

Testimony of
Evan F. Kohlmann
with Laith Alkhouri
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"Threats to the American Homeland after Killing Bin Laden: An Assessment"

**Beyond Bin Laden: The Future of Al-Qaida And U.S.
Homeland Security**

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A Biographical Sketch

Evan Kohlmann is a founder and Senior Partner at Flashpoint Global Partners, a New York-based security consulting firm. During the course of his research, Mr. Kohlmann has amassed one of the largest and most extensive open source databases in the world of original documents, communiqués, and multimedia from Al-Qaida and other international terrorist organizations. He has testified seventeen times as an expert witness in U.S. federal courts, and has served at various times as a contract consultant in terrorism matters on behalf of the U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. Department of Justice, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Office of the High Representative (OHR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTFY) at the Hague, the Australian Federal Police (AFP), the U.K. Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Scotland Yard's SO-15 Counter Terrorism Command, the Central Scotland Police, West Yorkshire Police, and the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET). Mr. Kohlmann currently works as an on-air analyst on behalf of NBC News / MSNBC.

"Mr. Kohlmann is certainly qualified to provide expert testimony on [terrorism] issues... Mr. Kohlmann has conducted first-hand interviews of several leaders of terrorist organizations and has reviewed reams of information about al Qaeda... It is apparent that these subjects are Mr. Kohlmann's life work, and he has, therefore, acquired a considerable amount of information and documentation on these subjects."

- U.S. District Judge Mark Kravitz (2/20/08)

"Kohlmann has developed an understanding of terrorist organization structures, operations, and membership, allowing him to speak with authority about Al-Qaeda in Iraq, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Jaish-e-Mohammed. His research and experience have provided him a base of understanding far greater, and far more sophisticated, than of the Court or of jurors... A person lacking Kohlmann's advanced knowledge of JeM and LeT essentially would not be able to recognize the information on Khan's hard drive as information that might link a person to JeM or LeT."

- U.S. District Judge William S. Duffey Jr. (6/1/09)

Mr. Kohlmann holds a undergraduate degree in International Politics from the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service (Georgetown University), and a graduate degree in law from the University of Pennsylvania Law School. While at Georgetown, he worked as a research assistant to Dr. Mamoun Fandy in the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies (CCAS). Kohlmann is also the recipient of a certificate in Islamic studies from the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding (CMCU) at Georgetown University, where he was mentored by Dr. John Voll.

I.) Introduction

Over the last decade, one of the central pillars of U.S. counterterrorism policy has been to aggressively target Al-Qaida's senior leadership in their longtime sanctuary in regions in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The prevailing wisdom behind this strategy is quite simple: by mounting direct pressure on Usama Bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and others within the highest echelons, Al-Qaida will presumably lack the time, resources, and opportunity to conceive complex international terrorist plots threatening U.S. homeland security. As President Obama explained in 2009 during a televised interview, "This is the heart of it. This is where Bin Laden is. This is where [his] allies are. It's from here that you see attacks launched not just against the United States, but against London, against Bali, against a whole host of countries." Indeed, the American government has invested billions of dollars and tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers in order to carry out this mission and deny Al-Qaida the use of a central base in South Asia. On May 1, the mission culminated in the successful killing of Usama Bin Laden at a hideout in Abbottabad, Pakistan by a team of U.S. Navy SEALs. Evidence recovered by the SEALs reportedly shows that Bin Laden continued to play a direct operational role in conceiving and micro-managing terrorist plots against the United States.

Were we still stuck in October 2001, this might be the end of the narrative for Bin Laden's jihadi movement. However, much has indeed changed in the world since those early days of the battle against Al-Qaida. The gaps in Al-Qaida's central leadership created by the deaths of former luminaries like Abu Hafs al-Masri and Abu Laith al-Liby have been filled by new younger figures like Abu Yahya al-Liby. With the blessings of Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, regional Al-Qaida leaderships have emerged in critical locations such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and North Africa. Meanwhile, a new generation of homegrown "lone wolf"-style jihadists has emerged (including many U.S. and European nationals) who may lack the military skills to plan the next 9/11, but whose passion for violence and bloodshed can nonetheless have deadly consequences.

II.) Reaction to the Death of Bin Laden

To understand what the future of Al-Qaida will now be, one must first assess the immediate reactions to the death of their revered former leader among its most diehard supporters. Late on the evening of May 1, Al-Qaida's online social networking forums were shaken awake in a spasm of activity as jihadi militants from around the globe rushed to log in and discover for themselves if reports of the killing of Bin Laden were really true. With Al-Qaida's remaining leaders still hiding quietly out of sight for the time being, these online forums provide one of the most compelling available windows into the thinking of Bin Laden's cadre as they mourn his passing.

At first, the response was largely one of chaotic disbelief. Stunned forum participants insisted that the announcement had to be part of a new scheme devised by the CIA to trick and demoralize Bin Laden's diehard supporters. With their patience quickly exhausted by the deluge of anxious incoming inquiries, ill-tempered forum administrators began threatening to permanently ban anyone who even dared to express sorrow based on "unverified crusader rumors" of Bin Laden's demise. Finally, on May 6, Al-Qaida's central leadership issued a formal communiqué acknowledging Bin Laden's "martyrdom." The message defiantly insisted,

“Shaykh Usama didn’t build an organization to die with it and go away with it... The university of faith, Quran, and jihad that was founded by Sheikh Usama bin Laden has not and will not close its doors... those of us from the Al-Qaidat ul-Jihad network vow to Allah to continue on the path of jihad taken by our leaders, headed by Sheikh Usama, without hesitation or question, and we will not deviate or lean from that.”¹

What first becomes obvious from the discussions taking place on Al-Qaida’s online chat forums is that—no matter what the organization’s leadership may claim in retrospect—the sudden word of Bin Laden’s death came as a nasty shock to his followers, and was undoubtedly a staggering blow. In the hours immediately following news of Bin Laden’s violent demise, Al-Qaida forum users and administrators were also preoccupied with another gnawing concern: the state of their own personal security. By the morning after the raid, media sources were reporting that U.S. Navy SEALs had seized an intelligence jackpot of hard drives, flash data disks, and other records of electronic communications from the Bin Laden compound in Abbottabad. One of the most credible and respected users on Al-Qaida’s top-tier “Shamukh” web forum, “Yaman Mukhadab”, posted a warning to fellow jihadists advising that these were “the most dangerous 72 hours in the struggle of Al-Qaida with the Zionists and Crusaders... in the history of the jihad struggle.”² He cautioned, “it is possible that America has infiltrated mujahideen communications and will seek to unveil the masterminds behind big [terrorist] operations.” He further urged, “As far as I see it, any group of mujahideen that are assigned to an operation should go forward and execute it... without hesitation or delay, and to completely avoid trying to communicate with anyone... or to seek new orders... Stopping and delaying while awaiting something new will not achieve anything, and it won’t change what has already taken place.”³

The palpable sense of melancholy and panic brewing in the hearts of Al-Qaida’s supporters on the web was soon swamped by a tidal wave of raw, unbridled rage, especially after televised images of crowds of jubilant Americans celebrating outside the White House and at Ground Zero were broadcast around the world. One user, “Ta’er Muhajir”, posted an open message on Al-Qaida’s web forums addressed to “you who danced in front of the White House... We, too, will start to dance the next time we hear about a massacre that befalls you, just as we danced when your rotten corpses were spread across the Pentagon and the World Trade Center.”⁴ Another forum user, “Mukhadab ad-Dima” (a nickname which translates to “Drenched in Blood”), pointed to the “big crowds in front of the White House” and demanded, “who will be the hero who will turn their night into day and their morning into hell, and who will renew the September glories—who will follow next in the list of our heroes: Arid Uka, Faisal Shahzad, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, Nidal Hassan... ?”⁵ Echoing this sentiment, jihadi forum user “Jaish al-Islam” scoffed, “they are celebrating the martyrdom of Shaykh Usama, but what they don’t realize is that we are all Usama.”⁶

Even as he acknowledged his “sadness over the loss of our Shaykh Usama Bin Laden”, jihadi forum user “Abu al-Qassam al-Maqdisi” vowed to “continue on this path.” Openly addressing U.S. President Barack Obama, he mocked, “if you think that by killing Shaykh Abu Abdullah you have finished off Al-Qaida, then you are totally delusional... the martyrdom of

¹ <http://shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=108210>. May 6, 2011.

² <http://shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=107305>. May 3, 2011.

³ <http://shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=107305>. May 3, 2011.

⁴ <http://shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=107232>. May 2, 2011.

⁵ <http://shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=107132>. May 2, 2011.

⁶ <http://shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=107100&page=4>. May 2, 2011

Shaykh Usama didn't weaken us and didn't disappoint us—it just gave us more passion to stay steadfast on this path. And if you have killed Usama, then we are all Usama.”⁷ These repeated declarations of defiance inevitably turned to the question of how best to avenge the “martyrdom” of Bin Laden. Another registered user, “Abu Musab al-Maqdisi”, complained, “unfortunately, the only thing I see is men who are crying over nothing... It would have been better to see the knife of Zarqawi being sharpened to the point that I can behold its shine from here.”⁸ He urged fellow Bin Laden supporters, “Beware, and get ready. And I don't know if there is time to say goodbye to your fathers, mothers, wives, children, brothers and neighbors, as time can't wait and the Shaykh can't wait, and now the battle has begun to eradicate the state of infidels, America, and anyone who stands alongside it from within the Muslim lands. It's only a matter of hours. Ohhh, hours are too many, just minutes, and even too much... secondssss... I'm now sharpening my sword so you should be sharpening yours.”⁹

Jihadi forum users have also been tendering their own unsolicited suggestions and insights to Al-Qaida's remaining leadership. In a message titled “Advice and Guidance for the Lions Launching Attacks in the Land of the Enemy, America”, user “Azmarai” addressed “those who will be planning in the coming days, weeks, and months to carry out operations in the United States”: “we aren't merely seeking to kill a soldier or an American civilian here or there, as this doesn't change anything... Our goal is bigger than that... Like our Shaykh Usama ordered us in his messages, it is critical to continue jihadi operations both against the U.S. military and economy... Their economic destruction is ongoing, but it requires more attacks and for the young men to strike at the strategic points of the American economy.” Towards the end of causing catastrophic damage to the U.S. economy, user “Azmarai” suggested a range of possible targets, including targeting hydroelectric dams, “major electricity-producing plants”, nuclear power plants, oil refineries, “Federal Reserve Banks and major financial centers”, and water-purification facilities. “Azmarai” was equally insistent on the need for Al-Qaida and its supporters to specifically “target the major companies that contribute technologically in supporting the U.S. army with information and technology, like the headquarters of DARPA... Killing America's scientists and those who participate in advancing military research is very important... Also target the headquarters of the big weapon manufacturing companies, and specifically targeting their main headquarters that include engineers and experts.”¹⁰

Equally of note is a formal communiqué issued in response to Bin Laden's death by the official team of online couriers responsible for distributing Al-Qaida's digital propaganda. The so-called “Fajr Media Center” included a direct “Message to the American People”:

“We say to you: killing the Shaykh was a big mistake, and a great sin, and a deed that will bring catastrophes upon you that will sink your joy. Obama has sacrificed your blood to remain in his position of power... Obama is not different from his predecessor Bush in anything, as the wars Bush started Obama continued and he didn't do anything to stop them... Do not blame us after today; you elected him and you will pay the price! Armies may protect Obama, but who protects you from our reach?”¹¹

⁷ <http://shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=107175>. May 2, 2011.

⁸ <http://shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=107288>. May 2, 2011.

⁹ <http://shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=107288>. May 2, 2011.

¹⁰ <http://shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=109881>. May 13, 2011.

¹¹ <http://shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=109164>. May 9, 2011.

Fajr Media Center also offered their own message of advice “for the Mujahideen”, urging Al-Qaida supporters to exact a heavy price in revenge for the “martyrdom” of Bin Laden—“the kind of revenge that will make America forget her present euphoria and instead scream with pain.” Echoing the popular sentiments among jihadi forum users, the group advocated “every Muslim mujahid” should “focus on making suitable preparations for any operation against the infidels, and we encourage that the operations be unique, and terribly devastating to the enemy... If the chance comes up, do not waste it, and do not consult anyone in killing the Americans and destroying their economy. The land of Allah is wide and their interests are widespread... We encourage you to launch individual terrorist operations that reap major results but which require only basic preparations.”¹²

III.) Al-Qaida’s Remaining Central Leadership Figures

It is perhaps inevitable that the killing of Usama Bin Laden would serve as a rather dramatic blow to Al-Qaida popular morale. However, Bin Laden’s passing has been particularly difficult to accept for jihadi supporters in light of the litany of other losses the group has endured over the past three years. The list of top-tier casualties suffered by Al-Qaida includes, among others: senior military field commander Abu Laith al-Liby, Al-Qaida Shura Council member Abu al-Hasan al-Masri, senior Al-Qaida explosives expert Abu Khabab al-Masri, senior Al-Qaida operational leader and spokesman Abu Mansour as-Shami, and Al-Qaida Shura Council member and presumed number three-in-command of the group Mustafa Abu al-Yazid (a.k.a. Shaykh Saeed). Al-Yazid’s death alone provoked the release of at least two different audio-recorded messages from Al-Qaida, including a confession from Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri that he was “deeply saddened at the loss.”¹³ The killing of Bin Laden has only managed to create an even larger gaping hole in Al-Qaida’s already unsteady central hierarchy. In the wake of initial news reports about Bin Laden’s passing, one jihadi chat forum user “Abu Zubaydah” posted a message offering his deepest respects “to the family of the martyr... and also Shaykh Ayman Zawahiri, who in a single year lost Shaykh Saeed and now his other companion on the path... By Allah, it is a year of sorrow.”¹⁴

With Bin Laden now gone, the question naturally turns to who will be selected to replace his now vacant position as the overall commander of Al-Qaida. Media speculation in recent days has ranged wildly—from fugitive Yemeni-American cleric Anwar al-Awlaki to a relatively obscure Pakistani jihadi militant named Mohammed Ilyas Kashmiri. Though the identity of Al-Qaida’s new top leader still remains uncertain, the far most likely candidate is Al-Qaida’s present Deputy Commander Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri. Al-Zawahiri, who merged his own Egyptian Islamic Jihad faction with Al-Qaida in 1998, has long stood alongside Usama Bin Laden as his closest advisor. The former Egyptian pediatrician has both played a key operational role in organizing and overseeing international terrorist attacks, and has also simultaneously spearheaded Al-Qaida media efforts—personally appearing in dozens of audio and video recordings released by Al-Qaida’s official media wing (in fact, far more often than Bin Laden himself). With Bin Laden gone, Ayman al-Zawahiri is by far the most recognizable face from among Al-Qaida’s remaining central leadership. He is one of a dwindling number of

¹² <http://shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=109164>. May 9, 2011.

¹³ <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=127650>. July 30, 2010.

¹⁴ <http://as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=37762>. May 2, 2011.

commanders who can claim to be one of the original founders and Shura Council members of Al-Qaida. His essential credibility as an early pioneer of the jihadi movement in Egypt and Afghanistan would be quite difficult to match by any potential challenger vying for control of Al-Qaida.

As far as supporters chatting on top-tier Al-Qaida web forums, there simply has been no serious discussion of any potential Bin Laden successors other than Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri. Al-Qaida's online constituents are so taken with the idea that al-Zawahiri will be the next leader of Al-Qaida that they have taken to casually referring to the group as "Jund Ayman" ("The Soldiers of Ayman"). Forum users have also taken it upon themselves to vigorously contest snarky comments from Al-Qaida critics that "Shaykh Usama made a mistake by merging Al-Qaida with Shaykh Ayman."¹⁵ User "Muheb Ruyat al-Rahman" dismissed these prevalent critiques as "poison" from those "pretending to be sympathizers": "Do you really think our Shaykh Usama couldn't distinguish the worthless from the valuable, or the beautiful from the ugly? Do you think... that he was somehow tricked by Shaykh Ayman? Do you really believe that [Bin Laden]... who refused to surrender his faith in jihad would simply give up on what he judged to be truthful and correct merely in order to satisfy Shaykh Ayman?"¹⁶ Al-Rahman insisted, "Our Shaykh Usama, may Allah have mercy on him, is our Shaykh Ayman, and our Shaykh Ayman is our Shaykh Usama."¹⁷

Nevertheless, this is not to say that the ascension of Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri to the top of Al-Qaida's hierarchy is by any means guaranteed, nor is it necessarily a fortunate development for the organization. Since beginning his career as a jihadi activist in Egypt, al-Zawahiri has acquired a notorious reputation as arrogant, self-serving, and unconscionably ruthless. As early as 1990, at Al-Qaida's own guesthouses in the Pakistani city of Peshawar, mujahideen fighters began to loudly grumble that too many Egyptians—primarily al-Zawahiri's cronies—were being appointed to senior positions in Al-Qaida. Accusations of preferential treatment and corruption began to fly back and forth. Former Al-Qaida lieutenant Jamal al-Fadl later recalled during testimony in U.S. federal court when he finally confronted Usama Bin Laden to complain that "the camp was being run by Egyptian people and the guesthouse—the emir from the guesthouse—is Egyptian and everything [is] Egyptian people and [everyone is] from [the Egyptian] jihad group, and we have people from Nigeria, from Tunisia, from Siberia, [so] why is Egyptian people got more chance than other people run everything?"¹⁸ Some of the dissidents within Al-Qaida felt too "embarrassed" to say this to Bin Laden's face, while others—such as a Libyan fighter named Abu Tamim—were much more vocal with their concerns: "He say, why everything run by Egyptian people?"¹⁹

During an interview in 2007 with the London-based newspaper *Al-Hayat*, Sayyid Imam al-Sharif (a.k.a. "Dr. Fadl")—once a "leading figure" in Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) movement and a founding member of Al-Qaida's own governing Shura Council—personally accused al-Zawahiri of being a "liar", a "gangster", and a "bandit." According to al-Sharif, "Ayman is a charlatan who used secrecy as a pretext... I can't think of anyone in Islamic history who has committed such deceit, fraud, falsification, and betrayal of

¹⁵ <http://shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=110085>. May 16, 2011.

¹⁶ <http://shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=110085>. May 16, 2011.

¹⁷ <http://shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=110085>. May 16, 2011.

¹⁸ *United States v. Usama bin Laden, et al.* S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS). United States District Court, Southern District of New York. Trial Transcript, February 6, 2001. Page 322.

¹⁹ *United States v. Usama bin Laden, et al.* S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS). United States District Court, Southern District of New York. Trial Transcript, February 6, 2001. Page 322.

trust... no one before Ayman al-Zawahiri.”²⁰ When I raised the subject of al-Zawahiri’s status of authority within Al-Qaida in a discussion with former Arab-Afghan mujahid Abdullah Anas, he sighed for a moment and chuckled to himself. “Can you imagine a great religion represented by al-Zawahiri?” he asked me. “It’s a catastrophe.”

In light of al-Zawahiri’s obvious shortcomings, and the likelihood that he will one day meet an end analogous to that of Bin Laden, it behooves us to examine the other potential leadership candidates among the top tier of Al-Qaida’s inner sanctum. Those candidates include:

- **Abu Yahya al-Liby (a.k.a. Hassan Qaid)**

Though he has undoubtedly far slimmer credentials than Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Shaykh Abu Yahya al-Liby has nonetheless also become a strikingly influential figure in the international jihadist movement ever since his stunning escape in July 2005 from a high-security U.S. prison at Bagram air base (near Kabul). At the time of his initial capture in Karachi, Pakistan in the wake of the events of 9/11, Abu Yahya was at most a mid-ranking lieutenant within a faction of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) directly allied with Al-Qaida. At the time, he was best known as an expert in computer media and Islamic jurisprudence. According to fellow former LIFG commander Noman Benotman, Abu Yahya “was a member of the Shariah committee of the LIFG, and he was known within the framework of the LIFG, and joined it relatively early on... almost in 1991... He was there at the end of the Afghan Jihad, meaning with the LIFG... But he wasn’t from amongst the top leadership.”²¹

However, the combination of Abu Yahya’s public speaking abilities, his natural charisma, and the compelling personal credential of having brazenly slipped out of America’s highest security prison in Afghanistan proved to be a powerful cocktail. Less than six months after fleeing Bagram, Abu Yahya began to appear in video recordings produced by Al-Qaida’s official “As-Sahab Media Foundation”—so often, in fact, that his face has become virtually synonymous with As-Sahab. Over the last five years, Abu Yahya has been the principle featured spokesman for Al-Qaida in dozens of audio and video recordings released by As-Sahab—appearing more often than either Usama Bin Laden or Ayman al-Zawahiri. Abu Yahya’s recorded sermons are highly influential, and are recycled and often re-published by other likeminded terrorist organizations like Shabaab al-Mujahideen in Somalia. Though Abu Yahya has never been granted an official title in Al-Qaida’s leadership to match that of Bin Laden, al-Zawahiri, or Mustafa Abu al-Yazid, he is widely considered to be within the very top echelons of the organization—possibly even the new “Number 3” in the wake of al-Yazid’s demise last year. Yet, as far as his former comrade Noman Benotman is concerned, Abu Yahya “was never, and I doubt will ever be, a military commander.”²²

- **Shaykh Atiyallah al-Liby (a.k.a. Atiyah Abd al-Rahman)**

Shaykh Atiyallah al-Liby is another Libyan national within the top ranks of Al-Qaida who hails from the now-besieged coastal town of Misrata. According to the U.S. State Department, Atiyallah first joined Bin Laden in Afghanistan “as a teenager in the 1980s. Since then, he has gained considerable stature in al-Qa’ida as an explosives expert and Islamic

²⁰ “Interview with Sayyid Imam al-Sharif.” *Al-Hayat*. December 8-10, 2007.

²¹ “Industry of Death: Abu Yahya al-Liby.” *Al-Arabiya*. July 4, 2009.

²² “Industry of Death: Abu Yahya al-Liby.” *Al-Arabiya*. July 4, 2009.

scholar.”²³ While in Afghanistan during the late 1990s, the Libyan also forged a relationship with a young Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in the western Afghan city of Herat.²⁴ He also joined Bin Laden and his coterie of top aides as they fled under fire to the mountainous redoubt of Tora Bora late in the fall of 2001.²⁵

Following the battle of Tora Bora, Shaykh Atiyallah publicly emerged as a key ideologue and spokesman on behalf of Al-Qaida’s senior leadership. As part of that role, according to the U.S. government, Atiyallah “recruits and facilitates talks with other Islamic groups to operate under al-Qaida” and “has been in regular contact with senior ranking al-Qaida leaders.”²⁶ In fact, the Libyan Al-Qaida leader has been a major proponent of decentralizing Al-Qaida’s network into an autonomous web of franchise affiliates. According to an essay written Atiyallah in 2004, the advantage of such a strategy is that “collective organized work is not affected by the loss of individuals, because individuals are easily replaced with others. The organization exists not on any individual; rather it operates as number of distributed responsibilities where the loss of individuals is redundant. This is one of the secrets of the effectiveness of Al-Qaida and their success in group operations.”²⁷

Since the death of Mustafa Abu al-Yazid, Shaykh Atiyallah has been making an increasingly frequent number of cameos in Al-Qaida audio and video recordings released by the As-Sahab Media Foundation. In his last appearance in a video released on March 18, 2011, he urged Libyan rebels to adopt an Islamist methodology and “avoid allying with the enemies of Allah.”²⁸ He also sternly warned “the enemies of Allah, whether America or others, to even think about acts of aggression or interference in the country [of Libya]. Otherwise, the Army of Allah and the chivalrous men of Islam will make them forget the tragedies they faced previously.”²⁹

- **Abu Zaid al-Kuwaiti (a.k.a. Khaled al-Hussainan)**

Though Shaykh Khaled al-Hussainan is a relatively new arrival to the jihad in Afghanistan, he is far older than most of Al-Qaida’s new up-and-coming generation of leaders. Likewise, while he has had no major military experiences to speak of, al-Hussainan has other credentials that offer him a leg up within Al-Qaida’s hierarchy—namely, that he was once a respected cleric at the Al-Albani mosque in Kuwait and a former state-sponsored lecturer at the Kuwaiti Ministry of Religious Endowments.³⁰ Al-Hussainan also reportedly worked as a preacher at the Saad al-Abdullah Academy, which is responsible for training Kuwaiti military officers. By 1996, Khaled al-Hussainan encountered his first brush with the law when he faced criminal charges in Kuwait in connection with what became known the “Desert Flogging” Case. Though he was later found innocent, al-Hussainan had been accused of joining with a group of radical Islamists in forcibly abducting two women and assaulting them with a whip in a remote

²³ http://www.rewardsforjustice.net/english/index.cfm?page=atiyah_abd

²⁴ http://www.rewardsforjustice.net/english/index.cfm?page=atiyah_abd

²⁵ http://www.rewardsforjustice.net/english/index.cfm?page=atiyah_abd

²⁶ http://www.rewardsforjustice.net/english/index.cfm?page=atiyah_abd

²⁷ Atiyatullah, Louis. “The Badr Al-Riyadh Tape: A Well Organized Al-Qaida’s Media Strategy Revealed.” The Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). 2004. Page 2.

²⁸ <http://shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=99893>. March 18, 2011.

²⁹ <http://shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=99893>. March 18, 2011.

³⁰ <http://www.islamhouse.com/ip/288149>. May 2011.

location as punishment for “what they considered to be a shameful act.”³¹ In 2007, without any warning, al-Hussainan suddenly disappeared from his pulpit in Kuwait and traveled to Afghanistan, reportedly by crossing through Iranian territory. Less than two years later, in August 2009, al-Hussainan was first publicly identified by Al-Qaida’s media wing as a prominent leader and spokesman for the group.³²

That al-Hussainan is one of Al-Qaida’s few remaining top-tier originally from the Arabian Peninsula (and a graduate of the Imam Muhammad bin Saud University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) is hugely significant.³³ First of all, Al-Qaida’s traditional wealthy financial donors based in the Gulf region are generally predisposed towards channeling their generous assistance to mujahideen organizations with prominent Saudi or Kuwaiti leaders with whom they feel most comfortable. Second, in countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan, the fact that al-Hussainan can say that he is from the same sacred soil as the holy city of Mecca and the Prophet Mohammed plays uniquely well among local Islamists. In video messages released by Al-Qaida, al-Hussainan has boasted of “traveling in Afghanistan from village to village and from city to city and from province to province, and praise Allah, I speak in the mosques and encourage the Afghan people to perform Jihad and encourage them to stand by the Mujahideen and encourage them to expel the Crusaders who have corrupted the people and land.”³⁴

Though his background is exclusively clerical, Khaled al-Hussainan has claimed to be participating in actual armed combat with Afghan and coalition military forces. In August 2009, he issued an open message to U.S. President Barack Obama, boasting, “your soldiers besieged me. I was besieged by your soldiers for ten hours. I was besieged by thirty tanks accompanied by helicopters and warplanes.”³⁵ According to al-Hussainan, “We came to Afghanistan to be killed as martyrs in Allah’s path. We came to Afghanistan for the hereafter. This is the fact which I want you to understand, Obama... We came to Afghanistan for Islam to dominate, not be dominated.”³⁶

- **Saif al-Adel (a.k.a. Mohammed al-Makkawi)**

Saif al-Adel (sometimes also known as “Mohammed al-Makkawi”) is a former Egyptian military officer who went on to become a top leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, and a founding member of Al-Qaida’s Shura Council. From early on, al-Adel served a critical role as Al-Qaida’s security chief, and as a manager of its covert overseas operations. According to former Al-Qaida lieutenant Jamal al-Fadl, al-Adel earned a reputation as “one of the members very good with explosives... He trained people for explosives.”³⁷ By the late 1990s, al-Adel’s nefarious activities were well-known to U.S. law enforcement and he was indicted along with Usama Bin Laden in the Southern District of New York (SDNY) for his role in the August 1998 bombings of two U.S. embassies in East Africa.³⁸ According to the mastermind of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the U.S., Khalid Shaykh Mohammed, Saif al-Adel was

³¹ “Industry of Death: Who is Khalid al-Hussainan?” *Al-Arabiya*. October 30, 2010.

³² <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=77715>. August 7, 2009.

³³ <http://www.islamhouse.com/ip/288149>

³⁴ <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=82666>. September 7, 2009.

³⁵ <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=82666>. September 7, 2009.

³⁶ <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=82666>. September 7, 2009.

³⁷ *United States v. Usama bin Laden, et al.* S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS). United States District Court, Southern District of New York. Trial Transcript, February 6, 2001. Page 244.

³⁸ <http://news.findlaw.com/cnn/docs/binladen/usbinladen-1a.pdf>.

also “involved in the 9/11 attack” and “knew the identity of the pilots who had been chosen when the Hamburg cell was picked in early 2000.”³⁹

Like other senior Al-Qaida leaders, in late 2001, al-Adel gathered his family and fled with Bin Laden to their rallying point in the Tora Bora mountains. In a later treatise published by Al-Qaida, al-Adel recalled how the group had dwindled to “at best” 1,900 men, with at least 350 “heroes” lying dead on the battlefield. Facing potential annihilation, Al-Qaida divided their ranks: “some of them returned to their countries, whereas the rest stayed to take revenge from Americans and their allies.”⁴⁰ Despite the capture of his wife and children in Tora Bora, Saif al-Adel managed to escape and continue in his role overseeing operations targeting coalition forces in southern Afghanistan. After a battle with U.S. forces in Kandahar in 2002, al-Adel insisted that “the Americans are not up to ground battles... They will not consider another experience in Kandahar, especially that the military force based in Kandahar has, by the grace of Allah, a level of the expertise that will make the U.S. a running joke for centuries to come.”⁴¹

Facing a renewed hunt by the U.S. military, Saif al-Adel allegedly fled once again—this time to neighboring Iran, where he was reportedly detained and placed under house arrest. Al-Adel’s exact status in Iran has always been somewhat murky. Though some reports paint him as under the strict custody of Iranian intelligence agents, other information suggests that al-Adel may have continued playing an operational role in Al-Qaida from the open sanctuary of Iran. In May 2003, U.S. national security officials accused al-Adel of “giving the go-ahead” for a dramatic wave of suicide bombing attacks in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia that killed at least 34 people. According to one “senior administration” source quoted by the Washington Post, “there are some senior members of al Qaeda in Iran... who might have had a hand in this.”⁴²

The controversial idea that a senior Sunni Muslim extremist like Saif al-Adel would choose to hide out in a fundamentalist Shiite state like Iran has not escaped the attention of Al-Qaida’s sectarian followers. In 2008, when Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri agreed to participate in an open Q&A session with Al-Qaida’s supporters on the web, he was peppered with inquiries about Saif al-Adel. One questioner explained, “I want to be rid of this doubt: why is Shaykh Saif al-Adel present in Iran, which murders our sons, keeps our women prisoner, and has perverted our religion and Quran—and yet he suffers no harm from them? ...His presence causes many question and exclamation marks. I ask you by Allah to clarify to us, O’ our noble Shaykh.”⁴³ Though al-Zawahiri acknowledged receiving these numerous questions about al-Adel, he refused to give any further explanation. “As for his question about the location of Saif al-Adel,” al-Zawahiri replied dryly, “it is something I am unable to tell him.”⁴⁴

Despite recent reports indicating that al-Adel has finally left Iran and has returned to the Pakistani-Afghan border region, there are compelling reasons to believe that he will not be appointed as Bin Laden’s replacement in charge of Al-Qaida. Al-Adel has never served a public role in Al-Qaida, and has deliberately avoided taking any sort of political role within the organization or even being shown on camera. In fact, al-Adel has based his entire career in Al-Qaida in serving critical but low-key roles within the upper echelon of Bin Laden’s operational

³⁹ “Substitution for the Testimony of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed.” United States v. Zacarias Moussaoui. Eastern District of Virginia (EDVA). Cr. No. 01-455-A. Defense Exhibit 941.

⁴⁰ <http://www.bkufus.com/images/img/indexe.php?subject=2&rec=14&tit=tit&pa=0>. January 2003.

⁴¹ <http://www.bkufus.com/images/img/indexe.php?subject=2&rec=15&tit=tit&pa=0>. January 2003.

⁴² Priest, Dana and Susan Schmidt. “Al Qaeda Figure Tied To Riyadh Bombings; U.S. Officials Say Leader Is In Iran With Other Terrorists.” Washington Post. May 18, 2003. Page A24.

⁴³ <http://myhesbah.com/v/showthread?t=174676>. April 2, 2008.

⁴⁴ <http://myhesbah.com/v/showthread?t=174676>. April 2, 2008.

arm. Assuming that al-Adel has indeed rejoined Al-Qaida's central leadership in AFPAK, the question remains if someone with as many lingering question marks as Saif al-Adel could possibly jump the hierarchy of Al-Qaida and supersede others figures like Ayman al-Zawahiri or Abu Yahya al-Liby who already have much more established profiles among Al-Qaida's contemporary base.

- **Azzam al-Amriki (a.k.a. Adam Gadahn)**

Adam Yehiye Gadahn is a convert to Islam originally from northern California. Raised on an isolated goat farm, Gadahn eventually moved south to Los Angeles to live with his grandmother. While in Los Angeles, Gadahn came into contact with a cell of computer-savvy Al-Qaida militants planning to aid Usama Bin Laden in Afghanistan. In 1998, Gadahn moved to Pakistan and married an Afghani refugee. Shortly thereafter, Gadahn was allegedly recruited by 9/11 mastermind Khalid Shaykh Mohammed to assist in Al-Qaida's ongoing media efforts.⁴⁵ In 2001, Gadahn made his first public appearance on behalf of Al-Qaida, when he lent his voice to help narrate an English-subtitled version of Al-Qaida's first official propaganda video, "The Destruction of the U.S.S. Cole."⁴⁶

Since 2004, Adam Gadahn has appeared in dozens of video-recorded messages released by Al-Qaida. In 2005, in a video marking the fourth anniversary of 9/11, Gadahn explained in English the role of As-Sahab's multimedia in recruiting new Al-Qaida members:

"Allah is our witness that the numerous audio and videotapes issued by Shaykh Usama Bin Laden, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, and other leaders of the jihad have not been released merely to dispel rumors of their death—or, as the Americans once ridiculously claimed, to send coded messages to their followers. No, these communiqués have been released to explain and propound the nature and goals of the worldwide jihad against America and the crusaders, and to convey our legitimate demands to friend and foe alike, so that the former may join us on this honorable and blessed path..."⁴⁷

Fingering an automatic weapon, Gadahn also added the following comments, swearing revenge on his own former hometown: "Yesterday, London and Madrid. Tomorrow, Los Angeles and Melbourne [Australia], God-willing... We love peace, but when the enemy violates that peace or prevents us from achieving it, then we love nothing better than the heat of battle, the echo of explosions, and [slitting] the throats of the infidels. When it comes to defending our religion, our freedom, and our brothers in faith, every one of us is Mohammed Atta. Every one of us is Jamal Lindsey, and every one of us is Mohammed Boieri."⁴⁸

Of all the individuals discussed herein, Adam Gadahn likely has the slimmest chance of ever ascending the ranks much farther beyond his current position as a spokesman and media

⁴⁵ http://www.defenselink.mil/news/transcript_ISN10024.pdf. Page 17.

⁴⁶ As-Sahab Media Foundation. "The State of the Ummah" (a.k.a. "The Destruction of the U.S.S. Cole"). Released: 2001.

⁴⁷ As-Sahab Media Foundation. "A Message to the People of the West from the fighting brother Azzam the American on the Fourth Anniversary of the Battles of New York and Washington." <http://www.as-sahaab.com>. MPEG Video; 12 minutes in length. November 6, 2005.

⁴⁸ As-Sahab Media Foundation. "A Message to the People of the West from the fighting brother Azzam the American on the Fourth Anniversary of the Battles of New York and Washington." <http://www.as-sahaab.com>. MPEG Video; 12 minutes in length. November 6, 2005.

advisor. He has no formal clerical or military credentials to speak of, and while his proficiency in speaking Arabic is improving, it is still quite poor. Like Ayman al-Zawahiri, Gadahn appears to be obsessed with his own celebrity, spewing an endless train of childish threats for the benefit of television cameras. Even with his conversion to Islam and the dramatic destruction of his own U.S. passport, the fact that Gadahn is a Caucasian American with Jewish (and even Zionist) roots would be difficult for many Islamists to swallow. Gadahn may serve at times as a useful propaganda tool for Al-Qaida to harass the White House and the American public, but he hardly stands out as the most capable figure to actually lead a terrorist organization based in South Asia.

IV.) The Question of Al-Qaida's Regional Affiliates

Prior to 9/11, Usama Bin Laden's principle obsession was on building a single armed force on a "Solid Foundation" with a centralized leadership under his control. According to founding Al-Qaida Shura Council member Mamdouh Mahmud Salim (a.k.a. Abu Hajer al-Iraqi), "Abu Abdullah [Bin Laden] had tendency to favor a policy of centralization... and felt obligated to assemble the Arabs in one location, train and prepare them to be a single mobilized fighting brigade."⁴⁹ However, Bin Laden had apparently overestimated the importance of group centralization, neglecting the substantial benefits afforded by Al-Qaida's loose, amalgamated infrastructure. Already by the late 1980s, those around Bin Laden warned him that their attempts to create strict administration and hierarchy within Al-Qaida were ending in disaster. Mamdouh Salim—appointed by Bin Laden to assist him in the regimentation of the Arabs in Afghanistan—admitted in mujahideen memoirs, "we tried our best to correct the brothers, but I should admit that... I was mistaken about the task of management. I thought of people what I had read about them in books—if you were to say to someone, 'Fear Allah', then that's fine, he would fear Allah! ...I believed that just like I could flip a switch to make a light turn on and off, I could also similarly handle people!"⁵⁰

For Al-Qaida, the real turning point came in December 2001, when groups of hardened Al-Qaida fighters attempted to make a dramatic last stand against U.S.-backed Afghan militiamen at a cave complex in the Tora Bora mountains, near the Pakistani border. The cream of Al-Qaida's leadership, including Bin Laden himself, had gathered in Tora Bora for what seemed like a fool's errand: to fight a mismatched conventional military battle against an adversary with total air dominance and far more sophisticated battlefield weapons. U.S. tactical airstrikes smothered hundreds of fighters to dust: "there was no difference between the night and the day: the sky was raining fire and the Earth was erupting volcanoes."⁵¹ Abortive attempts at regrouping and retreating caused the deaths of possibly hundreds of fleeing Al-Qaida fighters caught underneath a hail of cluster bombs. As a result of the defeats at Tora Bora and three months later at Shah-i-Kot, "almost all remaining al Qaeda forces" fled across the border with Pakistan seeking refuge in the remote, mountainous, and "lightly governed" frontier provinces.⁵²

⁴⁹ Muhammad, Basil. Al-Ansaru l'Arab fi Afghanistan. The Committee for Islamic Benevolence Publications; ©1991. Page 199.

⁵⁰ Muhammad, Basil. Al-Ansaru l'Arab fi Afghanistan. The Committee for Islamic Benevolence Publications; ©1991. Page 196.

⁵¹ Azzam, Abdullah. The Lofty Mountain. Azzam Publications. London; UK. ©2003. Page 136.

⁵² The 9/11 Commission Report. Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. July 22, 2004. Page 338.

Faced with a resounding defeat on the peaks of Tora Bora, a group of high-ranking Al-Qaida commanders decided to fundamentally re-think Usama Bin Laden's military campaign against the West and to embrace the development of a more diffuse and self-sufficient network of international operatives. In 2002 and 2003, Al-Qaida's shift in strategy became noticeable following a series of dramatic kamikaze bombing attacks targeting Westerners in a host of countries, from Indonesia to Morocco. Al-Qaida's then-official website—the Al-Neda Center for Islamic Studies and Research—acknowledged that these attacks marked a new phase in evolution: “the Al-Qaida Organization has adopted a strategy in its war with the Americans based on expanding the battlefield and exhausting the enemy, who spread his interests over the globe, with successive and varied blows... Expanding the battlefield has invaluable benefits. The enemy, who needed to protect his country only, realized that he needed to protect his huge interests in every country. The more diversified and distant the areas in which operations take place, the more exhausting it becomes for the enemy, the more he needs to stretch his resources, and the more he becomes terrified.”⁵³ By mid-2004, nascent Al-Qaida franchise organizations were already well ensconced inside both Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Today, similar Al-Qaida franchises have expanded their reach even further into Indonesia, Yemen, Algeria, Somalia, Lebanon, and the Palestinian territories. These upstart regional branches are capable of operating independently of Al-Qaida's central leadership in Afghanistan—and though the immediate purpose of forming these branches was to ramp up local activity in particular countries of interest—the growing affiliate factions often have expansive ambitions just as grandiose as those of Usama Bin Laden himself.

Al-Qaida's decision to branch out and form semi-autonomous regional affiliates has not been without its drawbacks. In Iraq, even as Al-Qaida's local leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi drew international media attention (rivaling that paid to Bin Laden) for his unrelenting campaign of suicide bombings and beheadings, al-Zarqawi's stubborn insistence on doing things in his own particular style caused countless problems for Al-Qaida and other Sunni insurgent groups. According to fellow insurgents (including some acknowledged former Zarqawi allies), Al-Qaida fighters are responsible for adopting arrogant, totalitarian measures in Iraq that have acutely undermined their popular image in the Islamic community as “chivalrous knights” working to safeguard justice and the innocent. In October 2007, one such estranged insurgent partner, the “Iraqi Jihad Union” (IJU), issued an open call to Al-Qaida's leaders: “What is happening out in the field is indeed a disaster and we hope that you have merely been misinformed about [these events]. However, it will be an even greater disaster if you are, in fact, well-informed about these matters.”⁵⁴ The IJU fingered Al-Qaida fighters as the guilty culprits behind the slaughter and mutilation of their own Sunni Muslim comrades: “To make things worse, they dug up their bodies from the graves, further mutilated them, beheaded them, and showed them off from their vehicles while driving through the towns. They even killed our men's wives and children.”⁵⁵ Yet another armed faction—“*Hamās al-Iraq*”—scoffed in a separate statement to its supporters, “the Al-Qaida network has actually made people here think that the occupation forces are merciful and humane by comparison.”⁵⁶

⁵³ Al-Neda Center for Islamic Studies and Research. “The Operation of 11 Rabi al-Awwal: The East Riyadh Operation and Our War With the United States and its Agents.” <http://www.faroq.org/news/news.php?id>. August 2003.

⁵⁴ <http://www.alboraq.info/showthread?t=33995>. October 5, 2007.

⁵⁵ <http://www.alboraq.info/showthread?t=33995>. October 5, 2007.

⁵⁶ <http://www.alboraq.info/showthread?t=33728>. October 2, 2007.

Only two years after bragging that Al-Qaida had “broken the back” of America with a barrage of suicide bombings in Iraq, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri was forced to reappear in April 2008 in order to defend Zarqawi’s cruel methodology in the face of sharp criticism from fellow Muslims. During a public Arabic-language Q&A session sponsored by Al-Qaida, one anonymous participant (who scornfully introduced himself as “Your Geography Teacher”) jeered at al-Zawahiri, “Do you consider the killing of women and children to be Jihad? I challenge you and your organization to do that in Tel Aviv... Or is it easier to kill Muslims in the markets? Maybe it is necessary [for you] to take some geography lessons, because your maps only show the Muslims’ states.”⁵⁷ With a touch of anger building in his voice, Dr. al-Zawahiri insisted, “We haven’t killed the innocents, not in Baghdad, nor in Morocco, nor in Algeria, nor anywhere else.” After a moment of reflection, he added, “And if there is any innocent who was killed in the Mujahideen’s operations, then it was either an unintentional error, or out of necessity as in cases of... the taking of human shields by the enemy.”⁵⁸

Nor have things gone especially well for Al-Qaida in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where the group’s local leadership was forced to flee the country or else be wiped out in a dragnet by security forces. During a 2006 interview in London, the prominent Saudi Islamist dissident Dr. Saad al-Faqih suggested that the problem stemmed from a critical shortage of locally-based skilled commanders following the death of the founder of the Saudi Al-Qaida branch, Yusuf al-Ayyiri: “Al-Ayyiri... was appointed by Bin Laden... probably before [9/11]. He is capable, you know. You know that this man is capable, right? [Al-Ayyiri] is a learned scholar, highly professional as a fighter, he is powerful in his articulation, has a dominating personality, he is a strategist. He knows what he is doing.”⁵⁹ However, in the absence of al-Ayyiri, Al-Qaida’s strategy in Saudi Arabia turned “hopeless”: “Their strategy in Saudi Arabia is in shambles... I see it as, in their own standards, very stupid strategy... Bin Laden was not fortunate to have an intelligent, capable person after al-Ayyiri. All the persons who came after al-Ayyiri were good military leaders but very bad strategists, very bad tacticians.”⁶⁰

In listing their various shortcomings, Dr. al-Faqih particularly noted the inexplicable failure of Saudi Al-Qaida leaders to conduct their activities in a way that might possibly have some popular appeal among ordinary Saudis. Al-Faqih scoffed, “when you confront them with the question, ‘why do you go to foreigners and leave [Prince] Nayif?’, they can’t answer. They answer very stupid answers. Sloganistic answers... This is a very naïve literal interpretation of the prophet’s teaching.”⁶¹ As a result, not only has the “cadre from before the Iraqi war been hit very hard by the regime”, but moreover, “people who had some sort of intention to join Al-Qaida inside the country changed their mind. They also lost in terms of sympathy and understanding.”⁶² According to Dr. al-Faqih, “Al-Qaida did not lose because of the technology of the Saudi government, did not lose because of the effective, the ‘effective’ media, cultural, and security campaign, it did not lose because of the support from the Americans and others. It lost because of its own mistakes.”⁶³ After a heavy sigh, he confessed, “I cannot understand why they planned it this way.”⁶⁴

⁵⁷ <http://myhesbah.com/v/showthread?t=174676>. April 2, 2008.

⁵⁸ <http://myhesbah.com/v/showthread?t=174676>. April 2, 2008.

⁵⁹ Author’s interview with Dr. Saad al-Faqih at his residence in London; U.K. February 2006.

⁶⁰ Author’s interview with Dr. Saad al-Faqih at his residence in London; U.K. February 2006.

⁶¹ Author’s interview with Dr. Saad al-Faqih at his residence in London; U.K. February 2006.

⁶² Author’s interview with Dr. Saad al-Faqih at his residence in London; U.K. February 2006.

⁶³ Author’s interview with Dr. Saad al-Faqih at his residence in London; U.K. February 2006.

⁶⁴ Author’s interview with Dr. Saad al-Faqih at his residence in London; U.K. February 2006.

While Al-Qaida's regional efforts in Iraq and Saudi Arabia may have suffered debilitating setbacks in recent years, the picture could not be any more different in nearby Yemen—where a growing Al-Qaida branch (known simply as “Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula”) not only has threatened to undermine the stability of the central government in Sanaa, but moreover, has demonstrated its ability to launch repeated and sophisticated international terrorist attacks targeting the U.S. homeland. Without doubt, the defining event for Al-Qaida's network in Yemen came in 2008 with the unexpected arrival of numerous Saudi Arabian Al-Qaida operatives who had recently been freed after years of detention in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. An influential partnership was formed between the remnants of Al-Qaida's Saudi branch and loyal Yemeni disciples of Usama Bin Laden—including his former personal secretary, Abu Basir al-Wahishi, and a graduate of Bin Laden's notorious Al-Farouq training camp near Kandahar, Qassim al-Rimi. In total, at least eleven former Gitmo detainees from Saudi Arabia returned to Al-Qaida, most of them by fleeing political rehabilitation centers and crossing the Saudi border into Yemen.

Throughout 2009, a slew of latent warnings emerged indicating that AQAP was developing advanced bomb-making skills, including the ability to circumvent heightened security measures at airports and other sensitive installations. Over the space of several months, Al-Qaida's network in Yemen released successive video recordings showing the fabrication of elaborate explosive devices, including bombs carefully hidden in picture frames and video cassette boxes. Then, in August 2009, AQAP claimed responsibility for its most sophisticated operation yet: the attempted assassination of the Saudi Deputy Interior Minister by a “surrendering” Al-Qaida member with a bomb hidden in his underwear. In an official communiqué released days later by AQAP, the group trumpeted the “first-of-its-kind” suicide operation by the baby-faced Abdullah Asseri who “was able to enter the palace... get past his bodyguards, and ignited his explosive device... after he already managed to pass through all the security checkpoints at the airports in Najran and Jeddah.”⁶⁵

In a video testimonial produced by AQAP and first broadcast in September 2009, Asseri bragged about the impressive technical innovations of locally-based Al-Qaida bombmakers:

“This is my ammunition... Allah has made this available to the mujahideen... The idol-worshipping tyrants of the Saudi family thought that they closed the doors on the face of the mujahideen, by banning all explosive substances from the markets. But Allah made available to us something they cannot handle... Allah willing, we will come to you with only 50, 100 or 200 grams. Allah willing, our brothers in the explosives department will release some instructive videos about how you can blow up the enemies of Allah with simple ingredients available to all which they cannot ban, except if they kill everyone or close all the stores. Sometimes you will be amazed that explosives can be made with things we even eat.”⁶⁶

On Christmas Day 2009, Nigerian national Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab—armed with a remarkably similar explosive device provided to him by AQAP and concealed in his underwear—attempted to bring down a civilian airliner packed with holiday travelers en route from Amsterdam to Detroit.

⁶⁵ Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). “Statement Claiming Responsibility for the Assassination Attempt on the Tyrant Mohammed bin Nayif al-Saud.” August 29, 2009.

⁶⁶ Al-Malahem Media Wing; Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). “The Progeny of Mohammed bin Maslamah.” Released on August 29, 2009.

In the months since the failed airline bombing over Detroit, AQAP has expressed particular pride in the fact that their recruit Umar Abdulmutallab was so successful in evading strict international airline security procedures. During a propaganda video produced by Al-Qaida's network in Yemen, an unseen narrator smugly insists, "security and military solutions won't help providing security for the Americans and their allies, as after eight years of big and continuous spending for the cause of advancing the security abilities, the mujahideen were able, with the grace of Allah, to infiltrate all the boundaries; the brother Umar Farouk—may Allah release him—took off and passed through five international airports, including the Dutch airport in Amsterdam, and neither their technology nor machines were able to uncover the manufactured device."⁶⁷ The leadership of Al-Qaida even published an eye-catching article on this subject in the official AQAP online magazine, titled, "Secrets of the Manufactured Device":

"Among the secrets of the device is that it included the study of the [currently] used scanning machines inside airports and other places, whether the security side or the technical side in America and Europe... studying all these gaps took place, and with the grace of Allah what we wished for has occurred; the intended martyr brother crossed four continents—Asia, then African, then Europe, then America—and he passed through four international airports that have strict procedures... The mujahideen have [also] acquired a highly-explosive material with power that exceeds the classic high explosives like 'PETN' and 'TNT' and 'RDX' and others, and it is being prepared and tested."⁶⁸

Until quite recently, the notion of such complex planning for transnational terrorist activities taking place outside the narrow confines of Usama Bin Laden's inner circle in Afghanistan would have seemed baffling and radically controversial to most observers.

The re-organized Al-Qaida network based in Yemen has also benefited from the contributions of Yemeni-American cleric Shaykh Anwar al-Awlaki, a charismatic, English-speaking missionary who had evolved from a mainstream "moderate" voice into one of the most passionate global advocates for violent jihad in any language. On his Internet blog—popular among British, Canadian, and American Muslims—al-Awlaki openly applauded Al-Qaida attacks on Yemeni security forces: "May this be the beginning of the greatest jihad, the jihad of the Arabian Peninsula that would free the heart of the Islamic world from the tyrants who are deceiving the Ummah and standing between us and victory."⁶⁹ Al-Awlaki has been publicly fingered by U.S. officials as the responsible party in turning Umar Abdulmutallab towards Al-Qaida. Speaking in a video interview produced by AQAP, al-Awlaki enthused that the Christmas Day airline bomb plot had "accomplished goals for the mujahideen and it is considered a reply and terrorizing operation to the Americans, and this operation showed the gaps in the American security instruments whether it be intelligence wise or in the security. In the American airports they spend more than 40 million dollars and yet the Mujahid Umar Farouk was able to pass these security instruments. And also the intelligence admits that it had put him under surveillance and in spite of that he was able to reach the heart of America to Detroit. So the operation accomplished great successes though it did not kill even one person, in spite of that

⁶⁷ Al-Malahem Media Wing; Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). "America and the Final Trap." Released on May 26, 2010.

⁶⁸ Al-Malahem Media Wing; Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). "Secrets of the Manufactured Device." *Sada al-Malahem Magazine*. Issue No. 12; Released on February 14, 2010.

⁶⁹ Al-Awlaki, Anwar. "The Army of Yemen Confronts the Mujahideen." August 1, 2009. Posted on: <http://www.anwar-alawlaki.com>.

it accomplished great successes.” After a pause, al-Awlaki added, “About the brother Umar Farouk, he is also from my students, and also I am very proud that the likes of Umar Farouk are from my students and I support what he did.”⁷⁰

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of AQAP’s interest in launching international terrorist attacks on the United States is their long-running obsession with conceiving plots aimed at causing “catastrophic” damage to the American economy. In October 2002, following a suicide bomb attack on a French supertanker off the coast of Yemen, Al-Qaida’s Politburo lost no time in formally praising the operation for “revealing the true danger the mujahideen pose to the strategic, commercial, and military interests of the enemy”:

“If a boat that once cost us less than \$1,000 managed to ruin a destroyer worth over \$1 billion (its symbolic value beyond measure), and a similar boat managed to devastate an oil tanker of such great magnitude, imagine the extent of the danger that threatens the West’s commercial lifeline which is petrol. This region sits on the largest [oil] reserves, owns the largest quantities and contains [the industry’s] most important passages and lanes. The operation that struck the French oil tanker is not merely an attack against a tanker—it is an attack against international oil transport lines and all its various connotations.”⁷¹

When it was still based in Saudi Arabia, AQAP published a treatise titled, “Bin Laden and the Oil Weapon”, in which the affiliate group argued that because “the United States will remain dependent on the Middle East in the near future, its oil will continue to be an easy target for all the enemies of the United States... It is imperative that we strike petroleum interests in all regions that the United States benefits from, and not only in the Middle East. The goal is to cut off its imports or reduce them by all means. The targeting of oil interests includes oil production wells, export pipelines, loading platforms, tankers—and anything else that will deprive the United States of oil, force it to make decisions that it has avoided having to make for a long time, disrupt and stifle its economy, and threaten its economic and political future.”⁷²

In early 2008, after Al-Qaida moved its local operations from Saudi Arabia to Yemen, the reconstituted AQAP published an approving interview with a most wanted Saudi Al-Qaida suspect Nayef Bin Mohammed al-Qahtani (a.k.a. Abu Humam al-Qahtani). Again endorsing the concept of striking at petroleum resources, Al-Qahtani reasoned, “if the enemy’s interests in the Arabian Peninsula were stricken, and his supply of oil was cut off, and the oil refineries were out of order, this would cause the enemy to collapse—and he won’t merely withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan, but would face total collapse. If he were to be struck hard from various places, then he would scatter and turn around and flee forlornly from the land of the Muslims.”⁷³

Given the high-profile role that AQAP has played in masterminding not only the “Underwear” bomber Abdulmutallab, but also more recently, a plot to smuggle explosive devices into U.S.-bound aircraft via UPS cargo shipments, AQAP’s passionate interest in launching “strategic” attacks aimed at devastating the U.S. economy can be ignored only at our

⁷⁰ Al-Malahem Media Wing; Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). “A Premiere and Exclusive Interview with the Islamic Preacher Sheikh Anwar Al-Awlaki.” Released on May 22, 2010.

⁷¹ Al-Neda Center for Islamic Studies and Research. “Statement from the Al-Qaida Organization Regarding the Explosion Targeting the Christian Oil Tanker in Yemen.” Al-neda.com. October 13, 2002.

⁷² Al-Bassam, Adeeb. “Bin Laden and the Oil Weapon.” *Sawt al-Jihad* (“Voice of Jihad”) Magazine; Issue #30. Al-Qaida’s Committee in the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia). Published: February 8, 2007.

⁷³ “A Meeting With One of the Most Wanted.” Al-Malahem Media Wing; Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). *Sada al-Malahem Magazine*. Issue No. 1; January 12, 2008.

own peril. It is also a telling reminder of how, thanks to the new affiliate network of global franchises, the underlying Al-Qaida terrorist threat to the U.S. homeland is, in some ways, unchanged by the death of Usama Bin Laden.

V.) The “Homegrown”: Al-Qaida as an Ideology

Even further beyond Al-Qaida’s existence as an organization and then as a franchise model is Al-Qaida as a political ideology. Given his obsession with group centralization, for many years, Bin Laden failed to fully grasp how the relative “openness” of his movement and the perceived lack of hierarchy appealed to young jihadist recruits. In the world of Al-Qaida and the Arab-Afghans, even the most junior of operatives could potentially gain high status within the movement by either demonstrating useful skills, or else by volunteering to sacrifice themselves on behalf of the mission. In other words, Al-Qaida offered an equal opportunity at fame and recognition to nearly any sympathetic soul willing to risk death or imprisonment. When agents from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) apprehended a junior Al-Qaida operative who helped build the suicide truck bombs used to attack two U.S. embassies in East Africa in 1998, he boasted of his own role in the plot and explained that he “was attracted to Usama Bin Ladin and the group Al Qaeda because it did not matter what nationality you were” and because Al Qaeda members did not explicitly follow “orders from a chain of command” in the same way as more traditional terrorist organizations.⁷⁴

In retrospect, it now appears that it was not Bin Laden, but rather his younger and more web-savvy lieutenants who truly championed the idea of spreading Al-Qaida as an ideology, including among homegrown extremists living in non-Muslim countries. One of those lieutenants was the founder of Al-Qaida’s franchise affiliate in Saudi Arabia, Yusuf al-Ayyiri. Addressing those who had criticized Al-Qaida for killing innocent Arab civilians during the May 2003 attacks in Riyadh, al-Ayyiri scoffed, “Whoever asks why in [Saudi Arabia] should ask himself—if he was honest—why in Chechnya, why in Kabul, why in Jerusalem, why in Bali, and why in Mombassa. These countries are ruled by agent Karzai-type rulers and occupied by Americans or Jews who are considered infidels and untrustworthy in Allah’s book.” Moreover, according to al-Ayyiri, “this war is based on a strategy to widen the battlefield. The entire world has become a battlefield in practice and not in theory.”⁷⁵

Al-Ayyiri’s strategy for developing a global “homegrown” terrorist movement has had an astonishing impact in motivating new faces to try and join Al-Qaida’s cause—if not directly, then indirectly. Among both Arabic and English-speaking Al-Qaida supporters, one of al-Ayyiri’s books has been particularly popular and enduring: “Constants on the Path of Jihad” (“Thawabit ala Darb al-Jihad”). The book attracted so much attention that fugitive AQAP cleric Shaykh Anwar al-Awlaki dedicated an entire lecture series to explaining al-Ayyiri’s underlying message in “Constants on the Path of Jihad” to an English-speaking audience:

“Jihad does not end with the disappearance of a person. Jihad must continue regardless because it does not depend on any particular leader or individual... Jihad does not depend on any particular

⁷⁴ Government Exhibit GX-6 (Interview of Mohammed Sadiq Odeh by FBI Agent John Anticev). U.S. v. Usama Bin Laden, et al. S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS). United States District Court, Southern District of New York.

⁷⁵ Al-Neda Center for Islamic Studies and Research. “The Operation of 11 Rabi al-Awwal: The East Riyadh Operation and Our War With the United States and its Agents.” <http://www.faroq.org/news/news.php?id>. August 2003.

land. It is global. When the Muslim is in his land, he performs jihad... No borders or barriers stop it. The message cannot be conveyed without jihad. If a particular people or nation is classified as... 'the people of war' in the Shariah, that classification applies to them all over the earth. Islam cannot be customized to suit the conditions where you are, for instance Europe."⁷⁶

According to Awlaki, al-Ayyiri also instructed that "victory" cannot be limited to mere "military victories" alone, and should also include "sacrifice. The Mujahid sacrificing 'his self' and his wealth is victory. Victory of your idea, your religion. If you die for your religion, your death will spread the da`wa... Allah chooses Shuhada (martyrs) from amongst the believers. This is a victory."⁷⁷

By early 2003, jihadi recruiters in Europe who had previously encouraged others to travel to training camps in Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Chechnya began radically changing their message. Just as with al-Ayyiri and al-Awlaki, their new philosophy emphasized the individual nature and responsibility of jihad. At a conference in Leicester organized by the radical Al-Muhajiroun faction in October 2002, Abu Hamza al-Masri (a.k.a. Mustafa Kamel) admonished his audience, "We need to resist, we need to fight, even alone. And you can't go now to learn in Afghanistan or Eritrea as before. Now, a war zone is a war zone. There is no need for camping, there is no facilities for camping... A lot of the skills you need for the frontline, you can learn from here... Where are you? What can you do in your area?"⁷⁸ Al-Muhajiroun leader Shaykh Omar Bakri Mohammed echoed these comments and added, "the Ummah [should] know it is obligatory upon them to engage in... preparation and to engage in the jihad. And each one must find their own way. There is no need yourself to contact somebody here or there. You find your own way! Sincerely, you will get it. You do not want to put someone else in trouble. You, look for yourself! ...Seek it! You will get it!"⁷⁹

Surprisingly, rather than Al-Qaida's central leadership, it is arguably Al-Qaida's local affiliate in Yemen that has actually expended the greatest amount of entrepreneurial efforts in trying to mobilize homegrown jihadists and inciting them into action. Six months after the botched "Underwear" bomb plot involving Umar Abdulmutallab, AQAP released the first issue of a new English-language propaganda magazine titled "Inspire." An article from the first issue, "Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom", explains:

"There are many Muslims who have the zeal to defend the ummah but their vision is unclear. They believe that in order to defend the ummah they need to travel and join the mujahideen elsewhere and they must train in their camps. But we tell the Muslims in America and Europe: There is a better choice and easier one to give support to your ummah. That is individual work inside the West such as the operations of [Fort Hood shooter] Nidal Hassan and [failed Times Square bomber] Faisal Shahzad... My Muslim brother, who wants to support the religion of Allah: do not make too many calculations and forecasting of the results and consequences. It is true that Umar Farouk and his brothers Nidal Hassan and Shahzad were imprisoned, but they have become heroes and icons that are examples to be followed... My Muslim brother: we are

⁷⁶ Shaykh Anwar Al Awlaki. "Constants on the Path of Jihad" ("Thawaabit Ala' Darb Al-Jihad.") Audio recording transcribed at <http://sabiluna.sitesled.com/Constants%20on%20The%20Path%20of%20Jihad.pdf>.

⁷⁷ Shaykh Anwar Al Awlaki. "Constants on the Path of Jihad" ("Thawaabit Ala' Darb Al-Jihad.") Audio recording transcribed at <http://sabiluna.sitesled.com/Constants%20on%20The%20Path%20of%20Jihad.pdf>.

⁷⁸ Speech given at "Iraq Today Mecca Tomorrow." National Conference held in Leicester, United Kingdom; organized by Al-Muhajiroun, P.O. Box 349 London N9 7RR. October 27, 2002.

⁷⁹ Speech given at "Iraq Today Mecca Tomorrow." National Conference held in Leicester, United Kingdom; organized by Al-Muhajiroun, P.O. Box 349 London N9 7RR. October 27, 2002.

conveying to you our military training right into your kitchen to relieve you of the difficulty of traveling to us. If you are sincere in your intentions to serve the religion of Allah, then all what you have to do is enter your kitchen and make an explosive device that would damage the enemy.”⁸⁰

The second issue of AQAP’s “Inspire” Magazine once again returned to the subject of individual jihad. Suggested tips included in the magazine urged would-be Al-Qaida recruits “coming from the West”, “you might be asked by the mujahidin why you didn’t partake in the jihad inside your country... Many will tell you that attacking the enemy in their backyard is one of the best ways to help the jihad... Put yourself in the shoes of the leadership for a moment. They have with them an individual who is not wanted by the intelligence services and they could use that person to further the Islamic cause. That person is you. I strongly recommend all the brothers and sisters coming from the West to consider attacking the West in its own backyard... These types of individual attacks are nearly impossible for them to contain.”⁸¹ The same magazine also featured plans for “the ultimate mowing machine”, an “idea to use a pickup truck as a mowing machine, not to mow grass but mow down the enemies of Allah.”⁸² Above all, however, the magazine urged that “the best operation... is the one where you come up with an innovative idea that the authorities have not yet turned their attention to, and that leads to maximum casualties or—equally important—maximum economic losses.”⁸³

The identity of the reputed “genius” behind AQAP’s latest propaganda coup is symbolic of the evolving terrorist threat posed by self-selecting “lone wolf” extremists. U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies believe that “Inspire” Magazine was created on behalf of AQAP by an American citizen and former resident of Charlotte, North Carolina, Samir Khan. In 2004, at the age of 18, Khan acquired a widespread reputation for his brash militancy on his well-traveled English-language blog, “InshallahShaheed” (Martyrdom God-willing). The blog routinely extolled the virtues of Bin Laden and other Al-Qaida leaders, along with terrorist attacks in Iraq and elsewhere. Yet, for all his threats and Internet tough talk, in real life, Khan looked far more the part of hapless computer nerd than deadly assassin. Nonetheless, in October 2009, two months before Umar Abdulmutallab boarded a flight headed to the U.S., the aspiring suburban warrior Samir Khan left his own home in America and traveled to Yemen, where he promptly disappeared and presumably joined Al-Qaida.⁸⁴ In a letter published recently in “Inspire”, Khan has since confessed his surprise at being allowed by U.S. federal authorities to join AQAP unhindered: “I was quite open about my beliefs online and it didn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out that I was al Qaeda to the core.”⁸⁵

Nor is Samir Khan alone. Internet chat forums run by Al-Qaida and likeminded jihad movements have become beacons for a variety of extremists searching for a path to infamy in the

⁸⁰ “Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom.” Inspire Magazine. Al-Malahem Media Wing; Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Issue No. 1; Released on July 11, 2010.

⁸¹ Inspire Magazine. Al-Malahem Media Wing; Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Issue No. 2; Released on October 11, 2010. Page 24.

⁸² Inspire Magazine. Al-Malahem Media Wing; Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Issue No. 2; Released on October 11, 2010. Page 24.

⁸³ Inspire Magazine. Al-Malahem Media Wing; Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Issue No. 2; Released on October 11, 2010. Page 24.

⁸⁴ Gendar, Alison. “Former New Yorker Samir Khan behind graphics of new Al Qaeda recruiting magazine.” New York Daily News. July 18, 2010.

⁸⁵ “The Ultimate Mowing Machine.” Inspire Magazine. Al-Malahem Media Wing; Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Issue No. 2; Released on October 11, 2010.

guiding hands of Al-Qaida. In April 2010, when the Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for an attempted bomb plot in New York's Times Square, they chose to release their claim via an exclusive English-language Al-Qaida chat forum. One of the forum administrators—a mysterious “lone wolf” militant calling himself “Asadullah al-Shishani” (“the Lion of Allah from Chechnya”)—immediately replied congratulating the Pakistani Taliban on their operation, and further offering to provide “help” in distributing their online propaganda.⁸⁶

Two months later, user “Asadullah al-Shishani” posted his own homemade song on Al-Qaida's top-tier forums in honor of Al-Qaida's slain “Number 3” leader Mustafa Abu al-Yazid. The lyrics to the English-language song included the lines, “You are a real hero, O' Mustafa Abu Yazid. You spent your whole life fighting, Until you fell down Shaheed. You are a real terror, Against America. You sent their soldiers running, With shots of your Pee-Ka... Asadullah Alshishani salutes you. And he prays for the day, That he meets you in Jannah And is killed as a Fidaye. And I pray for the day, O that day, When I'm killed as a Fidaye.”⁸⁷ This was quickly followed by the web release of yet another song performed in English by al-Shishani titled, “When the Jew's Blood Reds my Knife, then my Life is Free from Strife”:

“Hiding behind rocks and trees, I'll find them with greatest ease. Make them get down on their knees, Slaughter them despite their pleas. Throw them in the ovens hot, Soap and lampshades sold and bought, Made of the Jews that we shot. Mercy's something I have not. With the bomb and machinegun, Blast at them and watch them run. We will have a lot of fun, Shoot and kill Jews one by one.”⁸⁸

Given the picture that emerges of “Asadullah al-Shishani”—a hardcore fanatic volunteering as a manager on elite jihadi web forums, who seeks to assist the Pakistani Taliban in launching attacks on the United States, and who sings gaily about murdering innocent people—one might imagine his real identity is that of a high-ranking Al-Qaida terrorist in Iraq or Afghanistan. In fact, nothing could be further from the case—“Asadullah al-Shishani” is actually 21-year old Penn State college student Emerson Begolly, a native of Pittsburgh. In January 2011, FBI agents finally moved in on Begolly as he sat in a vehicle outside a fast food restaurant in New Bethlehem. When he noticed agents approaching him, Begolly attempted to resist arrest and “allegedly bit the agents, drawing blood.” Upon subduing and searching their suspect, the agents recovered a loaded 9mm handgun.⁸⁹ Further searches at Begolly's primary residence turned up homemade video recordings of Begolly dressed in camouflage and jihadi gear, armed to the teeth, and apparently practicing would-be military maneuvers.⁹⁰

Curiously, Begolly is neither Chechen, nor did he ever actually visit local mosques or Islamic centers in Pennsylvania. In fact, as far as the Muslim community in Pittsburgh is concerned, Emerson Begolly never existed. His entire indoctrination and radicalization process evidently took place online, exclusively via Al-Qaida social networking forums. No amount of eavesdropping or inside sources recruited from within a mosque would have led investigators to Begolly—only his violent ramblings posted on the Internet. This is the biggest challenge facing U.S. law enforcement in the coming years. While Begolly might not be capable of launching the next 9/11 all by himself, Al-Qaida doesn't need to achieve that level of success in order to stay

⁸⁶ <http://www.ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=21859>. May 3, 2010.

⁸⁷ <http://www.alqimmah.net/showthread.php?p=17492>. June 1, 2010.

⁸⁸ <http://www.ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=22963>. June 3, 2010.

⁸⁹ “Natrona Heights man accused of biting FBI agents.” *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*. January 6, 2011.

⁹⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yiHkuud8Yw>. May 2011.

relevant. Rather, as pointed out to me by jihadi veteran Abdullah Anas, “in order to spoil things and to stay on the front page of the news and the satellite channels, they don’t need much. Just one, from one thousand. If you have one in the list to wear the jacket with the TNT, that is enough.”

VI.) Conclusions

Looking back on the tumultuous career of the late Usama Bin Laden, it is truly striking how far Al-Qaida has evolved from its humble origins as a tightly-knit cabal largely based in Pashtun regions of Afghanistan into a multi-national enterprise with associate branches across the Muslim world—not to mention a blossoming ideological appeal which propels seemingly-random individuals into taking this battle upon themselves in their own backyard. The killing of Usama Bin Laden delivered a striking blow to the morale of this Al-Qaida enterprise, and it has provided perhaps a brief interruption in their operational planning. The substantial intelligence gathered from Bin Laden’s compound in Abbottabad may yet lead us to the hideouts of further high-ranking Al-Qaida leaders. Moreover, Bin Laden’s successor—be it Ayman al-Zawahiri or someone else—could prove to be a far less capable leader than Usama. But, ultimately, the terrorist threat faced by America today is multi-faceted and no longer the exclusive product of Bin Laden and a handful of dusty terrorist training camps perched along the Afghan-Pakistani border. Thus, whether we speak of Al-Qaida as a centralized organization, a globally-franchised web of affiliates, or simply as an organizing principle guiding homespun radical extremists, it seems quite clear that Al-Qaida will continue to present a serious and undeniable threat to the U.S. homeland for the foreseeable future.