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U.S. GRAND STRATEGY:
DESTROYING ISIS AND AL QAEDA, REPORT ONE

AL QAEDA AND ISIS: EXISTENTIAL THREATS TO THE U.S. AND EUROPE

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INSTITUTE FOR THE
STUDY OF WAR

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The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) is a non-partisan, non-profit, public policy research organization. ISW advances an informed understanding of military affairs through reliable research,trusted analysis, and innovative education. ISW is committed to improving the nation's ability to execute military operations and respond to emerging threats in order to achieve U.S. strategic objectives.

The Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute equips policymakers, opinion leaders, and the military and intelligence communities with detailed and objective open-source analysis of America's current and emerging national security challenges. Through daily monitoring, in-depth studies, graphic presentations, private briefings, and public events, the project is a unique resource for those who need to fully understand the nuance and scale of threats to America's security to effectively develop and execute policy

ABOUT OUR TECHNOLOGY PARTNERS

ISW believes superior strategic insight derives from a fusion of traditional social science research and innovative technological methods. ISW recognizes that the analyst of the future must be able to process a wide variety of information, ranging from personal interviews and historical artifacts to high volume structured data. ISW thanks its technology partner, Praescient Analytics, for their support in this innovative endeavor. In particular, their technology and implementation assistance has supported creating many ISW maps and graphics.

Praescient Analytics is a Veteran Owned Small Business based in Alexandria, Virginia. Its aim is to revolutionize how the world understands information by empowering its customers with the latest analytic tools and methodologies. Currently, Praescient provides several critical services to our government and commercial clients: training, embedded analysis, platform integration, and product customization.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) and the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute conducted an intensive multi-week exercise to frame, design, and evaluate potential courses of action that the United States could pursue to defeat the threat from the Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) and al Qaeda in Iraq and Syria. The planning group weighed the national security interests of the United States, its partners, its rivals, and its enemies operating in or influencing the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. It considered how current policies and interests are interacting in this complex environment. It identified the minimum endstates that would satisfy American national security requirements as well as the likely outcomes of current policies. The group also assessed the threat posed by al Qaeda and ISIS to the United States, both in the immediate and long-term, and tested the probable outcomes of several potential courses of action that the United States could pursue in Iraq and Syria.

ISW and CTP will publish the findings of this exercise in multiple reports. This first report examines America's global grand strategic objectives as they relate to the threat from ISIS and al Qaeda. It considers the nature of those enemy groups in depth and in their global context. The second report will define American strategic objectives in Iraq and Syria, along with those of Iran, Russia, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, and will articulate the minimum required conditions of military-political resolutions to conflicts in Iraq and Syria. Subsequent reports will present the planning group's evaluation of several courses of action.

The key findings of this first report are:

- **Salafi-jihadi military organizations, particularly ISIS and al Qaeda, are the greatest threat to the security and values of American and European citizens.** ISIS and al Qaeda pose an existential threat because they accelerate the collapse of world order, provoke domestic and global trends that endanger American values and way of life, and plan direct attacks against the U.S. and its partners.

- **Syrian al Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al Nusra poses one of the most significant long-term threats of any Salafi-jihadi group.** This al Qaeda affiliate has established an expansive network of partnerships with local opposition groups that have grown either dependent on or fiercely loyal to the organization. Its defeat and destruction must be one of the highest priorities of any strategy to defend the United States and Europe from al Qaeda attacks.

- **ISIS and al Qaeda are more than terrorist groups; they are insurgencies.** They use terrorism as a tactic, but these organizations are insurgencies that aim first to overthrow all existing governments in the Muslim world and replace them with their own, and later, to attack the West from a position of power to spread their ideology to all of humanity. Separating the elements of ISIS and al Qaeda that are actively working to attack the West from the main bodies of those groups fighting in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia is impossible. All al Qaeda groups and ISIS affiliates seek to take the war into the West to fulfill their grand strategic objective of establishing a global caliphate, albeit according to different timelines.

- **Current counter-ISIS and –al Qaeda policies do not ensure the safety of the American people or the homeland.** The primary objective of the U.S. government remains protecting the homeland and the American people, including safeguarding American values both in the homeland and abroad. The activities of ISIS and al Qaeda interact with the policies of Russia, Iran, and China to endanger the international systems upon which American safety and freedom depend. Any strategy to counter ISIS and al Qaeda will require coalition partners. However, there is no natural coalition of states with common goals that can readily work together to resolve this problem. The U.S. must lead its partners and ensure the continuation of existing guarantors of international security such as NATO.

- **American and Western security requires the elimination of ISIS and al Qaeda regional bases and safe havens**. Salafi-jihadi groups independent of al Qaeda and ISIS form a base of support from which the enemy draws strength and resilience. ISIS and al Qaeda use the extensive safe haven and infrastructure of locally focused Salafi-jihadi groups to help plan, train, and equip fighters for attacks against the West. Destroying specific cells or nodes actively preparing attacks against the West is not sufficient. Al Qaeda and ISIS will be able to reconstitute the threat as long as Salafi-jihadi military organizations continue to support them.

The Islamic State and al Qaeda

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Current as of December 14, 2015

This map shows assessed operating zones, areas in which groups conduct offensive attacks or have freedom of movement, for Islamic State and al Qaeda affiliates and associated movements. The terrain features play a signicant role in how the group interacts with its territory. Much of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb's operating zone is desert, for example.
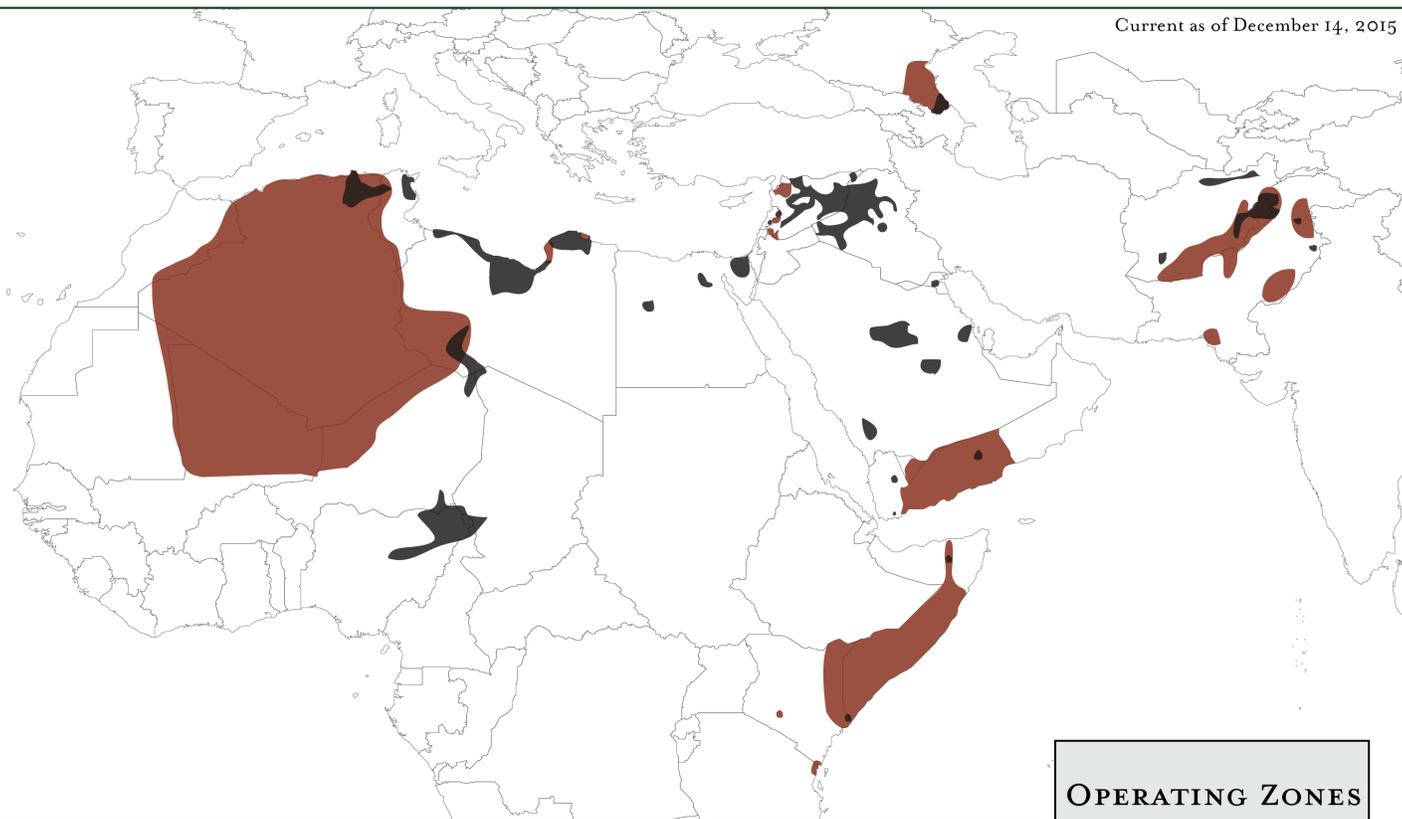
Operating Zones

Islamic State

Al Qaeda

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AL QAEDA AND ISIS:
EXISTENTIAL THREATS TO THE U.S. AND EUROPE

By Frederick W. Kagan, Kimberly Kagan, Jennifer Cafarella, Harleen Gambhir, and Katherine Zimmerman

INTRODUCTION

The terrorist attacks in Paris, France, and San Bernardino, California have focused the West again on the threat that militant Salafi-jihadi groups pose to its security and way of life. They have provoked France, Britain, and the United States to increase their military efforts against the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) in Syria and Iraq. They have demonstrated the fallacy of the idea that ISIS can be indefinitely contained within Iraq and Syria, the Middle East, or even the Muslim-majority world. They have revealed the inadequacy of current strategies to address the threat. These tragedies have thus created space for a serious discussion about the nature of the threat and the responses required to counter it.

PERVASIVE MISCHARACTERIZATIONS OF THE CHALLENGE

The current discussion of these attacks is cementing fundamental mischaracterizations of the national security problem, however. It presupposes that there is a single war, that ISIS is the only enemy or adversary in that war, and that defeating ISIS in Syria and Iraq is tantamount to defeating the organization as a whole. It has given superficial credibility to Russian President Vladimir Putin's call for a grand coalition of all major powers to unite in the fight against ISIS.[1] It largely ignores al Qaeda, including its powerful franchise in Syria called Jabhat al Nusra (JN). It also downplays the importance of the sectarian war that has engulfed the Middle East. That sectarian conflict is one of the primary drivers of the massive flow of refugees now undermining the integration of Europe, facilitating the destruction of multiple states in the Middle East such as Iraq and Yemen, and encouraging the mobilization and radicalization of global Sunni and Shi'a populations in the face of what increasing numbers of people perceive to be existential threats. Any effort to counter the al Qaeda and ISIS threats will fail as long as conditions on the ground do not change.

The media's and policymakers' single-minded focus on ISIS encourages Americans to overlook the fundamental incompatibility of Iranian and Russian regional and global objectives with those of the U.S. and Europe. Such a narrow lens ignores Russia's revisionist grand strategy that links Moscow's actions in Syria with its continued war in Ukraine, its subversive activities in the Baltics, and its mounting global military aggression. It simplifies an extremely complicated set of multi-actor, multi-theater conflicts into a problem that can be solved through counter-terrorism-targeting and homeland security measures. It guarantees that the West will not design or execute a coherent strategy to secure its vital national interests.

The San Bernardino attack in California adds superficial validity to the idea that the U.S. must turn inward to secure itself. It brings to the fore domestic issues such as gun control, law enforcement procedures, immigration policies, religious freedom, profiling, and many others. Each issue is important in its own right, and finding the right balance among competing valid concerns is essential to enhance America's ability to protect its citizens without compromising the civil liberties and individual rights that are the bedrock of our society.

Defensive and internal measures will not adequately protect Americans at home, however. Passivity abroad will facilitate the continued collapse of the international order, including the global economy on which American prosperity and the American way of life depend. More states will fail; more conflict will displace refugees; adversaries will revise borders by force and will contest the freedom of the seas; others will test weapons of mass destruction. The symptoms of the collapsing world order have appeared already: the promises of the Arab Spring have largely failed states; ISIS has overrun the borders of Iraq and Syria; Russia has annexed border provinces in Ukraine; refugees and migrants have overwhelmed Europe and collapsed the Schengen Zone; Iran has fired missiles in the Straits of Hormuz; China has built islands to allow it to project power; and North Korea has tested a nuclear weapon. The collapse of world order creates the vacuums that allow Salafi-jihadi military organizations such as al Qaeda and ISIS to amass resources to plan and conduct attacks on scales that could overwhelm any defenses the United States might raise. Even a marginal increase in such attacks could provoke Western societies to impose severe controls on the freedoms and civil liberties of their populations that would damage the very ideals that must most be defended. Sound strategy against these enemies requires effective action against their bases as well appropriate domestic efforts.

The inextricable interrelationship between the strength of ISIS and al Qaeda in the Muslim-majority world and the threat of direct attack the groups pose within Europe and the United States is one of the most important findings of this

exercise. Attempts to identify and target the specific enemy cells planning, preparing, or executing attacks on the U.S. homeland separately from the larger groups of which those cells are a part will inevitably fail to protect the American people. The regional bases of ISIS and al Qaeda provide a pool of resources and specific capabilities that will enable them to direct growing numbers of sophisticated attacks into the West whenever they so desire. American and Western security requires the elimination of ISIS and al Qaeda regional bases and safe havens.

There are multiple, separate wars ongoing at the start of 2016. Many share belligerents. The war in Yemen stems from a geopolitical struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia that has been gravely exacerbated by the ongoing war in Syria. A broader regional war in the Middle East may emerge as the Saudi-Iranian conflict escalates. Russia's establishment of an airbase in Syria close to Turkey's border on NATO's southern flank connects the war in Syria with that in Ukraine, as both challenge the brittle alliance. The United States must prevent the separate wars from merging into a general war, involving great powers, regional powers, and non-state actors. Such a situation may not be imminent, but it is possible and can stress the United States beyond anything we now see in January 2016.

GOALS AND METHODS OF THIS PLANNING EXERCISE

The Institute for the Study of War and the Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute have conducted an intensive multi-week effort to develop and evaluate various possible courses of action.

The exercise began with a complete re-consideration of the vital national security interests and objectives of the United States, its partners, rivals such as Russia and Iran, and its enemies including both ISIS and al Qaeda. The exercise also considered the nature of the current international environment in which many factors are undermining global order, stability, and international laws and norms. It evaluated the threat posed by the persistence of safe havens for al Qaeda and ISIS in Iraq and Syria as distinct from the individual cells of those organizations planning and conducting attacks in the West. The group then designed and tested many possible courses of action to mitigate and, if possible, eliminate these conditions and the threats.

None of the courses of action we examined, including a continuation or minor modification of the current strategy, achieved American national security objectives. The planning team is therefore continuing to examine other approaches to the problem and re-evaluating its assessments as circumstances on the ground change.

Debate about Western strategy toward Iraq and Syria continues in the U.S. and Europe, however, and negotiations between some Syrian opposition groups and the Assad government are scheduled to start on January 25, 2016. Examinations of American grand strategic interests and of the nature of the enemy groups and the threat they pose to the U.S. and the West should inform all of these discussions. We have decided, therefore, not to wait until we have completed developing possible courses of action to begin presenting our findings.

The planning group will thus present its results in several publications. This first paper examines American global grand strategic objectives as they relate to the threat from ISIS

The regional bases of ISIS and al Qaeda…enable them to direct growing numbers of sophisticated attacks into the West whenever they so desire.

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and al Qaeda. It also considers the nature of those groups from ideological, structural, and military perspectives and evaluates the relationship between the territory and resources those groups possess in the Muslim world and the direct violent threat they pose within the United States and Europe.

The second paper will present the group's assessment of American strategic objectives in Iraq and Syria in light of the issues considered in this first report. It will also describe the interests and objectives of Russia, Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia in Iraq and Syria as they relate to the overall goals of those states. It will then articulate the minimum conditions that a political-military resolution of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria must meet in order to meet U.S. national security requirements.

The group will publish one or more additional papers describing in detail the specific courses of action we have evaluated, assessments of their results and whether or not they would achieve core American security objectives, the risks they pose to those objectives, and approaches to mitigating those risks. These results will most likely appear in February 2016.

CONCLUSION

Americans must confront the magnitude of the security disaster we face squarely, neither simplifying the challenges nor minimizing the requirements. Yet we must not throw up our hands in despair and retreat behind our own walls. Retreat will cause a terrible situation to become much worse and will raise the cost and difficulty of repairing it in the future by orders of magnitude. Enemies and adversaries, such as al Qaeda and ISIS, will thrive. Focusing inwardly and defensively will severely undermine core American values such

as liberty and diversity. Retreat will accelerate the collapse of the global order and economy, thereby severely damaging America's prosperity and the well-being of all Americans.

The argument for caution, passivity, and delay is easy to make. The desire to turn away from so vexing and complicated a problem is strong. Nothing about the situation in Syria, Iraq, or in the Middle East generally inspires optimism. But inaction is also action, and refusal to choose among bad options is a form of decision. Drifting along the current path in order to avoid dangerous and unpleasant action will almost certainly fail to achieve vital American national security interests and will put the safety of the American people and their allies in greater danger. The U.S. must choose a new course, risky and costly as it will surely be. This project will ultimately recommend such a course as it evaluates options, but its primary purpose is to reframe the debate and discussion in the hopes of igniting well-grounded creative thinking that may produce a better way out of the shadows in which we now find ourselves.

AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Ensuring the safety of the American people and homeland is the first and most fundamental obligation of the American government. Current policies are not fulfilling that obligation and are unlikely to do so if continued. This planning exercise has therefore focused exclusively on the problems that threaten the safety and prosperity of the American people and on ways of ensuring their security today and into the future. No secondary considerations – democracy promotion, humanitarian activities, or support and expansion of American values, for example – have been allowed to intrude into our deliberations, despite the importance we and many Americans attach to each.

This exercise has thus considered only the actions required to accomplish what the authors of NSC-68, America's strategy during the Cold War, so articulately described as "the fundamental purpose" of the United States: "to assure the integrity and vitality of our free society, which is founded upon the dignity and worth of the individual."[2] They continued, in words that are as true today as they were when they were first written 65 years ago:

> *Three realities emerge as a consequence of this purpose: our determination to maintain the essential elements of individual freedom, as set forth in the Constitution and Bill of Rights; our determination to create conditions under which our free and democratic system can live and prosper; and our determination to fight if necessary to defend our way of life....*

We restate these realities as concrete objectives to guide American grand strategy in the current crisis:

- Secure the American people and homeland.

- Protect, retain, and promote by example our free and democratic way of life.

- Retain and promote a free market international economic system, which relies on the free flow of people and goods throughout the world.

- Protect and strengthen a rules-based international order.

- Retain and strengthen our alliances and assist our allies to survive and prosper in the face of common dangers.

These objectives are connected and interdependent, but all are required for securing the American people and our Constitution and way of life.

WHAT "PROTECTING THE HOMELAND" MEANS

Ensuring the physical safety of Americans within the United States is not a sufficient aim for U.S. grand strategy. America is more than a collection of people who happen to live within given borders. It is an idea, a way of life, and a set of common values still broadly accepted within our society despite the

> *Drifting along the current path in order to avoid dangerous and unpleasant action will almost certainly fail to achieve vital American national security interests.*

over-heated rhetoric of a fraught and dangerous time. Today's caustic discourse has created in the minds of many a belief that Americans no longer share a common set of values, and certainly not that which animated the Founding Fathers of this republic. A brief review of the most fundamental principles of our society and their implications for the current struggle is in order.

Americans today accept almost universally the affirmation of our values enunciated in the Declaration of Independence: "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among

Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed…" Nor do Americans question the idea animating the Constitution: that the purpose of our government is to "establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.…" We argue heatedly about the meaning of each of the words and the best policies by which to pursue these lofty goals, but not about the goals themselves. On those basic principles Americans remain united.

Individual liberty and the responsibility to use that liberty to support and advance the common values of society are at the heart of the American idea. As NSC-68 elaborates:

> *The free society values the individual as an end in himself, requiring of him only that measure of self–discipline and self–restraint which make the rights of each individual compatible with the rights of every other individual. The freedom of the individual has as its counterpart, therefore, the negative responsibility of the individual not to exercise his freedom in ways inconsistent with the freedom of other individuals and the positive responsibility to make constructive use of his freedom in the building of a just society.*

The value we place on individual liberty and its responsible use is, in fact, the principal source of our strength:

> *From this idea of freedom with responsibility derives the marvelous diversity, the deep tolerance, the lawfulness of the free society. This is the explanation of the strength of free men. It constitutes the integrity and the vitality of a free and democratic system. The free society attempts to create and maintain an environment in which every individual has the opportunity to realize his creative powers. It also explains why the free society tolerates those within it who would use their freedom to destroy it. By the same token, in relations between nations, the prime alliance of the free society is on the strength and appeal of its idea, and it feels no compulsion sooner or later to bring all societies into conformity with it.*

Written at a moment of fear and confusion as great as today's, NSC-68 followed this argument to its logical and necessary conclusion:

> *For the free society does not fear, it welcomes, diversity. It derives its strength from its hospitality even to antipathetic ideas. It is a market for free trade and ideas, secure in its faith that free men will take the best wares, and grow to a fuller and better realization of their powers in exercising their choice.*

This statement was a direct response to the first speech of Senator Joseph McCarthy in February 1950 that launched his fear-mongering crusade against people who could be accused of disloyalty to the United States. It reflected the belief that such a crusade would destroy America as an idea as surely as the military power of the Soviet Union. It warned against relying on tools of domestic suppression to defend against a foreign threat. It recalled, above all, the belief on which America was founded and that has guided it through turmoil: that protecting our heterogeneous, quarrelsome, and at times acrimonious diversity is the true source of our strength and the characteristic of Americans that we must protect most fiercely.

The American idea celebrates diversity at home and accepts it abroad. Our aim is not to remake all states and people in our own image. It must be, rather, to create and sustain a world order in which we can live peacefully in accord with our own values even as others live according to their different values. Thus in the words of NSC-68, "we should limit our requirement" of our adversaries and rivals to their "participation with other nations on the basis of equality and respect for the rights of others. Subject to this requirement, we must with our allies…seek to create a world society based on the principle of consent."

"In a shrinking world," as the document notes, "the absence of order among nations is becoming less and less tolerable. This fact imposes on us, in our own interests, the responsibility of world leadership. It demands that we make the attempt, and accept the risks inherent in it, to bring about order and justice by means consistent with the principles of freedom and democracy."

But we must hold ourselves to a reasonable standard of success. The framework of a global society based on consent that we must seek to create and sustain:

> *…cannot be inflexible. It will consist of many national communities of great and varying abilities and resources, and hence of war potential. The seeds of conflict will inevitably exist or will come into being. To acknowledge this is only to acknowledge the impossibility of a final solution. Not to acknowledge it can be fatally dangerous in a world in which there are no final solutions.*

From this review of our core values and their implications emerges a clear set of requirements and constraints that must control the development of any strategy to respond to the multifarious crises we face today:

- America cannot abandon its values in order to ensure its physical safety.

- The threat to those values and to our security comes from beyond our shores, and it must be met and defeated there without compromising the American idea at home.

- The U.S. must lead in the struggle to protect its own people and interests, but must also mobilize in its support all of those with compatible values and interests.

- America must not aim to remake all countries and peoples into our own image, but neither can it tolerate the persistence of powerful groups or states actively seeking to undermine or destroy our values and security.

- U.S. grand strategy must set achievable goals and adjust to new circumstances over time, not imagining that any set of policies can resolve all problems for all time.

- Americans must understand the current crisis in all of its depth and breadth, recognizing the interconnectedness of many disparate conflicts but not falsely homogenizing them under a single rubric.

- The U.S. must use all of the appropriate instruments of state, economic, social, and cultural power to achieve these aims, not preferring one or spurning another *a priori*, but using all in balanced application as each circumstance requires.

- Americans must not despair of succeeding in a long and difficult struggle despite mistakes and setbacks, disappointments and fears.

THE INTERSECTING THREATS OF TODAY

Salafi-jihadi military organizations, principally al Qaeda and ISIS, pose the most imminent threat to the security and values of the United States and Europe. Although these groups currently lack the ability to destroy us militarily, the danger they present is no less existential for that. Already their actions are causing the peoples of the West to turn against one another, to fear and suspect their neighbors, to constrain their freedoms, and to disrupt their ordinary lives. The nearly-unprecedented flow of refugees from the horrors of constant and brutal warfare threatens to overwhelm many peaceful societies, creating new conflicts and reviving old ones. Al Qaeda and ISIS have shattered states, undermined others, and are threatening more. They are destroying the international order in the Middle East and Africa and seeking to spread that destruction to Europe and Asia.

The success of these Salafi-jihadi military organizations comes only partly from their own strength and skill. It results also from a general collapse of the international order driven partly by the withdrawal of the United States from supporting that order, partly by the irresponsible passivity and free-riding of most European states, and partly from the active attempts of Iran, China, and Russia to dismantle all or part of a global order designed to favor our values and interests and to replace it with one that favors theirs.

Iran, China, and Russia all fear Salafi-jihadi groups and are fighting them in various ways. The interests and values of all three states are at odds with one another as well as with our own. There is thus no overt or covert alliance or coalition among these states, ISIS, and al Qaeda, nor a concerted conspiracy to disrupt the world order together. Yet their actions are mutually-reinforcing in the weakening of states, the destruction of the international consensus required to meet current challenges, and the continuous expansion of armed conflict in both scale and intensity. The task of confronting the diverse but explicit alliance of Axis powers in the Second World War was enormously easier, from an intellectual standpoint, than is the challenge of navigating the complex and shifting forces created by multiple separate and mutually-antagonistic actors who are nevertheless unwittingly helping one another to the same end.

The U.S. cannot thus understand the challenges of ISIS, al Qaeda, Russia, Iran, and China separately from one another, nor design individual strategies for dealing with each in isolation. Neither can we seek a single grand solution, agreeing with all partners on a resolution to all problems. American grand strategy must, rather, examine component parts of the global challenge we face in the context of all global actors and ensure that the solutions proposed for each component advance solutions for all other components to the greatest possible extent. No country has ever faced a task of grand strategic formulation as difficult, complex, and daunting as this one.

ENDSTATE FOR THE CURRENT CRISIS

The present exercise considered one such component, the requirement to develop an approach to defeating ISIS and al Qaeda taking into consideration the intersection of that undertaking with the challenges posed by Russia and Iran (China playing only a very limited role in this matter). It determined that the endstate required to achieve core American national security interests as defined above is that the United States and Europe can assure the physical security of their peoples and preserve their values and way of life while controlling the continued threat from Salafi-jihadi military organizations through the normal law-enforcement means appropriate for democratic societies at peace.

The disruption of European societies, the European Union, and the NATO alliance now under way caused the group to define additional, Europe-focused sub-components of the endstate:

- Europe becomes once again a net exporter of security and stability in its immediate environs and the world.

- NATO remains the primary national security and military alliance in Europe and North America and is neither supplanted by the European Union nor weakened by the loss or collapse of current member states.

The maintenance or full restoration of the European Union project, the integration and partial subordination of several European states to an overarching economic-political construct, is not in itself a requirement of American national security strategy. The current drift, led by French President Francois Hollande following the November 2015 Paris attacks, toward replacing NATO with the EU as the European military alliance is, in fact, deeply damaging to both American and European interests. Such

> *The U.S. and Europe must be able to secure their peoples and maintain their values while managing the continued threat from ISIS and al Qaeda through means appropriate for democratic societies at peace.*

a development would cleave apart the nearly seven-decades-old military union linking the U.S. and Canada with Europe that has facilitated the unified action of the Western powers against threats to their security and interests. NATO is the strongest possible statement of the mutual commitment of Europe and North America in pursuit of common security and common goals. The weakening of the NATO structure would do untold harm to the well-being of the West.

A Europe rent asunder by the combined forces of Salafi-jihadi attacks, refugee flows, Russian pressures, and the rise of racist, nationalist, and isolationist right-wing groups and parties, moreover, would significantly damage American security, economic, political, and social interests. It would be a serious blow to our common values, would encourage our enemies, and would accelerate the collapse of the world order as a whole. The U.S. therefore has a vital interest in helping the European Union idea survive in something close to its original form, at least for the duration of this phase of the present conflict.

DEFINING SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The general considerations and specific endstates described above do not suffice for the elaboration of specific strategic objectives or even endstates in the Middle East. The

characteristics of those endstates and objectives must flow from a nuanced assessment of the nature of the enemies the United States faces and the threats they pose. It is not right to leap from a recognition that the threat is external to the conclusion that it can be defeated by closing our borders, as many in both Europe and the United States now argue, even apart from the considerations of the damage such actions would do to our core values. We must also assess what degree of control over human movement across borders would be required, whether any feasible degree would be sufficient, and what options the enemy would have in response.

Neither can we jump to the conclusion that "defeating" ISIS and al Qaeda in the Middle East would resolve the threats to American security at home without articulating precisely what that "defeat" would have to entail. We must also consider how the remnants of ISIS and al Qaeda—for there is no circumstance in which we can hope to annihilate both groups completely—would continue to threaten and even attack Europe and the U.S. if their defeat were confined solely to the safe havens they now hold in the Middle East.

The next stage of this planning process, therefore, must be a re-assessment of the nature of the enemy and the threat it poses to the international order and to the security of the European and American homelands. We can then return to the task of defining specific regional endstates and objectives that, together with appropriate actions at our borders and within our societies and states, can achieve our over-arching requirements, protect our peoples, and sustain our values and way of life.

AL QAEDA, ISIS, AND GLOBAL SALAFI-JIHADIS

OVERVIEW

Establishing sound strategy requires properly defining the enemy as well as the problem. The planning group has assessed that the the threat to the United States comes from

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Assumptions of Current U.S. Strategy

- Focus on ISIS, not Jabhat al Nusra

- Patience will be rewarded

- Negotiated settlement is possible

- Negotiations will help create new partners to fight ISIS

Salafi-jihadi organizations, the broad category into which al Qaeda and ISIS fall. U.S. policy makers typically identify the threat posed by al Qaeda and ISIS as a counter-terrorism

problem, and they identify the solution as disrupting the leaders who give the organizations direction and the cells that conduct attacks. They also attempt to differentiate between Salafi-jihadi groups with global and local intent in order to limit the problem set. This conceptualization of the threat and its solution are incorrect. Al Qaeda and ISIS exist within safe havens provided by Salafi-jihadi military organizations. These regional support bases provide are a source of military strength and give al Qaeda and ISIS the ability to regenerate after defeat. The U.S. must therefore broaden the scope of its understanding of the problem to include a holistic assessment of the safe haven itself in order to develop tailored policies to defeat the Salafi-jihadi threat.

Al Qaeda and ISIS are Salafi-jihadi military organizations seeking to impose their vision of radical, intolerant, and violent Islam upon the entire world by force of arms.[3] They pose a number of threats to the core American national security objectives outlined in the previous section. They have shown the intent and ability to conduct a campaign of attacks within the U.S. and Europe at a low but growing level of sophistication and lethality. This campaign is already causing changes in Western polities that undermine the values of individual liberty and diversity that are central to the idea of America and to the modern Europe project.

These groups are also driving the expansion of wars in the heart of the Middle East that have destroyed three states (Syria, Iraq, and Yemen), created millions of refugees and caused an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. The flow of refugees is undermining Europe's ability to function as a coherent entity, weakening and dividing America's most important ally. The al Qaeda and ISIS war against the world order has both sectarian and geopolitical dimensions. Some ISIS and al Qaeda groups leverage sectarian splits to mobilize Sunni Muslim populations and conduct sectarian brutalities.[4] The wars these groups fuel in the Middle East are drawing the terrorist proxies and military forces of Iran into expeditionary operations throughout the Arab world while simultaneously giving seeming justification to their sectarian violence. Foreign-fighter support to ISIS and al Qaeda is well known; the Iranian axis also draws upon foreign fighters including Lebanese Hezbollah, Iraqi Shi'a militias, Afghan, and Pakistani fighters that augment Iranian armed forces and volunteers. The war is thus radicalizing both Sunni and Shi'a populations in the Middle East and beyond, creating even more recruits for the Salafi-jihadi military organizations that are at war with us.

The establishment of the ISIS caliphate, a Salafi-jihadi polity, and multiple Salafi-jihadi armies in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya provides al Qaeda and ISIS with access to resources and capabilities they have never had before. They can use those resources to consolidate and expand their positions in the region and to increase the rate and complexity of their attacks

in the West. Many of the capabilities needed to sustain armies in the field in Iraq and Syria are transferrable to protracted terrorist campaigns in the U.S. and Europe. They could even allow ISIS and al Qaeda to move from terrorist to low-level guerrilla operations in the West if conditions both in the Middle East and in Western countries continue to deteriorate along the current trajectory.

Killing individual al Qaeda and ISIS leaders and attempting to disrupt the specific cells actively preparing attacks against the West is no longer a sufficient strategy to protect Americans at home, if it ever was. President Obama has accepted this reality, at least to a limited extent, and now describes his approach as combining targeted strikes, disrupting ISIS operations, and engaging in diplomatic efforts to find "a political resolution to the Syrian war" with support to local forces that will "take away [jihadi] safe havens."[5] But the U.S. effort remains focused on ISIS in Iraq and Syria and largely ignores the al Qaeda affiliate in Syria, Jabhat al Nusra. This focus has distracted attention from al Qaeda and ISIS affiliates outside of Mesopotamia and the Levant. The current

> *Many of the capabilities needed to sustain armies in Iraq and Syria are transferrable to protracted terrorist campaigns in the U.S. and Europe.*

strategy also assumes that patience in retaking terrain will be rewarded: that the U.S. can take whatever time is necessary to build a viable coalition of local partners to eliminate ISIS safe havens in Iraq and Syria, presumably shifting over time to addressing affiliates elsewhere. It further assumes that there is a viable negotiated solution to the Syrian conflict that will achieve the core American objective of depriving both ISIS and al Qaeda of their positions in Syria.

These assumptions are invalid. Jabhat al Nusra has weakened the moderate opposition and penetrated other Sunni opposition groups in Syria so thoroughly that it is poised to benefit the most from the destruction of ISIS and the fall or transition of the Assad regime. The likeliest outcome of the current strategy in Syria, if it succeeds, is the *de facto* establishment and ultimate declaration of a Jabhat al Nusra emirate in Syria that has the backing of a wide range of non-al Qaeda fighting forces and population groups. This emirate, even before it is declared, will function as a central node in the global al Qaeda network, supporting other al Qaeda affiliates with resources and highly-trained fighters and technicians, and exporting violence into the heart of the West. The formal declaration of an emirate will help legitimize al Qaeda's methodology in the wider jihadi community and enable it to

inherit components of ISIS's support base as the latter loses territory.

ISIS is likely to maintain a safe haven in the eastern Syrian desert even if current military plans are successful. Counter-ISIS military operations along the Euphrates River Valley have focused on ISIS's primary safe haven in Raqqa, as well as Ramadi. Yet ISIS has freedom of maneuver and control over a large section of the Euphrates, with a hub in Deir ez-Zour, which is likely beyond the reach of both the Iraqi Security Forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces. This corridor is a safe haven from which ISIS can maintain and regrow capabilities even if it takes losses in the cities on which operations are now focused.

Jabhat al Nusra is also a spoiler that will almost certainly cause the current strategy in Syria to fail. Jabhat al Nusra opposes any negotiated settlement for both principled and practical reasons. It is influential enough with powerful opposition groups to ensure that some of them will remain in the field, undermine temporary ceasefires, and prevent any permanent ceasefire that does not remove the Assad regime. Many powerful armed opposition groups reject a settlement that does not guarantee Assad's removal from power, so Jabhat al Nusra is pushing in a direction toward which they are already inclined.[6]

The likely continued fighting and consequent failure to achieve a political resolution to the conflict will preclude the formation of a pan-Syrian and, indeed, pan-regional coalition to defeat ISIS. Would-be local partners in that fight will be distracted by continued conflict in Syria's western heart, which will remain more important to them than fighting ISIS in the eastern Syrian desert. The real outcome of the current approach will thus most likely be the persistence of safe havens for both ISIS and Jabhat al Nusra in Syria, the intensification of sectarian war, and the resulting continued radicalization and mobilization of the global Muslim community in ways that benefit the Salafi-jihadis who threaten us.

Developing a viable strategy to achieve our vital national security objectives requires first understanding the enemies we face in a synthetic fashion that examines the interactions among them rather than using the current siloed approach that treats each as a distinct phenomenon. It also requires recognizing that the threats to the American and European homeland emanate not from small cells of ISIS and al Qaeda leaders, but rather from the capabilities of ISIS and the al Qaeda affiliates inherent in their abilities to persist as military organizations rather than terrorist groups. It must, finally, account for the various contexts within which al Qaeda and ISIS operate. Only then can we consider what a plausible strategy to achieve our core security requirements might be.

THE NEXUS

Al Qaeda and ISIS operate in several contexts: global Salafism, intra-jihadi strife, Sunni alienation from and armed opposition to Shi'a-dominated governments in Baghdad and Damascus, the Arab-Persian conflict, Sunni Arab monarchies, sectarian conflict, and the war against the West. These contexts continually interact with one another. ISIS and al Qaeda affiliates balance their activities that support attacks against the West with the dynamics of the ISIS-al Qaeda conflict; of the local Sunni armed opposition to Shi'a governments within which they live; of the social and political milieu of predominantly Sunni states; and of the global Salafi-jihadi movement on which they rely for funding and recruitment. The competition between ISIS and al Qaeda for leadership of the global Salafi-jihadi movement is another imperative that affects each group's calculation of this balance and overall calibration of its activities. An assessment that focuses only on one aspect of this balance—such as attacks against the West—will constantly misunderstand what the groups are doing and why, and will consequently fail to predict their future behavior accurately. We will therefore consider each part of the context in turn.

ISIS and al Qaeda Contexts

- Global Salafism
- Intra-jihadi conflict
- Sunni alienation in Iraq and Syria
- Arab-Persian conflict
- Sunni Arab monarchies
- War against the West

A variety of factors compel us to consider the Salafi movement as a whole in order to understand this part of the ISIS-al Qaeda global context. Both groups draw heavily though not exclusively on this global movement for funding; religious, intellectual, and moral support; recruiting; and freedom of movement. The U.S. and the international community are apparently making greater efforts to disrupt financial and recruiting support for ISIS and, to a lesser extent, al Qaeda and its affiliates, but those efforts will certainly fail without a solid understanding of the Salafi sub-stratum from which some of the backing comes.

The situation in Syria has deteriorated to such an extent, moreover, that we must consider—and some advocate—supporting some Salafi groups in the hope of empowering them to check al Qaeda and ISIS. A careful evaluation of the Salafi theo-ideology not only rules out this course of action, but also highlights the long-term dangers that allowing even the non-al Qaeda and non-ISIS Salafi armed groups to remain powerful poses to American and European security.

SALAFISM

Both al Qaeda and ISIS exist within the global Salafi community. They vie with each other for the leadership of the component of global Salafism committed to the use of armed force to achieve its aims that is known as Salafi-jihadi.[7] Salafis believe that "Islam became decadent because it strayed from the righteous path. The strength of the original and righteous *umma* [Muslim community] flowed from its faith and its practices, for they were pleasing to God. Recapturing the glory and grandeur of the Golden Age requires a return to the authentic faith and practices of the ancient ones, namely the Prophet Mohammad and his companions."[8]

Quietist Salafism

By no means do all Salafis engage in, encourage, or support the use of violence to achieve their aims. A sizable "quietist" contingent of Salafis is "skeptical of violent and nonviolent political participation."[9] They "counsel their followers to observe strict obedience to Muslim rulers and silence on

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Al Qaeda and ISIS vie with each other for leadership of the global Salafi–jihadi Movement

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political matters. While many quietist Salafists do not engage in political activities, they do contribute to political discourse regarding international, regional, and local political matters. Their political actions are quiet, but their political voice is loud. They lie on a continuum between absolute quietism and peaceful political engagement."[10]

Quietist Salafis are not an immediate security threat to the U.S., in principle. Quietism is not necessarily a permanent condition, however, as the author of a recent study on the phenomenon notes: "There have been many cases of so-called 'quietist' Salafis throughout the twentieth century who became activist. Most recently, hundreds of thousands of quietists became politically active in parliamentary elections after the Arab Spring revolutions…"[11]

Quietism can even become militant activism in sufficiently dire circumstances: "The human toll of the crisis in Syria (which activist and quietist Salafis depict as a result of the Assad government's Shiite faith) has led some non-violent Salafis… to take up arms and lead battalions in Syria." The expansion of the humanitarian catastrophe in Syria has created a debate within the Kuwaiti Salafi community, for example, over "whether money should be channeled towards arming fighters or providing bread and blankets to orphans."[12] The thorny challenge of restricting the funds available to Salafi-jihadi groups requires understanding and engaging with nominally quietist Salafi donors.

The phenomenon of quietist Salafis becoming Salafi-jihadis—or at least their financiers—as a result of the appalling humanitarian crisis and seemingly existential threat to Sunni populations in Syria and elsewhere is a manifestation of the way in which the regional sectarian war is mobilizing the Muslim community behind radical and violent solutions more broadly. The shift to support for militant groups splits the donor community and the quietist Salafist community generally, but also tends to radicalize those who favor continued support to the fighters even further.[13] This dynamic within the quietist Salafi community, as well as with the much broader non-Salafist community of donors and supporters driven primarily by humanitarian concerns, is one of the most important factors allowing the current crisis in the Middle East to protract and expand.

Political Salafism

Another sizable group of Salafis pursue political power and influence as the primary means by which to accomplish their goals. Thus major Salafi figures such as Hassan al Banna and Mawlana Abu al Ala Mawdudi formed political parties in the first half of the 20th century in Egypt (the Muslim Brotherhood) and India (Jamaat-i Islami) respectively. They both believed in "the unity of Islam as an all-encompassing guide for the life of the believer and his or her community" and "advocated the creation of a true Muslim state through imposition of the Sharia, which they viewed not only as the strict Quranic law but also as the practices of the salaf…"[14] These political Salafis nevertheless also supported some degree of violence to pursue their aims, permitting violent jihad against the colonial powers they were fighting.[15] The permissibility of using violence to advance the Salafist cause
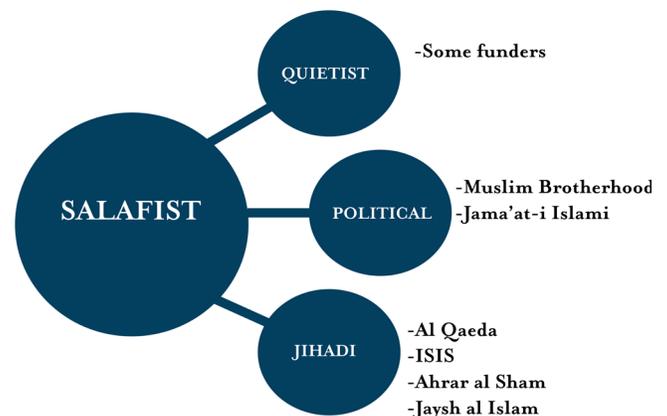
has continued to split the Muslim Brotherhood to this day, in fact. The Brotherhood's decision to renounce violence and enter the Egyptian political process in the 1990s drew vitriolic attacks from current al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri, who denounced it repeatedly and forcefully for abandoning the path of jihad.[16]

Political Salafism is thus not necessarily a direct security threat to the U.S. and the West in itself. The immediate

danger it poses depends on whether it advocates attacking the West in the name of defending the righteous community against colonial or post-colonial oppressors. Political Salafist groups that reject such an approach are not part of the Salafi-jihadi current against which the West must use force. Neither are they simply benign aspects of political Islamism. The theoretical gap between the ideology of Hassan al Banna and Salafi-jihadism is not that wide, and political Salafists can and often do tolerate and sometimes support Salafi-jihadis in their midst. Salafi-jihadis also use political Salafis as cover for operations that directly support their violence.[17]

The example of the Muslim Brotherhood should serve as a reminder, however, that involving political Salafis in the political process tends to split the movement and siphon strength away from the Salafi-jihadis. Excluding the entire Salafi creed from political participation risks driving a much higher percentage of them into the jihadi camp.

Salafi–Jihadis

Jihad is a complex concept in Islam. Its general meaning is simply "striving in the way of Allah," and it can refer to personal struggles to overcome temptation and purify oneself, communal efforts to live rightly, or armed combat. The idea of an obligation to act is also both complex and extremely important within Islam. An activity or behavior can be obligatory, *fard*, for either the individual or the community as a whole. Failing to perform acts that are *fard 'ayn,* or personal obligations, jeopardizes the soul of the offender. When acts are obligatory for the community, however, the individual has much more latitude to determine what role he must play in carrying them out.

Salafi-jihadis take the position that jihad as armed conflict against unbelievers and apostates is *fard 'ayn*—a personal obligation of every individual. They are thus by far the most dangerous sect within radical and even violent Islamism, because their creed demands the mobilization of every member of their community to fight. They are also dangerous because their beliefs allow them to kill civilians, even Muslims in certain circumstances, despite numerous explicit and vehement prohibitions in the Qu'ran and in the *hadith* against Muslim-on-Muslim violence.[18] They accept a line of reasoning that attributes personal responsibility for acts against Islam not only to the individuals perpetrating those acts and to their leaders, but also to people who voted for those leaders or supported them in some other way.[19] Salafi-jihadis, in other words, are inclined to see all individuals in the West as fair game and to argue that killing them is not only permissible, but may in some circumstances be a personal obligation.

The Obama administration makes a sharp distinction among Salafi-jihadis, restricting its operations to those who are planning or preparing attacks against the West.[20] U.S. strategy thus implicitly assumes that Salafi-jihadis who are not currently focused on attacking the West will not change their focus. Neither the theology nor the ideology of Salafi-jihadi groups offers any basis for that assumption, however, and it has been proven wrong. The administration long claimed, for example, that ISIS was not a threat to the West because it was locally-focused.

Nothing in Salafi-jihadi ideology inherently creates a firebreak between groups that are willing to attack the U.S. and those that are not. The principle that establishing a just Islamic society within the Muslim-majority world requires attacking and defeating the West in its own lands is, in fact, well-established in the writings of the most important Salafi thinkers.[21] The creed itself predisposes its members to support attacks against the West as a matter of principle, and to forbear from such attacks only as matters of practicality. The burden of proof is heavy on anyone who asserts that the U.S. can live with, let alone support, Salafi-jihadi groups such as Syria's Ahrar al Sham.

THE LOCAL CONTEXTS: IRAQ AND SYRIA

ISIS and the most powerful al Qaeda affiliates are engaged in local wars: ISIS in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Afghanistan; Jabhat al Nusra in Syria and to a lesser degree Lebanon; al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen; al Shabaab in Somalia and Kenya; al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in Libya and Mali; and Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region.[22] These groups draw strength from these conflicts, which provide them with both local and global recruits and sources of additional funding, as well as opportunities for media attention and enhancing their social media presence.

> *Nothing in Salafi–jihadi ideology creates a firebreak between groups that are willing to attack the U.S. and those that are not.*

It is a terrible mistake to imagine that war depletes al Qaeda and ISIS. On the contrary, the scale and intensity of a local conflict correlates closely with the strength of the local al Qaeda affiliate or ISIS wilayat.

Neither ISIS nor al Qaeda started any of these wars, nor were they originally the most powerful fighting forces in them. They took advantage, rather, of the collapse of states and the emergence of security vacuums in areas with aggrieved Sunni populations among whom they settled in hopes of mobilizing them on their behalf.

Such vacuums among fearful populations are unquestionably an opportunity for ISIS and al Qaeda. Abu Mus'ab al Zarqawi,

the founder of al Qaeda in Iraq (or al Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers, as ISIS called itself before December 2006), described the way in which his group capitalized on this opportunity in February 2004: "we feel that [our] body has begun to spread in the security vacuum, gaining locations on the ground that will be the nucleus from which to launch and move out in a serious way."[23] Abu Muhammad al Joulani, Jabhat al Nusra's leader, also framed his group's entry into Syria the same way. He stated in December 2013, "Al-Sham was not prepared for our entry had it not been for the Syrian revolution."[24]

ISIS deliberately increased the disorder it found in Iraq. Zarqawi "strived to create as much chaos as possible…," according to his successors, in order to inhibit ruling factions from achieving enough stability to be able to thwart the Islamic movement's expansion. "By using methods that led to maximum chaos and targeting apostates of all different backgrounds, the mujahidin were able to keep Iraq in constant instability and war, never allowing any apostate group to enjoy a moment of security."[25]

The chaos within political vacuums favors groups like ISIS and al Qaeda that have a clear purpose, a strong organization, excellent training, and skilled leaders. Zarqawi described the poor state of the Sunni opposition in Iraq in 2004 as disjointed and lacking in capabilities. He attributed the state of isolation and low ambition among the Sunnis to a "repressive regime that militarized the country, spread dismay, propagated fear and dread, and destroyed confidence among the people."[26] Zarqawi was able to bring a number of such isolated groups together under his banner and become a central organizing force and partner for many Sunni groups that did not accept the al Qaeda ideology, including the remnants of the Ba'ath Party that formed the 1920s Revolution Brigade.

Jabhat al Nusra has played a similar role in Syria. It is one of the very few groups that can operate in many different parts of the country, and it established itself initially with various opposition groups because of its ability to bring powerful military capabilities from one area to anothe

r to reinforce important operations. It is also one of the best-organized and most coherent groups, which has allowed it to serve as a coordinating body even among groups that reject its ideology.[27]

Operating in such conditions forced ISIS and al Qaeda affiliates to confront the conundrum of how to interact with other fighting groups that were also trying to mobilize the people under their own banners and for their own purposes. ISIS and al Qaeda began with the same approach to this problem, but have diverged dramatically.

Al Qaeda's principled position has always been to try to work with local groups to the greatest possible extent.

Current al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri has long articulated the importance of keeping the Salafi-jihadi vanguard connected to the people. He emphasized this ideal as deputy to Osama bin Laden in an October 2005 letter to Zarqawi: "The strongest weapon which the mujahedeen enjoy…is popular support from the Muslim masses in Iraq, and in the surrounding Muslim countries. So, we must maintain this support as best we can, and we should strive to increase it, on the condition that striving for that support does not lead to any concession in the laws of the Sharia."[28]

Zarqawi initially appeared to accept this approach, writing to Zawahiri in February 2004: "We have been striving for some time to observe the arena and sift those who work in it in search of those who are sincere and on the right path, so that we can cooperate with them for the good and coordinate some actions with them, so as to achieve solidarity and unity after testing and trying them."[29] Al Qaeda in Iraq retained this general approach throughout the period when American forces were present, despite declaring itself the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in December 2006. It still fought alongside Ba'athist forces and non-al Qaeda Salafi groups without seeking to control them completely or incorporate them directly.

> *The chaos within political vacuums favors groups like ISIS and al Qaeda that have a clear purpose.*

Its standards for cooperation were straightforward: fight against the Americans and the Iraqi government and refuse to participate in the Iraqi political process. Zarqawi thus "threatened war on any Sunni tribe, party, or assembly that would support the crusaders." When some Sunnis entered Iraqi politics, "ignoring what it entails of clear-cut major *shirk* [idolatry] he officially declared war on them…"[30]

THE CALIPHATE AND THE ISIS MODEL

The declaration of the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) in April 2013 marked the beginning of a shift away from this approach, since it was an attempt to absorb ISIS's scion Jabhat al Nusra fully and formally under the Iraqi group's control. The decisive break came in June 2014 with the ISIS declaration that it had established the Caliphate.

The caliphate is a universalist concept, referring to the restoration of the unitary Muslim state established and expanded by the successors (*khulafa*, singular: *khalifa*) of Mohammad. This concept is different from that of an emirate, which merely denotes the army and polity controlled by an emir or commander. There can be only one Caliphate in any strict sense of the term, but there can be many emirates.

ISIS publicly proclaimed the uniqueness of its state and the obligation of all pious Muslims therein to support it: "anyone who rebels against its authority inside its territory is considered a renegade, and it is permissible to fight him" after demonstrating to him his error.[31] It furthermore explicitly declared an end to the policy of cooperating with groups that did not share ISIS's ideology:

> During the jihad in Afghanistan against the communists, many of the muhajirin [foreign fighters] found themselves fighting a war similar to the one being fought in [Syria] now. Parties with different backgrounds fought a 'common' enemy, ignoring all matters that distinguished them from each other, even if those matters were an obstacle in the pursuit of [the Caliphate]. The biggest of these distinguishing factors were nationalism that tainted many of the banners and parties in Afghanistan, in addition to serious innovations that destroyed the creed and the healthy body of the Muslim jama'ah required for reviving the [Caliphate].[32]

It continued, "The obligation is now clearer than ever before for all Muslims to raise their voices and pledge their allegiance to" the new Caliph Ibrahim Abu Bakr al Baghdadi and the Islamic State. This new situation "opens the path for the complete unification of all Muslim peoples and lands under the single authority of the" Caliph. The days of partnership and cooperation with ISIS under its umbrella are over—all groups within its territory are either part of ISIS or its enemies.

THE JABHAT AL NUSRA MODEL

Jabhat al Nusra has remained true to the al Qaeda principles of cooperation with fellow-travelers. Joulani, explained in December 2013: "Preserving good relations with the other groups and treating them well and turning a blind eye to their mistakes is the foundation in dealing with the other groups…as long as they don't change."[33] Jabhat al Nusra even "appears to accommodate the continued cohesion of groups that were formed independently and subsequently pledged allegiance to" it.[34] It interacts differently with "large and independently powerful groups," with which its relations are more like an alliance; with "smaller local groups with Salafist ideologies," whose development Jabhat al Nusra guides "to bring them deeper into the fold of its ideological agenda and methodology;" and with Western-backed, non-Salafi groups with which it maintains a straightforward alliance of convenience.[35] The result is a "tiered, networked structure of influence" that "is optimized to enable [Jabhat al Nusra] to pursue its short-term objectives in Syria without backing it into a corner from which it cannot emerge."[36]

Jabhat al Nusra sets limits on the deviance it is prepared to tolerate even within this complex and nuanced network of relationships. When groups become too close to the West or too dependent on Western aid, Jabhat al Nusra punishes them severely. The combination of the aid Jabhat al Nusra provides, its general willingness to work with a diverse set of groups, and the precision of its reprisals has allowed it to avoid the problems that plagued al Qaeda in Iraq in 2006 leading up to the "Awakening" of Sunni tribes against the group: "Rather than provoking defiance, [Jabhat al Nusra's] coercive behavior toward rebel groups has largely been successful in forcing these groups to alter their behavior to accommodate [Jabhat al Nusra's] demands."[37]

The group has remained true to its approach even as ISIS moved abruptly away from it. Joulani said of opposition groups with "a fundamentally different religious perspective" in a May 2015 interview: "They are Muslims, even if they differ somewhat with us. There are some groups which have some mistakes, we overlook these mistakes because of the enormous severity of the battle."[38] Describing the formation of the Jaish al Fatah structure, a political and military alliance between Jabhat al Nusra and groups from within its network that is replicated locally in numerous Syrian provinces, Joulani said that it was

> based upon mutual consultation…, without looking at the one who is leading this army, it is based on the basis of [consultation] between all the groups. It is not a coalition between Jabhat an-Nusra and all these groups, nor [is] it a coalition between all these groups together with each other. So these groups are not at one end and Jabhat an-Nusra at the other end. Since we began this project we consult with all these groups in military work."[39]

Jabhat al Nusra and aligned clerics actively label ISIS as "extremist" for its views on killing Muslims who do not immediately subscribe to the ISIS ideology, and they declare the ground fight against ISIS to be justified because it is defensive in nature.[40]

Jabhat al Nusra's approach has been successful. It is thoroughly interwoven with many opposition groups, both Salafi and non-Salafi. It has earned enough respect from them that even non-Salafi groups protested when the U.S. designated Jabhat al Nusra as a terrorist organization in 2012 and then again when the U.S. struck the Khorasan Cell within Jabhat al Nusra that was planning attacks against the West in 2014.[41] It has placed limits on the willingness of opposition groups to accept Western assistance and shaped these groups' political demands by imposing a threshold of "subservience" to outside powers that it will tolerate.[42] It has accomplished all these things without having to field a large army or occupy and govern extensive terrain—both of which would make its power and the threat it poses to the West much more obvious, while simultaneously making it much more vulnerable to Western attack.

The Jabhat al Nusra model is much more dangerous to the U.S. than the ISIS model in the long run. ISIS has transformed itself into a territorial state with an army. It imposes itself upon the population in that territory by force and with terror. It does not tolerate dissension even within the narrow bands of Salafism, let alone beyond those bands. It promises governance that it cannot deliver. ISIS presents numerous vulnerabilities that a well-designed campaign against it could exploit.

Jabhat al Nusra, meanwhile, does not suffer from those vulnerabilities. It focuses on making friends of the people rather than subjugating them by force and on building a big-tent coalition rather than a narrowly-restricted one. It provides advanced military capabilities to its partners that make them both dependent on Jabhat al Nusra and grateful to it such that they willingly provide Jabhat al Nusra cover and at least rhetorical protection, even against U.S. activities precisely targeting the elements of Jabhat al Nusra oriented on attacking the West.

Nothing about the problem of designing a strategy to disentangle Jabhat al Nusra from the broader Sunni population in Syria is straightforward. Many of the courses of action the planning group examined foundered on precisely this problem, in fact. Failing to develop and execute such a strategy, however, means that Jabhat al Nusra is very likely to retain safe havens,

> *Any strategy that leaves Jabhat al Nusra in place will fail to secure the American homeland.*

support and freedom of movement and operations in Syria. It will therefore also maintain access to the resources needed to generate attack groups targeting the West. Any strategy that leaves Jabhat al Nusra in place will fail to secure the American homeland.

THE AL QAEDA AND ISIS INSURGENCIES

Al Qaeda and ISIS are not simply terrorist organizations and never have been. Terrorism is but one weapon they deploy in pursuit of their much larger objectives. They use terrorism, guerrilla tactics, and low-end conventional military capabilities in well-designed campaigns. It was a mistake to define the fight against al Qaeda as a war on terror, and it is a mistake to try to parse the terrorism and the individuals who perpetrate it from the larger organizations that employ it along with many other instruments of warfare.

Al Qaeda and ISIS are insurgent groups that aim to overthrow all of the existing governments in the Muslim world and replace them with their own. They thus fit the traditional model of an insurgency facing a government backed by a foreign power, to a point. Their struggle against the West is in the first instance an effort to defeat the powers they believe have imposed and

support the local governments against which they are fighting. They then intend to attack and defeat the West itself in order to spread their theo-ideology to all of humanity. The ISIS creed also includes pursuit of an apocalyptic final battle with the West that will herald the coming of the Day of Judgment.

Jabhat al Nusra's willingness to set aside its pursuit of global objectives for the moment allows it to integrate thoroughly with other insurgent groups in Syria that share its short-term aim. Its further willingness to defer discussions about the shape of a post-revolutionary government broadens the range of groups with which Jabhat al Nusra can cooperate. Jabhat al Nusra is focused sharply on the objective common to all Sunni opposition groups, namely the overthrow of the Assad regime, which is supported by foreign powers. In the meantime, it is slowly building a religious and governance foundation in its own image in terrain seized from the Syrian regime. Jabhat al Nusra will settle with the other victorious opposition groups the shape of the new government and its approach toward the group's global aims after it has won this key battle, and after it has had sufficient time to set conditions in its favor.

ISIS has taken a different approach. It has transitioned in Iraq and Syria from being an insurgent group to becoming a revolutionary government defending its newly-won territory with an army.[43] Its affiliates outside of Mesopotamia remain insurgent groups. They hold small areas of terrain in Libya and Afghanistan that serve as bases for campaigns they are pursuing to seize much larger areas. The ISIS group in Sinai is a robust guerrilla/terrorist force that has considerable freedom of movement but does not hold territory. ISIS affiliates in Yemen are at a slightly lower stage even than that.[44]

ISIS and its affiliates compete and even fight with other groups rather than cooperating with them as al Qaeda affiliates do. The ISIS group in Libya is fighting the various armed forces around it and has not generally coopted or allied with them. ISIS in Afghanistan is in a pitched battle with the Taliban. The fact that both groups seek to drive the U.S. out and topple the current government in Kabul has not led ISIS to put aside its doctrinal differences with the Taliban, as Jabhat al Nusra has done with groups professing much more divergent ideologies in Syria.

INSEPARABLE GLOBAL AND LOCAL OBJECTIVES

These methodological differences should not obscure the fundamental commonalities between ISIS and al Qaeda however. Both seek to establish a global Caliphate. Both seek to destroy all of the existing states in the Muslim world and replace them. Both seek to attack and defeat the West. The capabilities and resources they are building up in the

course of their local and regional insurgencies will be used against the West for discrete tactical purposes while they are fighting in the heart of the Middle East, but will be turned fully against the West once they have won there.

Zawahiri offers a complex and nuanced explanation of the relationship between attacking the West and seizing terrain in the Middle East. On the one hand, he wrote:

> The jihad movement must adopt its plan on the basis of controlling a piece of land in the heart of the Islamic world on which it could establish and protect the state of Islam and launch the battle to restore the rational caliphate based on the traditions of the prophet.[45]

But Zawahiri believed that the fight to acquire such a state in the Middle East could not be separated from the global fight against the West and that "confining the battle to the domestic enemy (within the Arab states) will not be feasible in this stage of the battle…."[46]

This is because of the way Zawahiri defines al Qaeda's enemy:

> The western forces that are hostile to Islam…are now joined in this by their old enemy, Russia. They have adopted a number of tools to fight Islam, including:
> 1. The United Nations.
> 2. The friendly rulers of the Muslim peoples.
> 3. The multinational corporations.
> 4. The international communications and data exchange systems.
> 5. The international news agencies and satellite media channels.
> 6. The international relief agencies, which are being used as a cover for espionage, proselytizing, coup planning, and the transfer of weapons.[47]

He therefore concludes that al Qaeda does not have time to defeat the domestic enemies referenced above, and then take the fight into the West afterwards. Zawahiri argues, "The Americans, the Jews, and their allies are present now with their forces…."[48]

It has thus never been the case that al Qaeda was focused solely on attacking the West, using local allies only to provide it safe haven for such attacks. Al Qaeda's global terrorism has always been part of a conscious strategy aimed at creating space for it to seize power in the Arab world from which it would expand to control the entire Muslim world—and ultimately all of humanity.

The artificial separation of the group into a "core" and affiliates has added great confusion to our understanding of the relationship between al Qaeda's local and global objectives and operations.[49] The distinction generated an understanding that only the "core" group—variably the leadership based in

Afghanistan-Pakistan and then later meant to include those in Yemen—focused on and contributed to attacks against the West.

Al Qaeda has exploited this interpretation of its operations to influence U.S. and Western policy decisions. Al Qaeda's leader in Syria, Mohammad Abu Joulani does not openly discuss al Qaeda's global strategy, for example, and, indeed, denies that Jabhat al Nusra currently intends to conduct attacks outside of Syria and Lebanon.[50] An al Qaeda attack that traces back to Jabhat al Nusra in Syria could force the West to react to Jabhat al Nusra's growing strength and could also weaken the group's local legitimacy. Other al Qaeda affiliates also focus on local issues more than on global operations, though these groups provide training and expertise to foreign fighters who may use these skills during a future attack in the West. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula actively supports public cells calling for and facilitating global attacks, but has also developed and prosecuted a local political-military campaign as well. Some of the declassified al Qaeda correspondence recovered during the May 2011 Abbottabad raid reveals al Qaeda decision-makers' considerations of U.S. and Western responses and a nuanced understanding of how to operate below a threshold level.[51]

Much of the rhetoric regarding the global war comes from al Qaeda "core," the senior leaders cultivated by Zawahiri and, before him, bin Laden. These leaders are dispersed today and have not been operating in a single location since 2001. They lead, advise, and inspire from sanctuaries held by al Qaeda affiliates, particularly those in Yemen, Syria, and the Maghreb. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula leadership, for example, has been al Qaeda's voice against ISIS at Ayman al Zawahiri's direction.[52] Al Qaeda has refrained from revealing certain members' identities, concealing the depth of its leadership cadre from U.S. and other Western intelligence agencies. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula released a video in mid-December 2015, "Guardians of Shari'a," that revealed the identities of senior leaders who had been operating covertly in Yemen.[53] The video featured former Guantanamo detainee Ibrahim al Qosi, an individual who had worked alongside bin Laden in Sudan in the 1990s, and a former member of Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Ibrahim Abu Saleh, who was described for the first time as one of the founders of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.[54] These core al Qaeda leaders continue to advance al Qaeda's global objectives from "locally focused" affiliate bases.

The abstention of local al Qaeda affiliates from actively engaging in the global jihad does not diminish the role the affiliates see for themselves in the global struggle however. Global leaders discuss global issues; leaders of regional and local groups focus on regional and local issues, but do so in a way that advances the global objectives of their more senior commanders. The job of Jabhat al Nusra is to build an al Qaeda state in the Levant, which is the translation of Zawahiri's global objectives into the goals that must be accomplished within that region.[55] There is no such thing as an al Qaeda or ISIS affiliate that does not

share the objectives of defeating the West within the West and establishing a global caliphate.

AL QAEDA AND ISIS METHODS OF WARFARE

Military commanders choose weapons and tactics based on a number of factors:

- The capabilities required to accomplish the objective.

- The nature and quantity of resources available.

- Positive and negative second-order effects of using certain kinds of weapons or capabilities.

- Legal and ethical constraints.

- The timing and sequencing of operations in a single theater.

- The need to allocate resources appropriately to all theaters.

ISIS and al Qaeda are no different. Both began with very limited resources compared to the tasks they had set for themselves and the resources available to their adversaries. They constrained their methods and tactics to match those limitations. Zawahiri thus articulated a series of guidelines for determining what kinds of weapons to use against which sorts of targets. Attacks, he wrote, "need to inflict the maximum casualties against the opponent, for this is the language understood by the west, no matter how much time and effort such operations take." He insisted that the movement concentrate on suicide bombings "as the most successful way of inflicting damage against the opponent and the least costly to the mujahideen in terms of casualties."[56] He also argued against some of the approaches Zarqawi was using in Iraq, particularly the attacks against Shi'a and the "scenes of mass slaughter" shown by al Qaeda in Iraq videos. These methods, he said, would confuse and alienate the Sunni masses whom it was necessary to mobilize.[57]

Zarqawi saw it differently, as he had explained in his 2004 letter to Zawahiri. He believed that attacking the Shi'a was the key to mobilizing the Sunni masses:

> *targeting and hitting them in [their] religious, political, and military depth will provoke them to show the Sunnis their rabies ... and bare the teeth of the hidden rancor working in their breasts. If we succeed in dragging them into the arena of sectarian war, it will become possible to awaken the inattentive Sunnis as they feel imminent danger and annihilating death at the hands of these Sabeans.[58]*

Zarqawi certainly valued and used suicide operations, but he sought to move to conventional fighting as rapidly as possible. His "work mechanism," as he called it, focused on developing a meaningful fighting force consisting of companies and battalions with "expertise, experience, and endurance" that will "repair to secure places and strive to reconnoiter the country, hunting the enemy – Americans, police, and soldiers -on the roads and lanes."[59]

The abstention of local al Qaeda affiliates from actively engaging in the global jihad does not diminish the role the affiliates see for themselves in the global struggle.

The ISIS *ex post facto* narrative of these events distinguished between *nikayah* attacks "that focus on causing the enemy death, injury, and damage," and "more complex attacks of a larger scale sometimes referred to as operations of '*tamkin*' (consolidation), which were meant to pave the way for the claiming of territory."[60] It described, in fact, a specific sequence for getting from its starting point to the declaration of the Caliphate that consists of: exploiting an unstable state and immigrating there to recruit and train members; forcefully compelling apostate forces to withdraw from the territory; degrading the state's stability so as to cause the apostate regime to completely collapse; and finally, filling the security vacuum to the point that the Caliphate holds governing power and has the opportunity to expand.[61]

Terrorism—either local or global—is thus but one of several instruments ISIS and al Qaeda deploy as part of their over-arching strategies. Their focus is not on the instrument, but on the aim.

They will not abjure terrorism, however, nor dismantle the capabilities needed to support terrorist campaigns. Both groups recognize the possibility of setbacks and the need for resilience, and both value the principle of living to fight another day. Zawahiri asked rhetorically "what if the movement's members or plans are uncovered, if its members are arrested…[its] survival is at risk…?" Should it then disperse or fight? "[T]he movement must pull out as many personnel as possible," he answered, "to the safety of shelter without hesitation, reluctance, or reliance on illusions."[62] ISIS acknowledged the setbacks it suffered during and after the "surge," noting:

the Islamic State was forced to withdraw mostly into the desert regions of al-Anbar, where its soldiers regrouped, planned, and trained. From the desert, they continued to carry out attacks against the crusaders and the treacherous apostates in coordination with operations executed by the underground units in urban regions.[63]

The ability to shift back and forth among quasi-conventional, guerrilla, and terrorist tactics is a hallmark of these groups that provides them enormous resilience.[64]

It also reflects the reality that terrorist attack capabilities are thoroughly embedded within the higher levels of military mobilization and operations that ISIS, Jabhat al Nusra, and a few other al Qaeda affiliates have obtained. Terrorist attacks are integral to these military organizations, not separated from them in unique cells. Terrorist capabilities th benefit from the overall increase in resources and capabilities the groups have obtained. Evaluating the terrorist threat groups such as ISIS and al Qaeda pose to the American homeland thus requires evaluating the strengths of the groups overall. It also requires understanding in more detail how the Western-oriented attack groups sponsored by al Qaeda and ISIS interact with the regional support bases they have established in the Middle East.

AL QAEDA AND ISIS PURPOSES IN ATTACKING THE WEST

ISIS and al Qaeda seek to attack the U.S. and Europe directly for different reasons. Zawahiri has long exhorted his followers to bring the war to the West to avenge the Muslim community and to persuade the West to stop fighting Islam. He articulated these reasons at length a decade ago and within the past few months.[65] Al Qaeda's English-language magazine, *Inspire*, praised the Charlie Hebdo attackers under the headline "Vengeance for the Prophet." The themes of vengeance and forcing the West to change its policies pervade the issue, which is devoted to what it calls "assassination operations," its term for lone-wolf attacks.[66]

ISIS attacks on the West, on the other hand, serve a more sophisticated and nuanced strategy. ISIS seeks to extend to the West the approach Zarqawi followed in Iraq of attacking the majority population to provoke it to oppress the potentially-righteous Sunni minority, thereby mobilizing that minority under the banner of ISIS.[67] It describes this approach as forcing the West to "destroy the grayzone [sic]" in which Muslims live in Europe and the U.S. and force them to choose between apostasy and emigrating to fight with the Caliphate. ISIS is pursuing parallel campaigns to encourage lone attacks and to direct and facilitate organized attacks in the West. ISIS hopes these dual efforts will destabilize and provoke the West, setting conditions for its desired apocalyptic war.

These different reasons for attacking or encouraging attacks within the West are not mutually-exclusive. ISIS also seeks

vengeance and congratulates itself for avenging the Muslim community. Zawahiri, for his part, also supports attacks that create clarifying moments, forcing the allies of the West to declare themselves before the Muslim people.[68] They do not so far appear to have generated a different basis for selecting targets in the West either, although it is possible that they will ultimately do so. The important fact about these various purposes is that Western states and societies that respond to attacks by seeming to victimize the innocent Muslims in their midst will be advancing the ISIS strategy regardless of what group perpetrated or claimed credit for them.

COMMON METHODS FOR ATTACKING THE WEST

The Paris and San Bernardino attacks demonstrate the two different methods by which ISIS and al Qaeda are trying to bring the war to the European and American homelands. Both groups advocate and support both methods—"lone jihad" and an "operation organized by a jihadi group," as al Qaeda calls them.[69] The Paris attacks were ordered, planned, and directly supported by an ISIS member using the regional safe haven in Syria as a base from which to deploy the attack group into Europe. The San Bernardino attack appears to have been inspired by al Qaeda and ISIS ideology rather than having been ordered by either group and does not seem to have used the regional safe haven directly.[70]

"Lone Wolf" Attacks

Attacks such as the San Bernardino massacre or the 2009 Fort Hood shooting require little support from and interaction with al Qaeda or ISIS regional bases. The groups that inspire or sponsor them need not expose their members. These attacks are easier to carry out and more likely to produce imitators who require even less direct support and encouragement from ISIS or al Qaeda. They are also likely to be less effective, less lethal, and more easily detected and disrupted. They are less subject to the control of al Qaeda or ISIS leadership and thus less useful as part of a coordinated and systematic campaign operating on a specific timetable. They are very suitable, however, for a longer-term and more generalized effort.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has spearheaded an effort to place the tools of jihad in the hands of potential lone wolves since July 2010.[71] The group's English-language magazine, *Inspire*, includes a dedicated section on "Open Source Jihad" that features tactics and techniques for small-scale do-it-yourself attacks in the West. The magazine was revolutionary for the Salafi-jihadi community in that it was the first to combine the religious justifications for jihad in colloquial English with how-to manuals. It provided an open line of communications from al Qaeda leadership, in particular with late leader Anwar al Awlaki, without compromising the safety of the leaders or the readers. Al Qaeda's objective was to broaden its campaign of violence against the West to include smaller, one-off attacks, though the overall call to jihad did

not resonate strongly at the time due to the global conditions. The terrorist manuals in Inspire have nevertheless both galvanized and facilitated attacks, including the Boston Marathon bombing and the San Bernardino shooting.[72]

ISIS prioritizes frequency over sophistication for lone-wolf attacks in its name. ISIS's spokesman Abu Muhammad al Adnani called for the organization's supporters to launch as many attacks as possible in a September 2014 speech.[73] Adnani claimed that these assaults did not require extensive preparation in order to be effective. He explained that supporters unable "to find an IED or bullet" could find a single foreigner and "smash his head with a rock, or slaughter him with a knife, or run him over with your car, or throw him down from a high place, or choke him, or poison him." ISIS believes that its supporters' individually-conducted frequent attacks, coupled with the existence of its physical caliphate, will create a unique "international atmosphere of terror" surpassing the effects of al Qaeda's large-scale attacks against the West.[74]

Lone Wolves and Organizations

The concept of a "lone wolf" is in tension with the ideas of communalism and the desire to be part of a society with common goals and values that are very strong within Islam generally and the Salafi-jihadi movement in particular. Both al Qaeda and ISIS generally prefer to build groups and organizations that rely on and support small teams of devoted individuals who can strengthen each other's faith and commitment to their cause. Their support for "lone wolf" activities is pragmatic and circumstantial.

Fear of Western surveillance is the driving factor leading al Qaeda and ISIS to support the emergence of isolated lone jihadis.[75] Individuals acting alone are obviously safest from detection. Zawahiri thus exhorts would-be lone wolves to "be silent on the matter from those closest to you, and beware of spies and plants among the Muslims…"[76] ISIS's official English-language magazine *Dabiq* notes:

> *The smaller the numbers of those involved and the less the discussion beforehand, the more likely it will be carried out without problems. One should not complicate the attacks by involving other parties, purchasing complex materials, or communicating with weak-hearted individuals.*[77]

Many eBooks and electronic pamphlets produced by ISIS and al Qaeda supporters present security risks and procedures for mitigating them in tremendous detail, sometimes conducting thorough analyses of publicly-released documentation about how the U.S. military and intelligence services work or how they conducted particular operations.[78]

ISIS and al Qaeda leaderships generally do not appear to imagine that the lone wolves they hope will arise in the West will come together at any point into a more organized effort. Both groups rely instead on the deliberate structures of networked cells they are creating in parallel to serve as the basis for such an effort. Some ISIS supporters have articulated a different concept, however. Their vision is not of many disconnected random lone-wolf attacks, but rather of lone wolves merging into larger organizations that can conduct insurgency operations within the West over time. The lone wolves are meant to be the first step toward an organization that can truly bring the war into the Western heartland.[79]

ISIS supporters note that "When friends of lone wolves realise the attacks are successful and the lone wolf is successful in evading the police, they might support his cause too. This is when lone wolves shift from individuals to small groups of individuals called 'Cells.'"[80] As soon as would-be attackers coalesce into even very small cells they cease to be "lone wolves" and become part of an organization. ISIS and al Qaeda leaders may not intend for this phenomenon to occur, but it may well happen naturally. If isolated "lone wolves" do begin to coalesce into cellular networks then the threat they pose to the West could expand dramatically and suddenly, giving the central organizations opportunities to direct resources and capabilities from their regional bases to support unexpectedly-large structures within the West.

Lone Wolves and Safe Havens

Eliminating safe havens in the Middle East will not eliminate the threat of true lone-wolf terrorism in the U.S. and Europe. It does not appear that San Bernardino attackers Syed Rizwan Farook or Tashfeen Malik used al Qaeda or ISIS safe havens, for example. They definitely used ideological and training materials prepared in those safe havens, but those materials are already available on the internet. Eliminating the safe havens will make it much harder for the groups to prepare new ones, but they will not remove the old ones from cyberspace.

There are three primary reasons to consider the elimination of regional safe havens as part of a strategy to combat lone-wolf terrorism, therefore. First, to hinder the development and promulgation of new, more advanced religious and training materials designed to help would-be lone wolves prepare for attacks against improved Western defenses. Second, to reduce the attractiveness of conducting lone-wolf operations on behalf of Salafi-jihadi groups that are being defeated. Third, to ensure that leadership and a trained cadre in safe havens are not able to use a budding collection of lone wolves to form a coherent organized attack network within the West over time. This third reason is by far the most important regardless of the current intentions of al Qaeda or ISIS leadership for their lone wolves to evolve in this direction.

Organized Attack

Attacks such as the November operation in Paris are considerably more dangerous than San Bernardino-style ones, or true lone-wolf attacks. They involve more careful

planning by more experienced fighters. They benefit from access to better-trained attackers with skills honed on the battlefield, and from direct access to skilled bomb-makers who can design and either build or teach others to build effective, reliable, and lethal explosive devices. They also allow the attackers to train together before the attack, thereby significantly increasing the likelihood that the attack will cause mass casualties. They represent the most straightforward extension of the military methods now used on the battlefields of the Middle East into the heart of the West.

Attacks such as the November operation in Paris…represent the most straightforward extension of the military methods now use on thebattlefields of the Middle East into the heart of the West.

Al Qaeda's description of the attacks against Charlie Hebdo exemplifies this kind of attack. The central al Qaeda organization ordered Said Kouachi to conduct the attack, and then gave him "necessary training [to] prepare him militarily and psychologically to successfully execute the operation." The al Qaeda leadership sent Kouachi to Paris to reconnoiter the target because "the target was geographically far from the leadership [and] information of the target was scarce."[81] In France, Kouachi "performed physical exercise for long periods in order to be fit in executing the operation." He "began training a team to execute the operation" after developing a strategy based on the intelligence he had gathered. He then "began collecting all the necessities required to execute the operation," and chose the optimal time for the attack.[82]

Al Qaeda boasted that "this military operation…is among the [most] difficult operations to be successfully executed. Selection of the target was from the central leadership (AQ). The planning and initiation of the operation was in the Arabian Peninsula…As for the manner of assassination, it was left for the executor to decide. Basing on his potential and the circumstances surrounding the operation." It described the complexities of such an operation in some detail:

> *The planning of this type of operation is wide and complicated, this is because a workplace is often in a confined closed environment. And the surrounding area is under security watch, guarded by individual soldiers scattered all over the premises and this differs from building to building. And this was the situation in the case of the Charlie Hebdo building. Because of this, Koachi chose a rapid room–clearance approach. This tactic requires a firearm in order to pinpoint a specific target and a weapon that will instill fear,*

> *provide cover and room for maneuvering and to randomly cleanse a target — using a grenade. Our brother Koachi used only a firearm, because the situation he was in dictated his choice of weapon. The Koachi brothers broke the security [perimeter] by using an open assault strategy, [u]sing this tactic so as to quickly arrive to the intended target [a]nd quickly eliminating the target. And their retreat was open and loud.[83]*

ISIS leaders also facilitate and resource sophisticated, multi-cell attacks against the group's international enemies using its foreign fighter network. Examples of this approach include the small arms and suicide bombing attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015, and the small arms attack on a Tunisian beach resort on June 26, 2015. These plots are riskier because they require greater secrecy and communication among geographically disparate cells. Abdelhamid Abouaad, the leader of the Paris attack group, attempted several unsuccessful large-scale attacks in Europe before November 2015.[84] Abouaad used ISIS's extensive foreign fighter network in France and Belgium to support these plots, while also drawing upon fighter pools and training facilities in Syria.[85] The Paris attacks have proved this model successful, and ISIS will likely repeat it in order to advance its efforts to destabilize the West.

CELLULAR NETWORKS FROM AN ISIS PERSPECTIVE

The ISIS supporters who suggested that lone wolves might come together to form a coherent insurgency presented a useful articulation of how cellular networks function that can serve as a primer for understanding the organized structures that both al Qaeda and ISIS are forming. Lone wolves offer the advantage of security but suffer from serious constraints on their abilities to plan and conduct truly devastating attacks or to support multiple attacks over time. Cells can develop significantly more lethal attacks at the cost of greater but still limited risk of detection.

Cells benefit from the distinct contributions of their members: one person "might attack, the other helps him escape on a motorbike, another gives him a place to hide, and another breaks…his attackers weapon apart and throws its different pieces away in different places to get rid of any evidence."[86] But fear of detection remains strong, and thus the cells' "strength lies in their secrecy and small number because less numbers = less people to spill secrets of the small group." Cells thus "run independently, they find their own funding (money), they plan their own attacks, and perform the attack and hide in their own hiding places." The cellular structure still suffers from serious limitations, however, because small cells are often constrained by the requirements to obtain their own funding, weapons, and intelligence. A more advanced strategy thus involves multiple small cells working together to divide responsibilities.[87]

An insurgency with many cells and effective ways to communicate securely, in fact, can generate serious harm. "Many Cells can specialize in different areas of war. In the Iraq war, there were IED making Cells and there were IED planting Cells... Another Cell would gather intelligence on the enemies' location and movements. Another Cell would be fighting the enemy with guns."[88] "But for the connected Cells to work in an organized way, they need a leader" who has "money, fighters, and weapons." This leader divides them into many different cells with varied responsibilities including: securing funding, buying and delivering weapons, stealing money and/or weapons from adversaries, making bombs, and recruiting and training new members. According to ISIS supporters, "All these activities are best done in lawless areas where there is less government control. This is why all experts agree that Al Qa'idah and the Islamic State rose up in parts of the world where there was war and instability."[89]

THE FULL FOOTPRINT OF AL QAEDA AND ISIS ATTACKS AGAINST THE WEST

Both al Qaeda and ISIS generate and deploy attack cells against the West as part of their core strategies and reasons for existence. Coordinated terrorist attacks naturally focus attention on the attack cell—the individuals who planned, prepared, and conducted the operation within Europe or the United States—and the threat node—those who directly ordered, inspired, or supported them from a terrorist safe haven. Western counter-terrorism strategies reinforce this strategy by divorcing those specific attack groups from the locally-focused components of al Qaeda and ISIS organizations. This approach has failed and will continue to fail because it fundamentally misunderstands the relationship between the full threat node, including the attack cell, and the regional support base from which it springs and on which it relies.

The greater the resources and capabilities of the regional support bases, the more frequently they can launch attacks and the more sophisticated these attacks can be.

The attack cell itself—the individuals directly involved in conducting the attack—has a small footprint. The cell has minimum requirements as we have seen: to build a team of individuals; reconnoiter an identified target; procure weapons, ammunition, and other materials for the operation; and have an ability to move, eat, sleep, and communicate. The current debate about how to deal with coordinated attacks focuses on identifying and eliminating both the attack cell and the threat node. Doing so does not actually bring us closer to securing ourselves over the long term, however.

Small, lean, and lethal attack cells depend on the much larger set of capabilities and resources provided by regional support bases controlled by Salafi military organizations. The threat node exists within a safe haven that gives it freedom of operation. Salafi military organizations provide such safe havens to potential threat nodes. The greater the resources and capabilities of the regional support bases, the more frequently they can launch attacks and the more sophisticated these attacks can be. The threat node can reconstitute as long as it has a regional support base.

The full footprint of the threat node includes capabilities and resources readily found within safe havens provided by Salafi military organizations. Components include recruitment and inter-theater movement; funding; communication; counter-intelligence; media support; vetting, training, and indoctrination; weapons design expertise; and intelligence and planning to name only some. (See p. 29 for a graphical depiction of what a threat node in Europe could look like.)

Finances
Attack groups need money to buy materiel, travel, hide, acquire communications equipment, and meet daily needs. The amounts need not be high, but they are often beyond the reach of ordinary recruits. Planned suicide attacks may also include the provision of support to the attacker's family. Sustaining a concerted campaign of multiple attacks will cause the price to mount, moreover, likely beyond the ability of a single cell or even small group of cells in the West to finance without devoting itself full-time to informal fundraising, as the ISIS supporters describing cellular networks discussed. Regional support bases that govern large swaths of territory and field thousands of highly-trained and well-equipped fighters can easily cover the costs of these attacks, however. The ability to provide necessary financing to attack cells is thus inherent in any group that controls significant terrain and fielded forces.

Counter-intelligence
Al Qaeda and ISIS have been concerned about being penetrated by Western agents since their foundations. Providing secure communications systems or methods, or transferring other kinds of expertise, risks compromising essential elements of the core group's ability to operate. They therefore must have procedures in place to vet potential recruits and to ensure that the recruits themselves are not turned by Western security services. They must also be able to conduct at least basic counter-surveillance activities to ensure that their operatives are not detected through their own carelessness.

Attack groups forming spontaneously in Europe or the U.S. are highly vulnerable to detection through lack of training, professionalism, and the support of a proper counter-intelligence and counter-surveillance system. Organized groups being cultivated by ISIS and al Qaeda leadership are similarly vulnerable and risk compromising the key operators

who are handling them. Regional safe havens mitigate that risk in several ways. They provide secure bases in which the groups can train leaders in counter-intelligence techniques. They also create environments to which potential recruits can be brought so that key leaders can personally assess their reliability as al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula did with would-be underwear-bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab.[90] Operatives can be introduced to one another in these safe havens as well, moreover, creating networks of trust that can help them maintain their security when they return to the West as was the case with some of the Paris attackers.[91] They serve as refuges, finally, for Salafi-jihadi operatives who have been compromised or believe they are about to be.

Media Support

Attack groups operating in the West almost invariably desire media attention. They acquire such attention automatically, in a sense, simply by conducting a successful attack. But Western media is sometimes slow to credit the sponsoring group with conducting the attack, as was the case with the downing of the Russian airliner over Sinai by ISIS and initially with the San Bernardino attack. The Sinai case is of particular interest because of the lengths ISIS went to in order to prove that it really had carried out the bombing of the plane in the face of significant—and unjustified—skepticism. It deployed the considerable media capabilities at its disposal to make multiple claims from sources reliably attributable to it, and then to provide imagery of the explosive device itself in its official magazine, *Dabiq*.[92] Had the attack group that placed the bomb on that airliner not been able to draw on the resources of the ISIS regional support base, the world might still be debating how the plane went down.

The importance of media support goes far beyond ensuring that the right group receives credit for an operation. Al Qaeda and ISIS deploy attack groups abroad in order to achieve very specific objectives not by the destruction of their targets, but rather by their plans to exploit the attacks in the information sphere. Since ISIS's attacks in the West generally seek to provoke anti-Muslim backlash and over-reactions in order to radicalize Muslim communities throughout the world, controlling the messaging following an attack is critical. Without such message-control, the attack is just another terrorist incident that may or may not advance the ISIS campaign plan.

The ability to shape and amplify the message delivered by an attack is thus a core component of the attack itself. An individual attack group does not have such an ability. It cannot, indeed, hope to have this capability since most of the attackers die in the attack. The media capabilities of the regional support base are what give the operation its meaning from the standpoint of the attackers through glossy publications like *Inspire* and *Dabiq* and through official and informal social media platforms.

Training and Indoctrination

Successful terror attacks in the West require that the attackers be fully committed to the effort ideologically, theologically, and emotionally. Indoctrinating people to the point where they willingly strap-on explosives and go to kill innocent people *en masse* before dying themselves is not easy. Anger at perceived atrocities committed by the West against Muslims in the Middle East or oppression of Muslims in Western societies is not enough. Anger wears off, but the preparations for a serious attack take months if not years. Sustaining the determination to conduct an attack thus requires instilling in all members of the attack group the positive belief that the attack is morally, ethically, and religiously required—not merely justified.

It is a rare individual, or even couple, that can derive for itself such an over-riding imperative to conduct such an attack and retain full belief in that imperative long enough to act on it. Building and sustaining the necessary conviction usually requires periodic contact with one or more external sources whom the attackers believe to be reliable guides to right behavior. Performing the role of such a guide requires skill, whether the communication is in person (which all of these groups prefer) or electronic. AQAP's Anwar al Awlaki played this role extremely well, communicating directly with Nidal Malik Hasan, who killed 13 people at Fort Hood Texas in 2009 and with the leader of the Virginia Jihad Network, rounded up by the FBI in 2003.[93]

A guide of this sort is highly vulnerable, however. He must be visible to his protégés, which means that his security can be compromised by them through a failure of their will or of their tradecraft. A guide living in the West and supporting many attack groups is not likely to remain long out of the sights of Western intelligence and law enforcement. The most effective such guides, therefore, reside in the regional support zones, from which they communicate electronically and to which would-be attackers make pilgrimages to receive indoctrination and continued spiritual support. Awlaki maintained his visibility through YouTube lectures and communicated with would-be recruits through emails and encrypted messages in safety in Yemen for many years before he finally met his end.[94]

Most attack groups also require more mundane training. Buying an AK-47, loading it, and firing it does not require much skill. Re-loading it and continuing to fire while standing exposed in a public place with adrenaline pumping requires a little more skill, but not much. Walking into a mall or a club, opening fire, and killing a lot of people, however, requires surprisingly more knowledge. People naturally scatter, hide behind obstacles, play dead, and do other things that confuse an inexperienced killer and generally help reduce the death toll of unprepared attacks. The shooters at the Bataclan Club in Paris, however, knew their business. They blocked escape routes and methodically cut people down but, more to the

point, cut them off from fleeing—and so killed scores where an untrained individual or team would have killed far fewer.

Any undertaking requiring multiple shooters, in fact, requires considerable skill if not training to ensure that the attackers do not end up shooting each other or otherwise blocking each other's lines of sight. Learning how to position oneself tactically in order to maximize sight lines while cutting off lines of escape, and so on, requires experience and training. It usually requires practice as well—reading how-to manuals put out by ISIS and al Qaeda will take would-be attackers only so far.

Finding places in the West where multiple killers can practice with live weapons without calling attention to themselves is tricky. Doing so in a war zone such as Syria is not. Regional support bases in Iraq, Syria, Sinai, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, and elsewhere, in fact, have to provide both basic and advanced training in weapons and tactics to thousands of recruits regularly in order to replenish ranks depleted by active combat. Those bases can inevitably turn out as many trained attack groups as desired. They sometimes even conduct attacks locally that can help them perfect training techniques suitable for use in the West, such as the 2013 attack in the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, in which fighters armed only with AK-47s killed dozens of shoppers.

Weapons Design Expertise

Both the San Bernardino and the Paris attack groups used more than assault rifles, however. The Paris attackers successfully detonated a number of suicide vests, adding to the carnage and fear. The San Bernardino team tried and failed to detonate linked pipe bombs at its target and had stockpiled other pipe bombs at its home. As the San Bernardino attackers and numerous other failed attack teams discovered, it is not that easy to make your own explosive devices from materials available in the West and get them to detonate at the time and in the manner of your choosing. Each team usually gets to test its wares only once, moreover, hindering the process of perfecting techniques and optimizing them for the Western environment.
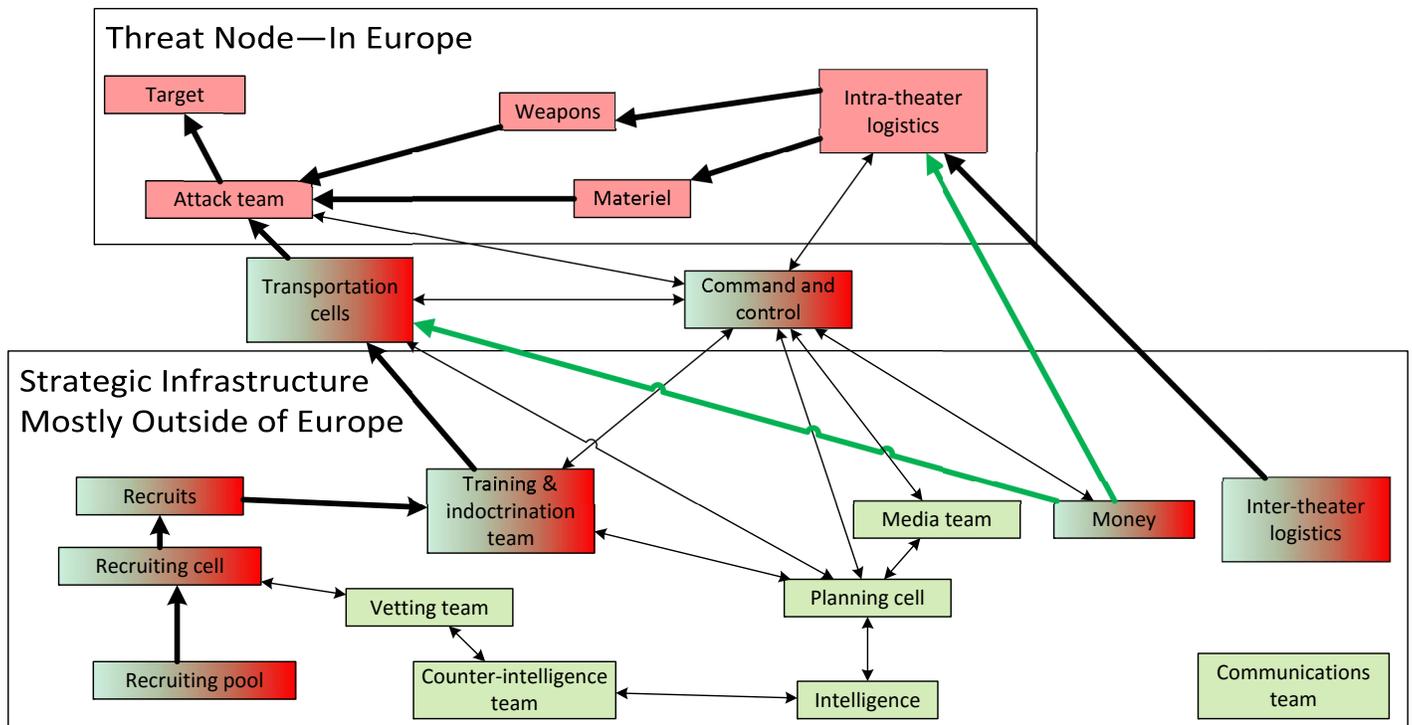
The threat node is the bullet; the strategic infrastructure is the gun. The strategic infrastructure exists to support the entire group including its activities in Iraq/Syria and those in Europe and the U.S. ISIS maintains a robust intelligence and counter-intelligence structure, as well as highly-developed teams to recruit, vet, train, and indoctrinate recruits from around the world. It has an advanced planning team that has designed and conducted operational maneuver campaigns as well as terrorist campaigns. It acquires money from many sources and moves it globally as required. It also moves people and things as necessary. Its communications teams work hard to develop and deploy secure means of communications for the entire group. Its media team produces high-quality videos and publications describing all of the group's activities. ISIS will continue to have these capabilities as long as it has safe-havens and fighting forces in Syria, Iraq, or elsewhere outside of Europe and the U.S. This strategic infrastructure can be used to generate and regenerate threat cells to attack the U.S. and Europe indefinitely. It must be able to do so, because each threat cell is explicitly a single-use weapon as suicide bombers always are. So attempting to track and defeat the threat cells in Europe and the U.S. or the specific elements of the strategic infrastructure in the Middle East supporting those threat cells is a fool's errand. It is like signing up to catch all the bullets.

Regional support bases concentrate a high level of the knowledge and experience needed to make effective bombs. Competition between bombers and their targets creates a technological and methodological race to find ever better ways to ensure that bombs remain hidden until they detonate, that they detonate when required despite advanced counter-measures (such as jammers that attempt to block the radio waves that some remote-detonation systems use), and that they do not explode prematurely.[95]

Bomb-designers are highly-valued and heavily-protected assets. Their groups will not often send them into insecure areas like Western countries where they can be easily picked up and their talents lost or, worse yet, compromised to Western intelligence services. The heavy-lifting of improving personnel-borne explosive designs and remote-detonation or timed-detonation systems will likely be done by the regional support groups for the foreseeable future, therefore. The odd bomb-maker either based in the West or translated into the attack zone is more likely to be drawing on techniques developed by more talented individuals in the regional support zone than to be advancing his murderous trade on his own.

Physical annihilation or total subjugation are not the only existential threats to America. Al Qaeda and ISIS also pose a threat to the continued existence of the world order we have known for decades.

The regional support zone thus provides a hot-house environment for the generation of explosive devices and of the techniques for manufacturing and deploying them that poses an infinitely greater threat to the West than any bomb-design undertakings within the West itself are likely to do. They are also bases for the training of more expendable bomb-makers deployed for specific missions. The Times Square bomber received explosives training in Pakistan under the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, which also financed his attack.[96] The car bomb failed to detonate because the attacker altered the explosives used inside the device.[97] One of the Tsarnaev brothers, too, may have received training during a trip to Russia that resulted in innovations on their simple pressure-cooker devices.[98] The attackers built their own bombs inside the United States in these attacks, unlike the device used in the 2009 attempted underwear bombing, creating a level of deniability for the groups that provided explosives training.

Targeting the threat node (e.g. killing the planners or bombmakers) will thus have only a temporary effect on the threat to the West, as both al Qaeda and ISIS can and will replace them. Depriving al Qaeda and ISIS of their own terrain and military forces is central to reducing and ultimately eliminating the threat of well-planned, coordinated, and lethal attacks in the West.

FINDING A SOLUTION

The challenge of understanding the threats posed by ISIS and al Qaeda is immense. It requires grappling with the psychology of individual fighters and suicide-bombers, Islamic theology, revolutionary ideology, military organization, insurgent cellular networks, and the technology of terror. It demands examining in detail complex and inter-related conflicts in many countries with different histories, ethnicities, confessions, dialects, and traditions. This challenge scorns simplifications and the analysis of this problem into more manageable component parts.

We cannot afford to fail at it, however. Mis-defining the threat ensures that strategies developed to address it will fail. They are likely, in fact, to make things worse. The temptations of election-year politics to demand simple statements of the problem matched by simple solutions must be resisted. Arguments about where to fix blame for the current crisis are not merely arid, but distracting. We must put them aside to focus firmly on comprehending the nature of the threats that confront us today.

But even that focus is insufficient. For the Salafi-jihadi movement is dynamic and adaptable. It has changed many times since its most recent re-emergence in the 1980s, opportunistically altering its shape to conform to the conditions around it. The rate of its change is accelerating because of the spread of ISIS and al Qaeda affiliates and the competition among them. Conditions in the Muslim world, Europe, and even America are also changing at an accelerating pace, moreover, creating additional opportunities and requirements for al Qaeda and ISIS to change as well.

We can never stop trying to understand this threat, therefore, never become complacent in our models of it, and never cease reviewing and renewing our assessments of it, at least not until it is defeated. Neither must we despair of comprehending it, however, nor of finding approaches to meeting it that are short of perfection but nevertheless advance us toward our vital objectives. A civilization that has grappled with and solved so many of the world's most complex problems from eliminating diseases to ending genocides to finding a peaceful end to a Cold War marked by the constant fear of thermonuclear doom need not quail before this challenge. If we devote ourselves to solving it, we will find a solution.

CONCLUSION

Descriptions of the danger confronting the United States and our European allies may appear hyperbolic to those who focus on the parts without seeing the whole and those who consider each particular event in isolation from the ones that have come before. Americans have become too skilled at downplaying danger and persuading themselves to accept as a new normal each degradation of both their own security and a peaceful global order. They are at risk of stumbling unintentionally into a new isolationism in which belief in our own helplessness stops us from taking prudent measures to protect ourselves and our core national interests. Diminishing the threat on the one hand and narrowing the scope of "vital national interests" on the other are rationalizations that serve the desire to avoid fully understanding and acting in a complex world so full of risk. We must shake ourselves free of this mindset and look reality squarely in the eye.

Physical annihilation or total subjugation are not the only existential threats to America. Al Qaeda and ISIS do not now have the capabilities to obliterate or conquer the West, yet they are already driving processes by which America and Europe are beginning to abandon the central values and ideas that define them. Al Qaeda and ISIS also pose a threat to the continued existence of the world order we have known for decades through their constant and periodically-successful efforts to destroy states on which regional order depends.

Those efforts unintentionally cohere with Putin's drive to reverse the outcome of the Cold War by truncating the territory and sovereignty of Soviet successor states, separating Europe from the U.S., and breaking both NATO and the European Union. They coincide with Chinese undertakings through the finely-calibrated use and threat of force to gain territory, separate the U.S. from its Asian allies, and acquire hegemony in the western Pacific. They interact with Iranian efforts to expel the United States, Britain, and the West from the Middle East and establish Persian hegemony from Afghanistan to the Mediterranean.

These phenomena, taken together as they must be, are reshaping the world in ways that will fundamentally alter the daily lives of Americans over time. Al Qaeda and ISIS will bring increasing levels of violence to our streets and homes, driving domestic security responses that will curtail Americans' civil liberties and fuel ethno-religious tensions that will increasingly rend our society. The destruction of a peaceful global order prizing the free movement of people, goods, and ideas will profoundly affect the American economy by reshaping our access to raw materials, finished products, trading partners, and the free flow of international investment. The time when Americans could live in safety and relative prosperity while the flames and fear of war engulf tens of millions is rapidly passing.

The drift toward major regional wars will inevitably involve America in those conflicts, moreover, however determined we might be to avoid such involvement. Americans have ended up fighting in every major European war since the start of the Republic except for one despite strenuous efforts to remain neutral in all of them.[99] The notion that the world can descend into flames and America can remain somehow insulated from the fire is unsustainable.

We have already been drawn into the wars in Syria, Iraq (again, following our withdrawal in 2011), and Afghanistan. The question before us now is how to design a prudent strategy to guide our future involvement in those conflicts and, more importantly, to begin shaping the world through military and non-military means toward a new stable order conducive to our safety, security, values, and way of life.

The current project focuses on addressing the threat of al Qaeda and ISIS globally but particularly in Iraq and Syria because that is the most urgent challenge facing America today. Its urgency springs from the fact that the war in Mesopotamia and the Levant is driving expanding regional conflict, global sectarian strife, and the mobilization of growing numbers of Muslims around the world behind banners of extremism and confessional hatred. It is causing

The question before us now is how…to begin shaping the world…toward a new stable order conducive to our safety, security, values, and way of life.

unprecedented resources to flow into the coffers and training camps of ISIS and al Qaeda affiliates which will direct some of those resources into increasing attacks within the U.S. and Europe. It has drawn Iranian military forces and proxies into combat in several countries, inextricably linking these wars with American hopes of preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and, ultimately, moderating Iran's willingness to use terrorism and armed force in pursuit of its regional ambitions. Russian military intervention in the conflict has now conjoined this crisis with Putin's attacks on NATO, Europe, and his neighbors as well. The wars in Iraq and Syria have become the nexus of almost all of the threats to American and European security and the world order and must thus have priority in any strategy.

They cannot be the exclusive focus of a global strategy nor of strategies to address any of the individual threats, however. Destroying ISIS in Iraq and Syria will not end the threat from ISIS affiliates in Africa, Egypt, and Asia, which were significant Salafi-jihadi fighting forces before joining ISIS and will remain so if they break away from a dying Caliphate.

Defeating Jabhat al Nusra will not by any means resolve the danger arising from al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's re-establishment of a significant safe haven and armed force in Yemen, from the growing threat posed by the kaleidoscope of al Qaeda affiliates and quasi-affiliates in North Africa and the Sahel, from al Shabaab as it metastasizes in East Africa, or from the numerous al Qaeda allies and like-minded groups in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. The U.S. must develop and execute strategies to address these dangers as well, as a recent report by the American Enterprise Institute describes.[100]

Defeating ISIS and Jabhat al Nusra in Iraq and Syria is a necessary but not sufficient condition for global success and security.

The plethora of threats and the impossibility of destroying all or even several with a single decisive blow leads some to argue against involvement in any of these conflicts and particularly in the horrifically complex struggle in Syria. Advocates of remaining aloof from these fights can pose a number of reasonable questions that demand serious answers.

Does committing our national power to the wars in the Levant and Mesopotamia not deprive us of the flexibility we need to respond to the many other threats facing us?

The scale of the requirement to secure our vital national interests in Iraq and Syria is by no means clear. This planning group has focused on seeking solutions that do not involve the massive deployment of American military force into either country and does not yet despair of finding one. We cannot reasonably weigh the risks, costs, and benefits of becoming deeply involved in these fights until we know how large an effort will be required. This exercise will articulate a number of options requiring various levels and kinds of resources, by no means all military, in the third publication that will appear in February. We will revisit this valid and important question on the basis of those concrete options, noting that the desire to minimize the commitment of American forces to any one theater and to retain the greatest possible degree of global flexibility heavily informs our deliberations.

If defeating ISIS and Jabhat al Nusra in Iraq and Syria will not end the threat from al Qaeda and other ISIS affiliates, why make the attempt?

Defeating ISIS and Jabhat al Nusra in Iraq and Syria is a necessary but not sufficient condition for global success and security. Salafi-jihadi forces in those theaters are far stronger,

better-resourced, and more militarily advanced than in any other. ISIS established its Caliphate in Iraq and requires the territory it holds in Iraq and Syria to sustain its legitimacy vis-à-vis al Qaeda, with which it competes for the leadership of the global Salafi-jihadi movement, and with respect to current fighters and potential recruits. Depriving ISIS of that territory will force it to reconstitute and, quite possibly, transform itself again into a different kind of organization with far less capability to acquire and deploy resources. Iraq and Syria form the locus in which defeating ISIS will have non-linear effects on the global ISIS network and brand.

Defeating Jabhat al Nusra in Syria will not have the same effect on the global al Qaeda movement because of the robust and independent affiliates in Yemen, South Asia, and Africa. It will disrupt that movement, however, which has been focusing attention and resources on the fight in Syria and benefiting from its ability to fundraise and recruit on Jabhat al Nusra's activities. It will also register as a major defeat for al Qaeda and its leader, Ayman al Zawahiri, who has put his name and prestige behind Jabhat al Nusra.

The real reason to prioritize defeating Jabhat al Nusra, however, is defensive. The group has been more successful in infiltrating a collection of Salafi and non-Salafi Sunni opposition groups in Syria than any other al Qaeda affiliate has been in its own region. Allowing Jabhat al Nusra to continue this infiltration and cooptation will allow it to continue its efforts to radicalize a large portion of the Sunni opposition through education, the example of its success, and its precise application of force through targeted assassinations of key figures who oppose it. Jabhat al Nusra is well down the path of hijacking the Sunni opposition in Syria into a Salafi-jihadi course while increasing its support among local populations who do not now ascribe to its ideology. Jabhat al Nusra poses one of the most significant long-term threats of any al Qaeda affiliate, and its defeat must be one of the highest priorities of any strategy to defend the United States and Europe from al Qaeda attacks.

Would it not be both safer and wiser to focus on disrupting the specific networks planning attacks against the U.S. and Europe than to embroil ourselves in the ethno-sectarian morass of the Middle East?

Separating the elements of al Qaeda and ISIS actively working to attack the West from the main bodies of those groups fighting in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia is impossible. All al Qaeda groups and ISIS affiliates seek to take the war into the West at some point and in some manner. Differences among and within groups on this matter are pragmatic—whether it seems most prudent to the groups to risk Western retaliation or to let Western anger fall on others while some groups focus on expanding and consolidating their positions locally. But the expulsion of the West from the Muslim world and the

conquest of the entire Muslim world are the core objectives of al Qaeda and ISIS. Both groups also intend to proceed from imposing their view of Islam on fellow Muslims to imposing it on the rest of humanity. Sound strategy does not attempt to parse the Salafi-jihadi movement into those seeking to attack the West and those with only local objectives because there is no such second category. To be an affiliate of al Qaeda or ISIS is to have a global agenda.

Division of labor within both groups does create distinct sub-groups whose main effort is preparing for and conducting attacks on the West. The strategy of focusing on those groups while hoping that other dynamics will dispose of the larger, supposedly-locally-focused organizations of which they are a part is superficially attractive. It fails because it misunderstands the relationship between the externally-focused sub-groups and the main bodies from which they spring.

Sound strategy also recognizes that Salafi-jihadi groups independent of al Qaeda and ISIS form a base of support from which the enemy draws strength and resilience. Externally-focused attack groups are not simply residing in safe havens in Iraq and Syria but otherwise disconnected from the local fights in those lands. They draw heavily on the extensive infrastructure that Salafi-jihadi armed forces have built to support those local fights.

Salafi military organizations in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, South Asia, and elsewhere have well-established means of acquiring and distributing significant amounts of cash. They recruit, vet, train, and equip tens of thousands of fighters from all around the world. They maintain large and increasingly sophisticated media outlets and social media hubs. They support extensive research and development teams specializing in the design and construction of explosive devices of all sorts. They pursue advanced communications systems and techniques to protect their members from Western intelligence. They have staffs that know how to prepare, plan, and oversee the execution of complex military operations over great distances. The attack cells focused on the West are extrusions of these capabilities. Al Qaeda and ISIS are readily able to replace one destroyed attack cell with another because the resources needed for any given cell are miniscule compared with what the groups have mobilized for their fights in Iraq and Syria.

Targeting those who are currently targeting us can thus do little more than disrupt some ongoing operations and add friction to al Qaeda and ISIS efforts to bring the war to our streets and homes. Doing so is unquestionably worthwhile and should be continued—better to disrupt and degrade their capabilities than to let them operate and expand freely. But it will not stop the attacks or keep us safe. It will do nothing, moreover, to address the multifarious other critical interests threatened and harmed by the continued raging of sectarian war among tens of millions of people.

> *"We run all these risks and the added risk of being confused and immobilized by our inability to weigh and choose, and pursue a firm course based on a rational assessment of each [challenge]."*
>
> *–NSC-68*

Why can we not rely on regional states and armies, whose interests in defeating ISIS and al Qaeda are even greater than ours, or partners with adversaries such as Russia to manage this threat with limited American assistance?

The Muslim world will ultimately have to defeat the ISIS and al Qaeda insurgency within it. Sunni and Shi'a populations will have to find a way to live once again in relative peace, as they have done throughout most of their history. The United States cannot and should not impose a solution on the region unilaterally or in concert with our extra-regional allies. Local actors will play dominant roles in resolving conflicts and ending the Salafi-jihadi threat.

It does not follow, however, that the U.S. can or should rely on regional states or other external actors to work things out. None of the other actors share all of our vital interests, and some are pursuing objectives that are antithetical to our security and well-being, as we shall see in Part II of this report. Regional states all have interests in conflict with one another. Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf States do not agree that defeating ISIS is their over-arching priority. Putin does not agree either. Their means, methods, and prioritization are therefore different and in many cases will exacerbate the drivers of instability over the long term. There is no natural coalition of states with common goals that can readily work together to resolve the problem that the U.S. has decided, for the moment, is the one we care most about.

ISIS and al Qaeda have established themselves in Iraq and Syria (and Yemen) in part because of the dynamics of regional sectarian conflict. This conflict is, in turn, driven in part by the struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran that is steadily drifting toward a rather warm Cold War. That conflict matters more to the combatants than ISIS or Jabhat al Nusra does, and so they are as inclined to use the fight against those groups as leverage to pursue advantages vis-à-vis one another as they are to make that fight a priority. They are engaged in that fight and cannot extricate themselves quickly. There is no

prospect that they will set aside other differences that are of far greater moment to them in order to concentrate on what we would like them to do, namely fight ISIS.

The United States, finally, has forgotten how to conduct coalition warfare, at which it has had a long a history of success from World War II to the Gulf War. American leaders now often judge the value of a coalition based on the number of participants contributing troops and financial resources. Partners and allies in effective coalitions do not contribute such goods in lieu of American assets, but alongside of them. The military forces of the NATO alliance were explicitly designed on the assumption that the U.S. would provide critical capabilities that only it possesses. American leadership is required to balance among the interests of our allies, moreover, to ensure that American interests are preserved, and to recognize and help our partners fulfill some of their other interests in return for their help on issues of vital importance to us.

Will the U.S. and Europe not still face continued lone-wolf attacks even if we defeated ISIS and al Qaeda in the Middle East?

Radicalization within the global Muslim community and alienation of Muslims in Western societies may have grown to the point that some lone-wolf attacks will continue. The number, scale, and lethality of such attacks is tied in no small part to the persistence of strong ISIS and al Qaeda groups in regional bases, however. Groups that seem to be winning inspire followers; those that are losing do not. The very real success that ISIS and al Qaeda have had in the past few years is an important motivational tool by which they can influence would-be lone wolves actually to take up arms. Depriving them of that success will significantly reduce the efficacy of that tool.

Lone-wolf attacks, however, are not the most serious threat either group poses to the safety of Americans and Europeans in their own homes. The attacks in Paris against Charlie Hebdo and then in November were not lone-wolf attacks. They were ordered by central al Qaeda leadership in Yemen and ISIS leadership in Syria respectively. The attackers were indoctrinated, trained, and prepared in those safe havens and connected there with each other to form the attack teams. They received a wide variety of other forms of support throughout their missions, which enabled them to conduct the attacks relatively smoothly and lethally. Lone wolves cannot conduct such sophisticated attacks, even if they are also lethal. We must not allow our fixation with the problem of lone wolf attacks to distract us from the much greater threat that organized attacks supported by the resources of regional Salafi-jihadi military forces pose.

The safety and security of Americans and Europeans thus demands defeating al Qaeda and ISIS in their regional bases, starting first of all in Iraq and Syria. The requirement in turn demands understanding the complex and interwoven factors driving the sectarian war and the involvement of various regional and extra-regional actors in it. Unraveling that tapestry means comprehending the objectives and interests of all of those various actors individually and as they relate to one another and to our own. This task is daunting, to say the least.

It is reminiscent of the intellectual environment of the first days of the Cold War, when American strategists were trying to grapple with the multitude of apparent threats in regions they did not understand and with complex relationships with the Soviet Union. Noting, thus, the apparent Soviet intention to engage the U.S. in many small conflicts around the world, the authors of NSC-68 warned in 1950: "We run all these risks and the added risk of being confused and immobilized by our inability to weigh and choose, and pursue a firm course based on a rational assessment of each" challenge.[101] They went on to articulate the dangers that flow from such confusion and immobilization

The risk that we may thereby be prevented or too long delayed in taking all needful measures to maintain the integrity and vitality of our system is great. The risk that our allies will lose their determination is greater. And the risk that in this manner a descending spiral of too little and too late, of doubt and recrimination, may present us with ever narrower and more desperate alternatives, is the greatest risk of all.[102]

There can be no clearer statement of the risks inherent in our situation today.

NOTES

1. "Read Putin's U.N. General Assembly speech," *Washington Post*, September 28, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/09/28/read-putins-u-n-general-assembly-speech/.

2. U.S. National Security Council, "NSC-68: United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," April 14, 1950, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/coldwar/documents/pdf/10-1.pdf> (accessed 8 December 2015).

3. See below for a detailed discussion of Salafism and Salafi-jihadism. See Mary Habeck, James Jay Carafano, Thomas Donnelly, Frederick W. Kagan, Kimberly Kagan, Thomas G. Mahnken, Katherine Zimmerman, Bruce Hoffman, and Seth Jones, "A Global Strategy for Combating al Qaeda and the Islamic State," American Enterprise Institute, December 7, 2015, https://www.aei.org/publication/a-global-strategy-for-combating-al-qaeda-and-the-islamic-state/ and Jessica D. Lewis, "The Islamic State: A Counter-Strategy for a Counter-State," Institute for the Study of War, July 28, 2014, http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Lewis-Center%20of%20gravity.pdf, for expositions of the nature and objectives of al Qaeda and ISIS.

4. ISIS exacerbates sectarian tensions as a matter of strategy. Al Qaeda writ large has historically tried to refrain from attacking Shi'a specifically, although Jabhat al Nusra casts itself as the defender of Syria's Sunnis against the Alawite regime of Bashar al Assad. See below for a more detailed examination of this question.

5. Office of the Press Secretary, "Address to the Nation by the President," The White House, December 6, 2015, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/12/06/address-nation-president.

6. Genevieve Casagrande with Jennifer Cafarella, "The Syrian Opposition's Political Demands," Institute for the Study of War, December 29, 2015, http://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/syrian-opposition%E2%80%99s-political-demands.

7. See Mary Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadi Ideology and the War on Terror*, for an excellent and accessible discussion of the history and evolution of jihadi ideology.

8. Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*. This line of thinking is articulated forcefully and clearly in one of the most influential treatises of Salafi-jihadis, Sayyid Qutb's *Milestones*: "the main reason for the difference between the first unique and distinguished group of Muslims and later Muslims is that the purity of the first source of Islamic guidance was mixed with various other sources…" p. 17, inter alia.

9. Jacob Olidort, "The Politics of 'Quietist' Salafism," The Brookings Institution, February 2015, http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/research/files/papers/2015/02/salafism-quietist-politics-olidort/olidort-final-web-version.pdf.

10. Jacob Olidort, "The Politics of 'Quietist' Salafism."

11. William McCants and Jacob Olidort, "Is Quietist Salafism the Antidote to ISIS?" The Brookings Institution, March 13, 2015, http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2015/03/13-rethinking-islamism-quietist-salafis.

12. William McCants and Jacob Olidort, "Is Quietist Salafism the Antidote to ISIS?" See also Elizabeth Dickinson, "Playing with Fire: Why Private Gulf Financing for Syria's Extremist Rebels Risks Igniting Sectarian Conflict at Home," The Brookings Institution, December 6, 2013, http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2013/12/06-private-gulf-financing-syria-extremist-rebels-sectarian-conflict-dickinson, referenced in that document, for a detailed discussion of this phenomenon.

13. Elizabeth Dickinson, "Playing with Fire: Why Private Gulf Financing for Syria's Extremist Rebels Risks Igniting Sectarian Conflict at Home."

14. Sageman, Habeck.

15. Habeck, pp. 31-33, notes that Hassan al Banna defined jihad as a personal obligation, fard 'ayn, for Muslims.

16. See Meir Hatina, "Redeeming Sunni Islam: Al-Qa'ida's Polemic Against the Muslim Brethren," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 39:1, 2012, 101-113, for an excellent summary of Zawahiri's primary attack against the Muslim Brotherhood, "The Bitter Harvest." Zawahiri reprised and expanded on this attack in "Knights under the Prophet's Banner," in Laura Mansfield, trans., *His Own Words: A Translation of the Writings of Dr. Ayman al Zawahiri*.

17. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, for example, helped establish a Salafi party in Yemen in 2012 for the purpose of establishing another recruiting pool. See Office of Foreign Asset Control, "Treasury Designates al-Qa'ida Supporters in Qatar and Yemen," U.S. Department of the Treasury, December 18, 2013, http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl2249.aspx. Jabhat al Nusra praises the Muslim Brotherhood as a critical step forward for global jihad, including the organization in a video on the history of jihad, likely in order to lure members into joining the armed movement. See "The Heirs of Glory," Al Manara al Bayda, June 26, 2015, https://pietervanostaeyen.wordpress.com/2015/06/28/al-manara-al-bayda-new-video-by-jabhat-an-nusra-the-heirs-of-glory/.

18. Al Qaeda has taken a strong position against targeting both Sunni and non-Sunni Muslims. Al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri distributed guidance in September 2013 explicitly ordering follows to avoid killing other Muslims, unless the action is defensive. He said, "**Avoid fighting the deviant sects such as Rawafidh, Ismailis, Qadianis, and deviant Sufis, except if they fight the Ahl as Sunnah [Sunni Muslims].** If they fight the Ahl as Sunnah, even then the response must be restricted to those parties amongst them who are directly engaged in the fight. At the same time, we must make it clear that we are only defending ourselves. Those from amongst them who do not participate in the fight against us and their families, should not be targeted in their homes, places of worship, their religious festivals and religious gatherings." Emphasis added. Excerpt from "Zawahiri Gives General Guidelines for Jihad Regarding Military, Propaganda," SITE Intelligence Group, September 13, 2013, available by subscription through Site Intelligence Group at: https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadi-News/zawahiri-gives-general-guidelines-for-jihad-regarding-military-propaganda.html.

19. Osama bin Laden wrote a fatwa published in al Quds al Arabi on February 23, 1998 that made killing Americans, including civilians, and their allies a fard 'ayn. Four other individuals signed the 1998 fatwa, including Ayman al Zawahiri. The Arabic text is available through Cornell library, https://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/fatw2.htm, and an English-language translation is available at http://fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm.

20. President Obama pledged that the U.S. will "destroy ISIL and any other organization that tries to harm us," in his December 6, 2015 Oval Office address. The February 2015 White House draft Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) against ISIS defined associated persons or forces as "individuals or organizations fighting for, on behalf of, or alongside ISIL or any closely-related successor entity in hostilities against the United States or its coalition partners." The 2015 National Security Strategy defined the terrorism threat as those groups that do or could "pose a threat to the homeland." Specifically, they include "globally oriented groups like al-Qa'ida and its affiliates, as well as a growing number of regionally focused and globally connected groups—many with an al-Qa'ida pedigree like ISIL." The full text of the National Security Strategy is available here: https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf. The full draft AUMF is available here: https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/aumf_02112015.pdf.

21. Hassan al Banna writes: we "will pursue this evil force to its own lands, invade its Western heartland, and struggle to overcome it until all the world shouts by the name of the Prophet and the teachings of Islam spread throughout the world. Only then will Muslims achieve their fundamental goal, and there will be no more 'persecution' and all religion will be exclusively for Allah." Cited in Habeck, p. 32. Sayyid Qutb declares: "This religion is not merely a declaration of the freedom of the Arabs, nor it is message confined to the Arabs. It addresses itself to the whole of mankind, and its sphere of work is the whole earth." *Milestones*, pp. 59-60.

22. Boko Haram has pledged allegiance to ISIS, but ISIS leadership did not publicly recognize it as a wilayat in the manner in which all other external ISIS affiliates have been recognized.

23. 2004 Zarqawi letter to Zawahiri. "February 2004 Coalition Provisional Authority English translation of terrorist Musab al Zarqawi letter obtained by United States Government in Iraq," U.S. Department of State, http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/31694.htm.

24. Interview with Abu Muhammad al Joulani, leader of al Qaeda-affiliated Jabhat al Nusra, by al Jazeera reporter Taysir Alluni. Originally aired as part of the program "Today's Encounter," place and date not specified. Available in translation as, "Syria's Al-Nusrah Front leader interviewed on conflict, political vision," BBC Monitoring Middle East, December 22, 2013.

25. Dabiq 1, p. 36. Released on July 5, 2014. Available through the Clarion Project, http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf.

26. 2004 Zarqawi letter to Zawahiri.

27. Jennifer Cafarella, "Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria," Institute for the Study of War, December 2014, http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/JN%20Final.pdf.

28. Mansfield, p. 257.

29. 2004 Zarqawi letter to Zawahiri.

30. Dabiq 1, p. 36 or following.

31. Dabiq 1, p. 27.

32. Dabiq 1, p. 35.

33. "Al-Qaeda leader in Syria speaks to al Jazeera," al Jazeera, December 19, 2013. Available in translation as, "Syria's Al Nusrah Front leader interviewed on conflict, political vision," BBC Monitoring Middle East, December 22, 2013, cited in Jennifer Cafarella, "Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria," Institute for the Study of War, December 2014, http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/JN%20Final.pdf, p. 16.

34. Cafarella, "Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria," p. 16.

35. Cafarella, "Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria," p. 17.

36. Cafarella, "Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria," p. 20.

37. Cafarella, "Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria," p. 21.

38. Abu Mohammad al Joulani interview with al Jazeera, May 27, 2015. Translation provided by a Jabhat al Nusra fighter available by subscription through the SITE Intelligence Group at: http://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Statements/translation-of-interview-with-nf-leader-provided-by-fighter.html.

39. Abu Mohammad al Joulani interview with al Jazeera, May 27, 2015.

40. Al Qaeda-aligned jihadi groups condemn the killing of Muslims by ISIS, citing ISIS attacks on Muslims, particularly Sunni Muslims, as evidence that ISIS deviates from true Islam or labeling the group as khariji (heretical), a historical reference to the extremist and heretical group that assassinated Ali ibn Abi Taleb, the fourth Caliph, thus precipitating the Sunni-Shi'a split. The Syrian Salafi-jihadi group Ahrar al Sham released a video on December 30, 2015 in which local civilians in Aleppo Province denounce ISIS as extremist for reasons including the killing of Muslims and betraying the Syrian Revolution. Video available by subscription through SITE Intelligence Group at: http://sitemultimedia.org/video/SITE_Ahrar-Aleppo_ISpoll.mp4. Nine Jabhat al Nusra-affiliated jurists issued a fatwa on June 2, 2015, that declared fighting against ISIS a duty in Northern Aleppo Province based on the legitimacy of repelling aggression. Ar Risalah, Issue 1, July 4, 2015. Copy and translation available by subscription through SITE Intelligence Group at: http://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Statements/anti-is-fighters-in-syria-release-first-issue-of-english-magazine-al-risalah.html.

41. Bill Roggio, "Syrian National Coalition Urges U.S. to Drop al-Nusrah Terrorism Designation," Long War Journal, December 12, 2012, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/12/syrian_national_coalition_urge.php; Sam Dagher and Maria Abi-Habib, "Syrians March to Protest U.S. Airstrikes Strategy," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 26, 2015, http://www.wsj.com/articles/syrians-march-to-protest-u-s-strategy-on-airstrikes-1411773983.

42. Jabhat al Nusra leader Abu Mohammad al Joulani reiterated his opposition to the receipt of "foreign assistance" by Syrian rebel groups in an interview in May 2015, stating: "[foreign supporters] direct these fighting groups in this direction so that they can build a political case for a peace treaty, or something else the UN representatives want, in Aleppo. Thus these fighting groups turn away from an essential battle." Abu Mohammad al Joulani interview with al Jazeera, May 27, 2015.

43. Jessica Lewis McFate, "The ISIS Defense of Iraq and Syria: Countering an Adaptive Enemy," Institute for the Study of War, May 2015, http://understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ISIS%20Defense%20in%20Iraq%20and%20Syria%20--%20Standard.pdf.

44. Harleen Gambhir, "Meet ISIS's Most Dangerous Affiliates," Politico, December 14, 2015, http://understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Harleen%20Gambhir-ISIS%20Affiliates-Politico%20DEC%202015.pdf.

45. Mansfield, 214.

46. Mansfield, 201.

47. Mansfield, 203.

48. Mansfield, 221.

49. Both the Bush and Obama administrations focused on "core" al Qaeda members—effectively the senior leadership group operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan and those individuals or cells receiving direct orders from senior leadership to conduct attacks against the American homeland, such as al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in 2009. Al Qaeda affiliates, which until 2012 publicly identified by the al Qaeda brand name, were conceived to be only focused on al Qaeda's local or regional fight. Other Salafi-jihadi groups, including those with close relationships with al Qaeda "core" such as the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, were not considered to be part of the al Qaeda threat. These distinctions overlooked the robust and resilient network that al Qaeda leadership directs and from which the "core" draws strength. See Katherine Zimmerman, "The al Qaeda Network: A New Framework for Defining the Enemy," AEI's Critical Threats Project, September 10, 2013, http://www.criticalthreats.org/al-qaeda/zimmerman-al-qaeda-network-new-framework-defining-enemy-september-10-2013, for an in-depth discussion on the relationship between local and global objectives and operations.

50. Abu Mohammad al Joulani gave a two-part interview with al Jazeera on May 27, 2015 and June 3, 2015. Translation for the first half was provided by a Jabhat al Nusra fighter available by subscription through SITE Intelligence Group at: http://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Statements/translation-of-interview-with-nf-leader-provided-by-fighter.html; Charles Lister, "An internal struggle: Al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate is grappling with its identity," Huffington Post, May 31, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/charles-lister/an-internal-struggle-al-q_b_7479730.html. Joulani stated: "Jabhat al-Nusrah isn't concerned with anything but fighting Bashar al-Assad and Hizbullah" in his most recent interview with Orient news. [First time on Orient news ... statements from Jabhat al Nusra leader Abu Mohammed al Joulani] Orient News, December

12, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXgeoFlUY8Y. Excerpted translations available at: https://abujamajem.wordpress.com/2015/12/19/jabhat-al-nusrahs-abu-muhammad-al-jolani-of-course-we-wont-be-bound-by-riyadh/.

51. An August 7, 2010 letter from Osama bin Laden to the late al Shabaab leader Ahmed Abdi aw Mohamed "Godane" (AKA Mukhtar Abu Zubayr) ordered him not to reveal his relationship with al Qaeda because "it would have the enemies escalate their anger and mobilize against you; this is what happened to the brother in Iraq or Algeria." Bin Laden noted explicitly the issue of funding, in which some donors would then have difficulty moving money into Somali due to sanctions. Such consideration was also present in obscuring Jabhat al Nusra's relationship with al Qaeda. The letter (socom-2012-0000005) is available through the Combating Terrorism Center's Harmony Project and a full download of the documents is available: https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/letters-from-abbottabad-bin-ladin-sidelined.

52. Ayman al Zawahiri said, "I commissioned my dear brother, the deputy emir of the group, his eminence Sheikh Abu Baseer Nasser al-Wuhayshi, to give all that he can to stop the current fighting between the mujahideen in Sham," in a video likely produced in March 2015 and released in September 2015. "Zawahiri Attacks Baghdadi, IS for Exporting Infighting from Iraq and Syria in Video," SITE Intelligence Group, September 9, 2015, available by subscription through SITE Intelligence Group: https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Multimedia/zawahiri-attacks-baghdadi-is-for-exporting-infighting-from-iraq-and-syria-in-video.html.

53. "AQAP Video 'Guardians of Shariah,' Explores Modern History of Jihad Against U.S., Allies," SITE Intelligence Group, December 9, 2015, available by subscription through SITE Intelligence Group at: https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Multimedia/aqap-video-guardians-of-shariah-explores-modern-history-of-jihad-against-u-s-allies.html.

54. Thomas Joscelyn, "An al Qaeda Commander Comes out from the Shadows," Long War Journal, December 16, 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/12/an-al-qaeda-commander-comes-out-from-the-shadows.php.

55. Jabhat al Nusra has conveyed its current objectives in Syria as a stepping stone for the global aims of the jihad in propaganda videos; see "The Heirs of Glory," Al Manara al Bayda, June 26, 2015. Available at: https://pietervanostaeyen.wordpress.com/2015/06/28/al-manara-al-bayda-new-video-by-jabhat-an-nusra-the-heirs-of-glory/. Likewise, Joulani admitted that Jabhat al Nusra was planning an attack in the West in an interview in May 2015, stating that Zawahiri had ordered the group to call it off. Joulani did actually admit that Jabhat al Nusra was planning an attack in the West in his May 2015 al Jazeera interview, but it said he called it off on Zawahiri's orders. See: Abu Mohammad al Joulani interview with al Jazeera, May 27, 2015; Charles Lister, "Al-Qai'da Plays a Long Game in Syria," Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel, September 11, 2015, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/al-qaida-plays-a-long-game-in-syria.

56. Mansfield, p. 223.

57. Mansfield, pp. 250 to 280..

58. 2004 Zarqawi letter to Zawahiri.

59. 2004 Zarqawi letter to Zawahiri

60. Dabiq 1, pp. 36-38.

61. Dabiq 1, p. 38.

62. Mansfield, pp. 216-217.

63. Dabiq 1, p. 40.

64. McFate, "The ISIS Defense of Iraq and Syria: Countering an Adaptive Enemy," pp. 17-19.

65. Mansfield, pp. 219 and 223; "Zawahiri Incites Lone-Wolf Attacks in the U.S. and West, Urges Fighters in Iraq, Syria to Cooperate with IS Against Enemy Alliance," SITE Intelligence Group, Sept. 13, 2015, available by subscription through SITE Intelligence Group at: https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Multimedia/zawahiri-incites-lone-wolf-attacks-in-the-u-s-and-west-directs-to-read-inspire-magazine.html.

66. "Charlie Hebdo: A Military Analysis," Inspire 14, pp. 5-7. Available through subscription by SITE Intelligence Group at: http://multimedia.org/docs/SITE_AQAP_Inspire14.pdf.

67. Harleen Gambhir, "The Islamic State's Trap for Europe," Washington Post, November 15, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/hating-muslim-refugees-is-exactly-what-the-islamic-state-wants-europe-to-do/2015/11/15/dfe0ca84-87d1-11e5-be39-0034bb576eee_story.html.

68. Mansfield, p. 218, e.g.

69. "Charlie Hebdo: A Military Analysis," Inspire 14, p. 40. Al Qaeda's support for San Bernardino-style lone-wolf attacks is well documented in the English-language magazine, Inspire, copies of which are available through www.jihadology.net. Al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri praised the January 2015 al Qaeda attack against the Charlie Hebdo office in Paris and called for direct attacks inside of Europe and America in a December 2015 statement. "Zawahiri Lauds January 2015 Paris Attacks, Calls for Strikes in U.S., Europe," SITE Intelligence Group, December 1, 2015, available by subscription through SITE Intelligence Group at: https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/zawahiri-lauds-january-2015-paris-attacks-calls-for-strikes-in-u-s-europe.html. Al Shabaab's 2013 attack on the Westgate mall in Nairobi, Kenya, targeting Westerners, was an organized, directed attack. See Katherine Zimmerman, "We Are Losing the Fight Against al Shabaab," CNN Global Public Square, September 23, 2013, http://www.criticalthreats.org/somalia/zimmerman-we-are-losing-fight-against-al-shabaab-september-23-2013, for analysis of the Westgate attack. "IS Spokesman Rallies Fighters Against U.S.-led Coalition, Threatens Enemy and Calls Individual Muslims to Launch Attacks," SITE Intelligence Group, September 21, 2014, available through subscription by SITE Intelligence Group at: http://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Multimedia/is-spokesman-rallies-fighters-against-u-s-led-coalition-threatens-enemy-and-calls-individual-muslims-to-launch-attacks.html; "Dabiq 12: Just Terror," page 2, The Clarion Project, November 2015, http://www.clarionproject.org/docs/islamic-state-isis-isil-dabiq-magazine-issue-12-just-terror.pdf.

70. Details of the San Bernardino attackers are still emerging. The recently-released FBI affidavit charging Enrique Marquez with complicity describes how shooter Syed Farook radicalized Marquez, but not how Farook himself was radicalized. United States District Court for the Central District of California, United States of America v. Enrique Marquez, Jr., Criminal Complaint, December 17, 2015, http://www.justice.gov/opa/file/800606/download.

71. Katherine Zimmerman, "Expanding the Campaign of Violence: Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's English-Language Magazine," AEI's Critical Threats Project, July 13, 2010, http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/expanding-campaign-violence-al-qaeda-arabian-peninsulas-english-language-magazine-july-13-2010.

72. Richard Vladmanis, "Boston Bomb Suspect Influenced by al Qaeda: Expert Witness," Reuters, March 23, 2015, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-boston-bombings-trial-idUSKBN0MJ0Z620150323; and Thomas Joscelyn, "San Bernardino Terrorists Allegedly Studied AQAP's Inspire Magazine, Pledged Allegiance to Baghdadi," The Long War Journal, December 17, 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/12/san-bernardino-terrorists-allegedly-studied-aqaps-inspire-magazine-pledged-allegiance-to-baghdadi.php.

73. "IS Spokesman Rallies Fighters Against U.S.-led Coalition, Threatens Enemy and Calls Individual Muslims to Launch Attacks," SITE Intelligence Group, September 21, 2014, http://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Multimedia/is-spokesman-rallies-fighters-against-u-s-led-coalition-threatens-enemy-and-calls-individual-muslims-to-launch-attacks.html.

74. "Dabiq 7: From Hypocrisy to Apostasy: The Extinction of the Grayzone" Dabiq 7, page 57, The Clarion Project, February 2015, http://media.clarionproject.org/files/islamic-state/islamic-state-dabiq-magazine-issue-7-from-hypocrisy-to-apostasy.pdf.

75. See https://www.recordedfuture.com/al-qaeda-encryption-technology-part-2/ for a discussion of how al Qaeda adapted its security procedures after the Edward Snowden leaks and updates since then.

76   "Zawahiri Incites Lone-Wolf Attacks in the U.S. and West, Urges Fighters in Iraq, Syria to Cooperate with IS Against Enemy Alliance," available by subscription through SITE Intelligence Group, https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Multimedia/zawahiri-incites-lone-wolf-attacks-in-the-u-s-and-west-directs-to-read-inspire-magazine.html.

77. "Dabiq 4: The Failed Crusade," page 44, The Clarion Project, October 2014, http://media.clarionproject.org/files/islamic-state/islamic-state-isis-magazine-Issue-4-the-failed-crusade.pdf.

78. "Safety and Security Guidelines for Lone Wolf Mujahideen," SITE Intelligence Group, available by subscription through SITE Intelligence Group at: http://sitemultimedia.org/docs/SITE_Lone_Wolf_Security.pdf; and "Black Flags from the Islamic State," available by subscription through SITE Intelligence Group at: http://sitemultimedia.org/docs/SITE_BlackFlagsFromTheIslamicState2016.pdf, e.g. The latter offers links to additional online materials about operational security.

79. "Black Flags from the Islamic State."

80. "Black Flags from the Islamic State," p. 100.

81. "Black Flags from the Islamic State," p. 40.

82. "Black Flags from the Islamic State," pp. 40-41.

83. "Charlie Hebdo: A Military Analysis," *Inspire* 14, p. 42. Available by subscription through SITE Intelligence Group at: http://sitemultimedia.org/docs/SITE_AQAP_Inspire14.pdf. Inspire is an official magazine of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and so the narrative of the Charlie Hebdo attack here should be regarded as more reliable than the ISIS-supporter narrative of the Paris attacks. The purpose of presenting this discussion, nevertheless, remains showing how AQAP abstracts general principles and procedures from the attack, rather than to validate its narrative of the attack details.

84. Mariano Castillo and Paul Cruickshank, "Who was Abdelhamid Abouaad, suspected ringleader of Paris attack?" CNN, November 19, 2015, http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/16/europe/paris-terror-attack-mastermind-abdelhamid-abaaoud/.

85. Kim Willsher, "Paris attacks: police identify third Bataclan assailant," The Guardian, December 9, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/09/paris-attacks-third-bataclan-attacker-identified-by-police.

86. "Black Flags from the Islamic State," p. 100.

87. "Black Flags from the Islamic State," p. 103.

88. "Black Flags from the Islamic State," p. 105.

89. "Black Flags from the Islamic State," pp. 105-106.

90. Katherine Zimmerman, "Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: Leaders and their Networks," AEI's Critical Threats Project, September 27, 2012, http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/zimmerman-aqap-leaders-and-networks-september-27-2012. Slides 11-12.

91. "The Expanding Web of Connections Among the Paris Attackers," *The New York Times*, December 9, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/11/15/world/europe/manhunt-for-paris-attackers.html.

92. "Dabiq 12: Just Terror," Available through the Clarion Project, November 2015, http://www.clarionproject.org/docs/islamic-state-isis-isil-dabiq-magazine-issue-12-just-terror.pdf.

93. Katherine Zimmerman, "Militant Islam's Global Preacher: The Radicalizing Effect of Sheikh Anwar al Awlaki," AEI's Critical Threats Project, March 12, 2010, http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/militant-islams-global-preacher-radicalizing-effect-sheikh-anwar-al-awlaki.

94. See "The Death of AQAP's Anwar al Awlaki," AEI's Critical Threats Project, http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/al-qaeda-arabian-peninsula/anwar-al-awlaki-death-september-30-2011, for further information on the AQAP cleric and leader; also Scott Shane, "The Lessons of Anwar al-Awlaki," *New York Times Magazine*, August 27, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/30/magazine/the-lessons-of-anwar-al-awlaki.html.

95. "Footage of ISIS Weapons Lab Shows Construction of Heat-Seeking Missiles, Car Bombs," Fox News, January 6, 2016, http://www.foxnews.com/world/2016/01/06/footage-isis-weapons-lab-shows-construction-heat-seeking-missiles-car-bombs.html.

96. U.S. Attorney's Office, "Faisal Shahzad Sentenced in Manhattan Federal Court to Life in Prison for Attempted Car Bombing in Times Square," Southern District of New York, October 5, 2010, https://www.fbi.gov/newyork/press-releases/2010/nyfo100510.htm.

97. Devlin Barrett, "Shahzad Used Inferior Bomb to Avoid Detection," *Wall Street Journal*, July 21, 2010, http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704723604575379371725895584.

98. The pressure-cooker devices were similar to those found in Inspire, but included innovations for the fusing system that was not in the magazine. "These relatively sophisticated devices would have been difficult for the Tsarnaevs to fabricate successfully without training or assistance from others," according to a filing from the U.S. Justice Department. See Richard Esposito, "Exclusive: Government Doc Shows How Closely Boston Marathon Bombers Followed al Qaeda Plans," NBC, April 26, 2013, http://investigations.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/04/26/17932143-exclusive-government-doc-shows-how-closely-boston-marathon-bombers-followed-al-qaeda-plans; James Gordon Meek, "FBI Feared Boston Bombers 'Received Training' And Aid from Terror Group, Docs Say" ABC News, May 22, 2014, http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/fbi-feared-boston-bombers-received-training-aid-terror/story?id=23819429; and United States District Court for the District of Manhattan, United States of America v. Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. Criminal Complaint, April 21, 2013. http://www.justice.gov/iso/opa/resources/9352013422133751713926.pdf.

99. In addition to World Wars One and Two, the War of 1812 was a direct extension of the Napoleonic Wars and driven by the disruptions to global free trade occasioned by French and British economic warfare in that conflict. The U.S. managed to sit out only the Crimean War (1853-1856), which was a considerably more limited struggle.

100. Mary Habeck, James Jay Carafano, Thomas Donnelly, Bruce Hoffman, Seth Jones, Frederick W. Kagan, Kimberly Kagan, Thomas G. Mahnken, and Katherine Zimmerman, "A Global Strategy for Combating al Qaeda and the Islamic State," American Enterprise Institute, December 7, 2015, https://www.aei.org/publication/a-global-strategy-for-combating-al-qaeda-and-the-islamic-state.

101. NSC-68, p. 35.

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