

Determining a Foreign Policy of Interdiction Towards Al Qaeda  
*A Story of Recruitment Strategy*

by

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## I. Introduction

### *Preface*

In 1995, Timothy Mcveigh, Teri Nichols, and Lori Fortier, white American veterans, detonated an explosive device at a federal building in Oklahoma. Referred to hereafter as Mr. Mcveigh, Mr. Nichols, and Mr. Fortier, coverage frantically explained their financial-related rationales at length, attempting to lend legitimacy and understanding to their horrifying actions.<sup>1</sup> Most of the coverage immediately began searching for explanations, as mass murder was not a commonly accepted result of a white man's depression. Surely these men did not harbor any crazy religious thoughts similar to Muslim extremists.

In March 2014, two college females at the University of California, San Diego set two fires on campus (both legally determined to be acts of eco-terrorism), to prevent the opening of a Starbucks on campus. Coverage cited their motives as environmental, for the Starbucks would violate UCSD's fair trade policy. Articles also explained the preexisting controversy revolving around the Starbucks issue, providing credibility to the terrorist act.<sup>2</sup> Similarly to the Oklahoma bombing, these wealthy, white women surely had rational, academic excuses for their violence. Religious terrorism was not a popular or immediate attribution.

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<sup>1</sup> "Timothy McVeigh Bombs Oklahoma City Building." *The Learning Network: Teaching and Learning with the New York Times*. The Learning Network, 19 Apr. 1995. Web. 17 Mar. 2014. <[http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/04/19/april-19-1995-timothy-mcveigh-bombs-oklahoma-city-building/?php=true&\\_type=blogs&\\_r=0](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/04/19/april-19-1995-timothy-mcveigh-bombs-oklahoma-city-building/?php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0)>.

<sup>2</sup> Allyn, Richard. "UCSD Arson Suspects Accused of Eco-terrorism." *UCSD Arson Suspects Accused of Eco-terrorism - San Diego, California News Station - KFMB Channel 8 - Cbs8.com*. CBS8.com, 4 Mar. 2014. Web. 17 Mar. 2014. <<http://www.cbs8.com/story/24876946/ucsd-arson-suspects-accused-of-eco-terrorism>>.

In 2013, a teenage boy was mistakenly identified as a suspect in the Boston Marathon bombing. The Moroccan teen was identified by his full name, Salah Barhoum, and controversy arose over the happenstance suspicion of his Middle Eastern heritage.<sup>3</sup> Immediate reaction to the news of his involvement acknowledged his likely culpability, given his heritage and probable exposure to radical terrorist groups. Once he was established to be entirely innocent, public disapproval of his inaccurate shaming was fairly lacking. After all, his name sounded Muslim, it was a rational conclusion.

In 2014, a Malaysian airline went missing. Zaharie Ahmad Shar, the highly ranked, experienced pilot who had amassed over 18,000 miles during a 30-year career, was referred to as "the pilot", and as 'Zaharie'.<sup>4 5</sup> His deserved "Captain" status was coincidentally left out of most articles, and his Muslim-sounding name was proclaimed as an obvious link to foul play.

These examples show how Americans are apt to link Muslim connections to terrorism, and hesitant to acknowledge the existence of white, wealthy jihadists. Reporting of these incidents plays a huge role in shaping public opinion, which we

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<sup>3</sup> Hallowell, Billy. "Teen Featured in NY Post's Boston Bombing Story Speaks Out: I'm Not the Bomber (But There Is a Twist)." *Yahoo! News*. Yahoo!, 18 Apr. 2013. Web. 17 Mar. 2014. <<http://news.yahoo.com/teen-featured-ny-post-boston-bombing-story-speaks-000533452.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> Shoichet, Catherine E., Samira Jafari, Ram Ramgopal, and Jethro Mullen. "Malaysia Airlines Flight 370: Get up to Speed on the Latest Developments." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 01 Jan. 1970. Web. 17 Mar. 2014. <<http://www.cnn.com/2014/03/17/world/asia/malaysia-plane-up-to-speed/>>.

<sup>5</sup> Sheldrick, Giles. "Missing Malaysia Airlines Plane: Baffled Police Check out Pilot Suicide Plot." *Daily Express World RSS*. N.p., 17 Mar. 2014. Web. 17 Mar. 2014. <<http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/465281/Missing-Malaysia-Airlines-plane-Baffled-police-check-out-pilot-suicide-plot>>.

will explore further in chapter two. In these examples, simple things such as the exclusion of an American sounding name and the emphasis of Muslim syllables can prove instrumental in crafting the perception of the common “terrorist”. Analysis of the public’s tendency to misinterpret potential terrorists can be damaging, as identification of susceptible terrorists is an integral part of terrorist prevention. If Americans believe that Muslims are likely to be terrorists, every non-Muslim terrorist walks free without suspicion. Thus, even the simple misreporting of a name can be a dangerous road towards further counterterrorism failures. More broadly, this single misconception is representative of the plethora of societal misunderstandings regarding terrorism. This confusion allows al Qaeda and other similar organizations easier access to individuals. Confusion and ill-conceived counterterrorism strategy breed recruitment.

### **IMPETUS FOR THESIS**

*"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free." John Gospel, 8.32*

Of course, these misconceptions regarding terrorism are not timeless. Following the impetus of al Qaeda, it was easy to identify perpetrators and understand why they adhered to that extremist ideology. Formed in the 1980s as a revolution against Soviet forces invading Afghanistan, al Qaeda’s early principles were clear. Today, the foremost problem with American conceptions of terrorist profiles is that those conceptions are misconceptions. They are ignorant, misinformed, or malicious. Yet, because the public believes they have an accurate grasp on the root causes and

common characteristics of what they call 'terrorists', they use that information to point America's defense efforts. They believe they can use this 'truth' to make themselves free and safe. This is wrong.

The problem is that while Al Qaeda has adapted and diversified over the years, their public profile has not. This change has not resonated in the minds of the public, who is pressuring the national security organizations to react quickly and efficiently. This is dangerous, because the United States cannot and should not base domestic protection strategies based on the assumption that all terrorists are Muslims, or that all Muslims are terrorists. Limiting the counterterrorism scope to religious ideologues and people predisposed to violence is inefficient.

This thesis will argue in favor of a counterterrorism strategy based on more efficient suspect targeting. While certain terrorist agents obviously adhere to the Quran's rules, statistics show that the majority of al Qaeda does not. The Henry Jackson Society published a report in 2013 titled "Al Qaeda in the United States" that claimed most al Qaeda followers either joined out of misinformation, or reject the original intent of the ideology in favor of other gospel, sometimes formed from personal experiences.<sup>6</sup> The report argued that those at most risk for ideological conversion are not students of religion, but the religiously misinformed. This served as the impetus for my research question. Why was this report such a scandal? Why was the American public so shocked by the lack of religiosity within al Qaeda?

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<sup>6</sup> Simcox, Robin, and Emily Dyer. *Al Qaeda in the United States: A Complete Analysis of Terrorism Offense*. Publication. Henry Jackson Society, 2013. Web. <<http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Al-Qaeda-in-the-USAbridged-version-LOWRES-Final.pdf>>.

While many Americans are certainly ignorant of al Qaeda's recruitment methods in East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, the report revealed that this illiteracy extends to homegrown terrorism in Western nations, particularly the United States. The 2013 Boston Marathon was instrumental in alerting the public to the possibility that "middle class, white Americans" could become terrorists. Although the perpetrators ultimately had connections with Chechnya, Chechnya's relative mysteriousness and lack of resonance within pop culture still damaged and confused public assumptions.

Although Americans have started to understand the diversity of homegrown American terrorists, they maintain a woefully inaccurate impression of foreign terrorists. Al Qaeda is able to capitalize on this misinformed public and government, and target people outside of the American realm of suspicion. They remain outside of our preventative influence, and our punitive grasp.

As al Qaeda has become more prevalent within American politics and homegrown terrorism has become mainstream, academics have seized upon the creation of the perfect al Qaeda terrorist profile. The Henry Jackson Society and other research organizations have analyzed at length the backgrounds of convicted al Qaeda terrorists. They have identified patterns within those biographies, and have proclaimed loudly that those variables are important indicators. They suggest that once we identify people with those indicators, we will abolish terrorism.<sup>7</sup> The report gained massive attention with its proclamation that Caucasian men were a large demographic of American terrorism. With this startling finding, others began

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

additional research to more accurately identify potential American extremists. Organizations such as the Center for Strategic and International Studies conducted hypotheticals to prevent recruitment information from reaching these potential extremists. Others focused on the identification of personal incentives for radicalization. Psychologist Anne Speckhard, in her book Talking to Terrorists, explored these irregular motivations.<sup>8</sup>

Although these findings are absolutely crucial, the luxury of hindsight helped me recognize the lack of preventative hypotheses within this field. These works effectively deemed al Qaeda recruitment composition to be standardized, repetitive messaging. This would suggest that one broad strategy could prevent all potential recruits from joining. Qualitatively, this seems inefficient and unrealistic, particularly recognizing the breadth of individual backgrounds showcased in the Henry Jackson Society report, in which biographical patterns were not immediately obvious. This assumption of al Qaeda recruitment homogeneity fails to extract from the heterogeneity of those recruited, which rather suggests a more grassroots, decentralized recruitment reliance.

By asserting that al Qaeda messages are quite fluctuant, I propose that cataloguing these fluctuations could reveal a more holistic al Qaeda recruitment strategy. This identification could help identify which methods of communication most successfully resulted in recruitment, and form more comprehensive counter-communication initiatives.

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<sup>8</sup> Speckhard, Anne. *Talking to Terrorists: Understanding the Psycho-social Motivations of Militant Jihadi Terrorists, Mass Hostage Takers, Suicide Bombers & "martyrs"* McLean, VA: Advances, 2012. Print.

This identification can occur from both data analysis and theoretical application. Although authors like Robert Entman and Adam Berinsky have explored public reactions to political messaging strategies, I found very little research that combined terrorism recruitment with communications theory.<sup>9</sup>

Filling in this gap is vital. Although it is helpful to identify commonly occurring attributes within the profiles of convicted terrorists, this doesn't account for changes within al Qaeda's recruitment targets. As soon as the American government determines a certain demographic at risk for ideological conversion, al Qaeda would, and should, target another pattern of attributes to pursue. That is why we must identify changes in al Qaeda's strategy, and adjust American counterterrorism accordingly.

### *History of Counterterrorism: Context*

In the early 1990s, American efforts to combat al Qaeda were misguided and ineffective. Early Presidents didn't take the threat too seriously. MSNBC analyst Richard Wolffe claimed that President Bush "ignored all the warnings about al-Qaeda wanting to attack the homeland before 9/11".<sup>10</sup> Today, most of the American public believes that the United States government had enough knowledge to predict and prevent the 9/11 attacks. Wolffe asserted, "You couldn't just say that 9/11 came out of

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<sup>9</sup> Entman, Robert M. *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004. Berinsky, Adam J. *In Time of War: Understanding American Public Opinion from World War II to Iraq*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2009. Print.

<sup>10</sup>Wilmouth, Brad. "MSNBC's Wolffe: Before 9/11, Bush Ignored All the Warnings About Al-Qaeda" *NewsBusters*. MSNBC, 25 Apr. 2013. Web. 24 Mar. 2014. <<http://newsbusters.org/blogs/brad-wilmouth/2013/04/25/msnbcs-wolffe-911-bush-ignored-all-warnings-about-al-qaeda>>.

nothing. It was a total surprise because, in their narrative, Bill Clinton, and by extension, all Democrats somehow lost the plot, and they didn't take terrorism seriously. Because they were doing that lawyerly stuff about respecting the rule of law and not torturing people."<sup>11</sup>

Of course, after 9/11, the United States' strategy against al Qaeda drastically changed. In the years preceding 9/11, al Qaeda fundamentally existed within an operations base in Sudan, holding thousands of soldiers. The United States recognized this structure, and eradicated the Sudanese network. The dispersed members left the country, and the leaders went into hiding. In this case, the United States correctly identified al Qaeda's methods of financing and organizing, and implemented a successful diffusion.

After 9/11, the United States government suitably acknowledged the al Qaeda threat, and during the early 2000s, effectively neutralized its physical capabilities. According to David Kane, an Illicit Finance Agent at the Department of Homeland Security, the United States aimed to reduce the manpower capacity and financial support by 90%, and succeeded.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the battle has changed. Al Qaeda's physicality has been abandoned in favor of loosely affiliated, adaptable freelancers and smaller groups.<sup>13</sup> The United States can no longer send fleets to find and destroy al Qaeda bases. It is more difficult to ascertain the central aspects of the location, and the targets for striking.

While dealing with al Qaeda's transformation into an amorphous edifice, the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Kane, David. "Interview with David Kane." Interview. 5 August 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

United States has particularly struggled with the cyber components. Daniel Benjamin, previously the Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the Department of State, said that “any effort to take down an al Qaeda propaganda website resulted in the reappearance of that site in a more secretive, difficult location hours later.”<sup>14</sup> The concept of intelligent surveillance was introduced, as tracking the networks became more of a priority.

Starting in 2010, The United States Central Command’s digital team began constructing infrastructure to battle and discredit al Qaeda’s cyber messages.<sup>15</sup>

In 2012, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton formed an initiative to hack into al Qaeda websites and replace the content with American propaganda.<sup>16</sup> Newly hired intelligence experts at the State Department accompanied these efforts, most notably those at the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC), a group that poses as locals and counters terrorist propaganda on al Qaeda sponsored websites.

In 2010-2012, the United States began using that surveillance data to conduct drone strikes. Although they acknowledged that Al Qaeda would use any errant strike, and even "successful" strikes as propaganda, they still decided in favor of the more accurate, less costly, and less devastating attacks.

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<sup>14</sup> Benjamin, Daniel. "Interview with Daniel Benjamin. Personal interview. 12 August 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Hartmann, Margaret. "New York Magazine." *Daily Intelligencer*. New York Magazine, 24 May 2012. Web. 01 Apr. 2014. <<http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2012/05/us-takes-fight-against-al-qaeda-online.html>>.

<sup>16</sup> "Al Qaeda Continues to Frighten the U.S, the Cyber War Is Begun." *Security Affairs RSS*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Apr. 2014. <<http://securityaffairs.co/wordpress/5745/intelligence/al-qaeda-continues-to-frighten-the-u-s-the-cyber-war-is-begun.html>>.

However, al Qaeda proved resilient in the face of these attacks. Though they lost most of their top recruiters and leaders to drone strikes, al Qaeda continued to recruit susceptible youth and easily found financiers.<sup>17</sup> The hierarchical structure transmuted into a more fluid network that encouraged homegrown terrorism and lone wolf attacks. These threats are obviously more difficult to identify and combat. Although the anti-propaganda efforts of places like the CSCC are lauded and exciting, the government has not yet released any statistics to determine their success.

### *Argument*

To evaluate al Qaeda's recruitment strategy, I analyzed a collection of al Qaeda and al Qaeda affiliated statements for language changes and consistencies. Using statements attributed to Osama Bin Laden, Ayman al Zawahiri, and the al Qaeda affiliate Groups 'al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb' and 'al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula', I identified a dramatic change from the earlier Bin Laden and Zawahiri works, and between the affiliate statements from 2011-2013. I found that the later statements were more reflexive and diverse, suggesting a change towards reactionary language instead of premeditated, repetitive "hooks".

From the results of this analysis (to be further explained in chapter three), I was able to infer a change in al Qaeda's recruitment aims. These changes differed depending on the speaker, the location, and the time period. This sort of supposition allows us to consider external factors (such as United States counterterrorism methods) from their point of view, and prepare subsequent counter-methods. With

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with David Kane.

this contrary perspective, I can adjust United States counterterrorism strategy to account more preemptively for recruitment targets. Efficiency comes from the elimination of useless government initiatives and misidentification of recruitment risks. In the past, American efforts have limited themselves to stereotypical demographics. Before the publication of the Henry Jackson report, very little literature discussed non-religious motivations for terrorism. Any proficient strategy must account for as many risks as possible.

### *Outline*

This thesis will be separated into four subsequent chapters.

Chapter two discusses popular communications and propaganda theory, and applies the findings and suggestions to al Qaeda. I pay particular attention to motive, success, and methods, and look for theoretical explanations of al Qaeda's work. The impetus behind the theory is, of course, solution-based. I apply several theories to the al Qaeda case study, most notably, the ideas of positive communication, the targeting of naive recipients, the subtle and manipulative framing of global events, and methods of inspiring ideological conversion.

Chapter three discusses the impetus for my data analysis. This chapter explains the historical contexts of the authors whose statements I catalogue, and explains the procedures I use to complete the data analysis.

Chapter four displays these findings. I identify significant differences in strategy between earlier and later works, and particularly between al Qaeda central leadership and the more autonomous al Qaeda affiliate groups.

Chapter five gives an overview of primarily Western counter-terrorism and counter-messaging methods in the past. I look at efforts put forth by American diplomats, Western Europe's government agencies, and partner groups in certain African nations. I use a retrospective, qualitative analysis to determine which efforts were most successful. I conclude that international efforts to monitor and identify threats were very successful in eliminating al Qaeda leaders, and that the strategies that prevented illicit movement deterred terrorist agents. Regionally, I found that local efforts to increase senses of community and belonging showed certain levels of success.

Chapter six, my conclusion, aggregates these analyses. Combining my theoretical studies and my data findings, I propose several approaches. The first recommendation incorporates a hypothetical public affairs exercise. The second considers the problem from a diplomatic, policy-centered perspective, and the third focuses on domestic counter-terrorism implications.

## II. A Theoretical Analysis of al Qaeda Communications Strategy

The study of communications is obviously not a new concept. Academics have studied aspects of interpersonal communication and propaganda for centuries. In order to properly consider al Qaeda communications from a strategic viewpoint, I use this chapter to place that narrative within a theoretical framework. I use several prominent scholars' approaches to establish this framework. John Zaller, a UCLA political science professor, explores how political messages in the news can influence the public's opinion.<sup>18</sup> Martha Crenshaw, a previous Wesleyan University professor, explores successful terrorist recruitment.<sup>19</sup> Robert Entman suggests additional connections between media and foreign policy.<sup>20</sup> Harold Lasswell, a professor of power relations and communications at Yale University, studied the emotional aspects of propaganda.<sup>21</sup>

Prior to my data analysis, I expected that I would find a general adherence to these theories and strategies across al Qaeda's communications timeline. Although I expected that the earlier, centrally published statements would be fairly repetitive and

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<sup>18</sup> John Zaller is a Political Science professor at UCLA. He studies public opinion and American politics. <<http://www.polisci.ucla.edu/people/faculty-pages/john-zaller/>>.

<sup>19</sup> Martha Crenshaw is a Political Science professor at Stanford. She has written extensively on political terrorism, and of the causes of successful terrorism recruitment <[http://fsi.stanford.edu/people/martha\\_crenshaw/](http://fsi.stanford.edu/people/martha_crenshaw/)>.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Entman is a Media and Public Affairs professor at George Washington University. He works with political communication, media, and foreign policy. <<http://elliott.gwu.edu/entman/>>.

<sup>21</sup> Harold Lasswell was a Political Science professor from Yale University. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/331058/Harold-Dwight-Lasswell>>

religiously inclined, I predicted that the later, affiliate statements would follow these author's theories more. I hypothesized that the most successful, modern al Qaeda initiatives would combine these author's theories, and provide a capitalization of ideological predisposition, abstract exclusionary tactics, framing, and emotional appeal. The 'Twitter Strategy', explained later in this chapter, appears to be the perfect culmination.

*John Zaller*

John Zaller discusses the connection between positive and negative communication and political awareness. He explains that an audience with greater political awareness is more likely to receive and accept new, contrary information, and change its opinion.<sup>22</sup> He argues that more influential messages don't necessarily replace one belief with another. Rather, the most powerful messages are able to change the recipient's balance of positive and negative consideration of an issue.<sup>23</sup> While he doesn't determine the impact that preexisting expertise has on political farming, he does find that cognizant targets lacking expertise are more easily swayed with unwavering, one-sided communication.<sup>24</sup> Zaller might predict that al Qaeda should target demographics with both significant awareness of Islamic thought, and enough naiveté and lack of religious expertise; these targets would have a predisposition to theological influence.

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<sup>22</sup> De. Vreese, Claes H., and Hajo G. Boomgaarden. "Media Message Flows and Interpersonal Communication: The Conditional Nature of Effects on Public Opinion." *Communication Research* 33.1 (2006): 20. Web.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 24.

This has proven true. The case of the United States v. Masoud Khan to further explore this.<sup>25</sup> In this case, the four defendants were all moderate Muslim students at Prince George's Community College. They formed a group intending to study and teach Islam in English. The group morphed into a paintball club, with exclusive membership rights and secrecy requirements. Two of the members took a trip to Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, and were arrested for participating in jihad training camps. The group was then suspected of providing battle training in the form of paintball, and all four defendants were indicted on charges of the conspiracy to levy war against the United States provide material support to al Qaeda, contribute services to the Taliban, contribute material support to Lashkar-e-Taliba<sup>26</sup>, expedition against a friendly nation, and possession and use of firearms in connection with a crime of violence.

Two of the members had been soldiers in the US Marines, which, according to the court opinion, explained their predisposition to participate in violent undertakings. It would have made sense if the members were extreme interpreters of Islamic law. Yet, their religious knowledge was surprisingly lacking, although they were certainly zealous in their efforts.<sup>27</sup> According to Zaller's theory, this made them perfect recruitment targets for radicalization, and an extremist group in Pakistan contacted

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<sup>25</sup> UNITED STATES of America v. Masoud Khan, et al., Defendants. No. CRIM.03-296-A. E.D. VA 2004). United States District Court, E.D. Virginia. Alexandria Division. 4 Mar 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Lashkar-e-Tayyiba is a Kashmir-focused militant group, originally formed as a Pakistan-based Islamic fundamentalist movement in the 1980s. The group likely has several thousand members. The group is active in Afghanistan, and also recruits in the United States. <http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/let.html>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

them. The Pakistani group determined that these actors were inclined to ideologically convert. Thus, recruitment language wouldn't have necessarily been that extreme. A standard recruitment message would have worked in this case.

This theory supports my hypothesis regarding al Qaeda's early years. When al Qaeda was a centralized, fairly quantifiable construct, it would have been easier to identify compatible, yet slightly different ideologies. Thus, when Bin Laden and Zawahiri were communication leaders, they would have been able to pick out several dominant demographics that aligned with al Qaeda and send standard messages. As al Qaeda decentralized and affiliates and known actors took on more varying personalities, compatibility would have been more difficult to ascertain. This would suggest that, as affiliates became more dominant within the recruitment field, recruits would become more varied, and counterterrorism initiatives would face a greater challenge.

#### *Martha Crenshaw*

Martha Crenshaw focuses on the incentives that cause ideological transformations or expand preexisting ideologies into tangible actionable roles. She categorized these influences as issue-oriented, revolutionary, and redemptive.<sup>28</sup>

However, she acknowledges that as al Qaeda grew as a network, recruits became less invested in the ideology, and more interested in the network itself. Thus, the influences became less "issue" based, as recruits were more attracted to the power

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<sup>28</sup> Crenshaw, Martha. "Theories of Terrorism: Instrumental and Organizational Approaches." *Journal of Strategic Studies - Special Issue: Inside Terrorist Organizations* 10.4 (1987). 20. Web.

dynamics and benefits of the network. People were enticed by the nature of al Qaeda, not the ideology it spouted.

This is important. As these logical, ideological influences dimmed, al Qaeda would care less about the incentives of its recruits. Requirements to join would fade, and people with a more diverse array of incentives and ideological beliefs would support al Qaeda for its branding and resources. This explains why so many converts are religiously ignorant, or confused about al Qaeda's beliefs. When al Qaeda formed, almost all of the members were in alignment with Bin Laden's extreme Islamic interpretations and his religiously based goals. As the years progressed, other extremists with different beliefs joined al Qaeda, and received the benefits of its training and network. Al Qaeda became a platform. Considering that al Qaeda continued to praise any and all jihad acts, whether they were religiously inspired or not, it appears that they were fine with this structural change.

These theories, however, are problematic for identifying susceptible recruits. As mentioned earlier, if the ideological characteristics of recruits are diversifying, it is more difficult to identify predictive patterns. In light of these developments, Crenshaw suggests looking for ideological sympathizers anyways. She ascertains that indoctrinated activists are a lost cause, and that prevention is more efficient, even if it will often be wrong. This is obviously disheartening, for it fails to provide a method to identify non-religious recruiting targets. According to my data analysis, post-Arab Spring recruitment messages are meant for a large, diverse population. If we singularly weed out the Islamic extremists, and ignore other ideological predispositions such as violence, cultural isolation, and boredom, we are abandoning

a huge number of recruits. This obviously bodes well for al Qaeda, who could simply continue targeting newer, newly frustrated revolutionaries. The less predictable recruitment is, the more likely our measures will fail.

*Robert Entman*

However, besides targeting readers, al Qaeda focuses expressly on its content. Robert Entman writes about the powerful implications of framing, which have proved grossly influential in both sides of the War on Terror. Entman considers all framing (and, according to him, all forms of communication) contextually manipulative. Using the Presidential State of the Union as an example, he shows how political speeches can limit all reactions and implications within a certain frame. He explains how George W. Bush ignored certain global considerations when declaring the beginning of the War on Terror, and confined his language within the boundaries of a “revolutionary incitement”.<sup>29</sup> Bush’s framing tactics included ambiguous goals and compelling emotional components, which resulted in an indisputable narrative and a “manipulated” public.

Entman further elaborates on subtle framing, which he defines as “selecting and highlighting some facets or events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution.”<sup>30</sup> Similarly to all communication, he identifies emotion as a key component. Logic and relevance are superseded by gut reactions, which can overwhelm rationality.

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<sup>29</sup> Entman, Robert M. *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004. 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

Al Qaeda has employed this tactic in several ways. Although even religiously informed Muslims have critiqued the al Qaeda interpretation of Islamic as inaccurate and overly extremist, al Qaeda has responded carefully to these attacks with gut-wrenching stories of American treachery and violence. Muslim victims in al Qaeda suicide attacks have been cleverly swept over with stories of the dangers of Westernization.

Part of this framing comes from what Entman calls 'Cultural Congruence', or the "ease with which a news frame can cascade through the different levels of the framing process and stimulate similar reactions at each step".<sup>31</sup> Essentially, the best al Qaeda messages simply capitalize on preexisting, potentially unformed opinions. Entman explains that framing is most powerful when it fits within a preexisting dominant schema. This way, subtle manipulation allows the recipient to still feel like he or she is in line with common wisdom. Al Qaeda uses illogical Muslim arguments (i.e., conflicting with pure religious belief) to attract the religiously naïve. Entman's theory explains that this adherence to cultural relevancy and mainstream approval is more aerodynamic than lengthy, 'logical' explanations.<sup>32</sup>

Al Qaeda uses ambiguous stories to attract those who fit within a majority opinion adjacent to al Qaeda's message.<sup>33</sup> For our counterterrorism purposes, this would suggest, contrary to my hypothesis for modern strategy, a continuation of standard, al Qaeda messaging, with slight alterations to appeal to slightly differing crowds.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 13

*Harold Lasswell*

Harold Lasswell, a professor of Communications and Political Science, agrees with Entman that propaganda must offer indirect information and adapt to preexisting feelings. Successful indoctrination “builds on preexisting symbols to elicit emotional responses”.<sup>34</sup> This explains why al Qaeda would have limited their statements only to those few stories and claims that elicited the strongest reactions, whether they were true or not. Besides appealing to a greater audience, emotionally titillating, unsubstantial messages would demand a greater commitment of counter-terrorism initiatives. The United States can easily discredit inaccurate statements. Deterring an emotional photo is more difficult, as is inviting critique of the propaganda from other sources.<sup>35</sup>

The al Qaeda magazine *Inspire*, the most widely read Western vehicle of propaganda, is largely without citations or factual evidence.<sup>36</sup> Instead, authors contribute scintillating anecdotes of American oppression and general Western infidelity. Drones are a popular read, because it takes very little argumentation that drones are “evil”. This method has proven effective, and I explore it later in my conclusion.

### **EXTENDED EXAMPLES**

I use several examples to further explore these popular propaganda theories, and

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>36</sup> "Inspire Magazine | Public Intelligence." *Public Intelligence*. Pi, 4 June 2013. Web. 11 Apr. 2014. <<https://publicintelligence.net/tag/inspire-magazine/>>.

situate them within the context of al Qaeda's tactics.

*British and American Neutrality, World War II*

*A Move from Ideological Predisposition towards Violence*

From al Qaeda's perspective, I would argue there are two categories of susceptible recruitment targets. There are those who have no real predispositions to the ideology, and there are those who have predispositions but no evidence of supporting violently inclined operations. These are two very different demographics, and would have to be approached accordingly.

Nicholas J. Cull explores the first group, what we'll call the "neutral" group, in his book "Selling War", in an analysis of the American public's move from neutral to violent during World War II. For this case study, the American public represents neutrality. The book explores how the British carefully constructed a campaign that manipulated the Americans from "neutral in thought, word, and deed" to armed intervention during the war. The United States was firmly against intervention and firmly pro-isolationism, and in 1935 passed the Neutrality Acts. The British were cognizant of the Anglophobia present in America, and had to organize their public affairs campaign around that context. They capitalized upon the American desperation to 'know things', and became sympathizers. By limiting conversation within American cultural norms, the British crafted bonds between the masses and

presented common American and British heroes.<sup>37</sup> This seems to fit within Entman's "emotional" scope.

By keeping a small press bureau in New York, publicly acclaiming their policy of "No Propaganda", and then 'accidentally' releasing enticing information to the American public, the British became extremely inclusive. Americans felt privileged to eavesdrop on the British Empire, and the information travelled throughout the population. The isolationism waned, Pearl Harbor coincidentally happened, and American eventually entered the war.<sup>38</sup>

The second al Qaeda recruitment group revolves around the transition from ideological support to violent participation. These recruits could have either a religious predisposition or political begrudges, like veteran Timothy McVeigh. McVeigh began voicing disapproval of United States government actions in 1992. He criticized taxes and overly zealous policing, and began reading anti-government literature. However, this radicalism remained nonviolent until 1995, when he detonated an explosive outside a Federal building. This transition is crucial. There are thousands of nonviolent dissenters in the United States, and most of them never even own a gun.

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<sup>37</sup> Cull, Nicholas John. *Selling War: The British Propaganda Campaign against American "neutrality" in World War II*. New York: Oxford UP, 1995, 8.

<sup>38</sup> Cull.

However, while it's reassuringly difficult for al Qaeda to pick out those likely to transform, it's even harder for the government to predict who will be chosen, and who is likely to turn violent even without the assistance of extremists.<sup>39</sup>

There are an endless number of triggers that could predispose someone to violence. Clint Watts, a researcher for the Foreign Policy Research Institute Program on National Security, spoke at a conference titled "Irregular Warfare: Challenges and Opportunities" in December 2011.<sup>40</sup> He attributes radicalization (what he considers to be a manifestation of violent tendencies) to ethnic identity, psychological and social factors.<sup>41</sup> Brian Jenkins of RAND (a global policy think tank employed by the United States armed forces) says, "we have no metric for measuring faith, but the attraction of the jihadists' extremist ideology for these individuals appears to have had more to do with participating in action than religious instruction... few of America's accused terrorists seem to have arrived at jihadism through a process of profound spiritual discernment."<sup>42</sup> Jenkins adds that of the sixty-eight Muslims implicated in al Qaeda terrorism from 2008-2011, the majority of these were Somali-Americans, and were recruited through "peer relationships and Somali identity", not standard al Qaeda messaging.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> "Terror Hits Home: The Oklahoma City Bombing." *The FBI*. FBI, 21 May 2010. Web. 16 Mar. 2014. <<http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/history/famous-cases/oklahoma-city-bombing>>.

<sup>40</sup> *Radicalization in the U.S. Beyond Al Qaeda: Treating the Disease of the Disconnection*. Rep. Foreign Policy Research Institute: Program on National Security, Aug. 2012. Web. <[http://www.fpri.org/docs/PaperRadicalization\\_in\\_the\\_US\\_Beyond\\_al\\_Qaeda\\_Watts.pdf](http://www.fpri.org/docs/PaperRadicalization_in_the_US_Beyond_al_Qaeda_Watts.pdf)>.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

In the beginning, al Qaeda targeted specific radicalization groups based on ideological adherences, and used personal communication to shift them towards violence. These recruits were often extremely religious. Now, however, "virtual radicalization and recruitment provides al Qaeda low volumes of weak recruits executing fumbled plots leading to a lowering of the terror groups' global stature."<sup>44</sup>

To this day, the connection in America between religious ideology and terrorism remains confusing. Although the number of homegrown American terrorist attacks appears to have grown within the last decade, Jenkins is positive that the American Muslim community is *not* becoming significantly more radical.<sup>45</sup> Perpetrators who find instructions online, either published by al Qaeda or someone else, often have no immediately apparent religious or ideological predisposition to jihadism.

Based on these ideologically diverse homegrown terrorists, Jenkins says that in the future, we should expect a constant rate of low-level radicalization across the US, and more lone wolf perpetrators rather than operationally supported group attacks.<sup>46</sup>

Cull doesn't specifically explore this terrorist demographic, but my later research shows that the most recent al Qaeda recruitment messages acknowledge the diversity and lack of coherent ideological predisposition within its readers, and tailors recruitment statements to different locales. Cull's theory accounts for al Qaeda's shift towards content-based statements that allude to controversial legislation and city-

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 8.

specific discontents. Any strategy that catered to such discontent would fit Watt's guidelines.

### *Bush and 9/11: An Example of Abstract Exclusion*

Of course, propaganda isn't historically limited towards foreign nations. George W. Bush was acclaimed for adopting a carefully maintained campaign to garner support for his foreign policy decisions post 9/11. It was a simple strategy of word choice. Bush used the word 'evil' five times and the word 'war' twelve times in his 2002 State of the Union.<sup>47</sup> In fact, he employed several of the strategies the British had during World War II. In adherence to Nyhan's suggestions, Bush used very few facts or reports to convince the American people of the threat.<sup>48</sup> He constructed a very abstract enemy, and a global conspiracy of shadowy agents. This parallels al Qaeda's exclusionary tactics, mainly their blanket ban on all Western infidels.

### *Bush: Framing the Situation*

We can also discuss this strategy in terms of framing. Entman defined frames as an "identified cause that conveyed a moral judgment and suggested a certain remedy". By joining Bush's in-group, Americans and allied nations agreed upon the moral judgment towards abstract terrorism, and supported the implied declaration of war against terrorism.<sup>49</sup> In addition to maintaining cultural relevancy, Bush used techniques such as prominence and repetition; by stressing certain statements over

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<sup>47</sup> Entman, Robert M. *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004, 1.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 7.

others, he was able to stimulate emotionally charged support for his political ends.<sup>50</sup> Whenever he spoke of increased defense spending and troop movements, he circulated terrifying photos of Bin Laden. This appealed to Americans' negative emotions by forcing them to revisit their feelings from when the World Trade Centers burned. Although artificially constructed, these negative feelings incited an inclination to support any and all of his actions. Bush made sure to keep these emotional ties abstract, so he could appear sympathetic to people of different values and beliefs. By allowing his listeners to feel like they were with the majority, he employed Entman's theory of Cultural Congruence."<sup>51</sup>

### *Historical Application of These Theories*

Other groups have been adopting these theories and strategies for years. David Lyons, a professor at the University of Texas, El Paso explored the historical context of terrorist organizations using propaganda to influence recruitment.

He first spoke of the leaderless white supremacist militia movements that swept across the United States in the 1980s. He identified the movement's loss of property, income, and tangible assets in his comparison to the network characteristics of al Qaeda (essentially, the two groups had similar physical limitations).<sup>52</sup> The supremacists first used the Internet to spread indoctrinating, inflammatory messages to potential like-minded individuals. The level of autonomy the members were

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>52</sup> Lyons, David K. "Analyzing the Effectiveness of Al Qaeda's Online Influence Operations by Means of Propaganda Theory." Diss. University of Texas at El Paso, 2013. 11.

granted allowed them to infiltrate different social networks, and reach a diverse demographic.<sup>53</sup>

Lyons said Hezbollah had improved upon this notion by actually adopting its own media channel, Al-Manar, a Lebanese television station; this solidified the importance of messaging for any insurgency group.<sup>54</sup> Hezbollah used the media network to barrage viewers with information that was sometimes logical, and sometimes simply emotionally stirring.

These auxiliary examples show that al Qaeda has not, in fact, developed a brilliant communications strategy. Emotional appeal is an old trick, as is convenient framing of a situation. These strategies have passed from one group to another because they have a high success rate. Although the findings show more correlation than causation, these tactics are certainly effective. The longevity of these tactics, however, allows us to analyze past actions of discretization and counter-communication, in the hopes of ascertaining the proper way to counter al Qaeda's messages.

#### *Conclusion on Theoretical Hypotheses*

Although these authors have varying opinions on messaging efficiency and indoctrination successes, they all provide context for an improved United States counterterrorism strategy. Zaller essentially recommends that the United States not challenge the logic behind al Qaeda propaganda, as he claims that readers won't be entirely swayed by a new argument. Rather, the United States must engage in the

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 11.

battle to change perceptions around certain issues. If, as Zaller argues, al Qaeda is simply putting a new spin on preexisting stories, photos, and events, the United States must use similar tactics, and take advantage of its communications resources to “out perform” al Qaeda within this arena.

Crenshaw, Entman, and Lasswell, to an extent, all provide corollary opinions. Crenshaw and Entman both propose that al Qaeda targets people predisposed to recruitment, whether that is through discontent, lack of success, ambition, or naiveté. Lasswell expands on the emotional aspect, proposing that al Qaeda could easily recruit people by showing a photo of American atrocities. For him, recruitment could be entirely defined by emotional reactions, and so attempting to counter al Qaeda narratives with logic would be fruitless.

Seemingly the biggest conclusion from these authors is that the United States must react to al Qaeda’s communication strategies using similar methods. If al Qaeda achieves recruitment success through emotional trickery, the United States must respond similarly. If al Qaeda targets certain disgruntled populations over a fledging issue, the United States must offer an alternative reactive option to that issue. The challenge to this conclusion is preventative strategy. It’s ill conceived to prepare educational initiatives when the next recruitment target is undisclosed. Thus, pattern identification becomes key for predictive purposes, and for making educated hypotheses.

### III. Impetus for Data Analysis

#### TIMELINE OF AL QAEDA STRATEGY

##### *Introduction of Media Platforms, Virality and Decentralization*

**A**lthough al Qaeda has certainly capitalized on preexisting communication strategies, it *has* been instrumental in its use of the media, acting as a leader in the race to creating viral content.

In 2002, Bin Laden said, "it is obvious that the media war in this century is one of the strongest methods; in fact, its ratio may reach 90% of the total preparation for the battles."<sup>55</sup> As communication channels have evolved and non-leaders have become more involved in the communications processes, an organization's *appearance* has become just as important as official releases from leaders. Lyons argues that al Qaeda gained the best brand recognition of all international terrorist organizations, because anyone who heard the name felt an emotional response.<sup>56</sup> These responses did not necessarily originate from one message or one method of indoctrination, but they certainly promulgated al Qaeda's popularity.

This popularity spawns largely from al Qaeda's adoption of Internet opportunities. When al Qaeda first formed, traditional media venues had the power to limit messages. Emotional appeal, and contextual manipulated were more difficult. These limitations are generally nonexistent online. Internet accessibility has exploded. Al Qaeda has been at the front; it released five times more informational

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 17.

videos in 2007 than in 2005.<sup>57</sup>

As al Qaeda encouraged its members to release more propaganda, central leadership retreated to the shadows, releasing only the occasional message. The theory of diminishing marginal returns suggests that, as Bin Laden became more mysterious, his releases carried more weight. Thus, Bin Laden began releasing fewer videos, and allowed his disciples to fill the informational void for potential recruits and devoted readers.<sup>58</sup>

These devotees maintained al Qaeda's cultural relevancy. As conflict erupted throughout the Middle East, the importance of a quick response magnified. Al Qaeda took on the role of "vanguard" for Muslims across the world.<sup>59</sup> Maintaining visibility as a leader is crucial in this sort of information battle.<sup>60</sup> This move towards mass inclusivity has employed the tool of mass victimization.<sup>61</sup> While al Qaeda had a steady stream of followers, a different strategy was necessary to recruit other insurgency groups that disagreed with al Qaeda's extremist Islamic interpretation. Al Qaeda targeted groups that seemed particularly vulnerable to this victimization narrative, mainly weak Arab states that considered the United States interventions in the Middle East an atrocity.<sup>62</sup> Al Qaeda worked hard to show that anyone who considered the United States a "them" was part of the al Qaeda "us".<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 28.

*2013 Twitter Strategy – The Culmination of Theories*

Of course, as the geopolitical state of East Africa and the Middle East changed, and in response to American counter-cyber measures, al Qaeda adopted less-traditional, newer platforms for its communication. They seemed fascinated by Twitter in particular, and all its benefits.

In 2013, they used it as an outreach tool to win the hearts of struggling populations. They exploited certain social grievances such as unemployment and hunger, and used the fast communication capabilities of Twitter to organize causes and programs. In Mali, they created a program that provided food, services, and cash to win over the locals.

The sheer number of followers boosted both al Qaeda's sense of success and the world's perception of them as a growing force. Within its first two weeks on Twitter, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb had over 5,000 followers.<sup>64</sup> Elaine Ganley, a Huffington Post contributor, described it as brilliant soft power strategy.<sup>65</sup> When the Syrian Civil War was monopolizing global attention, al Qaeda used Twitter in an attempt to regain the omnipresence of Northern Africa.<sup>66</sup> By focusing on the social concerns and leaving the military and chemical issues in Syria to occupy their own corner of the press, al Qaeda kept the attention of potential recruits and locals.<sup>67</sup>

The issues they lauded on Twitter were appealing. The writing was less violent and newer. "This is a direct consequence of the Arab Spring," said Jean-Paul Rouiller,

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<sup>64</sup> Ganley, Elaine. "Al Qaeda In The Islamic Maghreb Reaches Out On Twitter." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 23 Apr. 2013. Web. 05 Feb. 2014.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

director of the Geneva Center for Training and Analysis of Terrorism. "They are less violent in what they write, more social, trying to be more connected to the problems that people face.... AQIM seems to think 'that there are actions that they can trigger to push the situation a bit further.' The organization 'wants to be a part of a second wave'".<sup>68</sup>

Several al Qaeda affiliate groups have formed their own twitter accounts and pursued varying strategies. Both Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Jabhat al-Nursa in Syria use twitter fairly often. In fact, twitter has even been considered a form of competition between affiliates, for funding and international attention. Magnus Ranstorp of the Swedish National Defense College says, "In some strange way, it's almost competition... You have these two theaters that are live and hot and active and need recruits."<sup>69</sup> Al Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb officially formed its twitter account in March, 2013. Named @Andalus\_Media, one of its first messages was, "Will Muslims be silent about what is happening to their brothers in faith in terms of killing, imprisonment and displacement, or will they retaliate?"<sup>70</sup>

Later in 2013, al Qaeda Central even organized a 'hashtag session', in an effort to crowd source its followers, in hopes of ideas capable of rebranding their online reputation. Unfortunately for them, an American terrorism expert named JM Berger recognized the effort, and in a brilliant counter-terrorism move, had thousands of Americans hijack the operation, and use the hashtag to write their own silly, unrelated

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Agence France Presse. "Al Qaeda Offshoot Joins Twitter, AQIM Threatens To Execute French Hostages." *The World Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 28 Mar. 2013. Web. 05 Feb. 2014.

tweets.<sup>71</sup>

The twitter strategy necessitates a more modern platform, based on the ideals mentioned in the works by Zaller, Crenshaw, and Entman. Considering twitter posts are short and restricted, this obviously limits the amount of academic or factual citations that can occur. It makes more sense within the twitter framework to work within the emotional landscape Lasswell discusses, and to make the most of the 150 characters to frame the post's context and appeal. It also seems most prudent to use vague language, considering the wide array of readers that could follow a Twitter account. By keeping posts short, inflammatory, and widely appealing, al Qaeda can reach a huge number of potential targets. This strategy would coincide both within Lasswell and Entman's recommendations, insofar as al Qaeda could make purposefully vague posts, and hope for implicit, emotional framing.

Prior to my data analysis, I expected that I would find a general adherence to these strategies across al Qaeda's communications timeline. Although I expected that the earlier, centrally published statements would be fairly repetitive and religiously inclined, I predicted that the later, affiliate statements would follow these author's theories more. I hypothesized that my analysis would show a later inclination in line with the twitter Strategy: essentially, a combination of capitalization on ideological predisposition, abstract exclusionary tactics, framing, and emotional appeal.

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<sup>71</sup> Haynes, Gavin. "Translating the Tweets of Brainstorming Al Qaeda Fans." *VICE*. Vice, Tech, 19 Aug. 2013. Web. 05 Feb. 2014.

### *My Data Analysis*

Based on this al Qaeda timeline and the theories from chapter two, I predicted that there would be significant changes from al Qaeda's earlier statements and those after Bin Laden's death. I expected that later statements would be more diverse and reflexive, in light of the decentralization of al Qaeda and the beginnings of more advanced, open source Internet opportunities. As mentioned in the conclusion of chapter two, it would make sense for later al Qaeda propaganda to truly capitalize on the recommendations from those authors. If more successful statements were to be emotionally charged, contextually framed, and targeted towards non-violent, yet susceptible targets, this would mark a massive change from the homogeneous Bin Laden statements I expected from 1996-2011.

This next chapter explores the statistical relationship between al Qaeda recruitment materials from 2001-2013. I will examine statements officially released from al Qaeda leadership and al Qaeda affiliates.

This data comes from several sources. Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad and Alejandro J. Beutel, President and Junior Fellow respectively of the Minaret of Freedom Institute, published a report entitled "Examining Bin Laden's Statements: A Quantitative Content Analysis from 1996-2011".<sup>72</sup> They agreed to share their raw data with me, the largest recorded collection of forty-nine translated, transcribed, and standardized statements officially attributed to Osama Bin Laden.

Beutel and Ahmad chose to explore the period from 1996-2001. This reflects

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<sup>72</sup> Beutel, Alejandro J., and Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad. *Examining Bin Laden's Statements: A Quantitative Content Analysis from 1996 to 2011*. Publication. N.p.: Minaret of Freedom Institute, 2011.

Bin Laden's first "Declaration of War" against the United States up until the present, as the study was conducted in 2011.<sup>73</sup> Throughout this time, Bin Laden maintained active operational control of al Qaeda. Thus, the statements can be assumed to be official strategic releases by al Qaeda leadership.

Beutel and Ahmad separated the content of the articles into seven categories: strategy, policy grievance-based justification, formal religious themes, religious justification, non-militant religious appeal, ambiguous, and other.<sup>74</sup> They found that the primary strategy used was policy grievances, and hypothesized that the lack of religiously affiliated language suggested a predominance of Muslims ignorant of their faith or its practices.<sup>75</sup> It could also suggest a tendency of ultra-religious Muslims to reject militancy that opposes their practices.<sup>76</sup>

Bin Laden acknowledged that Islamic ideology strictly forbade harm towards innocent women and children, and rather than ignoring that statement during his messages, constructed explanations for his victim's lack of innocence. Strict Muslims would have found this lacking.<sup>77</sup>

Beutel and Ahmad's report discredited the misperceptions that Bin Laden only attracted followers through religious arguments, concluding that Bin Laden found the most resonance with political messaging. They didn't allude to any changes in strategy from 1996-2011, so I assume that their conclusion was meant to be

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 17

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 18.

constant.<sup>78</sup>

I use their raw data for my data analysis. Rather than looking at general content, I use their Bin Laden dataset to compare changes across time, and to compare the Bin Laden data to my other datasets.

Based off my empirical research, I decided to limit my analysis of this collection of statements. I coded the statements to identify certain words categories, and observed the percentage of time those categories appeared in statements, and analyzed changes and trends within those percentages.

#### *Selection of al Qaeda authors*

Bin Laden was an obvious choice. For almost two decades, he was the primary strategist determining what propaganda al Qaeda released, and who they released it to. Researching al Qaeda records from that time could reveal what al Qaeda was trying to say, and to whom, both of which were shown to be of critical importance in my second chapter.

For purposes of diversity and longevity, I also decided to use statements attributed to Ayman al Zawahiri, Bin Laden's right-hand man. This could account for individual standards that might be imposed by Bin Laden, yet not entirely representative of al Qaeda strategy. Although Bin Laden was likely involved with all communications decisions during his tenure, I supposed that Zawahiri was autonomous and high-level enough to make decisions on his own. Hopefully, this would eliminate Bin Laden's influence enough to make this dataset useful. This

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 7.

dataset also allowed for the inclusion of more centralized statements that occurred after Bin Laden's death.

I hoped that a comparison between Bin Laden and Zawahiri would reveal a central, core al Qaeda theme, and a general al Qaeda strategy. Once I found this, I could track for temporal changes within that "central" strategy over time.

Along with this strategy, it was important to find a comparative variable. For this reason, I included statements from al Qaeda affiliates, starting in 2010. First, I wanted to see if different affiliates with different goals had any communicative similarities. Then, I compared these strategies with the central strategy, to see if al Qaeda had undergone significant strategic changes. I chose affiliate groups in different locations to account for differences in locale and local aims, in order to isolate any consistencies between the groups from geographical coincidence. If there were no consistencies, this would be an important find as well, and would signify al Qaeda's move towards communicative decentralization. Devolution mandates and involves more individually tailored counter-terrorism methods, so I expected that the affiliates would definitely be more tactical in their strategies.

### *Affiliates*

The two affiliates I chose to examine were Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

Based primarily in Algeria and Mali, AQIM is a designated Islamist militant organization with the goal of overthrowing regional government structures and implementing an Islamic State. The US Department of State has labeled AQIM as a

Foreign Terrorist Organization, as has the European Union. AQIM is particularly known for kidnapping foreigners as a means of financing operations; they have raised over \$50 million since 2000. AQIM has always supported attacking Western and European targets, but changed its primary mission after officially joining al Qaeda in 2006. As its membership numbers decreased rapidly from 30,000 to fewer than 1,000, AQIM declared a greater intention to attack Western targets, particularly Americans.<sup>79</sup> I believed this aggression would be important to examine, because it suggests a tendency towards violent language, and could explore the transition from ideological support to tangible action. Geographically, AQIM represents a very important space. Much of Northern Mali is desert and caves, and Hillary Clinton has warned against allowing it to become a safe haven.<sup>80</sup>

AQAP is based in Yemen, and is responsible for a greater number of terrorist initiatives. AQAP has received a large amount of press coverage, and is globally recognizable as a "sensation". AQAP has taken responsibility for several attacks against Western targets in the past five years. In December 2009, AQAP attempted to detonate a bomb on a Northwest airline flight. This attack was significant, as it marked the first al Qaeda attack in the United States since September 11, 2001. They tried again in 2010 with a flight bound package, and failed again. However, in 2010, they branded themselves as one of the most social media-savvy al Qaeda affiliates in

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<sup>79</sup> "Al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)." *Al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) - Terrorist Groups*. National Counterterrorism Center, n.d. Web. 05 Mar. 2014. <<http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/aqim.html>>.

<sup>80</sup> Laub, Zachary. "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Council on Foreign Relations, 08 Jan. 2014. Web. 10 Apr. 2014. <[http://www.cfr.org/terrorist-organizations-and-networks/al-qaeda-islamic-maghreb-aqim/p12717?cid=rss-africa-al\\_qaeda\\_in\\_the\\_islamic\\_maghre-101512](http://www.cfr.org/terrorist-organizations-and-networks/al-qaeda-islamic-maghreb-aqim/p12717?cid=rss-africa-al_qaeda_in_the_islamic_maghre-101512)>.

the world with their launch of Inspire Magazine, an English-language magazine aimed at recruiting jihadist soldiers and providing open-source information on jihadist activities. Anwar al-Aulaqi, an American-Yemeni national, was instrumental in this initiative, though he was later killed by the United States.<sup>81</sup> Similarly to AQIM, I believed that AQAP's predisposition to encourage violent terrorists acts would prove a great variable for this analysis. As well, AQAP potentially represents the physical location of the future al Qaeda core. As leaders of al Qaeda central leave Pakistan, Yemen is the logical next choice for residence.<sup>82</sup>

I also deliberately chose two affiliates within different geographic regions. I wanted to eliminate the possibility that the affiliates would be similar because of shared local grievances and target audiences. As well, the differing locations allude to different cultural and counter-terrorism battles. For example, AQAP in Yemen has faced an increasing number of American drone strikes, while AQIM has been labeled as less consequential by United States Command.

### *A Roadmap of the Data Analysis*

To prepare the datasets, I created simple excel spreadsheets to aggregate the statements. Each author-affiliated spreadsheet had columns titled "year", "month", "date", and "text", with the relevant data copied into the cells. I imported these

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<sup>81</sup> "Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) - Terrorist Groups." *Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)*. National Counterterrorism Center, n.d. Web. 05 Mar. 2014. <<http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/aqap.html>>.

<sup>82</sup> Masters, Jonathan. "Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Council on Foreign Relations, 22 Aug. 2013. Web. 10 Apr. 2014. <[http://www.cfr.org/yemen/al-qaeda-arabian-peninsula-aqap/p9369?cid=rss-terrorism-al\\_qaeda\\_in\\_the\\_arabian\\_penins-110711](http://www.cfr.org/yemen/al-qaeda-arabian-peninsula-aqap/p9369?cid=rss-terrorism-al_qaeda_in_the_arabian_penins-110711)>.

spreadsheets into R-Studio, an application that uses the R-Project for Statistical Computing, an environment for statistical computing and graphics. The program can take raw data and create an output of frequencies, patterns, and associations.<sup>83</sup>

### *Frequency Tests*

For my first test, I decided to test for the frequency of certain words across different authors and time periods. Using code, I was able to collect only the texts from a certain year, month, or author.<sup>84</sup> For each new dataset, I could code for the most frequent words. The output was fairly simple. Under each heading, which indicated either a collection of statements from one author, or from one author during a certain time period, R-Studio produced a list of the most frequency words in order of frequency, along with each word's word count. I used this output chart as my baseline.<sup>85</sup>

Once I had identified the most frequent terms, I decided to test for the frequency of certain categories of words. Based on a qualitative hypothesis, I decided upon the following categories: "aggression words", "geographical words", al Qaeda central words", and "religious words". I conjectured that searching for consistent and

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<sup>83</sup> <http://www.r-project.org/>

<sup>84</sup> To create a grouping such as "Bin Laden statements from 1992", I used a subset formula: `BL1992 <- subset.year(BL.data, 1992)`. This formula gathered all of the statements from Bin Laden in 1992 into a new dataset, so I could run tests specifically on that time frame.

<sup>85</sup> For this test, I ran a CloudFrame formula. Cloudframe essentially converted my excel spreadsheet into a frame, which contained the output of words used in the "text" cell of the spreadsheet and counted the number of times they appeared. I used CloudFrame to ultimately create the output of my baseline chart. For example, to create a matrix with the frequency of all words within the Bin Laden 1992 timeframe, I used the code" `BLcloudframe <- CloudFrame(BL.data)`. For purposes of this thesis, I coded to test for only the top twenty-five frequent words in each dataset.

changing frequencies of these groups would best help my identify consistencies and differences between the different datasets.

- **Aggression:** I grouped words into this category using indications of violence, military operations, and physicality. (Ex: jihad, fight, war, battle, death)
- **Geography:** I grouped words into this category using indications of geographic location or specificity to a certain locale. These words tended to suggest a target audience or a reaction to a global event. (Ex: land, nation, Iraq, America)
- **Al Qaeda Central:** For this group, I used my hypothesized conception of the standard rhetoric that has defined al Qaeda since its inception. Based on my research, I identified words that I had come to associate with al Qaeda's core, consistent message. (Ex: Allah, Muslim, people, Americans)
- **Religious:** for this category, I searched for words associated with Sharia law and general religiosity. (Ex: will, islam, god, one)

To create an output of these categorical frequencies, I used my original frequency chart as a base, and manually highlighted those words I determined to be within a category. These charts are displayed below.

#### *Word Removals/Aggregation*

For several of the frequency tests, the results produced words that, for my purposes, showed up twice. For example, both 'American' and 'Americans' appeared in the top twenty-five words for AQAP. I removed the second word in the list and combined it with the first version. I ensured that words belonging to different

categories would not be combined. For example, French would not be catalogued as a location word, while France would, so I did not combine these words.

### *Word Counts*

Understandable, certain data subsets had different numbers of statements and corresponding words within the texts. I included these numbers next to each output graph, with the understanding that the lists of frequency counts should be acknowledged within these words counts. For example, if the Bin Laden dataset had a 6,000 word count while the Zawahiri dataset had a 4,000 word count, and the word 'kill' showed up 100 times in each, that would imply a greater frequency within the Zawahiri dataset.

### *Association Tests*

After I ran the frequency tests, I ran associational tests.<sup>86</sup> These tests searched for connections between words within the datasets, and words that appeared in close proximity to each other within the text. For example, within the Bin Laden dataset, I could code to see which words associated with the word "kill".

### *Overview*

Once I ran these frequency and associational tests, I recorded the output charts

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<sup>86</sup> Similar to the CloudFrame, I created a matrix of all the words and their associations. This matrix formula was: `BL.TDM <- term.document.matrix(BL.data)`. To find an association, I used a formula that searched the TDM matrix and gave me an output of results. For example, to determine which words associated with the word "Allah" over 40% of the time in the Bin Laden dataset, I used the formula: `findAssocs(BL.TDM, "allah", 0.4)`.

and qualitatively analyzed the findings. These outputs and analyses can be found in chapter four, “Data”.

## IV. Data

### *Individual Tests on Bin Laden*

**B**efore running any comparison between authors, I first examined the messaging changes solely within the Bin Laden data set. I separated the statements into three groups. The first, which I called BL\_one, consisted of those statements ranging from 1996 to 2000. I choose this time period as indicative of pre-9/11 strategy, and before al Qaeda was truly a global, everyday staple. The second group, called BL\_two, consisted of statements ranging from 2001 until 2003. I chose this group to represent strategy coming after the 9/11 attack, and before the 2003 Iraq War, which I knew was a huge turning point in al Qaeda's messaging strategy and recruitment tactics. The last group, BL\_three, was those statements after 2003, spanning until 2011. I tested these three groups against each other to see if Bin Laden's language significantly changed. Figure 1, a chart of the top twenty-five most frequency terms in each dataset, represents these results. I manually highlighted those words that appear in all three time frames. Unsurprisingly (according to my hypothesis), I found a fairly stable repetition pattern, and observed that standard al Qaeda words repeated across all three periods. This suggests that Bin Laden's language remained fairly constant throughout his tenure.

#### Key:

*BL\_one: 1996-2000 (total words: 3,214)*

*BL\_two: 2001-2003 (total words: 4,411)*

*BL\_three: 2004-2011 (total words: 6508)\**

#### **General Comparison, Figure 1**

<b>BL_one</b>	<b>BL_two</b>	<b>BL_three</b>
God 126	God 281	Allah 449
Will 108	Allah 204	Will 291
Holy 71	Will 196	People 257

States 71	People 175	One 191
Muslims 68	One 132	Muslims 138/Muslim 79
Allah 62	Nation 126	God 133
United 61	Said 104	Islam 127
People 55	Muslims 94/Muslim 79	War 127
Two 55	Jihad 93	Leaders 122
One 46	Islam 92	Religion 122
Said 46	May 90	Like 155
Land 41	Upon 87	Jihad 113
World 39	States 79	Iraq 110
Islamic 38/Islam 34	World 77	Islamic 107
Forces 37	Jews 77	Said 105
Country 36	Peace 76	Must 100
Great 35	Also 74	Palestine 97
Mosques 35	Religion 74	America 94
Jihad 33	Fight 71	Upon 88
Nation 33	United 71	Fighting 84/Fight 80
Gods 32	Palestine 70	Ummah 83
Prophet 32	Prophet 64	Among 76
Fighting 31	American 58	Great 76
May 31	Say 57	

Ratio: 8:7:8

*As mentioned in Chapter 3, this chart organized the output in order of frequency. Words at the top appear more frequently than words at the bottom. The number next to each term is the number of times that term appears within the word count of that dataset. For cells with the two terms, I included the frequency for both terms.*

*\*Considering the third dataset is roughly twice as large as each of the first two, one should generally expect words of the same frequency percentage to show up twice as many times within this third dataset. Thus, words with higher numbers in the third category should be understood with this taken into account.*

Next, I coded for aggression words. I used the same output chart, and manually highlighted words I determined to be aggressive in nature. (Figure 2) In line with the findings above, Bin Laden's frequency of aggression words remained fairly constant across time. Considering that the number of repeated words seems low, we can infer that Bin Laden either didn't vary much in his aggressive words, or that he relied more on religious, geographic, and central words. I did observe that he used a slightly

higher frequency of aggression words in the second and third groupings (i.e., more in the third group, and terms in the second group higher up on the frequency list), which represent all his statements following September 11 up until his death in 2011.

**Aggression words, Figure 2**

<b>BL_one</b>	<b>BL_two</b>	<b>BL_three</b>
God 126*	God 281	Allah 449
Will 108	Allah 204	Will 291
Holy 71	Will 196	People 257
States 71	People 175	One 191
Muslims 68	One 132	Muslims 138/Muslim 79
Allah 62	Nation 126	God 133
United 61	Said 104	Islam 127
People 55	Muslims 94/Muslim 79	War 127
Two 55	Jihad 93	Leaders 122
One 46	Islam 92	Religion 122
Said 46	May 90	Like 155
Land 41	Upon 87	Jihad 113
World 39	States 79	Iraq 110
Islamic 38/Islam 34**	World 77	Islamic 107
Forces 37	Jews 77	Said 105
Country 36	Peace 76	Must 100
Great 35	Also 74	Palestine 97
Mosques 35	Religion 74	America 94
Jihad 33	Fight 71	Upon 88
Nation 33	United 71	Fighting 84/Fight 80
Gods 32	Palestine 70	Ummah 83
Prophet 32	Prophet 64	Among 76
Fighting 31	American 58	Great 76
May 31	Say 57	

Ratio: 2:2:3

My third test searched for the frequency of "geographic terms", or indications that a statement was focusing particularly on a nation or region, and appealing to a certain audience. I highlighted these geographic terms. (Figure 3) Similarly to aggression words, Bin Laden's frequency of geographic terms seemed low, indicating that he shied away from region-specific statements, and potentially focused more on his repetitive, standard al Qaeda rhetoric.

**Geographic terms, Figure 3**

<b>BL_one</b>	<b>BL_two</b>	<b>BL_three</b>
God 126*	God 281	Allah 449
Will 108	Allah 204	Will 291
Holy 71	Will 196	People 257
States 71	People 175	One 191
Muslims 68	One 132	Muslims 138/Muslim 79
Allah 62	Nation 126	God 133
United 61	Said 104	Islam 127
People 55	Muslims 94/Muslim 79	War 127
Two 55	Jihad 93	Leaders 122
One 46	Islam 92	Religion 122
Said 46	May 90	Like 155
Land 41	Upon 87	Jihad 113
World 39	States 79	Iraq 110
Islamic 38/Islam 34**	World 77	Islamic 107
Forces 37	Jews 77	Said 105
Country 36	Peace 76	Must 100
Great 35	Also 74	Palestine 97
Mosques 35	Religion 74	America 94
Jihad 33	Fight 71	Upon 88
Nation 33	United 71	Fighting 84/Fight 80
Gods 32	Palestine 70	Ummah 83
Prophet 32	Prophet 64	Among 76
Fighting 31	American 58	Great 76
May 31	Say 57	

Ratio: 2:4:3

Although R-studio does not provide me with a number that compares these time periods, I believe a qualitative observance of these charts and these highlighted words has enough validity to suggest a fairly constant language structure. I infer that Bin Laden had a single messaging strategy he used throughout the last decade of his life.

*Individual Tests on Zawahiri*

To ensure my comparisons would be accurate, I ran similar tests on Zawahiri's statements. Because Zawahiri was been lauded as an integral part of al Qaeda's communications team, I separated his statements into an earlier time period and a

later one. I chose a separation date of 2008, because I believed 2008 roughly represented the entrance of more modern communications platforms. 2008 would signify a change in Internet accessibility, and a possible change in Zawahiri's communications strategy. My *zawahiri\_one* dataset included statements spanning 2003-2008, and my *zawahiri\_two* dataset spanned 2008-2012.

Similarly to the Bin Laden data, I used my subset code to separate the Zawahiri statements into these two time periods, and first ran tested for word frequency. I highlighted those words that appeared in the list of top twenty-five words of both time periods. (Figure 4) From a qualitative observation, considering there are nine repeated words, I asserted that Zawahiri also had a fairly stable language strategy across these times.

Key:

*Zawahiri\_one*: 2003-2008 (total words: 4, 743)

*Zawahiri\_two*: 2009-2012 (total words: 4,072)

**General Comparison, Figure 4**

<b>Zawahiri_one</b>	<b>Zawahiri_two</b>
Allah 258	Allah 231
Muslims 235/Muslim 182	People 119
Will 223	Will 109
Islam 196/Islamic 118	Muslim 101/Muslims 81
Palestine 171	Islamic 90/Islam 89
Iraq 168	Egypt 77
Afghanistan 149	One 70
God 142	Brothers 69
One 130	Gaza 69
Jihad 125	Jihad 63
America 112	Upon 63
Crusader103/Crusaders 80	Pakistan 62
People 103	Ummah 62
Israel 94	Must 60
Upon 91	Afghanistan 56
Americans 89/American 83	Government 50
May 86	Egyptian 49
Brothers 81	America 47

Nation 79	Regime 47
Muhajidin 77	State 47
Religion 75	Mujahideen 44
	Peace 44
	Mercy 41

Ratio: 1:1

I then ran a test for the frequency of "geographic terms", and after highlighting the categorical words, I did observe some slight changes in the two groupings.

(Figure 5) Zawahiri\_one included Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, America, and Israel.

Each of these country names had at least seventy-five mentions in the Zawahiri statements between 2003 and 2008. Zawahiri\_two included Egypt, Gaza, Pakistan, and America. Each of these appeared over forty-seven times from 2009 to 2012.

Changes in geographic terms are easier to comprehend. Likely the context of the statements would explain a targeted audience, or a relevant event in the country of choice. Thus, I wouldn't conclude this slight change in geographic term frequency represents a significant change in Zawahiri's messaging strategy from 2003 to 2012.

### Geographic terms, Figure 5

Zawahiri_one	Zawahiri_two
Allah 258	Allah 231
Muslims 235/Muslim 182	People 119
Will 223	Will 109
Islam 196/Islamic 118	Muslim 101/Muslims 81
Palestine 171	Islamic 90/Islam 89
Iraq 168	Egypt 77
Afghanistan 149	One 70
God 142	Brothers 69
One 130	Gaza 69
Jihad 125	Jihad 63
America 112	Upon 63
Crusader103/Crusaders 80	Pakistan 62
People 103	Ummah 62
Israel 94	Must 60
Upon 91	Afghanistan 56
Americans 89/American 83	Government 50
May 86	Egyptian 49

Brothers 81	America 47
Nation 79	Regime 47
Muhajidin 77	State 47
Religion 75	Mujahideen 44
	Peace 44
	Mercy 41
	Allah 231

Ratio: 3:4

I found a similar, and thus expected, frequency in the number of religious terms frequenting the two groups as well (Figure 6) Both zawahiri\_one and zawahiri\_two each included the terms "allah, muslim, will, islam, and god" over seventy-one and forty-one times respectively.

### Religion words, Figure 6

Zawahiri_one	Zawahiri_two
Allah 258	Allah 231
Muslims 235/Muslim 182	People 119
Will 223	Will 109
Islam 196/Islamic 118	Muslim 101/Muslims 81
Palestine 171	Islamic 90/Islam 89
Iraq 168	Egypt 77
Afghanistan 149	One 70
God 142	Brothers 69
One 130	Gaza 69
Jihad 125	Jihad 63
America 112	Upon 63
Crusader103/Crusaders 80	Pakistan 62
People 103	Ummah 62
Israel 94	Must 60
Upon 91	Afghanistan 56
Americans 89/American 83	Government 50
May 86	Egyptian 49
Brothers 81	America 47
Nation 79	Regime 47
Muhajidin 77	State 47
Religion 75	Mujahideen 44
	Peace 44
	Mercy 41

Ratio: 8:5

So, similarly to Bin Laden's statements, I feel comfortable claiming that

Zawahiri's general messaging strategy, as shown in the thirty-nine statements making up my dataset, has remained fairly stable from 2003-2012.

### *Bin Laden and Zawahiri Comparison*

I then ran a comparative test between Bin Laden and Zawahiri. For this comparison, I ran the same tests as before on each author's dataset, and placed the output graphs of the top twenty-five most frequency terms next to each other. Each author's dataset included all the texts from all the years the dataset included.

I observed eight repeating words, and nothing that seemed especially noteworthy. (Figure 7) From a qualitative observance, I determined that these repeating words seemed to be largely "al Qaeda central" words, or words that seemed to appear throughout al Qaeda's general rhetoric. Using this result, and the outputs I found for my individual Bin Laden and Zawahiri tests, I concluded that Bin Laden and Zawahiri both remained consistent enough to each other and from 2001-2012, for purposes of a comparison to the later affiliate datasets.

*Zawahiri (total words: 6,743)*

*Bin Laden (total words: 9,849)*

#### **General Comparison, Figure 7**

<b>Zawahiri</b>	<b>Bin Laden</b>
Allah 489	Allah 724
Will 337	God 661
Muslims 316/Muslim 284	Will 635
Islam 286	People 546
People 225	One 394
One 217	Muslims 353/Muslim 207
Afghanistan 211	Jihad 321
Islamic 211	Said 285
Palestine 209	Islam 277/Islamic 232
Iraq 204	States 263
Jihad 188	Nation 244

God 173	United 230
America 159/Americans 119	World 230
Upon 154	Religion 229
Brothers 150	May 219
Crusader 138	Upon 215
Forces 131	War 201
Israel 131	Also 198
Must 130	Fight 188
Pakistan 126	Palestine 188
May 121	Iraq 178
Unmah (nation) 118	Afghanistan 176
Peace 114	Like 172

*Word Associations for Bin Laden and Zawahiri*

In order to complement these frequency results for Bin Laden and Zawahiri, I also ran "associational tests". For these tests, I was able to determine a certain word, and measure which words "associated" with it (or showed up in the same or neighboring sentences) a certain percentage of the time.<sup>87</sup>

For example, within the Bin Laden dataset, I searched for words that showed up with the word "fighting" over 45% of the time. Words that showed up the most included: pure, emirs, accuse, accompany, rulings, and non-Islamic.

I have listed the results of several of these tests below. Using my qualitative discretion, I have removed those associational words that I deemed unimportant, such as simple verbs and repetitions of the same word. For example, I didn't believe a high frequency of the words to, will, and by were crucial in my language analysis. I also took the liberty to change the spelling of certain words to the traditional Western spelling.

Dataset: Bin Laden, 1996-2011

Word: **Fought**

Words that associated over 40% of the time: believers, fighting, rulers, Russians, Afghans, accuse, allah, Taliban

Word: **America**

Words that associated over 40% of the time: alliances, attracts, conspiracy, breached, empowered, glorifying, homelands, materially, mercifulness, patriotism, recruiting, repent, seduce, weak-minded, national, Zionist crusader

Word: **kill**

Words that associated over 60% of the time: befriends, blasphemy, butchering, censured, convictions, clearest, camp, deters, disbeliever, indivisible, islam, infidelity, pulsating, struck, swore, terrifies, terrorized, wasted

Word: **States**

Words that associated over 50% of the time: United, Sudan, 1973, Iran, India, Taliban

Word: **American**

Words that associated over 50% of the time: deplorable, discarding, gender, penetrate, pillage, polluting, planning, sex, shamelessly, sponsors, elected, steals, tax

Dataset: Zawahiri 2013-2012

Word: **America**

Words that associated over 45% of the time: crimes, rich, forgetting, amnesty, capitals, criminality, crook, customary, despicableness, duress, elected, immune, internationally, mastered, misconceptions, muslims, popularity, prosecution, sarcasm, thievery, rock

Word: **Americans**

Words that associated over 55% of the time: bombings, bodies, bankruptcy, bloodthirsty, Britains, crazy, detest, crazy, extorting, economies, formidable, illusions, impostors, rudely, slaughterhouse, wounded, vacated, claimed

Word: **slaughterhouse**

Words that associated over 95% of the time: bankruptcy, bathist, bloodthirsty, crazy, extorting, detest, formidable, underestimate, bandits, wounded, vacated, world

Word: **participate**

Words that associated over 65% of the time: audacity, bore, criminally, exhibition, garrisoned, initiatives, invented, jail, missing, nonviolence, protestors, repressed, rebel, screamers, segregation, shaken, slaughters, tactics

### *Analysis of Associational Tests*

These tests served to further complement the results of my frequency tests. These associational tests were able to show that the Bin Laden and Zawahiri statements largely fit within their core ideological strategy. Within Bin Laden's statements, "American" accompanied by words like "weak-minded, conspiracy, and seduction", as he sought to demonize the West in the eyes of susceptible targets. Both Bin Laden and Zawahiri expanded upon the idea of an evil capitalist empire, commenting particularly on American economics, sex, and pillaging. America was stressed to be an epicenter of seduction and recruitment, and Bin Laden and Zawahiri seemed to be warning their readers to resist the lure. Further contextual words like "alliances, conspiracy, and recruiting" painted a larger depiction of Western criminality, and placed America within a framework of all Western nations.

Aggressive words like "kill" were associated by 'proper' names for victims, like "blasphemy, disbelievers, and infidelity", as Bin Laden and Zawahiri tried to legitimize the death of 'innocent' victims. They suggested that Americans were evil starting at birth, and their death was no loss to a proper, Sharia-led society. Jihadists were called "protestors, rebels, and believers", to further add to the larger-than-reality

These tests show how al Qaeda employed both the exclusionary and victimization principles, and tried to paint a picture of the honorable jihadist eliminating the existence of the evil Americans. These theories and my data results fit Bin Laden and Zawahiri within the narrative I expected. I had concluded from my theory and qualitative research that earlier al Qaeda strategy (i.e., strategy before communications theory became dependent on virality and open source contributions)

would have been focused on a single, emotionally viable, repetitive narrative. Al Qaeda would have maintained consistency to remain within the desired framework.

This strategy fits within Entman's framing recommendations, as the associations suggest an abundance of extremism linked with common terms. For example, framing al Qaeda as protestors repressed by the America pillagers paints a very visceral picture for anyone dreaming of revolution. Even if those readers lack the religious or ideological foundation to support al Qaeda, this sort of tricky language could persuade someone craving power, which Crenshaw alludes to as well.

#### AFFILIATE TESTS

Once I had individual and comparative results from Bin Laden and Zawahiri, and was able to broadly determine that al Qaeda messaging strategy had, overall, remained fairly constant across time and authorship up until 2011, I brought my affiliate groups, AQIM and AQAP, into play.

##### *Individual Tests on AQIM*

Similar to the Bin Laden and Zawahiri's datasets, I first tested to establish AQIM's frequency of word categories over time. My AQIM dataset contained statements from 2011-2013, so I tested two sub-datasets, one group with statements from 2011, and the other with statements from 2013. I first ran a standard frequency comparison tests for the twenty-five most frequent terms in each group, and highlighted those words that appeared in both time periods. (Figure 8) Surprisingly, I found very few repetitive words, the only ones being "French" and "Allah". This

suggests that AQIM did not operate with an overarching messaging strategy like in Laden and Zawahiri did, and suggests that AQIM was more tactical with its communication. Changes from 2011-2013 could be attributed to geopolitical changes, changes in American foreign policy, reactions to new methods of warfare such as drones, environmental policies, and new avenues of social media.

*AQIM 2011 (total words: 346)*

*AQIM 2013 (total words: 1481)*

*\*Note that the 2013 dataset has roughly four times as many terms as the 2011 dataset. Thus, the frequency charts below show focus on the comparative frequencies within each dataset.*

**General Comparison, Figure 8.**

<b>AQIM 2011</b>	<b>AQIM 2013</b>
French 25/Frenchmen 3	War 62
Muhajideen 17	France 52
Nigerien 10	Will 51
Captives 8	Mali 45
Two 7	People 45
Government 5	Muslims 35/Muslim 26
Praise 5	Since 31
Free 4	French 28
Heavily 4	Allah 26
Planes 4	Interests 25
Safely 4	Cost 24
Say 4	Religion 24
Will 4	Country 22
Allah 3	One 21
Also 3	World 19
Brother 3/Brothers 3	Islam 18/Islamic 14
Bases 3	Wants 18
Battle 3	Land 17
Continued 3	Children 15
Dead/Death 3	Important 15
Decided 3	Africans 14
Despite 3	America 14
	Countries 14

Ratio: 1:1

To further this comparison, I used the same baseline graph of twenty-five terms, and highlighted the aggression words, using the same qualitative standards I used for

the previous datasets. (Figure (9) I observed that 2011 had many more of these terms than 2013. 2011 was littered with terms like "captives, planes, bases, battle, and dead", whereas 2013 only had two aggression words within its top twenty-five.

**Aggression words, Figure 9**

<b>AQIM 2011</b>	<b>AQIM 2013</b>
French 25/Frenchmen 3	<b>War</b> 62
Muhajideen 17	France 52
Nigerien 10	Will 51
<b>Captives</b> 8	Mali 45
Two 7	People 45
Government 5	Muslims 35/Muslim
Praise 5	Since 31
Free 4	French 28
Heavily 4	Allah 26
<b>Planes</b> 4	Interests 25
Safely 4	<b>Cost</b> 24
Say 4	Religion 24
Will 4	Country 22/ Countries 14
Allah 3	One 21
Also 3	World 19
Brother 3/Brothers 3	Islam 18/Islamic 14
<b>Bases</b> 3	Wants 18
<b>Battle</b> 3	Land 17
Continued 3	Children 15
<b>Dead/Death</b> 3	Important 15
Decided 3	Africans 14
Despite 3	America 14

Ratio: 5:2

2013, on the other hand, possessed several more frequent geographic terms than 2011. (Figure 10) These 2013 statements were riddled with "France, Mali, World, Land, Africans, America, and Countries". The geographic test is particularly relevant if I am hypothesizing that AQIM was more tactical, and crafted its messaging to appeal to certain populations. While Bin Laden and Zawahiri remained consistent with their communication regardless of global happenings, this data suggests that AQIM tended to respond to events, whether those were national or international

news. Geographical mentions also suggest that other aspects of the messaging might have been altered to account for different nations and different cultural structures.

**Geographic terms, Figure 10**

AQIM 2011	AQIM 2013
French 25/Frenchmen 3	War 62
Muhajideen 17	France 52
Nigerien 10	Will 51
Captives 8	Mali 45
Two 7	People 45
Government 5	Muslims 35/Muslim
Praise 5	Since 31
Free 4	French 28
Heavily 4	Allah 26
Planes 4	Interests 25
Safely 4	Cost 24
Say 4	Religion 24
Will 4	Country 22/ Countries 14
Allah 3	One 21
Also 3	World 19
Brother 3/Brothers 3	Islam 18/Islamic 14
Bases 3	Wants 18
Battle 3	Land 17
Continued 3	Children 15
Dead/Death 3	Important 15
Decided 3	Africans 14
Despite 3	America 14

Ratio: 1:4

*Individual Tests on AQAP*

Once I had established that AQIM appeared to have an inconsistent messaging strategy over several years, I ran the same tests on the AQAP dataset, in order to ascertain consistent inconsistency, or a different level of strategic changes. Similar to the AQIM dataset, I split the AQAP dataset into two groups, one from 2011 and one from 2013. I used the same time period in hopes of establishing a constant variable. First, I ran the standard frequency comparison test as before, and highlighted terms that showed up in both lists. (Figure 11) I found much more standard "al Qaeda

central" terms in this dataset, as the top twenty-five words from both 2011 and 2013 contained words like "allah, brothers, death, and jihad".

*AQAP 2011 (total words: 930)*

*AQAP 2013 (total words: 299)*

*\*Note that these datasets are fairly small compared to the previous Bin Laden and Zawahiri datasets. Thus, comparative frequencies within each dataset are most important for our purposes.*

**Regular comparison, Figure 11**

<b>AQAP 2011</b>	<b>AQAP 2013</b>
Allah 46/Allahs 8	Military 9
One 18	Headquarters 7
May 17	Muhajidin 6
Mercy 14	Region 6
Sheikh 14	War 6
Killed 13	Second 5
America 11	Security 5
Upon 10	Allah 4
Brother 9/Brothers 7	Building 4
American 8	God 4
Lord 8	Group 4
Ummad 8	Jihad 4
Will 8	Officers 4
Muhammad 7	Operation 4
People 7	Advanced 3
Abu 6	Battle 3
Alanbari 6	Brothers 3
Death 6	Camp 3
Jihad 6	Car 3
Muslim 6	Central 3
Victory 6	Dead 3
Ali 5	Forces 3
Also 5	Led 3
	Present 3
	Room 3

Ratio: 1:1

However, once I highlighted the aggression words, I found that AQAP had very different frequencies of these words in 2011 and 2013. (Figure 12) Of the top twenty-five terms in 2013, some that made the list were "military, headquarters, muhajidin, war, security, jihad, officers, operation, battle, dead, forces, and led". 2011 only had

four aggression words within its list. This is important, because a change in aggression is not necessarily an appeal to a certain region. A change in aggression could be attributed to a general change in strategy for the entire organization. This could signify a change in AQAP's purpose or ideology.

**Aggression words, Figure 12**

<b>AQAP 2011</b>	<b>AQAP 2013</b>
Allah 46/Allahs 8	Military 9
One 18	Headquarters 7
May 17	Muhajidin 6
Mercy 14	Region 6
Sheikh 14	War 6
Killed 13	Second 5
America 11	Security 5
Upon 10	Allah 4
Brother 9/Brothers 7	Building 4
American 8	God 4
Lord 8	Group 4
Ummad 8	Jihad 4
Will 8	Officers 4
Muhammad 7	Operation 4
People 7	Advanced 3
Abu 6	Battle 3
Alanbari 6	Brothers 3
Death 6	Camp 3
Jihad 6	Car 3
Muslim 6	Central 3
Victory 6	Dead 3
Ali 5	Forces 3
Also 5	Led 3
	Present 3
	Room 3

Ratio: 1:3

*AQIM and AQAP Conclusion on Individual Tests*

To conclude on these primary comparisons, it's not accurate to say that AQAP and AQIM both ran steady messaging strategies from 2011-2013. The level of aggression fluctuated within both years, and some "central" words were more

consistent than others. It is also important that AQIM and AQAP did not have similar changes, as AQIM became more heavily riddled with geographic terms, and AQAP increased dramatically in terms of aggression. This means that al Qaeda affiliates were not following a predetermined strategy change, and suggests that the different affiliates were acting autonomously.

*Comparison between AQIM and AQAP*

Once I had tested AQIM and AQAP for changes over time, I ran a cross affiliate comparison between the two. For these tests, each complete affiliate dataset spanned from 2011-2013.

First, I ran a frequency comparison and highlighted those words that showed up within both datasets. (Figure 13) There was nothing surprising in these results. Words important and central to al Qaeda's ideology cropped up with a large frequency, including "allah, brother, god, muhajid, muslim, and war". This suggests that AQAP and AQIM were similar insofar as they both used the repetitive, consistent words Bin Laden and Zawahiri had spearheaded. This means that their strategies may have at least originated from a standard al Qaeda strategy.

*AQAP: 2011-2013 (total words: 1818)*

*AQIM: 2011-2013 (total words: 3371)*

*\*Note the AQIM dataset has roughly twice as many words as the AQAP dataset. Thus, comparative frequency numbers between the two should acknowledge this.*

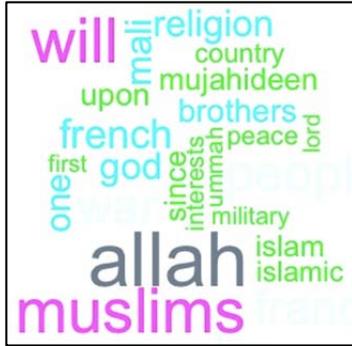
**General Comparison, Figure 13**

<b>AQAP</b>	<b>AQIM</b>
Allah 61/God 27	Allah 119/God 50/ Lord 25
Bin 38	Muslims 95/Muslim 71
Brother 29	Will 95
Muhajid 25	People 78
May 24	War 73

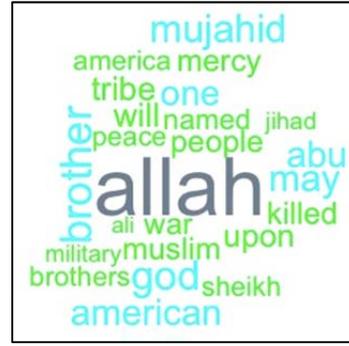
Abu 23	France 69
American 23	French 56
One 22	Religion 50
Tribe 20	Mali 49
Will 20	One 47
Upon 19	Brothers 41
Killed 18	Upon 39
Mercy 18	Muhajideen 38
Muslim 18	Since 37
People 18	Islam 36/Islamic 34
War 17	Country 32/Unmah(nation) 26
Named 16	Peace 30
America 15	Interests 28
Brothers 15	Military 27
Peace 15	First 26
Sheikh 15	
Jihad 12	
Military 12	
Ali 11	

### *WordClouds*<sup>88</sup>

To allow for additional visual comparison of the most frequent terms in AQAP and AQIM, I constructed WordClouds. A WordCloud is a visual representation of both words frequencies and association. The larger words are more frequency than the smaller words (the colors help to identify changes in text size). As well, words that are closer together tend to associate with one another more frequently in the dataset. The wordclouds below show how al Qaeda central words like “allah, Muslim, and brother” are the most frequent. However, it’s also apparent that the AQIM and AQAP datasets are fairly different, as shown above in the AQIM-AQAP cross affiliate comparison.



*AQIM words*



*AQAP words*

After this initial frequency comparison, I highlighted only the aggression words. As expected (due to AQAP’s serious changes in aggression from 2011-2013), I found a greater frequency of aggression words within the AQAP 2011-2013 dataset than in the AQIM 2011-2013 dataset. (Figure 14)

**Aggression Words, Figure 14**

<b>AQAP</b>	<b>AQIM</b>
Allah 61/God 27	Allah 119/God 50/ Lord 25
Bin 38	Muslims 95/Muslim 71
Brother 29	Will 95
Muhajid 25	People 78
May 24	War 73
Abu 23	France 69
American 23	French 56
One 22	Religion 50
Tribe 20	Mali 49
Will 20	One 47
Upon 19	Brothers 41
Killed 18	Upon 39
Mercy 18	Muhajideen 38
Muslim 18	Since 37
People 18	Islam 36/Islamic 34
War 17	Country 32/Unmah(nation) 26
Named 16	Peace 30
America 15	Interests 28
Brothers 15	Military 27
Peace 15	First 26
Sheikh 15	
Jihad 12	
Military 12	

Ali 11	
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To further complement this test, acknowledging that AQAP had been much more aggressive in 2013 than in 2011, I ran a test between the 2013 statements from AQIM and AQAP and highlighted the aggression words. I found startling results. (Figure 15) Of AQAP's top twenty-five terms, eleven were aggression words (military, headquarters, muhajidin, war, jihad, officers, operation, battle, camp, dead, forces). In 2013, AQIM's list only included one aggression word, "war". This shows that AQAP was not simply more aggressive in 2013 than in 2011, but that AQAP was aggressive in relation to other affiliates.

*AQAP 2013 (total words: 299)*

*AQIM 2013 (total words: 1481)*

*\*Note the AQIM dataset has roughly three times as many terms as the AQAP dataset*

### Aggression Words, Figure 15

AQAP 2013	AQIM 2013
Military 9	War 62
Headquarters 7	France 52
Muhajidin 6	Will 51
Region 6	Mali 45
War 6	People 45
Second 5	Muslims 35/Muslim
Security 5	Since 31
Allah 4	French 28
Building 4	Allah 26
God 4	Interests 25
Group 4	Cost 24
Jihad 4	Religion 24
Officers 4	Country 22/ Countries 14
Operation 4	One 21
Advanced 3	World 19
Battle 3	Islam 18/Islamic 14
Brothers 3	Wants 18
Camp 3	Land 17
Car 3	Children 15
Central 3	Important 15
Dead 3	Africans 14
Forces 3	America 14

Led 3	
Present 3	
Room 3	

*Tests between Bin Laden, Zawahiri, AQIM, and AQAP*

Once these individual annual changes were documented and I had established basic comparative models between the pairs of datasets, I was ready to compare all four. I inputted all of the datasets and tested for changes in frequencies.

*Aggression Words*

Of the four data sets, AQAP had the most aggression words (and I know from previous tests that these frequencies were even heavier in 2013, the latest recorded statements I had from AQAP). (Figure 16) The ratio in this case, of AQAP:AQIM:Zawahiri:Bin Laden is 6:2:1:1.

*Time periods and Word Counts for each dataset:*

*AQAP: 2013 (total words: 1,818)*

*AQIM: 2013 (total words: 3,371)*

*Zawahiri: 2003-2012 (total words: 6,743)*

*Bin Laden: 1996-2011 (total words: 9,849)*

*\*The 2013 subset was chosen so the affiliates could represent the most modern communications strategy)*

**Aggression words, Figure 16**

<b>AQAP</b>	<b>AQIM</b>	<b>Zawahiri</b>	<b>Bin Laden</b>
Military 9	War 62	Allah 489/ God 173	Allah 724/God 661
Headquarters 7	France 52	Will 337	Will 635
Muhajidin 6	Will 51	Muslims 316/Muslim 284	People 546
Region 6	Mali 45	Islam 286	One 394
War 6	People 45	People 225	Muslims 353/Muslim 207
Second 5	Muslims 35/Muslim	One 217	Jihad 321
Security 5	Since 31	Afghanistan 211	Said 285
Allah 4	French 28	Islamic 211	Islam 277/Islamic 232
Building 4	Allah 26	Palestine 209	States 263
God 4	Interests 25	Iraq 204	Nation 244
Group 4	Cost 24	Jihad 188	United 230
Jihad 4	Religion 24	America 159/Americans 119	World 230

Officers 4	Country 22/ Countries 14	Upon 154	Religion 229
Operation 4	One 21	Brothers 150	May 219
Advanced 3	World 19	Crusader 138	Upon 215
Battle 3	Islam 18/Islamic 14	Forces 131	War 201
Brothers 3	Wants 18	Israel 131	Also 198
Camp 3	Land 17	Must 130	Fight 188
Car 3	Children 15	Pakistan 126	Palestine 188
Central 3	Important 15	May 121	Iraq 178
Dead 3	Africans 14	Unmah (nation) 118	Afghanistan 176
Forces 3	America 14	Peace 114	Like 172
Led 3			
Present 3			
Room 3			

### *Geographic Terms*

Geographic terms are particularly interesting, because each of the datasets were known to focus in different locales. Of the four, AQAP had a shockingly small number of geographic terms, i.e., zero in its top twenty-five set. (Figure 17) Bin Laden had a few more, followed by Zawahiri, and then AQIM. The ratio of AQAP:AQIM:Zawahiri:Bin Laden is 0:4:7:5.

### **Geographic Words, Figure 17**

<b>AQAP</b>	<b>AQIM</b>	<b>Zawahiri</b>	<b>Bin Laden</b>
Allah 61/God 27	Allah 119/God 50/ Lord 25	Allah 489/ God 173	Allah 724/God 661
Bin 38	Muslims 95/Muslim 71	Will 337	Will 635
Brother 29	Will 95	Muslims 316/Muslim 284	People 546
Muhajid 25	People 78	Islam 286	One 394
May 24	War 73	People 225	Muslims 353/Muslim 207
Abu 23	France 69	One 217	Jihad 321
American 23	French 56	Afghanistan 211	Said 285
One 22	Religion 50	Islamic 211	Islam 277/Islamic 232
Tribe 20	Mali 49	Palestine 209	States 263
Will 20	One 47	Iraq 204	Nation 244
Upon 19	Brothers 41	Jihad 188	United 230
Killed 18	Upon 39	America 159/Americans 119	World 230

Mercy 18	Muhajideen 38	Upon 154	Religion 229
Muslim 18	Since 37	Brothers 150	May 219
People 18	Islam 36/Islamic 34	Crusader 138	Upon 215
War 17	Country 32/Unmah(nation) 26	Forces 131	War 201
Named 16	Peace 30	Israel 131	Also 198
America 15	Interests 28	Must 130	Fight 188
Brothers 15	Military 27	Pakistan 126	Palestine 188
Peace 15	First 26	May 121	Iraq 178
Sheikh 15		Unmah (nation) 118	Afghanistan 176
Jihad 12		Peace 114	Like 172
Military 12			
Ali 11			

### *Analysis of Data Results*

From these tests, we can conclude several things. Bin Laden and Zawahiri, the operations and communications of al Qaeda through most of its 2001-2011 time period, were fairly consistent with their communications strategy.

By separating the Bin Laden statements into three categories (BL\_one 1996-2000, BL2001-2003, and BL\_three 2004-2011), I was able to run the same tests for each of the time periods. Throughout all of these periods, Bin Laden's statements included a consistently large amount of al Qaeda central words, suggesting that Bin Laden adhered to al Qaeda's ideological mantra. He did become more geographically focused as the years went on, but very minimally. We can conclude that Bin Laden was a consistent communicator.

I also split the Zawahiri dataset into two time periods and analyzed his works from 2003-2008, and from 2009-2012. Considering the similarity of the most frequent words in these two periods, his statements were even more consistent than Bin Laden's. He had a greater focus on geographic regions (suggesting he has a greater appreciation for localized, individualized targeting), but also kept a consistent focus

on general al Qaeda religious dogma.

I consider both Bin Laden and Zawahiri to be staple al Qaeda communicators. They kept to their script, and acknowledging that al Qaeda definitely experienced higher and lower rates of success from 2001-2012, they seemed to keep their communication strategy very predictable.

Before I ran my tests on my affiliate groups, AQIM and AQAP, I anticipated dramatic differences between these groups and Bin Laden and Zawahiri. I hoped that the affiliates would show a more flexible strategy, and hypothesized that al Qaeda communication would become more individualized as it adopted newer social media platforms. Any changes could suggest affiliate reactions to changing geopolitical pressures and changes of intended reader demographics.

Along these lines, I also expected dramatic differences between AQIM and AQAP, to further illustrate the unique, decentralized strategy of the modern al Qaeda affiliates. As discussed in chapter three, AQIM and AQAP have had vastly different levels of government stability, histories of terrorist acts against Western targets, and offer different geographic incentives for terrorist havens.

My very first AQIM test supported this finding. Of the top twenty-five frequent words for AQIM in 2011 and AQIM in 2013, only two words showed up in both. This suggests a large difference between the two datasets. Most importantly, in AQIM's dataset, I found a huge difference in the presence of geographic allusion. AQIM was far more geographically inclined in 2013, suggesting geopolitical challenges or opportunities in those later years. It also coincides with AQIM's occupation of Northern Mali, an ideal, under governed, desert location.

I found similar differences in AQAP's dataset. AQAP became extremely aggressive in 2013, suggesting that they found a demographic opportunity to capitalize upon pre-existing violent tendencies, or that they felt the strong language was a desperate last resort. They also have a more aggressive history of anti-American rhetoric and action, so this makes sense as well.

However, the test comparing all four datasets was the most conclusive. The first test, a comparison of aggression words, shows that AQAP was very different from the earlier Bin Laden and Zawahiri statements. This shows that the newer al Qaeda releases from 2011-2013 have abandoned the previous and predictable writings of earlier al Qaeda propaganda. The strategy has changed. Differences between AQIM and AQAP show that these differences are diverse as well. Individual affiliates are constructing their own strategies in efforts to best capitalize upon their surrounding populations. Propaganda is more reactive, and seeks to capitalize upon world events and changes in public perception.

### *Implications of Data Results*

These data results fit within the communications strategy timeline I had expected after my second chapter. The theory provided a framework for both consistency and tactical flexibility. Crenshaw explains why Bin Laden and Zawahiri might have kept their rhetoric consistent in an effort to provide clear conception of the group. Before the Internet was accessible and free, each message was costly and risky, and had to be targeted at only the most susceptible audiences. This suggests that Bin Laden and Zawahiri may have limited their scope to those already

ideologically in support of al Qaeda's work. During this time, these authors did not seek middle class Americans. They used emblematic rhetoric to attract those with grievances. Theoretically, they were using the exclusionary principle to paint the Western society as heathens, and to paint themselves as heroic revolutionaries. Religious propaganda was essential to frame this situation.

My data supports the theory that 2011, and the advancement of social media platforms, inspired a new, individualized, al Qaeda strategy tactic. It's also important to note that in 2011, communication responsibility became more grassroots. Bin Laden and Zawahiri made many communication decisions individually, while the affiliates might depend on more contributors and less on oversight.

With this in mind, it's important to analyze the counter-terrorism, counter-communications methods that have succeeded and failed in the past. Because the strategy has changed, foreign policy that responded to the Bin Laden and Zawahiri statements will no longer be applicable against these affiliates. Policy that acted upon the assumption that al Qaeda messages were consistent and "standard" must become appropriately tactic-based. If we establish that AQAP and AQIM (a representation of affiliates for purposes of this thesis) employed newer, more modern communication strategies, we have to strike certain counterterrorism tactics and establish new ones. The next chapter gives an outline of previous American counter-propaganda tactics. It will explore the success and failure of strategies such as community building, network dissolution, and counter-narratives, and show how these strategies have changed as al Qaeda has morphed. The final chapter will take these previous successes and failures into account, and propose new counter-terrorism strategies in

light of the affiliate data results.

## V. A History of Counterterrorism

**N**ow that I've given an analysis of al Qaeda messaging strategy, for implicative purposes, I will give a history of United States counter-communication policy. While this policy has traditionally responded to the most public, sometimes transient al Qaeda initiatives, the United States has largely failed to adapt accordingly to al Qaeda's longevity of appeal. The theories from chapter two suggest that, as al Qaeda decentralizes and becomes less ideologically and religiously narrow, counterterrorism would have to account for more general occurrences or likelihoods of discontent, revolutionary stirrings, and individual predispositions to violence. As well, as mentioned in the theory chapter and portrayed within my data results, al Qaeda reveals several patterns within its messaging strategy. Most importantly, while the al Qaeda message was constant for roughly ten years, with the rising importance of affiliate groups starting around 2011, messages became radically more tactical and locally focused.

This chapter will explore several policies the United States employed against the first al Qaeda recruitment efforts, and will offer case studies to illustrate their effectiveness. The concluding chapter will establish if these policies would work in post-Arab Spring, post-2011 situations, and propose suitably new counter-terrorism strategies. These strategies will come from public affairs, diplomatic, and domestic perspectives.

### *US and EU Responses post 9/11*

Since the beginning of al Qaeda's global fame, powerful nations have been working together to identify and combat terrorist threats. Over the years, these alliances formed and abandoned defensive strategies with such frequency that they never established a continuous, reliable plan.

In this first cooperative year, the United States and the European Union (two of the world's most capable defensive bodies) formed relationships capable of exponential resources and influence. From a legal standpoint, they established a common definition of terrorism and a common list of terrorist groups, in an attempt to encompass every insurgency group that was potentially affiliated with Al Qaeda.<sup>89</sup> They crafted legislation that would allow their police forces and judicial bodies to share information, and formed extradition treaties. One of the most difficult challenges was the indefensibility of airlines, including both passengers and containers.<sup>90</sup> Europe acknowledged that its open borders and superfluity of national legal systems truly provided terrorists with an easy road. Arrests and prosecution were almost impossible. A July 2005 terrorist attack on London's mass transit system sparked a newfound determination.<sup>91</sup>

Counterterrorism efforts then recognized the need to abolish terrorist communication and propaganda, and organized efforts to capitalize on preexisting information networks to identify suspicious individuals. The European Union and the

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<sup>89</sup> Boon, Kristen. " Document No. 7 – U.S.-EU Cooperation Against Terrorism." *U.S. Approaches to Global Security Challenges*. Vol. 124. New York, NY: Oxford UP, 2010. 397. Print. *TERRORISM: Commentary on Security Documents*.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 398.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 400.

United States sought to create a legal, democratically accepted reformation on data privacy. They acknowledged that information sharing was crucial to eradicate intangible terror networks, and created several legislative agreements. These included the Intelligence Reform and Terrorist Prevention Act of 2004, (P.L. 108-458) and the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 (P.L.110-53).<sup>92</sup>

The United Nations became involved when the European Union and the United States tried to create and improve existing databases in hopes of better monitoring traveling suspects. The United Nations possessed the resources necessary to maintain an updated list of suspects, which included de-listing those individuals who became deceased and those entities that became defunct.<sup>93</sup> However, with regards to travel bans, the resources and responsibility remained with the individual states. For the global list to remain up to date, states had to maintain vigorous surveillance on their own transits and report to the United Nations. This was an unprecedented level of global information sharing.

In 2010, the European Union and the United States established SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Communications). The United States explicitly and vastly expanded the allowances and role of the Treasury Department's Terrorist Finance Tracking Program. From 2010 to 2012, the European Union and the United States shared over 1,500 leads through SWIFT. The European Union had second

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 401.

<sup>93</sup> Boon, Kristen E., Aziz Huq, and Douglas C. Lovelace. " Document No. 31." *UN Response to Al Qaeda – Developments Through 2011*. Vol. 122. New York, NY: Oxford UP, 2010. 654-655. Print. *TERRORISM: Commentary on Security Documents*.

thoughts and revoked its privileges in 2010, but later revised it and allowed the United States to continue viewing their data.<sup>94</sup> Coordinated areas included border control, transport security, container security initiatives (in an effort to stop the transit of weapons of mass destruction), passenger name record data, and aviation security.<sup>95</sup>

The United States also initiated individual efforts to combat illicit movement. President George W. Bush signed the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism (NSCT) in 2003 (and revised it in 2006), which contained four priorities:

1. Preventing terrorist attacks by attacking terrorists and their capacity to operate and travel, and by defending potential targets
2. Denying weapons of mass destruction to rogue states and terrorist allies
3. Denying terrorist the support and sanctuary of rogue states
4. Denying terrorist physical, legal, cyber, and financial safe havens.<sup>96</sup>

The sharing of information has been a crucial global, cooperative initiative to identify suspect communications, and suspect recruits. However, legalities and political beliefs have shrouded this initiative in continuous uncertainty.

Through an interview with Kristin Archick, a United States-European Union expert at the Congressional Research Service, I was able to inquire towards these efforts.<sup>97</sup>

Archick explained that the United States has always been willing to breach

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<sup>94</sup> Boon, Kristen. "Document No. 7 – U.S.-EU Cooperation Against Terrorism." *U.S. Approaches to Global Security Challenges*. Vol. 124. New York, NY: Oxford UP, 2010. 405. Print. TERRORISM: Commentary on Security Documents.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 473.

<sup>97</sup> Archick, Kristin. "Interview with Kristin Archick." Personal interview. 14 Aug. 2013.

privacy laws and ignore general privacy concerns to identify al Qaeda perpetrators. Europe has proved less enthusiastic. Although the US-EU SWIFT agreement had operated for years, when the 2009 Lisbon Treaty granted European Parliaments greater involvement, they expressed their dissatisfaction with the privacy breaches. Particularly after the 2013 reveal of National Security Agency's domestic and global operations, Parliament set up working groups to investigate. While they eventually allowed SWIFT's continuation, they informed the United States that they would be setting up their own terrorist finance tracking program, and the bad blood persisted. Now that they have more internal capabilities, they are rallying to transfer less information to the United States, someone they consider an unnecessary partner.

However, the British-American relations are spectacular compared to the United States' relationships with certain nations in the Balkans and Southeast Europe. While the United States has been present in the Balkans for decades and has worked bilaterally with intelligence agencies, these controls have produced very few results. Within the past few years, more and more terrorists have been using the area for transit and to recruit disenfranchised, poor populations. To the surprise of Archick and other researchers, however, the terrorist use of these areas has still been fairly minimal. While an overzealous media has propelled several cases into the media, the Congressional Research Service has determined that Western Europe produces far more recruits than the Balkans.

Archick explained that the third generation Muslims felt caught between British and French societies. Clever al Qaeda members offer to teach them about becoming Muslims, and, desperate for a community, they accept. These personalized lessons

give way to radicalization. The Western world has very recently picked up on this susceptibility, highlighting several cases of middle class Europeans becoming terrorists after twenty years of peaceful existence. With the newfound phenomena of wealthy Western radicalization, Western nations have returned to their drawing boards to better facilitate inter-state cooperation.

### *US Efforts in Regional Counterterrorism*

Over the years, it became apparent that certain regions were both more rampant with established terrorists, and more susceptible to recruitment. In 2001, the House Subcommittee on Africa held a hearing to discuss the newfound threat and the war on the global terrorism. Susan Rice, Assistant Secretary of State for African affairs (now the National Security Advisor) said, "Africa was the world's soft underbelly for global terrorism."<sup>98</sup> It was true that East Africa had historically harbored extremists. Sudan had been a safe haven for Islamic extremist groups starting in the early 1990s, and Bin Laden had taken refuge in Sudan in 1992.<sup>99</sup> Al Qaeda became particularly interested in Somalia, as they searched for an alternative to Afghanistan for their operational base. This suggested that focusing counter-terrorism efforts in these regions would also prevent those geographic populations from radicalizing.

After the 2001 hearing, the United States took great initiative to combat terrorism in these East African regions. The State Department formed dozens of

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<sup>98</sup> Ploch, Lauren. "Document No. 9 – Countering terrorism in East Africa: The U.S. Response." *U.S. Approaches to Global Security Challenges*. Vol. 124. New York, NY: Oxford UP, 2010. 459. Print. **TERRORISM: Commentary on Security Documents**.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 462.

committees towards this end: EARSII (East Africa Regional Strategic Initiative), CJTF-HOA (Combined Joint Task Force for the Horn of Africa), and AFRICOM (Africa Command) were only a few. It also helped the AU (African Union) with peace operations in Somalia against al Shabaab.<sup>100</sup>

The East Africa Regional Strategic Initiative (PREACT) had direct involvement in trying to discredit ideology. PREACT worked with border security to keep listed terrorists out, and worked to improve the democratic aspects of governance to dissuade extremism built from oppression or dissatisfaction.<sup>101</sup>

### *Country Examples*

However, every susceptible country has developed a different level of preventative and punitive frameworks, and has demanded different levels of assistance from the United States. It is helpful to outline these efforts, in hopes of finding one that might work post 2011. Many of these national initiatives depend on intelligence services and information sorting centers.

As of 2012, Burkina Faso, for example, has developed a significant financial intelligence unit called CENTIF, and has been able to assist the United States in securing the release of Western hostages from AQIM. They had proved particularly helpful in the identification of financiers and the arrest of such leaders.<sup>102</sup> Finance networks possess more importance than thought, because financiers often have certain ideological ties to al Qaeda, and can be identified as hubs of terrorist

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 455.

<sup>101</sup> United States. Department of State. Bureau of Counterterrorism. *Country Reports On Terrorism 2012*. Washington, D.C.: United States Department of State, 2013.

<sup>102</sup> Country Reports on Terrorism.

propaganda.

Cameroon, however, worked more closely in the religious community, partnering with religious leaders to monitor preaching in mosques. This prevention has been accompanied by increased penal actions against people incriminated in terrorist attacks. Cameroon has demanded especially vigorous counterterrorism methods, as the country has been plagued by natural and humanitarian concerns, including extreme floods in 2012, and intense socio-economic and political challenges.<sup>103</sup> Thus, it has taken special care to ensure that these disasters do not lead to radicalization.

Other nations have formed weaker coalitions against terrorist recruitment. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, as of 2012, had completely lost control over most of its territory. The government has not made counterterrorism a large priority, and the east has been taken over by many armed groups. In 2012, there were 62 attacks by like groups, including 22 deaths and 131 abductions.<sup>104</sup>

It appears that partnership with the United States is a critical factor for successful monitoring and apprehension of terrorists, and for prevention of radicalization. Eritrea, while eager to be a counterterrorism partner, has not spoken with the United States and has been unable to close its porous Sudanese border. The police had refused to work with Western nations, and thus had been unable to successfully identify perpetrators or suspects.<sup>105</sup>

Kenya seemed to come to this realization in 2012, and constructed a plethora of

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<sup>103</sup> Country Reports on Terrorism.

<sup>104</sup> Country Reports on Terrorism.

<sup>105</sup> Country Reports on Terrorism.

counterterrorism initiatives. The government took measures to secure its borders, apprehend known terrorists, and cooperate in international counter-terrorism efforts. Kenya's "Prevention of Terrorism Act" has proven key, particularly with regards to money laundering. Even so, the number of al Shabaab-affiliated incidents rose to over three-dozen, leaving thirty-four dead and one hundred forty-five injured.<sup>106</sup>

Even as Mali has both public and privately stressed counterterrorism as a priority, external factors have prevented a successful strategy. In March 2012, a coup toppled the elected government of President Amadou Toumani touré. AQIM and other terrorist groups officially took over. The United States determined Mali a lost cause, and terminated all counter-terrorism financial assistance. However, although legislations have been muddled and society in disarray, the Malians have proved fairly unreceptive to violent extremist ideologies.<sup>107</sup> Thus, the Malian population could be helpful to analyze for preventative purposes.

Niger has proved a fertile ground for al Qaeda recruitment. As Niger contains many ungoverned spaces and borders the volatile Libya, it has been home to a plethora of arms trafficking. Although the government has attempted to provide employment to diminish the demographic of unemployed, potential extremist ideologists, al Qaeda has had little difficulty in finding eager recruits.<sup>108</sup>

In light of the diminished governments in Mali and Niger, Nigeria has created harsh, somewhat illegal counterterrorism strategies. A Boko Haram faction named Ansaru, which possesses extremely close ties to AQIM, has prioritized targeting

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<sup>106</sup> Country Reports on Terrorism.

<sup>107</sup> Country Reports on Terrorism.

<sup>108</sup> Country Reports on Terrorism.

Westerners in Nigeria, and has performed many killings, bombings, and kidnappings in 2012. In 2011, President Jonathan declared a state of emergency, which gave him claim to search and arrest without warrants. However, the government continues to have problems freezing the assets of suspected terrorists. This slowed down all punitive processes, allowing financiers and recipients time to complete their missions and disappear.<sup>109</sup>

### *General US Strategy in Regional Areas*

As Al Qaeda transformed into an affiliate network, American efforts in East Africa became more focused on preventing those affiliates from possessing under-governed spaces. While early strategy had focused on countering extremism, later initiatives resembled what was both lauded and criticized and democratization. The 2010 National Security Strategy identified Somalia, Yemen, Maghreb, and Sahel as "favorable labor markets for recruitment" and vowed to create "logistical challenges that [would] hinder the ability of violent extremist groups to operate transnationally".<sup>110</sup>

Nations like Kenya lacked the resources to govern further spaces, and coastal Kenya with its "porous borders, relative stability, and basic infrastructure, including banks" was the perfect haven, allowing access to Western targets and easy movement.

Somalia posed potentially an even greater threat.<sup>111</sup> Post 9/11, Somalia was officially a collapsed state suffering a humanitarian crisis. Refugees and illegal arms

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<sup>109</sup> Country Reports on Terrorism.

<sup>110</sup> Country Reports on Terrorism, 496.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 505.

operations overwhelmed its regions, and international Western nations were outraged at what they called a "sanctuary and staging ground for pirates and violent extremists".<sup>112</sup> President Obama's challenge was to both continue supporting these nations attempts at peace and stability, while also encouraging and leading operations to oppose al Shabaab and al Qaeda.

However, as 9/11 become a more distant emotional memory, American regional operations had a more difficult time maintaining support. The fact was, although they were highly documented, the number of successful al Qaeda bombings against American interest in these regions was very small. The first attack in these regions directly attributed to al Qaeda was in 1998, when al Qaeda bombed the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania; 224 people were killed, 12 of whom were Americas.<sup>113</sup> The first American suicide bomber detonated in Somalia in October 2008, and the first successful Al Shabaab attack outside Somalia was a Kompala bombing in July 2010 that killed 76 people, including one American.<sup>114</sup>

Further into the 2000s, these State Department initiatives and what Americans saw as an unnecessary intervention became less popular, as Obama struggled to maintain the definition of 'terrorist enemies'.

### *European and US counter-radicalization*

Besides the more aggressive methods of combating terrorism, the European Union and the United States both took steps to counter radicalization, the European

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 505.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 456.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 456.

Union in its homeland and the United States on susceptible foreign soils.

Starting in 2011, the European Union established working groups to identify targets. The United Kingdom created the ‘Engaging with Young People Working Group’ in an effort to counter these extremist ideas as a young age. The United Kingdom implemented a national grass roots movement of events targeted at Muslim youth, with a focus on using popular and influential academics to discredit extremist interpretations of Islam. They also sought to improve the provision of services to Muslim youth, and to encourage them to be leaders and active citizens.<sup>115</sup> The ‘Supporting Regional and Local Initiatives and Community Actions Working Group’ sought to better monitor the Muslim communities and create an up-to-date interfaith work map.<sup>116</sup> They encouraged places of worship to transform into community hubs, in an effort to better integrate theological communities. The ‘Addressing Islamophobia Working Group’ tried to improve the oversight of policing, and prevent the divide between Muslims and others.<sup>117</sup> They offered Muslim communities more intellectual and human resources, and tried to involve them in the anti-terrorism initiatives.<sup>118</sup>

The United States’ foreign efforts sought to address the root causes of violent extremism in East Africa. The USAID Guide stated that “the vast majority of those affected by the underlying conditions to which violent extremism is often ascribed do

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<sup>115</sup> Boon, Kristen E., Aziz Huq, and Douglas C. Lovelace. " 'Preventing Extremism Together' Working group." *European Responses to Terrorist Radicalization*. Vol. 114. New York, NY: Oxford UP, 2010. 179. Print. **TERRORISM: Commentary on Security Documents**.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 180.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 181.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 182.

not, in fact, resort to violence – and it is not clear at all that the few among them who do are motivated primarily by the conditions in question”.<sup>119</sup>

The United States determined and stated that "boredom, idleness, and thrill-seeking impulses among youth, combined with feelings of marginalization and frustrated expectations stemming from lack of job opportunities" led to extremism."<sup>120</sup> However, as much as the State Department initiatives and similar projects to the European Union's working groups sought to establish alliances in East Africa, terror groups responded with pointed and effective communications defenses. The United States was labeled as an enabler, and as a participant of gross human rights violations. The United States government implemented several communications efforts to align themselves with terrorism ‘victims’, and the State Department began several programs to improve these relations.<sup>121</sup> The America.gov website offered an exploration of American Muslims, and the United States created an exchange program for allow African Muslim leaders. (478) Results for these initiatives were not awe-inspiring, so with these successes and failures in mind, I constructed newer counter-communications strategies.

Although these strategies certainly aimed to counter the ‘central’ al Qaeda message, as mentioned by Crenshaw, they would have failed to account for non-traditional incentives. While they focused on specific ideological connections, as discussed by Zaller, they failed to recognize al Qaeda’s ability to simply enhance

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<sup>119</sup> Ploch, Lauren. "Document No. 9 – Countering terrorism in East Africa: The U.S. Response." *U.S. Approaches to Global Security Challenges*. Vol. 124. New York, NY: Oxford UP, 2010. 474. Print. TERRORISM: Commentary on Security Documents.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 475.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 476.

preexisting, corollary feelings of discontent.

## VI. Conclusion

**D**uring my preliminary research stages, I expected to find a continuance of al Qaeda's core ideology throughout the 2000s. I expected that most al Qaeda affiliate organizations would capitalize on the brand appeal of al Qaeda's language, because the language was effective. I assumed that words like "jihad, war, and infidel" were effective towards the people it was always going to be effective towards. I hypothesized that al Qaeda would not spend a significant amount of time trying to recruit people like me. Thus, I didn't expect their propaganda to be either tactical or individually targeted.

My data suggests a different conclusion. Although my hypothesis proved true for the last ten years of Bin Laden and Zawahiri's leadership, I found that the affiliates were, in fact, tactical, and individually targeting their audiences. I found drastic changes between AQIM and AQAP, and across their time periods.

Using the conclusions from my theory and data chapter, it's clear that any counter-terrorism, counter-communications strategy will have to be multifaceted and react to the diverse and flexible nature of the affiliate narratives.

Al Qaeda, through its affiliates, is crafting specialized messages particular to demographics, regions, cultures, and current events. It is also capitalizing on the rampant anti-American narratives proliferating on the free and accessible Internet. This open source platform provides al Qaeda with serious ammunition, and allows them to gauge public opinion without spending a dime.

This means that counterterrorism strategies must account for this new decentralization, and the vastly underrated accessibility of the Internet. As messages come from more sources, and authorship becomes easier to attain, counter narratives must assert themselves in response to as many of these grassroots messages as possible, whether it is through smaller, insurgent operations, or through the crafting of a more generalized, applicable narrative.

In this chapter, I propose several implications produced from my data analysis, notable successful strategies, and the communications theory explored in chapter two.

The first example attacks the al Qaeda communications strategy from a public affairs perspective, and includes initiatives inspired from propaganda theory and ineffective government initiatives. The next section explores the counter-terrorism, counter-communications issue from a more tangible, policy-related perspective, using Libya as a case study. The final sections consider the barriers of enacting a successful counter-terrorism narrative, which include the unique appeal the cyber world gives to potential recruits.

#### *Using Propaganda Theory to Construct Theoretical Counterterrorism Strategy*

If the United States government wants to deter potential homegrown extremism, it must adopt a public relations strategy of inclusivity and social media manipulation. This strategy takes into account several preexisting initiatives and several newer recommendations, taking the lead from the CSCC's work, the idea of an "agent of change", the affect social groups can project, the opportunities presented within the

entertainment industry, and the emotional appeal that causes virality.

If we determine a certain demographic of potential extremists (acknowledging that they can come from any and all social groups, economic and educational backgrounds, and living situations), we can target counter-propaganda towards them. We can look at multiple sociological and psychological perspectives to cement the limitations of this group. Brendan Nyhan and Jason Riefler, political scientists, introduced the idea of confirmation bias, a determination that people are born or groomed into certain firmly held beliefs, and that changing someone's mind is more difficult than presupposed.<sup>122</sup> They argue that even when misperceptions face reliable facts and logic, people are apt to hold onto their beliefs, as those beliefs tie into their self-esteem and self-perception. Humans are goal-oriented, and in this instance, we can observe the goal to be the maintenance of norms. People who believe they are right want to maintain that belief, and want the world to continue existing in that framework. Nyhan also discusses how people are motivated to reduce dissonance. Even when a belief is incongruent with logic, when challenged, people find ways to self-affirm.<sup>123</sup>

This has dangerous counter-propaganda implications. Acknowledging that Qaeda employs Cultural Congruence to reach people with similar ideologies, these readers already have set beliefs. If al Qaeda can provide slightly altered information with a slightly different end-goal, people will be inclined to adapt their beliefs to fit

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<sup>122</sup> Nyhan, Brendan, and Jason Reifler. "Blank Slates or Closed Minds? The Role of Information Deficits and Identity Threat in the Prevalence of Misperceptions." MS. Dartmouth University. Dartmouth University, 12 Sep. 2011. Web. <<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~nyhan/opening-political-mind.pdf>>.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

the message. Once their minds are newly set, they will resist any logical arguments coming from the United States. They might even ignore logical arguments from their neighbors, as the United States attempted to do with the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC).

In September 2011, President Obama drafted the CSCC with Executive Order 13584, to "coordinate, orient, and inform government-wide foreign communications activities targeted against terrorism and violent extremism, particularly al Qaida and its affiliates and adherents."<sup>124</sup>

One of the CSCC's main experiments trained agents in the language, cultures, and societal details of at-risk Middle Eastern locales, and placed them in chat rooms and online extremist centers. The agents would pretend to be members of that locale, struggling with the same feelings of isolation or disillusionment as the other website members.

The idea was adherent to Malcolm Gladwell's principle of change, or people with a "particular and rare set of social gifts".<sup>125</sup> The CSCC hypothesized that people would begin to trust the American agents, and be persuaded by their seemingly innocent sound clips. Gladwell enumerates on these 'agents of change', who possessed skills like clear communication, patience, pure knowledge, credibility, and trustworthiness. It falls to reason that the CSCC chose agents predisposed to these skillsets, molded them to be even more approachable, and set them loose in

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<sup>124</sup> "Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications." *U.S. Department of State*. U.S. Department of State, n.d. Web. 16 Dec. 2013.

<sup>125</sup> Wolfe, Alan. "The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference." *New York Times* [New York] 5 Mar. 2000, Books sec.: n. pag. Print.

cyberspace.

Although the center is fairly new and results will obviously be limited, Nyhan's research suggests that the program will be unsuccessful. While the idea of an agent of change is certainly entrancing, this sort of ideology seems to fit with general information dissemination and virality. Propaganda is different.

According to Nyman, Jonah Berger and Chip Heath, who researched human divergence, the propaganda of culture, and conformity, having one trustworthy person wouldn't trigger a susceptible extremist to abandon their thoughts. Berger and Heath suggest that people's choices and ideological changes are based off of social groups. People adopt certain beliefs and wear certain clothes because they want to distinguish themselves as part of the right group. This can include joining an admirable group, or avoiding another. People like to believe their thoughts are distinct, and terrorism promotes feelings of power for those who are lonely. Loneliness must be countered with inclusion, so counter-propaganda must offer alternative group membership.<sup>126</sup> Although online interactions certainly boast an extreme intimacy, it would be difficult for anonymous CSCC chat room members to offer this inclusivity. Rather, this inclusivity must come from a mass narrative. Particularly because the data analysis showed that al Qaeda's narrative was constantly changing, it would be impractical for the United States to prepare for and react to every new strategy. A preventative, general message is ideal.

This government narrative would have to include several important aspects.

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<sup>126</sup> Berger, Jonah and Heath, Chip. "Why Drives Divergence? Identify Signaling, Outgroup Dissimilarity, and the Abandonment of Cultural Tastes." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol 95(3), Sep 2008, 593-607. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.95.3.593.

Chris Graves, Chief Executive Officer of Ogilvy Public Relations, says that for this project, the government would need to significantly decentralize its efforts. The government would have to stress relate-ability within the narrative, and organize a widespread social media effort to make susceptible extremists feel included in the American's 'in group'. The overall strategy would have to focus on certain values that pertain to this demographic. For instance, extremist youths have said that being America-Muslim makes them feel like outsiders. In response, the government could sponsor a fiction book series that chronicled the story of an American-Muslim teenager feeling lonely, harboring extremist thoughts, and choosing to abandon those in favor of joining an American youth group. By not criticizing or combating the value of those youths, the youths would instead sympathize with the book character, and realize they were not entirely alone.<sup>127</sup> This is a creative method of offering healthy memberships.

Graves expanded upon this idea, explaining that bloggers, pop stars, journalists, and actors could use similar messages to inundate susceptible populations. He placed this theory within his "theory of the majority", an idea that most people unknowingly tend to fall within majority opinions. Any mass propaganda effort would need to include lonely people within a cultural majority. Television shows and songs could promote this through relatable stories and characters, and combat what 'pluralistic ignorance', or the tendency to believe you are more unique than you are. Pluralistic ignorance convinces many people that their beliefs fall within the minority opinion,

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<sup>127</sup> Graves, Christopher. "Interview with Chris Graves." Personal interview. 16 Dec. 2013.

so any government effort would have to prove this wrong.<sup>128</sup> However, this effort would have to be decentralized and diverse. The government would need to send a message that both affirmed people's pre-existing beliefs, allowed people to feel unique, include them in majority communities, and send a message that subtly encouraged a change of opinion.<sup>129</sup>

Of course, this message would have to be carefully crafted across all fronts. Berger explores the idea of identify signaling as a method for correctly ascertaining which social group one belongs to, wants to join, and wants to avoid. These signals can vary from clothes, accents, and methods of conversing. Somehow, the television shows and the books would have to send signals to susceptible populations. They would have to correctly create a character sympathetic to the plight of the target.

However, it seems absurd to try and send the right signals to the right people. This is where theories of virality come into play. Graves says that these studies are critical towards matching content with viewers and/or readers, and that oftentimes it's near impossible to pre-ordain what will stick. Of course one can act as BuzzFeed does, who conduct live updates upon a website every minute, and changes the content to that receiving the most hits and views. Still, even media experts don't always know why certain things are well received, or even go viral.

Berger conducted studies in this as well, and immediately hypothesized that emotion was at the crux of virality. One study explored which New York Times articles were shared most frequently through email, he controlled for external factors,

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<sup>128</sup> "What Is Pluralistic Ignorance?" Psychology Dictionary. Psychologydictionary.com, n.d. Web. 11 Apr. 2014. <<http://psychologydictionary.org/pluralistic-ignorance/>>.

<sup>129</sup> Graves, Interview.

so the study would solely focus on the positive and negative valence of the article. Essentially, he controlled for each article's intended emotional evocations. He then tested to see which emotional arousals led to the greatest social transmission.<sup>130</sup> Contrary to common belief, the study, which encompassed over 7,000 New York Times articles, found that positive news was more likely to be shared. Additionally, although some have argued that people transmit information purely for the value that comes from self-presentation, Berger suggests that people tended to share highly interesting content purely for entertainment benefits.

This provides severe implications for our large-scale, hypothetical counterterrorism effort. Berger found that "self-presentation motives, identity signaling, and affiliation goals" played a strong role in shaping the transmission of information.<sup>131</sup> Our propaganda effort would have to acknowledge and manipulate these theories of movement. If the government were to successfully inundate a wide variety of social groups, it would have to begin with certain transmitters and make its way to the intended demographic. Thus, a certain fiction book with a sympathetic protagonist would have to be spread through email, word of mouth, and other social media websites. It would have to somehow strike that emotional cord in different readers, and be arousing enough to continue transmitting through smaller networks.<sup>132</sup>

Of course, if the effort adhered to target's sympathies, it would need to provide relatable experiences, many of which would be negative. Berger found that, in opposition to general entertainment, customer experiences that aroused negativity

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<sup>130</sup> Berger, Jonah and Milkman, Katherine L. "What Makes Online Content Viral?" *Journal of Marketing Research*, 2011. doi: 10.1509/jmr.10.0353.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

were more likely to be shared. Thus, the aforementioned fiction books would need to tell stories of loneliness, but in a way that ensured readers they weren't being indoctrinated. Once the books adhered to these standards of emotional evocation and achieved optimal transmission, they could subtly insert the counter-propaganda.

The most important conclusion from these information theories is that counterterrorism cannot limit itself to a few influential actors. While individuals certainly go to trusted friends and leaders for advice and ideological direction, the overall effort must span several mediums, and must account for the dissonance factors introduced earlier. People who ask friends for advice have a reason for asking; they are likely already considering ideological change. Our mass effort is targeting those who haven't decided to reconsider, and are privy to the stubbornness that Nyhan talks about. They need subtle encouragement from different sources.

This effort cannot solely depend on influential leaders, because then it would be overly dependent on subtle, emotional, individualized triggers. The confirmation bias and dissonance theories explored by Nyhan confirm this.<sup>133</sup> If you attack targets with statistics that disprove their beliefs, they will use that information to further strengthen those beliefs. It's not as simple as a trusted neighbor telling a lonely child that violence is terrible and that child's life is actually wonderful. Logic isn't as important as sometimes-illogical emotional responses.

Graves says that rather than publishing a book about overcoming loneliness and violent thoughts, the book could be a simple story about making friends and

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<sup>133</sup> Nyhan, Confirmation Bias.

evoking feelings of happiness.<sup>134</sup> After, whenever the youth felt lonely, he or she could remember the story and feel happy, rather than search for other solutions to the loneliness. The effort would have to somehow offer a diverse platter of these emotional responses, which could combine to encourage to target to actually seek advice from a trusted neighbor, who could complete the ‘majority theory’ inclusion. It is important that the effort allow the target to feel like the choice to seek advice was theirs, and that there was no indoctrination involved. For this reason, the mass narrative would have a greater chance of success.

This theory fits in with the data results from chapter four. Since the tests revealed an array of affiliate narratives, it stands to reason that recruits could join for diverse reasons. It is irrational to reach out to a certain locale anytime that locale is threatened, or anytime al Qaeda is able to capitalize on a certain event. It is expensive and time-costly to monitor all potential triggers. Preventative, community-building strategies are more realistic.

#### *What Didn't Work in Libya*

However, while community-building, democratization, and radicalization theory are certainly helpful for foreign policy, on-the-ground, retrospective experience lends a different weight.

I had a conversation with a former Western official in Libya. We discussed the failures of American foreign policy in Libya, and his sense of what would be needed

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<sup>134</sup> Graves, Interview.

prevent violent extremism in susceptible locales.<sup>135</sup> Of course, Libya is a specific case study, but we can extract from it for speculative purposes.

The official said that the eastern region of Libya has always been particularly religious, though not necessarily violent or extreme. Most of the opposition to Gaddafi was built around Islamist groups, so a long-term loyalty was in place. Within Libyan history (and precedent for Islamic extremism), the Libyan jihadists played a large role in the 1980s Afghanistan conflict against the Soviets, and sent foreign fighters to civil wars in Algeria and Afghanistan. Thus, the eastern religious groups, while not violent, had a history of supporting jihad.

During the Libyan revolution, several of these community members expanded their sympathies. The most extreme members became leaders of the brigades, and radicalized the young men who signed up to fight in the revolution.

This American official never met any of the extremist leaders; he only met some very religious followers. However, he said the entire country was characterized as extremely pious, and he didn't find it surprising that so many easily made the jump to violent jihad, particularly those living in the eastern region of Derna. The official described that port as a mini caliphate, and a representation of everything Islamist extremists wanted to enforce. The entire locale enforces strict interpretations of the Quran, and sends out important jihad leaders to other conflicts.

With this historical context in mind, the official began to criticize American foreign policy actions in Libya, particularly those enacted after the 2012 attack in Benghazi. While previous foreign policy had professed a serious desire for

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<sup>135</sup> Interview with US Official – see Appendix VII.

cooperation, almost all actions taken after Benghazi came from a counterterrorism focus.

Before the attack, the United States State Department worked with the Gaddafi government because they shared a common enemy: the religious extremists. After the Libyan revolution, Americans worked with Gaddafi on democracy, healthcare, education, and building and strengthening commercial ties. However, after the Benghazi attack, all of this policy reverted to counterterrorism doctrine.

The official laments that we are missing the opportunity for huge changes in Libya. He argues that the Libyan government is very pro-American and wants badly to cooperate with us. By limiting our foreign policy conversations to counterterrorism and espionage, we are missing a chance to fight terrorism in a different way.

The official adds that another lesson could be learned from the Benghazi attacks. He cites a Western, particularly American, misconception that all extremists are part of an international network inspired by the same ideology. Those involved in the Benghazi attack were not operationally connected, however, to any well-known al Qaeda organization. The culprits were local, and the core leaders mobilized others by using an inflammatory anti-Islamic as a catalyst. The Benghazi attack wouldn't actually make sense in the context of an official al Qaeda attack. Many of the people who participated benefitted from the American intervention in 2011, when the Americans supported the opposition to a dictator, even though that opposition was Islamist.

The official called it a confusing narrative. Were the Libyan perpetrators truly that unreformable? Was the ideology truly that powerful? Could a few ringleaders

really brainwash other people with such a weak, confusing narrative? The official referred to a New York Times reporter, David Kirkpatrick, who speculated that the mob in Benghazi was simply angry about the video, and had no idea anyone was inside the United States mission. This would suggest that the Islamist extremism wasn't entirely focused against the United States, and that the goal wasn't to harm Americans, but was rather an impassioned, irrational act. Attacks like these represent the audiences that may have been swayed by any one of the al Qaeda affiliates' messages. It's irrational to suggest that a certain aggressive statement inspired this action. It's inconceivable to believe one can identify exactly how this individual was predisposed to the ideology or to general violence.

However, the official also suggested that a victimization narrative might have played a part in the mob mentality. Eastern Libya had remained historically destitute while Gaddafi's regime sent power and money to the West. The East, left alone with neglected infrastructure, was apt to explode. This does not mean that a conscious, or even unconscious al Qaeda message was running rampant throughout Libya, but the rumblings of discontent did amass.

This also suggests that other attacks attributed to al Qaeda could have been similarly discordant and unrelated to any Islamist ideology. Particularly within certain locales, it's likely that attacks from the past few years were locally induced. The prevalence of Western victims may have been happenstance.

My data analysis explains difficulty in ascertaining recruit's causes for violent action. The diversity of the statements shows how varied recruitment can be, as message focuses ranged from exclusionary narratives, victimization stories,

geographic appeals, and aggression. Considering the theories discussed in chapter two and the data findings, recruits could have joined out of a gut reaction, an impassioned moment, a desire to follow a certain individual, a desire to join an in-group, or even a desire to simply be violent. According to Crenshaw's theory, recruits could lack even a simple comprehension of al Qaeda's aims, and join out of a simple desire for power.

### *Domestic Policy Implications*

With this diversity and its subsequent complications in mind, the implication leans towards a mass, preemptive federal strategy. Clint Watts, a Senior Fellow for the Foreign Policy Research Institute, suggests an increase of information sharing for surveillance purposes, along with community engagement and a complex network of strategically placed informants.<sup>136</sup> These words sound impressive, but these "strategic placements" cause a problem. Which demographics are most susceptible to jihad? Should the greatest efforts go towards people predisposed to violence, regardless of religious belief, or should preemptive measures focus on all ideological similar believers? Having established with Zaller that people rarely change their minds in substantial manners, what sorts of propaganda work should the United States engage in to prevent any sort of leaning, violent, religious, or otherwise, towards jihadism?<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> *Radicalization in the U.S. Beyond Al Qaeda: Treating the Disease of the Disconnection*. Rep. Foreign Policy Research Institute: Program on National Security, Aug. 2012. Web. <[http://www.fpri.org/docs/PaperRadicalization\\_in\\_the\\_US\\_Beyond\\_al\\_Qaeda\\_Watts.pdf](http://www.fpri.org/docs/PaperRadicalization_in_the_US_Beyond_al_Qaeda_Watts.pdf)>.

<sup>137</sup> "John Zaller." — *UCLA Department of Political Science*. UCLA, n.d. Web. 04 Mar. 2014. <<http://www.polisci.ucla.edu/people/faculty-pages/john-zaller>>.

Based on my research, I would suggest that the majority of these efforts go towards younger generations. Empirical research shows that teens and people in their twenties are more likely to feel disengaged from their societies, and to yearn for inclusion. For many, violence is simply a tactic; they are not particularly attracted to the act of violence itself. Thus, anti-violence initiatives do not seem particularly crucial to me. I would be more inclined to suggest monitoring feelings of discontent within communities, or searching for controversial community conversations that might isolate a certain demographic. This could also include searching for corresponding chat rooms and websites where community members can post online.

### *Barriers*

However, how do we compete with the multiplying narratives available online, when these sites are either clearly terrorism-related or more of a subterfuge? Daniel Benjamin, Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the Department of State from 2009-2012, says that a big aspect of the solution is cost-effectiveness. Because attempts to counter these constantly evolving, amorphous narratives will inevitably fail multiple times, efforts need to be strategic and creative.<sup>138</sup>

He mentions the work at the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, an interagency effort to enter certain chat rooms and pose as locales with logical counter-information.<sup>139</sup> The diplomatic aspects of this, which tend to be ignored within the counterterrorism perspective, account for international human

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<sup>138</sup> Benjamin, Daniel. "Interview with Daniel Benjamin. Personal interview. 12 August 2013.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

rights and domestic legislation. People have a right to speak and publish.

Particularly when these influential narrators are wealthy, other governments tend to shy from confrontation. Benjamin says that many countries refuse American offers of cooperation, because they disapprove of the allusions to 'unique' methods of intelligence gathering.<sup>140</sup> However, Benjamin certainly has a more progressive view of American efforts, and says that al Qaeda's popularity was a completely different story in 2001 and 2002. Now there might be more paths to radicalization, but they are weaker and more dispersed. Still, this mandates international cooperation against all media platforms, and efforts within the propaganda and hate speech theories explored earlier.

### *The Cyber Appeal*

Of course, people have already attempted to dismantle the language of "hate speech", and to discredit within the eyes of viewers and populations. James Finkel, previously an advisor to the Director of National Intelligence and a Mass Atrocity Expert at the CIA, likens the al Qaeda counter-communications struggle to the Bosnian-Serbian conflict and the Rwandan genocide. He says that common stresses for these types of atrocities are development, corruption, lower-tech "solutions", favored groups, unjust distributions of resources, and lack of religious plurality.<sup>141</sup> These common triggers certainly fit within the al Qaeda framework, but fail to entirely account for those converts who lack these, or similar, stresses. Returning to the Boston bombing mentions in the introductory chapter, why are first world citizens

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Finkel, Jim. "Interview with Jim Finkel." 8 August 2012.

getting caught up in the al Qaeda hate speech? They don't fit within the narrative of oppression, and lack incentive to reject Western traditions and modernity.

Finkel proposes the undermining aspects of the Internet as a possible trigger for this population. He claims that the Internet allows less social people to become part of a community, and the Internet itself serves as a large basis of appeal for terrorist conversion. Citing the reality of online identity isolating, he supposes that the diversity within these converts could come from the avatar-like characteristics of chat rooms and websites.<sup>142</sup>

### *Conclusion*

This is an interesting concept, as it ties in with the data analysis in chapter three, which showed that propaganda was much more diverse and flexible starting around 2011. It is possible that, during these years, the platforms of ideological conversion became more powerful than the messages they carried. People are definitely attracted to the powerful nature of anonymity, and al Qaeda is a popular brand name. Of course, if we introduce this, the next question is the counterfactual of those Internet users who don't become terrorist agents. Then, rather than asking why certain people buy into terrorist ideology, we must ask why certain people are particularly attracted to and swept up in cyberspace.

This supposition only further highlights the difficulty of the struggle against al Qaeda propaganda. Identification of susceptibility is key, and yet we have introduced several potential target groups. There are those who buy into the religious ideology

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

that persists in certain al Qaeda affiliates and certain territories. There are those who possess credible, justifiable reasons to hate their oppressors and seek ways to alter the power balance in their lives. There are those attracted to power, and to the fame that comes from allegiance. There are those who seek communal bonds.

Al Qaeda responds to this diversity with an appropriately diverse array of language. It seems the struggle for us is not to discredit al Qaeda's message, but provide a stronger inclination within our populations to disengage from inflammatory language and illogical 'emotional' triggers. Our relative failure to identify perpetrators and those about to commit terrorists' acts strongly suggests that our goal must be early prevention. That is why Grave's public affairs hypothetical is so crucial.<sup>143</sup> Children and innocents are the easiest to manipulate, and the challenge is to find a narrative that engenders natural, harmless feelings of power and satisfaction.

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<sup>143</sup> Interview with Christopher Graves.

## Appendix - Interviews

### Daniel Benjamin

- Benjamin was the Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the United States Department of State from 2009-2012, under Secretary Hillary Clinton. Presently, he is the Director of the Center for International Understanding at Dartmouth College. He wrote the book The Age of Sacred Terror, which reviews the history of Islamist political thought up until Bin Laden. I interviewed Benjamin over the phone in July 2013.

### David Kane

- Kane is an agent in the Illicit Terrorism Finance division at the Department of Homeland Security. I interviewed him in person twice in July 2013.

### Jim Finkel

- Finkel was a former Mass Atrocity Expert at the Center for Intelligence Analysis. I interviewed him in person on August 8, 2013.

### Kristin Archick

- Archick is a researcher for the Congressional Research Service, focusing on European Counterterrorism Politics and US-EU Cooperation. I interviewed her in person on August 13, 2013.

### Mike Abramowitz

- Abramowitz is the Director of Center for Prevention of Genocide at the Holocaust Museum. Between 2006-2009, he worked as the White House correspondent for the Post, and served as the National Editor of the post from 2000-2006. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, a fellow of the German Marshall Fund. He is also a member of the Aspen Homeland Security Group.

### Laura Blumenfeld

- Blumenfeld is a Professor of Psychiatry at Georgetown University Medical School, and a Transatlantic Fellow at the German Marshall Fund. Previously, she was a reporter for the Washington post, and covered the Middle East, national security, politics, and counter-terrorism. She recently wrote a book titled Talking to Terrorists, a psychological exploration into terrorist motivations. We spoke on the phone on July 19, 2013.

### Gordon Kromberg

- Kromberg is an attorney with the Department of Justice. He provided me with materials from court case Criminal No. 03-296-A, the United States of America v. Masoud Khan, et al., Defendants. I spoke with him over the phone on August 6, 2013, and he was able to provide me with some background on the case and some clarification about the legal proceedings.

### **Dan Prieto**

- Prieto is the Director of Cyber Security and Technology at the DOD's CIO office, and was announced by Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel. Prieto is a senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies' homeland security and counterterrorism program, and was the research director at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government's Homeland Security Partnership Initiative. He is a member of the Aspen Homeland Security Group. He is a frequent contributor to *Foreign Policy*.

### **Christopher Graves**

- Graves is the Global CEO of Ogilvy Public Relations. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and has published within McKinsey publications on the topics of international communications and government public affairs. I interviewed him in person on December 16, 2013.

<http://www.gigiscupcakesusa.com/>

### **US Official**

- This US official worked diplomatically in Benghazi, Libya. He will remain anonymous for purposes of his truthful, sometimes criticizing opinions of US foreign policy efforts in Libya. I interviewed him over the phone on March 6, 2014.

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