 2016, al-Qa`ida released only two statements attributed to Hamza bin Ladin, while since mid-2017, it has released six, with the most recent released in the spring of 2018.[13] Hamza was reportedly one of bin Ladin's favorite sons, and was groomed to one day help lead al-Qa`ida— appearing in propaganda footage alongside his father, undergoing assault training with al-Qa`ida fighters, and preaching sermons to al-Qa`ida rank-and-file.[14]

Al-Qa`ida is likely attempting to draw on Hamza's lineage as the son of Usama bin Ladin to inspire a new generation of fighters, while also providing a "next gen" alternative to al-Zawahiri as the face of al-Qa`ida. Al-Qa`ida appears to be relying in part on Hamza to maintain the symbolic underpinnings of the group. Al-Qa`ida will likely be careful not to overpromote Hamza in order to suppress possible questions of succession or challenges to the current senior leadership cadre, and it may curb his outreach in order to avoid compromising his personal security. However, the group appears to be comfortable in giving Hamza bin Ladin a role in spearheading efforts against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (no doubt seen by the group as a valid fit, owing to his familial and historical ties to the region). More than half of Hamza's statements have focused on criticizing the Saudi regime, whom he has claimed "betrayed Islam and the Muslims with unprecedented treachery."[15]

Reintroducing the Strategic Vision

Perhaps more notable than the pace at which al-Qa`ida has increased its media outreach is the content of al-Qa`ida's messages. An examination of the statements disseminated in 2018 indicates al-Qa`ida is not only attempting to reintroduce its leaders to the world, but it may also be reintroducing its strategic vision as well. Al-Zawahiri has repeatedly outlined a broad strategy, which appears to be grounded by three pillars—the establishment of an expansionist Islamic Emirate (the cornerstone of which is Afghanistan), the adoption of al-Qa`ida's brand of sharia in Muslim countries, and targeting "far" enemies such as the United States. In addition to these broad strategic goals, al-Zawahiri has repeatedly called for unity of effort amongst Muslims and has offered an olive branch to former Islamic State members, stating they are welcome to join al-Qa`ida ranks.

The symbolic importance of Afghanistan was emphasized in at least five of al-Zawahiri's statements in 2018. This includes an August 23, 2018, statement in which al-Zawahiri claimed al-Qa`ida had planted the "seed" for its future state around the "Islamic Emirate" in Afghanistan.[16] He also stated that Muslims needed to join the Taliban and al-Qa`ida in the establishment of a state that would eventually serve an "Islamic jihadi gathering from Turkistan to the Atlantic Coasts."[17][b] This suggests that al-Qa`ida likely attributes the viability of its aspirational caliphate to that of the Taliban and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, and helps to explain al-Qa`ida's continued subordination to the Taliban leader as the Emir Ul Momineen (leader of the faithful).[18]

Similarly, the implementation of sharia law also remains central to al-Qa`ida's narrative. For example, al-Zawahiri mentioned sharia law in each statement he released in 2018, underscoring its significance to al-Qa`ida. On October 11, 2018, al-Zawahiri devoted an entire statement to sharia.[19] In it, he criticized Muslim nations that incorporated secular law and have held democratic elections,

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b   Turkistan is a reference to a historic region that encompasses wide swaths of Central Asia and stretches from Siberia to Iran and Afghanistan.

Al-Qa`ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri (taken from a March 2018 al-Qa`ida media release)

Hamza bin Ladin (taken from video footage released by the Central Intelligence Agency following the 2011 raid on Usama bin Ladin's compound)

calling them "failed experiments" that were representative of the "swamp of the corrupt." Al-Zawahiri further emphasized that in the "call of jihad," there is nothing higher than defending sharia law, and emphasized that sharia—what he referred to as al-Qa`ida's "doctrine of governance"—should never be abandoned. Al-Zawahiri also issued repeated critiques of governments in Muslim-majority countries that al-Qa`ida believed were corrupted by secular law, particularly Egypt, which was mentioned in seven of the 13 statements, and other North African nations such as Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, and Algeria. In January 2018, al-Zawahiri claimed that the "tyrannical regimes" in North Africa had been corrupted and that sharia-based governance was "sacrificed" in these areas in order to please the West.

Finally, al-Zawahiri discussed al-Qa`ida's grievances with the United States in all but two statements in 2018, demonstrating that the group has not abandoned its efforts to target its "far enemy." This includes a March 20, 2018, statement titled "America is the First Enemy of Muslims," in which al-Zawahiri not only advocated for attacks on the United States and its interests but calls for the worldwide Muslim community to unite in the effort.[20] He stated, "Let us fight America everywhere the same way it attacks us everywhere. Let us unite in confronting it, and never divide. Let us unify and never disperse. Let us gather and never become shattered." Furthermore, on September 11, 2018, al-Zawahiri laid out a 14-point missive outlining al-Qa`ida's positions against the United States. In that statement, al-Zawahiri ominously warned that "the battle against America has become inevitable."[21] Should al-Qa`ida attempt to translate the increased rhetoric into operational activity against Western interests, it would signal a shift from its apparent strategy from around 2015 of holding off attacks targeting Western

interests to avoid additional counterterrorism pressure.[c] As former head of the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center Nicholas Rasmussen said in January 2018, al-Qa`ida may be in the process of a pivoting back to an international focus, and there was "never any sense of comfort" that al-Qa`ida's external planning had abated. It appears as if there is growing concern that this shift may become a reality. For instance, in December 2018, U.K. security minister Ben Wallace warned that "al-Qaeda are resurgent. They have reorganised. They are pushing more and more plots towards Europe" and that intelligence had revealed that the group was developing technology to bring down passenger jets.[22]

Al-Qa`ida Affiliates Increasing Cohesion, Share A Global Vision

Al-Qa`ida also appears to be increasing cohesion amongst its global affiliates. The synchronization of media between al-Qa`ida leaders and its affiliates almost certainly helps the group to promote perceptions of upward momentum and unity of effort on a more global scale. On several occasions since early 2017, affiliates have issued joint statements regarding external issues. For example, in February 2017, al-Qa`ida's affiliate in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) issued a joint statement eulogizing Omar Abdul Rahman, aka the "Blind Sheikh," who died while in U.S. federal custody.[23] The statement called for fighters to conduct attacks against U.S. interests to avenge his death. Meanwhile, in September 2017, al-Qa`ida's affiliate in Somalia, al-Shabaab, and AQAP issued nearly identical statements calling for support of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar.[24] When AQIM announced the merger of several armed groups in Mali in March 2017, the groups pledged loyalty to both al-Qa`ida and the Taliban, underscoring that even in a remote area such as Timbuktu, al-Qa`ida affiliates are in line with the movement's strategic messaging.[25] Furthermore, in May 2017, al-Shabaab issued a 55-minute video featuring statements from several senior al-Qa`ida leaders. The narration called the United States the "Satan of our time" and stated that al-Shabaab's jihad is a global one that is not restricted to geographical boundaries.[26]

Outlook

Al-Qa`ida's enhanced media campaign suggests the group is willing to evolve and is likely endeavoring to emerge from behind the shadows of the Islamic State with a renewed vision and a sense of vindication for its more patient strategy. Al-Qa`ida has seen its appeal ebb and flow over time, and it is unclear if its efforts to publicly reinvigorate its movement will translate into any operational successes.[27] However, the rebranding, coupled with the measured roll-out of Hamza bin Ladin as a "next gen" leader, may help the group to connect with and inspire a new generation of fighters. It may also enable al-Qa`ida to increase its appeal to former members of the Islamic State, which is currently stymied by the decline of its

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c   In May 2015, Abu Muhammad al-Julani, the leader of the then al-Qa`ida affiliate in Syria Jabhat al-Nusra, told Al Jazeera that al-Zawahiri had instructed him to avoid launching attacks in the United States or Europe that might jeopardize the group's operations in Syria. Authorities have not publicly disclosed any plot by al-Qa`ida or any of its affiliates targeting Western soil since then. "Al-Qaeda 'orders Syria's Al-Nusra Front not to attack West,'" BBC, May 28, 2015; James Novogrod, "Al-Qaeda in Syria: Our Focus Is Assad, Not West," NBC, May 27, 2015.

own media campaigns.[28]

Through al-Zawahiri's statements, al-Qa`ida has clearly enu-merated its strategy and has provided insight into its potential operational priorities. Al-Qa`ida remains intent on developing an Islamic caliphate, steadfastly resolves to implement sharia law and undermine governments and regimes in the Muslim world that in-corporate secular law and democratic elections, and remains intent on targeting the United States and its "far enemies." This all sug-gests it is positioning its movement for a resurgence.   CTC

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