

Denying Terrorist Safe Havens: Homeland Security Efforts to Counter Threats from Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia

Testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations and Management of the House Committee on Homeland Security

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Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Keating, members of the Subcommittee and Subcommittee staff, thank you for this opportunity to present my views before you today.

The death of Bin Ladin poses a major setback for al-Qa'ida. Nevertheless, the al-Qa'ida core remains a danger to the United States, as do al-Qa'ida affiliates. These organizations are capable of mounting attacks against the U.S. homeland in the years to come, and the danger they pose to U.S. allies in Europe and in the Muslim world is even greater. However, al-Qa'ida and its allies suffer from many weaknesses, are fractious in the best of times, and in general are under considerable strain.

I would urge this subcommittee to consider several recommendations as it strives to improve U.S. homeland security. Fighting the al-Qa'ida core in Pakistan should remain at the center of U.S. counterterrorism policy, even after Bin Ladin's death. With the death of Bin Ladin there is an additional opportunity to weaken al-Qa'ida's relationship with affiliate groups, one of the core's most important sources of strength. The aggressive U.S. drone campaign in Pakistan has played an important role in weakening al-Qa'ida and should be continued. The drone campaign will not end the al-Qa'ida presence in Pakistan, but it does keep the organization on the run and reduces its operational effectiveness.

The "Arab spring" also requires fundamental changes in U.S. counterterrorism policy. The change sweeping the Arab world undermines al-Qa'ida's message but, at the same time, offers terrorists more operational freedom. The United States must exploit the threat to al-Qa'ida's message and encourage a smooth transition to democracy while continuing counterterrorism partnerships and building new ones.

In addition to aggressive efforts abroad, U.S. officials must consider how American foreign policy can lead to domestic radicalization and ensure that U.S. policy does not unnecessarily alienate key domestic constituencies. At home the FBI and state officials should redouble efforts to know local Muslim communities and gain their trust.

In the end, however, it is difficult to separate "over there" from "here." U.S. intelligence and homeland defense should focus on "seam" areas – where the United

States is attackable outside of U.S. soil, such as on airplanes transiting from airports overseas to airports in the United States.

My testimony will address several issues: 1. The danger from the al-Qa'ida core in Pakistan after the death of Bin Ladin; 2. The importance of the drone campaign; 3. The role of al-Qa'ida-linked affiliate groups; 4. The nature of the threat to the U.S. homeland; 5. The impact of the "Arab spring" on counterterrorism; and 6. Policy recommendations for increasing the security of the U.S. homeland.

I. The State of the al-Qa'ida Core

Despite claims that the al-Qa'ida core became largely irrelevant after 9/11, in reality it remained active in proselytizing, plotting anti-Western terrorist attacks, and supporting insurgencies in the Muslim world.¹ The al-Qaeda core revived after the collapse of the Taliban in 2001 and its loss of a haven in Afghanistan. Over time, the group became more entrenched in parts of Pakistan. While Islamabad had made fitful efforts to uproot it, some of the jihadist groups that the regime nurtured and tolerated to fight India and advance Pakistani interests in Afghanistan have turned against the regime. Al-Qa'ida now has close ties to Lashkar-e Janghvi, Jaish-e Mohammed, and other groups that have tens of thousands of supporters in Pakistan, and its reach is considerable in non-tribal parts of the country.

In this sanctuary al-Qa'ida has planned, recruited, issued propaganda, and trained the next round of attackers. Al-Qa'ida played a major role in the 2005 attacks on the transportation system in London.² Writing in 2008, terrorism expert Peter Bergen describes the bombings as "a classic al-Qa'ida plot."³ Al-Qa'ida appears to have organized, coordinated, or otherwise played a major role in foiled 2004 attacks in the United Kingdom on a nightclub or a shopping mall; plans to bomb economic targets in

¹ For a leading proponent of the view that al-Qa'ida was weak and decentralized, see Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the 21st Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). However, several official U.S. and U.K. government statements and documents support the assessment that the al-Qa'ida core remains active. National Intelligence Council, "National Intelligence Estimate: The Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland," unclassified key judgments (July 2007), p. 1; Dennis C. Blair, "Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence," February 12, 2009, pp. 5-6; "Speech by the Director General of the Security Service," Queen Mary's College, London, November 9, 2006; and Jonathan Evans, "Intelligence, Counter Terrorism and Trust," November 5, 2007. Available at: www.mi5.gov.uk.

² See "Were They Directed from Abroad?" Honourable House of Commons, *Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on the July 2005* (London: The Stationary Office, May 2006), pp. 20-21; Robert Winnett and David Leppard, "Leaked No 10 Dossier Reveals Al-Qaeda's British Recruits," *Sunday Times*, July 10, 2005 available at: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article542420.ece>; Bruce Riedel, *The Search for Al Qaeda* (Brookings, 2008); Bruce Hoffman, "Challenges for the U.S. Special Operations Command Posed by the Global Terrorist Threat: Al Qaeda on the Run or on the March?" written testimony submitted to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats, and Capabilities, February 14, 2007," pp. 11-13; Bruce Hoffman, "Radicalization and Subversion: Al Qaeda and the 7 July 2005 Bombings and the 2006 Airline Bombing Plot," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 32 (2009), p. 1102; and Bruce Hoffman, "The 7 July 2005 Bombings," unpublished paper.

³ Peter Bergen, "Al Qaeda, the Organization: A Five Year Forecast," *Annals of the American Association of Political Science* (July 2008), p. 15.

several American cities; and the 2006 plan to simultaneously blow up perhaps ten airplanes as they went from the United Kingdom to the United States.⁴ Press reporting indicates that operatives with links to Pakistan played a role in the spring 2009 Manchester plot that British security services disrupted – all those alleged to be involved were of Pakistani origin.⁵ Terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman found that al-Qa'ida was actively involved in virtually all major terrorist plots in the United Kingdom since 2003.⁶

Outside of the United Kingdom, German government officials claimed that they disrupted a plot to attack U.S. and German targets in Germany in 2007 involving three men, none of whom were of Pakistani origin, who trained at camps in Pakistan.⁷ The Danish government also reported a disrupted plot linked to Pakistan in 2007. France and Italy have also reported al-Qa'ida-linked plots.

Al-Qa'ida has carried out numerous terrorist attacks in Pakistan today, working both on its own and with various Pakistani groups. It tried to kill former President Pervez Musharraf several times and probably was responsible for the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in 2007.⁸

Al-Qa'ida's own thinkers stress the importance of maintaining a haven and seem to have little faith in decentralized, bottom-up efforts. Al-Qa'ida itself was consciously constituted as a vanguard. Bin Ladin's deputy and heir-apparent, Ayman al-Zawahiri contended even as his movement was being expelled from Afghanistan that, "the *mujahid* [fighter for the faith] Islamic movement will not triumph against the world coalition unless it possesses a Islamist base in the heart of the Islamic world."⁹

The al-Qa'ida core issues propaganda to radicalize Muslims and helps recruit potential terrorists, trains them, and offers guidance for specific attacks. As a result, local individuals become far more dangerous when they are able to interact with al-Qa'ida core members.

Impact of the Death of Bin Ladin

Bin Ladin's death is a significant blow to al-Qa'ida. Bin Ladin, Hoffman notes, "played an active role at every level of al-Qa'ida operations: from planning to targeting and from networking to propaganda."¹⁰ Beyond his operational role, his survival was a form of successful defiance. The world's biggest military and most powerful country

⁴ Hoffman, "Challenges for the U.S. Special Operations Command," pp. 11, 13-14; Richard Greenberg, Paul Cruickshank, and Chris Hansen, "Inside the Terror Plot that 'Rivaled 9/11,'" MSNBC.com, September 16, 2008.

⁵ Sarah Laville, Richard Norton-Taylor, and Vikram Dodd, "Student visa link to terror raids as Gordon Brown points finger at Pakistan," *Guardian*, available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/apr/10/student-visa-terror-arrests-link>; House of Commons, "Examination of Witnesses," statement of James Fergusson, available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmcaff/302/9042103.htm>

⁶ Hoffman, "Challenges for the U.S. Special Operations Command," p. 11.

⁷ Craig Whitlock, "Germany Says It Foiled Bomb Plot," *Washington Post*, September 6, 2007.

⁸ Riedel, *The Search for Al-Qaeda*, p. 125.

⁹ Zawahiri, *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*. Serialized in *Al-Sharq al Awsat* (London) 2-10 December 2001, trans. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, document FBIS-NES-2001-1202, maintained on-line by the Federation of American Scientists, http://fas.org/irp/world/para/aymanh_bk.html

¹⁰ Bruce Hoffman, "The Leaderless Jihad's Leader," *Foreign Affairs*, May 13, 2011, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67851/bruce-hoffman/the-leaderless-jihads-leader>

made him public enemy number one for almost 10 years and failed to find him. To Bin Ladin's supporters, only God's protection explained this mystery.

Because of the successful U.S. attack, the aura of divine protection has diminished not only for Bin Ladin, but by association his cause. A new leader like Zawahiri is an effective operator but has far less stardom than Bin Ladin and is unlikely to inspire Muslims as effectively. More prosaically, but no less importantly, al-Qa'ida will find it hard to recruit and fundraise without Bin Ladin to lead their cause.

Within the jihadist movement, Bin Ladin often pushed back against the tendency toward slaughter that manifested in Iraq and Algeria. In such countries, so-called "*taqfiris*" (who saw other Muslims who did not adhere to their extreme views as apostates) made war on their own societies, killing other Muslims and often making civil strife a priority over striking U.S. or regime targets. Bin Ladin counseled against this tendency and tried to put his resources behind leaders who embraced his agenda rather than killed their co-religionists on a mass scale.

In short, Bin Ladin was both a symbol of the movement and an effective strategic and operational leader. It would be glib to assume his death means the movement is finished. At the same time, however, the organization has suffered a tremendous blow.

II. The Importance of the Drone Campaign

The U.S. drone campaign against al-Qa'ida, begun under Bush and put on steroids under Obama, has taken out dozens of al-Qa'ida figures, primarily in Pakistan. In 2010, the United States launched over 100 drone attacks in Pakistan, according to the New America Foundation.¹¹ Those killed were far less prominent than Bin Ladin, but in many cases their skills were in short supply and difficult to replace. Al-Qa'ida struggles to find seasoned and skilled new leaders, and even when it can it takes time to integrate them into the organization. Even more important, but even harder to see, al-Qa'ida lieutenants must limit communications to stop U.S. eavesdropping that could lead to airstrikes, reduce their circle of associates to avoid spies, and avoid public exposure, all of which make them far less effective as leaders. This makes it harder, though not impossible, for them to pull off sophisticated attacks that require long-term planning.

Although innocent civilians do die in these attacks, the number of non-combatant deaths is often exaggerated and has been declining. According to Peter Bergen and Katherine Tiedemann, "According to our estimates, the nonmilitant fatality rate since 2004 is approximately 25 percent, and in 2010, the figure has been more like 6 percent -- an improvement that is likely the result of increased numbers of U.S. spies in Pakistan's tribal areas, better targeting, more intelligence cooperation with the Pakistani military, and smaller missiles."¹² Such innocent deaths are still considerable, and errant strikes have the potential to worsen U.S.-Pakistan relations, but drone strikes are often far less bloody than alternatives such as Pakistani military attacks or U.S. attacks by manned fixed-wing aircraft. In addition, drone strikes involve no risk of U.S. personnel.

¹¹ See data compiled by Peter Bergen and Katherine Tiedemann, "The Year of the Drone" at <http://counterterrorism.newamerica.net/drones>.

¹² Peter Bergen and Katherine Tiedemann, "There Were More Drone Strikes — And Far Fewer Civilians Killed," *Foreign Policy*, December 22, 2010, available at: <http://newamerica.net/node/41927>

Killing terrorist group lieutenants on a large scale can devastate a group. There may still be thousands of people who hate the United States and want to take up arms, but without bomb-makers, passport-forgers, and leaders to direct their actions they are often reduced to menacing bumbler, easier to disrupt and often more a danger to themselves than to their enemies.

III. Al-Qa'ida Affiliates

Because of the blows the al-Qa'ida core has suffered, attention is increasingly focused on al-Qa'ida affiliates. The most notable of these affiliates include al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al-Qa'ida of Iraq (AQI), al-Qa'ida of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and al-Shabaab in Somalia. Al-Qa'ida also has ties to a range of other salafi-jihadist groups, at times working with them against U.S. or allied interests and in other cases simply supporting the local groups' struggles against various regimes.¹³

The Yemen-based AQAP began to receive far more attention from U.S. homeland security officials after the 2009 Christmas Day bombing plot, in which a Nigerian recruit almost blew up a passenger airplane landing in Detroit. Al-Qa'ida has long had operatives and associates in Yemen, but for most of the last decade they focused on targets in Yemen or in the region. The Yemeni regime effectively crushed the threat after 9/11, but a 2006 jailbreak and a lapse in U.S. and Yemeni attention reinvigorated the jihadists.¹⁴ At the same time the Saudi government successfully suppressed what had briefly seemed to be a serious jihadist threat to the regime, and many Saudi fighters fled to Yemen. In 2009 the Saudi and Yemeni branches claimed to merge under the AQAP banner and took a more global focus, attacking not just Yemeni and Western targets in the region but also conducting international terrorism such as the Christmas bombing plot and the October 2010 plan to blow up two cargo planes as they neared U.S. cities.¹⁵ Some U.S. officials claim that AQAP is more dangerous than al-Qa'ida.

¹³ AQIM remains focused on the greater Maghreb area, but it is more anti-Western in its operations than in the past. On the road to becoming AQIM the GSPC expanded its primary focus to include France as well as the Algerian regime. The group also began to strike U.N. and Israeli targets and go after Algeria's energy infrastructure, none of which were a priority in the past. Suicide bombings, hitherto one of the few horrors the GSPC did not inflict, grew more frequent, along with Iraq-style car bombs. In addition, with the NATO intervention in Libya AQIM should be a concern to Western officials. In Pakistan, where al-Qa'ida's influence has spread since 9/11, there were two suicide attacks in 2002; by 2010 there were over 50, which killed over 1,000 people. Al-Qa'ida allies in Pakistan attack both the Pakistani state and support anti-U.S. forces in Afghanistan. And AQI, of course, attacks U.S. forces in Iraq. See Lianne Kennedy Boudali, "The GSCP: Newest Franchise in Al-Qa'ida's Global Jihad," April 2, 2007, available at: <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-gspc-newest-franchise-in-al-qaidas-global-jihad>; "2010 bloodiest year in Pakistan since 2001," The Economic Times Online, December 24, 2010, available at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2010-12-24/news/27599872_1_suicide-khyber-pakhtunkhwa-province-personnel

¹⁴ See in particular "Testimony of Gregory D. Johnsen," before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, January 20, 2010.

¹⁵ For an overview of this danger, see Christopher Boucek, "Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland – Al-Qaeda in the Arabaian Peninsula (AQAP)," Testimony before the House Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, March 2, 2011.

It is difficult to come to firm conclusions about how to view al-Qa'ida affiliates.¹⁶ There is no single way to join al-Qa'ida, nor is it always clear when a group should be viewed as under the al-Qa'ida core's control. Al-Qa'ida does not demand sole allegiance: it supports local struggles even as it pursues its own war against the United States and its allies. So group members can be part of al-Qa'ida's ranks and loyal fighters in their local organizations.

Groups often straddle their old and new identities, trying to keep up their local activities while also attacking more global targets. Often this is a time of infighting within a group, with key leaders pulling in different directions. Somalia's al-Shabaab, for instance, appears to be in such a phase today.¹⁷ Some parts of the organization cooperate with al-Qa'ida, with foreign jihadis playing leading roles in tactics and operations. But others within the movement -- probably the majority, in fact -- oppose the control of the foreigners, with some even publicly condemning terrorism and even working with international humanitarian relief efforts. Al-Shabaab could become "al-Qa'ida of the Horn of Africa," but this is not yet a done deal. And if it happens, it could split the group.¹⁸

The Benefits and Risks of Affiliation

Al-Qa'ida seeks not only to change the Islamic world, but also to shift the orientation of jihad from the local to the global – and here affiliates play a crucial role. Historically, most jihadist resistance movements have focused on their own territory or on throwing out foreign troops, but Bin Ladin successfully convinced groups that striking the United States and its allies is more important to this victory than fighting more proximate enemies.

For the al-Qa'ida core, affiliates provide hundreds or even thousands of fighters, donors, smuggling networks, and sympathetic preachers who offer religious legitimacy. For example, when al-Qa'ida needed to get its fighters out of Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban, they relied on the logistical assistance of Sunni radicals in Pakistan; the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group helped them obtain false travel documents.

Al-Qa'ida affiliates also offer access to immigrant and diaspora communities – a group like Somalia's al-Shabaab, with its connections to the Somali-American population, would be a prize asset. In 2010 a Somali-American from Portland was arrested for planning to bomb a Christmas tree lighting ceremony in Portland.¹⁹ (There is no indication I have seen, however, that the individual was linked to the al-Qa'ida core).

Al-Qa'ida franchises, in turn, often get money from the al-Qa'ida core or others in its fundraising network. Al-Qa'ida also has web and media specialists, recruiters, trainers, and other experts in its global rolodex, all available to help a local franchise.

¹⁶ For an excellent recent review of how al-Qa'ida views affiliation, see Barak Mendelsohn, "Al-Qaeda's Franchising Strategy," *Survival* (Summer 2011), <http://www.iiss.org/publications/survival/survival-2011/year-2011-issue-3/al-qaedas-franchising-strategy/>

¹⁷ International Crisis Group, "Somalia's Divided Islamists," May 18, 2010.

¹⁸ See Bronwyn Burton, "In the Quicksands of Somalia," *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 2009), available at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/65462/bronwyn-bruton/in-the-quicksands-of-somalia>

¹⁹ See "Somali-American accused of plotting to bomb Oregon tree-lighting event," November 27, 2010. http://articles.cnn.com/2010-11-27/justice/oregon.bomb.plot_1_tree-lighting-justice-department-portland-resident?_s=PM:CRIME

In the past, an al-Qa'ida label is also a potential recruiting boon -- it may help a group attract new members who hate the West and the United States but were not motivated by the group's past, more local, rhetoric. Less tangibly, the al-Qa'ida brand also can give credibility to groups struggling at home. Groups like al-Shabaab often have an inchoate ideology; al-Qa'ida offers them a coherent alternative. The death of Bin Ladin, for now at least, diminishes the attractiveness of the al-Qa'ida brand.

Gaining affiliates may raise al-Qa'ida's profile and extend its reach, but it also poses risks for the core. The biggest is the lack of control. Nowhere was this more apparent than Iraq. Beginning at least in 2005, al-Qa'ida core leaders tried to push Iraqi fighters waging guerrilla war under the banner of al-Qa'ida in Iraq not to slaughter Shi'a Muslims, and especially not Sunni civilians, but to no avail. As the bloodshed rose, al-Qa'ida funders and supporters pointed their fingers not only at AQI leaders, but also at the al-Qa'ida core.

The risk is even greater for affiliates. When they take on the al-Qa'ida label, they also take on al-Qa'ida enemies. The United States not only conducts direct attacks on al-Qa'ida-related individuals and targets their recruiting and financial infrastructure, but Washington also can offer its allies intelligence, financial support, paramilitary capabilities, and other vital forms of assistance, creating new headaches for groups that are already beleaguered. They also move farther away from their original goal of fighting the local regime. Because of these risks, the decision to join al-Qa'ida's ranks often angers more sensible group members who retain local ambitions.

IV. The Nature of the Threat to the U.S. Homeland

The U.S. homeland is safer than it was in the months before 9/11, and the death of Bin Ladin is a further blow to al-Qa'ida. Yet the danger of terrorism remains real. As I and others have noted, there is a real chance that in revenge an al-Qa'ida sympathizer or member will attack a U.S. target, ideally (from the terrorists' point of view) in the U.S. homeland but also, primarily for operational reasons, on U.S. persons and facilities overseas. Al-Qa'ida itself also has a strong incentive to conduct an attack in order to prove its relevance at a time when many question whether it can continue after Bin Ladin's death.

There have been few attacks on the U.S. homeland since 9/11, and one only serious terrorist success -- Major Nidal Malik Hasan's shooting of 13 Americans at Fort Hood in Texas. Hasan does not appear to have any direct linkages to the al-Qa'ida core, but he was in email contact with AQAP member, and U.S. citizen, Anwar al-Awlaki, the ideologue and operator who was also linked to AQAP's attempted attacks on U.S. aviation targets in 2009 and 2010.

Despite Hasan's action, in general the U.S. homeland has enjoyed far more freedom from terrorism than I and many experts predicted in the months after 9/11. I believe this good fortune stems from several factors. The destruction of Al-Qa'ida's haven in Afghanistan and the global intelligence and law enforcement hunt for group members and supporters dealt major blows to the core's operational capability and global reach. At home, the FBI and other organizations focused intensely on al-Qa'ida, making it harder for the terrorists to pass unnoticed. Although there are individual exceptions, the

U.S. Muslim community is not radicalized. Indeed, in several important terrorism cases community members have worked with U.S. law enforcement, providing invaluable tips.

Ironically, the terrorism charges levied against various Americans in the years immediately after 9/11 seemed to confirm how much safer our country was. The FBI would often announce arrests of suspects with great drama, but those charged were often common criminals or unskilled dreamers, talking big but with little ability to carry out their schemes. Those arrested had little or no training, and—just as importantly—they did not seem to know how to get in touch with the al-Qa’ida core. In the end, the government would often charge them with minor, non-terrorism related crimes such as fraud or violating their immigration status.

Yet there is reason to believe that all these factors are changing for the worse in recent years. As discussed above, al-Qa’ida has revived somewhat in Pakistan, enabling it to plan and train more effectively than it could in the years after losing its base in Afghanistan. This revival is why the September 19, 2009, arrest of Najibullah Zazi is so disturbing to homeland defense officials. Zazi, a legal Afghan resident of the United States for many years, pled guilty in 2010 to planning to bomb several targets in New York. Unlike the unskilled attackers who were arrested in the past, Zazi admitted he was trained in Pakistan where he was instructed to carry out a suicide bombing.²⁰

Nor is Pakistan the only problem. On October 28, 2008, Shirwa Ahmed became the first American suicide bomber, killing himself in Somalia's civil war on behalf of the Islamist group al-Shabaab.²¹ Ahmed was part of two groups of perhaps 20 Somali-Americans who grew up in Minneapolis and became radicalized after the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in 2006. The Somali-American community from which he came has more in common with the Algerians in the *banlieues* in Paris than the affluent Arab Muslim community of the U.S. By one estimate 60 percent of the Somalis in the U.S., a community estimated as high as 200,000 people, live in poverty, and many young men drop out of school and turn to crime.

While the conflict in Somalia may seem distant to most Americans, the U.S. role there is considerable—and Somali-Americans know it well. In the minds of many Somalis, the 2008 U.S. airstrike that killed Aden Hashi Ayro, a Shabaab leader, fused Somalia's historic enemy Ethiopia and the United States. The result, in Somalia expert Ken Menkhaus' words, was that "fierce levels of anti-Americanism took root among many Somalis at home and abroad."²² In September 2009, the United States struck again, killing another al-Qa’ida figure there, Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan. So far, none of the Somali-Americans who went overseas have planned to return home and attack, but the Shabaab's move toward al-Qa’ida and the anger at U.S. policy are a disturbing combination.

²⁰ United States Department of Justice, "Najibullah Zazi Pleads Guilty to Conspiracy to Use Explosives Against Persons or Property in U.S., Conspiracy to Murder Abroad, and Providing Material Support to Al-Qaeda," February 22, 2010.

²¹ In 2009, al-Qa’ida's No. 2 Zawahiri called Shabaab advances in Somalia "a step on the path of victory of Islam," while Shabaab would pledge allegiance to Bin Laden. The group even used Alabama native Omar Hammani, who spoke under the name Abu Mansoor al-Amriki ("the American"), to do a video critique of President Barack Obama's speech in Cairo earlier in the year.

²² Testimony of Ken Menkhaus, "Violent Islamic Extremism: Al-Shabaab Recruitment in America," before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, United States Senate, March 11, 2009.

One of the biggest dangers involves “seam” areas that involve borders, airspace, and other security spots that are the responsibility of multiple countries – areas where homeland security meets foreign policy. Al-Qa’ida and affiliate groups have far more sympathizers in foreign countries and better logistics networks there as well, making it easier for them to launch attacks from there rather than in the United States. Several of the most deadly terrorist plots in the last decade – the 2003 “shoebomber” attempt to blow up American Airlines flight 63 in 2001, the 2009 and 2010 AQAP attempts on civil and commercial aviation, a United Kingdom cell’s the 2006 plan to bomb as many as ten transatlantic flights – would have had devastating effects on the U.S. homeland but were not based in the United States. Instead, these involved the al-Qa’ida core in Pakistan working with members and sympathizers, usually in Europe, to attack the U.S. homeland.²³

Radicalization from abroad is another homeland security problem. Anwar al-Awlaki left the United States in 2002 and went to Yemen in 2004. From there, his fluent English and comprehensive understanding of U.S. culture enabled him to radicalize individuals like Major Hasan and perhaps others – activities that would have led to his arrest had he remained in the United States.

V. Counterterrorism and the Arab Spring

Al-Qa’ida is dangerous not just because it has hundreds of skilled fighters under arms, but also because tens of thousands of Muslims have found its calls for violent change compelling. When dictators reigned supreme in Arab lands, al-Qa’ida could score points by emphasizing its struggle against despotism. When dictators like Mubarak fall, however, al-Qa’ida loses one of its best recruiting pitches: the repression Arab governments inflict on their citizens and the stagnant societies that result. The possible emergence of less repressive and more dynamic leaders would remove a popular issue from al-Qa’ida propagandists.

Although the word democracy itself often means different things to different audiences, polls suggest that the generic concept is quite popular in the Arab world, as befits a region that knows first-hand how brutal autocracy can be.²⁴ In contrast, Al-Qa’ida believes that democracy is blasphemous because it places man’s word above God’s.

Even more ominous for al-Qa’ida is the way in which Mubarak and Ben Ali fell. Al-Qa’ida’s narrative is that violence carried out in the name of God is the only way to force change. Further damaging al-Qa’ida’s message, change occurred without blows being struck first at the United States. Al-Qa’ida has long insisted that you must first destroy the region’s supposed puppetmaster in Washington (or Jerusalem) before change will come to Cairo or Tripoli. Events have shown idealistic young people dreaming of a new order—in, say, Jordan or Morocco—that you do not need to strike at Westerners and that peaceful change is possible.

²³ BBC News, “‘Airliners Plot’: The Allegations,” April 3, 2008, available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/7329221.stm; Riedel, *The Search for Al-Qaeda*, p. 131.

²⁴ See for example <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1874/egypt-protests-democracy-islam-influence-politics-islamic-extremism>

Finally, Bin Ladin must also have lamented that the youth of various Arab countries are leading the revolution. Young people, especially young men, are al-Qa'ida's key demographic, the ones al-Qa'ida propagandists expect to take up arms. For over a decade, al-Qa'ida portrayed its fighters as audacious and honorable defenders of Muslim lands. In some circles they are cool. Now youth in the Arab world are afire with ideas of freedom and non-violent action.

Though the revolutions make al-Qa'ida's message less compelling, it may still gain traction in the Arab world through greater freedom of operation. Arab tyranny often served U.S. purposes. U.S. counterterrorism officials have long praised countries like Egypt for their aggressive efforts against terrorism and their cooperation with the United States. Even Qaddafi – long derided as the “Mad Dog of the Middle East” – since 9/11 has been valued as a partner against al-Qa'ida.

New governments in the Arab world will not necessarily be anti-American, but if they take popular opinion into account, cooperation will not be as close as it had been with governments like Mubarak's. The security services that have fought al-Qa'ida and its affiliates have also imprisoned peaceful bloggers, beat up Islamist organizers to intimidate them, and censored pro-democracy newspapers. Indeed, one measure of how much progress the Arab regimes are making toward democracy will be how much these services are purged. New security officials will be inexperienced, and conspiracy theories about U.S. intelligence have run amok in the Arab world. U.S. intelligence officers would probably be seen as coup plotters rather than partners. Islamists are likely to be particularly suspicious of intelligence cooperation.

In addition, during the unrest some jails in Libya and Egypt have emptied, and the ranks of newly freed jihadists multiplied. In both countries, many of the jailed jihadists turned away from violence in the last decade, producing bitter polemics against al-Qa'ida (and an even more vitriolic al-Qa'ida response) in recent years. Nevertheless, among those released are some true believers in jihad who are willing to wreak havoc upon their perceived enemies.

Even in countries where the autocrats cling to power, security services are likely to be less effective against jihadists. At the very least, the security services of Morocco, Algeria, and other countries that have seen protests will make the democratic dissenters their top priority, not suspected terrorists.

For now, there is reason to hope that revolutions in the Arab world will end up a net plus for counterterrorism. But hope should be balanced with the recognition that in the short-term al-Qa'ida will gain operational freedom and that the United States and its allies need to act now if they are to prevent al-Qa'ida from reaping long-term benefits from the upheavals.

VI. Policy Recommendations

I would urge this subcommittee to consider several recommendations as it strives to improve U.S. homeland security. First, fighting the al-Qa'ida core in Pakistan should remain at the center of U.S. counterterrorism policy, even after Bin Ladin's death. Having a secure haven is often a make or break issue for terrorist groups, and al-Qa'ida's strength there is a deadly danger. Because of the danger this haven presents, and because

Pakistan is at best a fitful counterterrorism partner, the United States must continue an aggressive drone campaign. Drone strikes, however, are not a substitute for forcing Pakistan to crack down on terrorist groups and secure its own territory. Zazi, for example, managed to receive training after the drone strikes began in earnest, and other terrorist recruits can do so too.

Second, we need to consider how American foreign policy can lead to domestic radicalization. Killing an al-Qa'ida leader in Somalia can be a blow to the organization there, but the decision on whether to pull the trigger or not should also factor in the risk of radicalizing an immigrant group here at home, not just the operational benefit of removing one leader from the organization.

Third, Bin Ladin's death also offers a further opportunity to reduce links between the al-Qa'ida core and al-Qa'ida affiliates. Zawahiri does not have Bin Ladin's charisma, and in the past his leadership has been more polemical and divisive. Affiliates may be more reluctant to follow him, particularly if al-Qa'ida core fundraising efforts suffer after Bin Ladin's death and the drone campaign makes it difficult for Zawahiri to communicate regularly with affiliate leaders. Conversely, atrocities by one branch of al-Qa'ida discredit the core, as has happened with AQI.

Fourth, the United States needs to prepare for low-end threats as well as high-level dangers. For homeland defense purposes, the al-Qa'ida core represents an unusual set of leaders and operatives: most are highly skilled and dedicated, well-trained, and meticulous about operational security. Affiliate members, however, are often less careful -- their organizations grew up amidst a civil war, and accordingly focused more on maintaining an insurgency as opposed to a limited number of high profile terrorist attacks.

A vexing dilemma for U.S. policy concerns groups that may be moving toward al-Qa'ida but have not yet made the leap. Many al-Qa'ida affiliates always hated the United States and its allies and, even before they took on the al-Qa'ida label, had members who trained or worked with al-Qa'ida in a limited way. Their focus, however, was primarily on local issues. Because their groups had some ties to al-Qa'ida, the Bush and Obama administrations began to target them and encourage others to do so. As a result, the groups became more anti-American, creating a vicious circle. Administrations are damned either way: ignoring the group allows potential threat to grow worse and risks an attack from out of the blue. But taking them on may mean driving some deeper into al-Qa'ida's fold.

Fourth, U.S. intelligence and homeland defense should focus on "seam" areas -- where the U.S. homeland is attackable from outside the country, such as on airplanes transiting from airports overseas to U.S. soil. U.S. officials should continue to try to improve integration between domestic and foreign-focused agencies and, at the same time, ensure that domestic-focused agencies are in touch with the relevant non-U.S. agencies in key countries.

Fifth, at home the FBI and state officials should redouble efforts to know local Muslim communities and gain their trust. Counterterrorism involves not only drone attacks, but also social services for immigrant communities and courtesy calls to local religious leaders to hear their concerns and assure them that the United States continues to welcome them. Whether it be concerns over radicalization of Somali-Americans or

other recent immigrant groups, outreach and successful immigration is vital for counterterrorism.

Finally, U.S. counterterrorism policy must incorporate the “Arab spring” into its strategic planning, and U.S. regional policy toward the new regimes (and surviving old ones) must continue to emphasize counterterrorism. U.S. public diplomacy efforts should relentlessly highlight al-Qa’ida’s criticisms of democracy and emphasize the now-credible argument that reform can come through peaceful change. The message should be spread by television and radio, as always, but specific attention should be given to the internet given the importance of reaching young men in particular.

Washington also needs a new policy towards Islamists. Ignoring the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist movements seemed prudent to both Republican and Democratic administrations when they had little chance of gaining power. In particular, the United States should make it clear that it does not want these movements frozen out of government, but rather wants them to participate. The price for this participation is more moderate policies at home and abroad. Inevitably, this will lead to tension, as these Islamist groups seek policies that do not jibe with U.S. preferences, but their alienation could be a disaster for U.S. counterterrorism.

More quietly, the United States should renew efforts to train the intelligence and security forces of new regimes, particularly if there are widespread purges. The first step is simply to gain their trust, as the new leaders are likely to see their U.S. counterparts as bulwarks of the old order and a possible source of counterrevolution. Many of the security services’ leaders will be new to counterterrorism. Even more important, they will be unaccustomed to the difficult task of balancing civil liberties and aggressive efforts against terrorism. Here the FBI and Western domestic intelligence services have much to offer.

Recognizing these dilemmas and implementing (or continuing to implement) these policy recommendations will not end the threat from terrorism. However, they can make the United States more secure as the terrorism threat continues to evolve.