A New Index to Assess the Effectiveness of Al Qaeda

Introduction

12 years on from the devastating 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centres in New York, the Obama Administration claims that Al Qaeda is on the verge of destruction. However, the closure of 20 diplomatic institutions throughout the Middle East in August, the intensification of drone attacks in Yemen in the last months that have reportedly killed 34 high-level Al Qaeda suspects, the full-scale military campaign in Mali to drive out Al Qaeda and the ongoing presence of Al Qaeda among the Syrian opposition, suggest that the group is undergoing a resurgence. Continued and more nuanced counter-terrorism policy will be required to combat the threat the group presents. If Al Qaeda is indeed resurgent, does this represent an intelligence failure for the US Administration? Has it failed to assess the situation correctly? Or does it define the threat differently to other sources and does this reveal a gap between the White House and the intelligence community?

Confirmed Al Qaeda attacks have increased fourfold since 11 September 2001 compared to the number before and, the attack on the twin towers aside, the number of deaths as a result of Al Qaeda terrorist attacks has also increased considerably. The two recent complex operations to instigate prison breaks by Al Qaeda affiliates in Iraq and Pakistan show that training and execution have both improved, and all previous assessment must be judged with these statistics in mind. The claim that the organisation is dead, as the Obama administration has made, would apparently justify the decade of the 'war on terror' and the methods it has used to counter Al Qaeda, including drones, torture and extraordinary rendition. Indeed, the escalation of the recent drone strategy (Obama has increased the Bush Administration's drone strategy fivefold) is, we are told, proving more strategically successful than having American boots on the ground as several mid- to high-ranking Al Qaeda officials have been "neutralised." One of the biggest successes of Obama's presidency was the targeted killing of Al Qaeda's former *amir* (leader), Osama Bin Laden, on May 2 2011, by Navy SEALs of the U.S. Naval Special Warfare Development Group. However, even in death, Bin Laden is proving to be a legendary figure and something of a charismatic recruiter for Al Qaeda with

many Islamist groups all around the world labelling him *shaheed* (martyr). One of Bin Laden's greatest achievements was developing the Al Qaeda brand beyond that of the individual, to the extent that his death would strengthen it rather than kill it, and arguably render any decapitation strategy like Obama's drone programme redundant. Likewise, it can be expected that similar adulation would adorn Ayman al-Zawahri, the group's current *amir*, should Obama successfully kill the current occupier of the central position on the United States of America's much debated Disposition Matrix and it certainly would not spell the end of the group. According to the revelations of the intercepted conversation between al-Zawahri and Nasir al-Wuhayshi (Abu Basir), the current leader of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is both Al Qaeda's second in command and, one would assume, the future leader of the transnational salafi-jihadi group.

Since Al Qaeda Core's move from the Sudan back to Afghanistan and Pakistan in 1996, it developed a new model and entered a new phase with the aim of leading, guiding and inspiring others against enemies of Islam, but with as little burden of fighting as possible. The leader of Al Qaeda was to be seen as the leader of jihad in Islam and to provide religious rhetoric and discourse when necessary to justify the actions of others and to mobilise others towards the fulfilment of Al Qaeda's key objectives. A former senior Al Qaeda member framed this in a new but concise way when he said to Osama Bin Laden, "Be Khomeini for the Sunnis" and Al Qaeda can emulate his success. Bin Laden's main aim was to establish an 'Islamic State', but recognised that a step that must be fulfilled beforehand was the liberation of Palestine as it was the single issue that had the potential to unify the Muslim world. It is true that even secularists and liberals would likely rally behind this cause and agree with the argument, even if not with the action or the strategy to achieve it. To achieve these aims, there was a more pressing objective for Al Qaeda and that was to push American interests out of the Middle East. Bin Laden did not accept the idea of imperialism and did not see any Arab states as sovereign, instead viewing them as American puppets and, therefore, to push US interests out of the region would be to deprive Arab leaders of its support. Thus instead of the anti-colonialist hatred for America as purported by the Muslim Brotherhood or the Salafi notion that irresponsible freedom and uncontrolled democracy are the tools used to bring *fitna* (chaos), Bin Laden and Al Qaeda's rejection of the US is a political and strategic conclusion, based on the belief that the US is using the region for resources to build itself up as the world's only superpower. This brings it remarkably close to previous socialist and nationalist anti-imperialist perceptions of America that swept through the Middle East in

preceding decades. Al Qaeda's Islamist ideology is simply the latest framework to conceptualise this struggle and joins the other ideologies in being a response to underdevelopment. Jihad, as conceptualised by Bin Laden, is therefore different to that of organisational fighting groups like the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria (GIA), the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) or Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) for example, as it is based on a bigger scale struggle. With this in mind, it needs a charismatic leader who can hold transnational influence that transcends other political, ethnic or socioeconomic differences and symbols that can bind its followers together with those who are not openly supportive of the ideology.

Is it accurate to think about the organisation or campaigns led by Al Qaeda? It is clearly not just a "collection of ideas without a formal organisational structure" (Burke and Curtis), nor was it a "fully fledged hierarchical organisation with global ambitions from the very beginning" (Gunaratna). Bergen and Cruickshank's analysis in "Revisiting the Early Al Qaeda" was thorough and nuanced in its analysis but only focused on the development of the organisation until 1996. These expert analyses from distinguished scholars are valuable contributions to the literature on the matter, but with this new analytical framework, it is possible to not only reconceptualise the effectiveness of Al Qaeda since 9/11, but also to assess previous security and academic analyses of the group and consider its evolution throughout the 1990s and beyond.

This report will explain that Al Qaeda's effectiveness should not be judged by its actions or by its ability to avoid or survive counter-terrorism initiatives; rather, it should be judged by a complex matrix of six main indicators of effectiveness. These indicators are size, nature of organisational design, secrecy, power of representation, interests it protects and cohesion. It must be noted that this index can be used to judge the effectiveness of any jihadist group and that conclusions can be drawn not by focusing on just one indicator but rather by balancing the success and failure of all of them and investigating the interplay between them. By using this index, it will also be possible to anticipate its potential for future effectiveness and, by extension, recommendations for counter-terrorism strategy should be developed with these aspects in mind.

To analyse Al Qaeda using this index, it is necessary to clarify its current structure so that individual groups' added value to Al Qaeda's effectiveness can be assessed. Al Qaeda has a

general command led by Ayman al-Zawahri. It then has multiple regional commands including Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al Shabaab, Jabhat al Nusra, and several cells in Gaza and Egypt. In addition, affiliated but not official groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, Lashka-e Taiba (LeT) and Tehrik-e Taliban (TTP) in Pakistan, the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Southern Philippines, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in Southeast Asia and the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus may also be examined when relevant.

Size

There is huge controversy amongst intelligence personnel, governments, academics and journalists surrounding the size and structure of Al Qaeda. For example, it is clearly not just a collection of ideas without a formal organisational structure as Burke and Curtis claim, nor was it a fully-fledged hierarchical organisation with global ambitions from the very beginning, as Gunaratna would have us believe. The source of these failures to accurately portray Al Qaeda is a failure to define the group and the relation between any given local or regional group with the general command. This paper has a different point of view that considers the link between Al Qaeda's size and its ideology, not simply its organisational structure, as undetachable, because of the importance of Al Qaeda as a vanguard in the conflict against the West.

To accurately analyse the size and therefore the effectiveness of Al Qaeda, it is necessary to elucidate who can be considered a member and discuss which individuals or groups contribute to Al Qaeda's militant efforts in the global jihad. There is an important distinction to be made between members and partisans. Members are a relatively small number of individuals who give *bay'ah* (religious oath) to Al Qaeda leaders and to the group. We believe that there are only several thousand of these members worldwide. By comparison there are over one hundred thousand partisans all around the world, who contribute to Al Qaeda's aims and subscribe to its ideology. This populace encompasses individuals, cells, groups and even criminal networks and operations, who are perhaps fully-fledged members of their own groups but are not official members of Al Qaeda. They represent an integral part of Al Qaeda's strategy and must therefore be considered part of its size.

For example, the Taliban in Afghanistan, which constituted tens of thousands of tough guerrilla warfare trained fighters, provided a perfect safe haven in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region for about 200 Al Qaeda members to survive, organise and communicate. Indeed, Mullah Omar, the Taliban's leader, sacrificed his own state and power to give sanctuary to Al Qaeda. These forces, and others like them such as the Tehrik-i Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which must be engaged in battle in order to get through to the Al Qaeda members, are a key element of Al Qaeda's effectiveness and therefore must be counted in the group's size.

Jabhat al Nusra has over 5000 members and a further 5000 partisans and makes a clear distinction between them, though lost significant numbers to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), which is in continued disagreement and conflict with the Al Qaeda chain of command. AQIM has over 800 Algerian members and a further 3000 in Northern Mali, but has lost over 600 in the recent conflict, though in comparison with Jabhat al Nusra, Al Qaeda's North African branch makes very little distinction between its membership types.

Al Qaeda's size is a key element of its effectiveness. It has engaged the West in the 'war on terror' for over a decade, with a huge economic, political and human cost. France was required to launch a full-scale military campaign and drum up support from a coalition, just to drive out 3000 partisans from Mali and yet without resounding success, instead simply relocating them to six different countries, spreading the threat. A key mistake of the 'war on terror' was engaging the enemy without having made an accurate estimation of the size of the opposing forces. This constitutes a real success for Al Qaeda; secrecy and continued transformative evolution within Al Qaeda's pool of regular combatants complicates the making of an accurate assessment of its size. In this way, it is likely to continue to be effective.

Effectiveness Assessment: 65%

Nature of Organisational Design

The main distinction between Al Qaeda's former organisational design and its current state is the nature of the relationship between its mandatory and voluntary membership and represents a key element of its strategy with huge implications for its command structure and therefore its effectiveness. Al Qaeda developed and broke away from the old *jihadist*

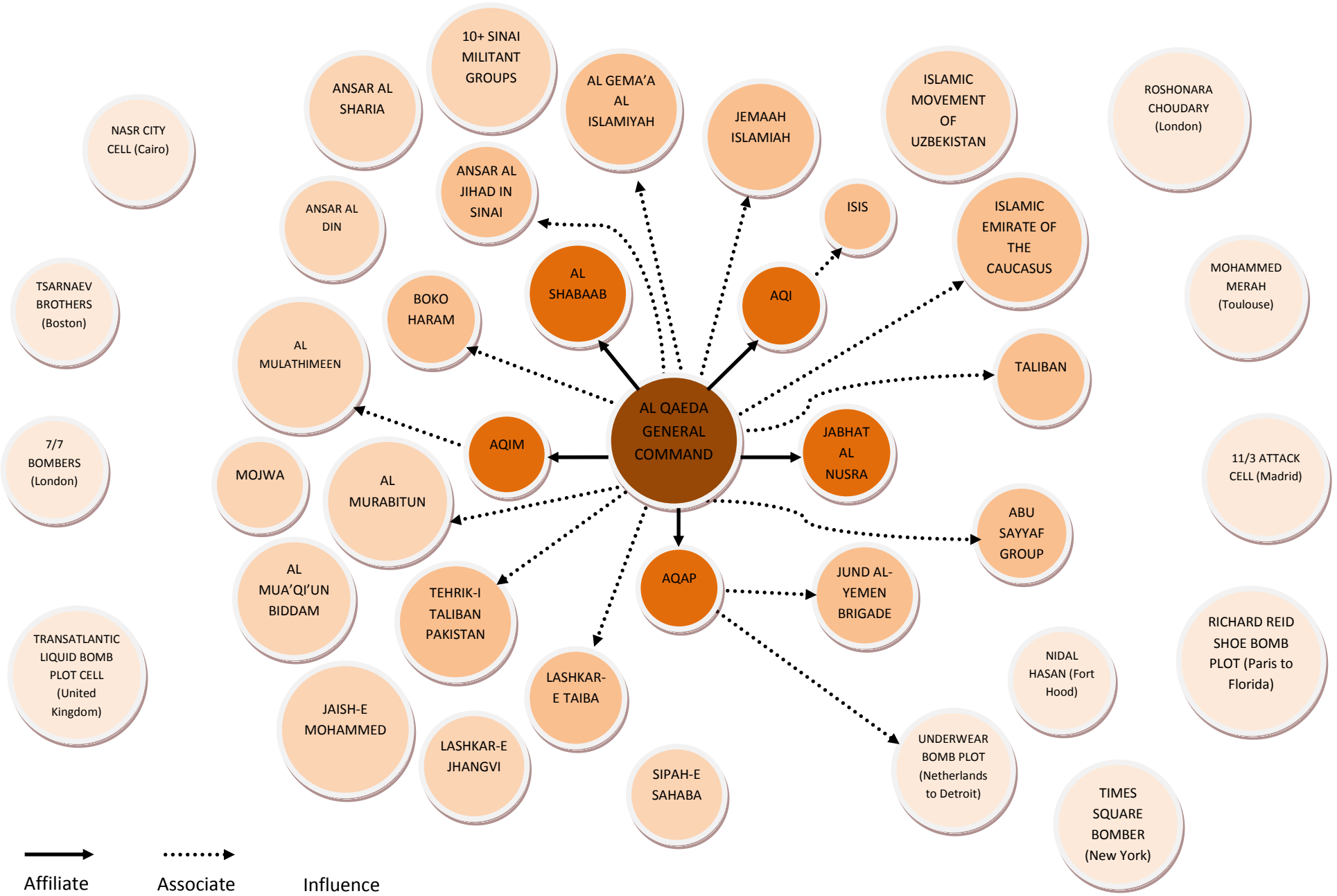
movement model of mandatory membership. This was a necessary evolution as groups such as the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) or al-Zawahri's old group Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) had only mandatory membership and were reasonably easy for the state to clamp down on.

Al Qaeda now has a small number of mandatory members who swear *bay'ah*, but its aims of being a vanguard for the global Sunni Islamist movement stipulate that it accepts another level of relations with different voluntary individuals and groups. Through training and provision of resources and prestige, Al Qaeda can help small groups and these small groups can help Al Qaeda achieve its aims on a regional level. In this way, Al Qaeda's strategy has impacted its loose ideology.

Jabhat al-Nusra, Al Qaeda's regional command in Syria, is a very good example of this. While having its own structure of 5000 mandatory members, below this it has the same number of voluntary partisans, many of whom come from abroad to fight, but still under its official command as explained by the previous indicator. While these two groups look the same to outsiders, there is a long process for them to become full members, whereby they need to have fought on two different front lines, have two referees and then must be invited to give *bay'ah* to Al Qaeda. The nature of this organisational design is due to urban guerrilla warfare nature of the conflict: to remain effective and to survive, Al Qaeda must be very fluid and keep its diversity.

With this model, Al Qaeda can effectively influence any conflict, be the major stakeholder across a variety of regions and represent a diverse range of interests. This allows it to stay in control of the global war and the Islamist narrative and protect its own interests first and foremost, crucially enabling it to adapt quickly to any contextual development. This means that Al Qaeda can operate in the Sahel, the Arabian Peninsula, the Levant or even Europe and maintain the most crucial element of its organisational design: the fluidity of its network.

Visualisation of Al Qaeda's network (not exhaustive)



This aspect of the index is very closely related to its size, but also has key implications for its use of secrecy, its power of representation, its cohesion and, ultimately, its effectiveness. Al Qaeda's fluidity and its ability to successfully regionalise have transformed the organisation into a weapon itself rather than simply a hierarchical structure, enabling it to constitute a terrorist threat all around the world. Thus, Al Qaeda must be given credit for its effective nature of organisational design.

Effectiveness Assessment: 80%

Secrecy

The theory of secrecy used by jihadist groups since the 1960s was one of limited communication, little media interaction and a high threshold of trust required to be established with members before details were shared. This was caused by state treatment of jihadist groups, but had severe implications for their size and nature of their organisational design, as well as their ability to communicate their group and stay in control of the narrative surrounding a particular conflict. Al Qaeda developed its conceptualisation and implementation of secrecy to go beyond the old jihadist group theory. This was a necessary development because of its desire to conduct a global war and, therefore, the necessity of having strong relationships with the media, prominent and recognisable leaders, and good communication with the masses. Al Qaeda loosened its security measures in 1996 so that it could meet with other leaders and this was a necessary sacrifice to balance its global strategy.

Following the attacks on 11 September 2001, this became more difficult as Al Qaeda not only needed to protect itself from the inevitable aggressive 'war on terror' onslaught using robust security strategy and tactics, it also needed to manage conflicts like Iraq and continue to mobilise thousands of fighters and therefore accepted many partisans without performing proper checks. In other words, it sacrificed secrecy in order to boost recruitment. The implication of this, particularly in Iraq, was the intake of many unsuitable thugs who took advantage of Al Qaeda's reputation in order to commit crimes, and ultimately, the group's reputation paid a heavy price. This balance between quality and quantity of partisans was therefore one of the most complicated issues facing Al Qaeda on an operational and recruitment level.

The US drone strategy in the last decade has had similar effects, as it has prompted a lack of balance in the Al Qaeda ranks. In the first two years of Barack Obama's presidency, the US successfully killed thirty Al Qaeda leaders using drones. The failure of Al Qaeda to protect itself represents a huge security disaster. Not striking the right balance between secrecy and openness, protection and communication - a key issue for any organisation in a conflict - meant that it did not keep the location of its safe havens secret from its enemies. Through leaks, which have led to most Al Qaeda planned attacks being foiled before they happen, or through the absence of tip-offs, which has led to a significant proportion of its leadership being killed, Al Qaeda continues to suffer from security failures.

In Syria, Al Qaeda appeared to have learnt the lessons of their security failures during the Iraq conflict and the leader of Jabhat al Nusra, Abu Mohammad al-Julani, upped its secrecy. However, this has also caused problems for Al Qaeda as the leaders are not known in the media nor among the Syrian people, and the group's vision and aims have not been successfully communicated. This has led to complaints that they are a "leadership of ghosts" and even accusations that they are fighting on behalf of the regime, a key hit to their credibility.

Since the death of Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda has lost an important symbol and media face. This has huge negative ramifications for the nature of its relationship with Muslims around the world, who are told they are led by this vanguard but are in fact unsure of the identity of its leaders. It has tried to continue the brand that bin Laden created with his legendary personal story and Al Qaeda's successful terrorist attack on 9/11, but fails to understand that this is no longer working and that people do not buy it. An alternative strategy for coping with the negative effects of its secrecy seems to be its aggressive fighting style in hot zones, capitalising on the environment in an effort to improve its recognition, but even this reputation for fighting the regime has not carried the group in Syria.

For AQIM, secrecy is not so much a policy as an approach and has been a key component of forming the group's mafia-style operations. It has assumed extreme secrecy and no communications whatsoever with the people in the region. This is clearly affecting the group's recruitment and cohesion and is, in essence, a return to the former jihadist model found in Egypt or Algeria in the 1980s and 1990s.

Al Qaeda grew quickly after 9/11, but had it had a robust yet fluid secrecy strategy that was synthesised with its regionalisation, it could have become even bigger. Simply judging Al Qaeda by its own aims and vision, it failed drastically in Iraq, currently has fewer than 200 members in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, can claim thousands of active fighters in Syria but fall short of the numbers that the Free Syrian Army has attracted, and now has between three and four thousand fighters in the Maghreb (around 800 in Algeria and 3000 in Northern Mali, including those belonging to affiliated groups), though is nowhere near achieving critical mass in any of those areas. A further key problem that Al Qaeda faces is its inability to control any mosques, historically a principal way for Islamist groups to recruit, raise funds, establish authority, communicate with the people and control the manufacturing of the narrative. Its illegal status and its reputation make this impossible and also severely detract from its religious legitimacy. While the group's leaders claim to fight for the masses, they are in essence isolated from them. Al Qaeda is thus ineffective when judged by its use of secrecy, so much so that it negatively impacts other elements of this index.

Effectiveness Assessment: 35%

Power of Representation

Al Qaeda claims, wrongly, to be the only true representative of Muslim Sunni people all around the world. Its old model appeared to be one of representing all Muslims against all others, but in recent years, this has become more exclusivist and along sectarian lines, claiming to represent just Sunni Muslims, particularly in regions such as Pakistan, Syria, Yemen and Iraq where there is a notable Shi'a population. This development has taken place since the Iraq conflict and is now more obvious than ever before. Al Qaeda has, however, failed as Sunni community interests per se do not exist and sectarianism is not a conscious part of their identity. Rather Al Qaeda needed to initially create a Sunni consciousness and develop artificial interests in order to have an impact. This is most apparent in Zarqawi's 2004 letter to al-Zawahri, suggesting to "recruit coward Sunnis by fighting Shi'as." Indeed Al Qaeda's definition of Sunni is very narrow and ignores *sufi* and *ash'ari* minorities. This index shows that this is indicative of Al Qaeda's larger failure to properly represent those it claims to and that, by being violent and using terrorism against all minorities, it has alienated a significant proportion of its potential support base.

This was very ineffective strategically as it significantly reduced the future recruitment capabilities of the group. Although it can be seen as a minor tactical success in Syria, as it has tapped into the frustrated Sunni youth around the world and can claim to represent all Syrians against the despotic Assad state, it means the group is now not fighting principally against the West, its main enemy, and will continue to sustain big human and economic losses. In comparison with the successful Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union, the conflict that gave birth to Al Qaeda and drew on a broad range of Islamists from around the world, the current conflict in Syria has actually attracted very few partisans to Al Qaeda's cause and must be deemed a failed recruitment strategy and failure when examined against Al Qaeda's core aims. Moreover, it fails to recognise that although this model for recruitment may succeed during war, it will fail during peacetime.

Al Qaeda thinks that the war against the United States of America, the perceived key supporter and protector of Israel, and against all Arab political systems, who are not only supported by the West and not truly Islamic but also have either official or de facto peace treaties with Israel, shows that it is the only party that truly represents Muslims because it is defending Palestine and trying to liberate it. Indeed, every conflict is spun to suggest "the road to Jerusalem goes through Washington/Cairo/Baghdad" and even Kabul before that. In truth, Al Qaeda has never acted against Israel and even the Palestinians it claims to represent think that Al Qaeda is a threat to their cause.

Indeed, Al Qaeda represents a tiny number of Muslims and must be deemed ineffective. It fails to capitalise on other things that do matter to Muslims in each respective country, largely ignore tribal, ethnic and regional differences and instead focus on fighting. The increasing sentiment in Libya, indicative of many other locales, is that Sunni Muslims do not feel represented by Al Qaeda whatsoever. Its regionalisation strategy to establish multiple franchises has been successful in some regards, but it must be concluded that, in terms of power of representation, it is ineffective on both a regional and global level. Al Qaeda has an adequate power of representation in very hot conflicts, like the current Syria crisis, but is otherwise very ineffective in this regard. Indeed, the most damaging element to Al Qaeda in the last decade, Zarqawi's leadership of AQI, from which it is yet to recover, has affected it most in this aspect.

Effectiveness Assessment: 20%

Interests it Protects

First and foremost, Al Qaeda protects its own interests. These can be broken down into its long-term, mid-term and short-term interests as follows:

Short-term:	*Mid-term:*	*Long-term:*
To continue waging jihad	To push the United States of America out of the Middle East	To liberate Palestine
To create chaos upon which to capitalize	To establish different Islamist states/emirates	To restore the *Khilafah*
To expand, both geographically and numerically	To defeat Arab dictators and regimes	
To establish itself/remain as the vanguard of Sunni Muslims		
To protect Islam		
To survive		

However, few of these interests are also the interests of the 22 Arab Muslim-majority countries, let alone the general interests of Sunni Muslim minority communities around the world. Even if they occasionally share general ideas, they have different interpretations and certainly different methods that do not tend to include violence and terrorism. This therefore brings Al Qaeda into conflict with a range of domestic groups in the countries in which it operates. Al Qaeda claim not just to protect the interests of Muslim-majority states but also the societies found within them. In reality, a tiny proportion of these societies support these general interests and therefore Al Qaeda does not represent them. By comparison, the waves of nationalism, socialism and pan-Arabism that swept the Middle East in preceding decades represented and mobilized a much greater proportion of these societies and, therefore, Al Qaeda must be seen as ineffective in this regard.

That said, Al Qaeda has been very effective at placing itself in strategic positions in conflicts. Even without formal agreements with other countries, it sometimes serves its interests, which in turn, allows it to be protected from an otherwise hostile party. For example, the US

administration claimed that Iran aided Al Qaeda financially in 2003 and supported militias inside Afghanistan and Iraq that carried out attacks against American forces. By having the same enemy, Iran and Al Qaeda were placed on the same side and Al Qaeda initially protected Shi'a interests. Likewise, until late 2007, Syrian president Bashar al-Assad supported AQI in its fight against the West and 90% of foreign fighters to Iraq came through Syria, smuggled through five different ports of entry, with Assad even turning a blind eye to guest houses provided for some of them. Assad did not support AQI's Sunni or Salafi-jihadi ideology or aims, but they had a common enemy at that time. When the Iraqi civil war broke out, Assad promptly ended his support for AQI because he was represented more by its opposition, the Shi'as. In the current conflict in Syria, Al Qaeda fights the Kurdish population, which like most minorities, falls on Assad's side. By doing so, it is inadvertently helping Turkey. Turkey will be therefore be unlikely to intervene against Al Qaeda as the group is in fact doing something that benefits it. Al Qaeda clearly does not care about helping Turkey and sees it as a Westernised puppet state, but will continue fighting the Kurds and therefore not receive any opposition from Turkey. In the game of interests, this is tremendously effective, as it can allow the group to buy time and establish a safe haven, giving it an opportunity to build capacity.

Understandably, this causes many problems: Syrian minorities support Assad despite having very little in common with his Ba'athist politics because they know that their situation would be worse were Al Qaeda to assume state control. Likewise, in the Al Anbar governate of Iraq, Nouri al Maliki helped establish the Sahawat, an organization of tribal chiefs, to fight against Al Qaeda and aim to remove it from the region, and achieved much success because its interests did not align with those of Al Qaeda. Similarly, in Northern Mali, although the locals do not particularly support the government, as they are happy to get rid of Al Qaeda, they perceive the French intervention positively.

Thus, we can see that Al Qaeda is somewhat effective in terms of the interests that it protects, but not overwhelmingly so. Its manipulation of terms such as sovereignty and mobilising general grievances such as the Iraq War or the Israel-Palestine conflict improve its effectiveness, but ultimately it is yet to truly represent the societies in which it has a regional presence.

Effectiveness Assessment: 40%

Cohesion and Integration

Maintaining cohesion when combining people from a number of different backgrounds is a key aspect to the effectiveness of any group. Al Qaeda has to combine Arabs with non-Arabs, strike a balance between those with different kinds of membership and, increasingly, welcome foreign partisans into its ranks.

In Somalia, for example, Al Shabaab members and indigenous fighters are notorious for not accepting foreigners, even those with Somali heritage, because of existing tribal fault lines. The ideological draw of salafi-jihadism and the group integrity of Al Qaeda is not strong enough to overcome such differences. AQIM also faces integration problems, where MOJWA was initially created from AQIM members who had left the group because of the perception that the leadership was dominated by Algerians. Mokhtar Belmokhtar, an Algerian, subsequently left AQIM to lead Al Mulathimeen, then took his former men to create al-Mua'qi'oon Biddam, the group that took over 800 hostages at In Amenas in its first major operation. This group then joined with MOJWA to form Al Murabitun and has claimed to be part of Al Qaeda, though continues to refuse links with AQIM. This is a clear indication of Al Qaeda's failure to integrate various jihadist groups in North West Africa. In April 2013, the leader of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), Abu Bakr al Baghdadi announced that Jabhat al Nusra was an extension of the ISI and announced the creation of the ISIS. Jabhat al Nusra's leader, Abu Mohammad al-Julani, reacted by rejecting this declaration, resulting in an ongoing dispute between the ISIS leadership and Ayman al-Zawahri.

By contrast, AQAP has successfully reorganised after the 2006 defeat of the Saudi Arabian Al Qaeda affiliate at the hands of the Saudi authorities. AQAP looks to be the most cohesive of all Al Qaeda regional commands, and it is therefore unsurprising that it offers the most eminent threat to Western security.

To integrate into the Al Qaeda network, acceptance of its hierarchical structure is of paramount importance. It is clearly difficult for it to integrate different elements of its global structure together with the general command, especially with its relatively new regionalisation strategy, where there are also regional commands with different political, social and historical dynamics at work.

Al Qaeda's decentralised strategy and structure provides it with a constant challenge. As new groups form and demand inclusion in its command and control structure, its precarious balancing act gets affected by new micro-dynamics. For example, there are allegedly around 15 active groups in the Sinai Peninsula with possible affiliation to Al Qaeda, and two groups with undeniable links: Ansar al Jihad fi Sinai and Ramzi Mowafi's Ansar al Sharia. Their influence is likely to grow in the power vacuum that recent Egyptian developments have created. At some point, some of these can be expected to be incorporated into Al Qaeda's global structure, but it is unlikely to be a smooth process. The balance between members and partisans is crucial to Al Qaeda's success, and if it grows too quickly, this will create problems for it like it did in Iraq. With the current Egyptian leadership of Al Qaeda, if its aims are perceived to change and do not continue to reflect the interests of its other affiliates, it can be expected that the group will become even more unstable.
Al Qaeda has an impressive network and can boast extensive operations but problems of micromanagement and the difficulties in relationships between individuals, groups, regional branches and the network itself means that it is not effective as it could be.

Effectiveness Assessment: 50%

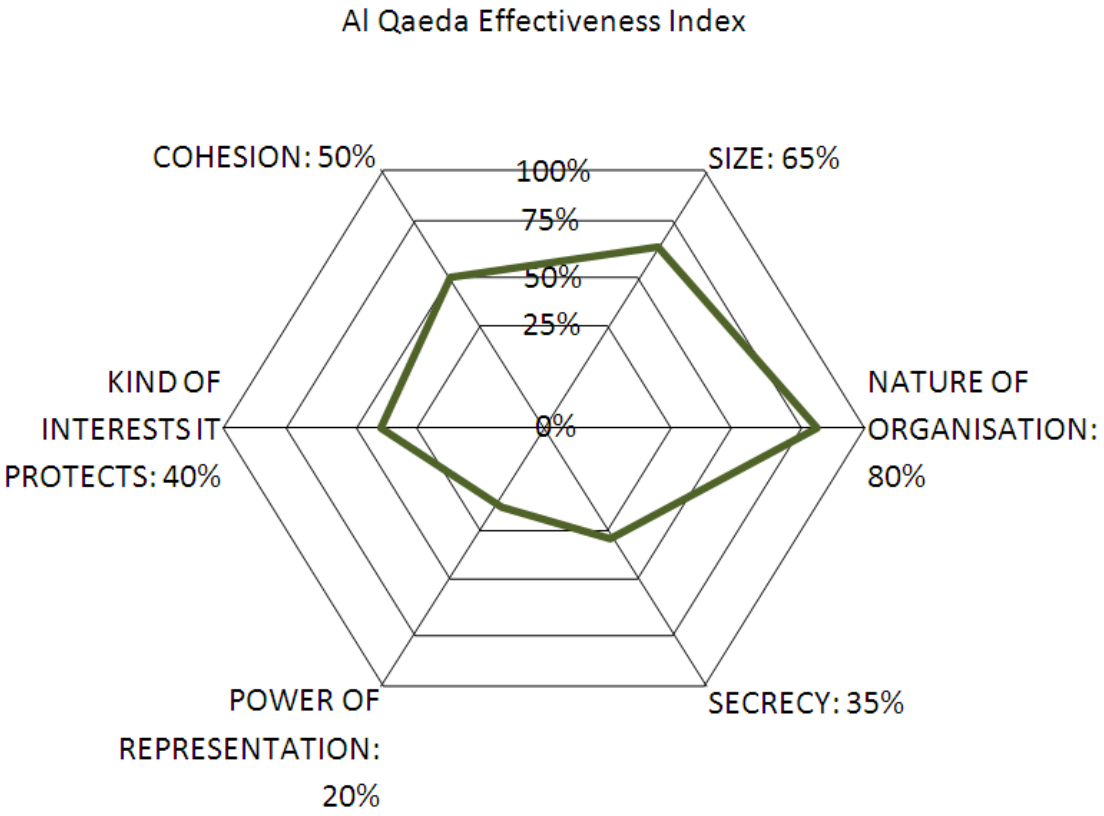
Conclusion

This index allows for a more accurate and nuanced analysis of the effectiveness of any terrorist organisation and can even be employed to analyse a group's evolving effectiveness across different time periods. As has been shown in this report, the six indicators - size, nature of organisation, secrecy, power of representation, interests it protects and cohesion - are all closely related and can impact a group's effectiveness in a variety of ways and to differing extents in different locations.

Despite President Obama's claims on his 2012 campaign trail that Al Qaeda had been "decimated" and was "on the run", this report shows that the group's regionalisation, evolution and reaction to regional conflict means it remains a threat to global stability and continues to be resilient and fluid. The implications of Al Qaeda's regionalisation and metastasising to smaller but potentially stronger offshoots around the world are a focus on regional conflicts and agendas, increased instability in regions in which the group has a presence and the potential for Western targets to be hit as Al Qaeda continue to develop its base and rebuild. The general command, likely in the FATA region in Pakistan, may indeed

be less effective now than previously due to the Obama administration's redoubled drone strategy but it is still effectively setting the strategic direction for these global affiliates and the ideological direction for more loosely affiliated groups, cells and lone wolves around the world.

Much focus is afforded to Al Qaeda's 20-year strategic plan, theorised by jihadists, which surfaced in 2005 and involved "an awakening of Muslims...following a US-led 'war on Islam'...a metastasisation to different regional commands...a focus on the Levant region...and the downfall of Arab tyrant regimes between 2000 and 2013." The next seven years, according to these sources, are to be the phase in which Al Qaeda establishes a series of Islamic states thanks to a weakened Western influence in the Middle East followed by an all-out war against unbelievers. Despite apparent successes in the first phases of this plan, and the further unwritten success of its fluidity, Al Qaeda has made several key strategic failures as highlighted in this effectiveness index. In particular, these relate to its use of secrecy in post-Arab Spring environments which demand a greater level of openness, its inability to achieve critical mass in any single locations due to its ineffective protection of a variety of interests, its precarious balance between members and partisans, its lack of cohesion both within regional groups and across its network and its failure to truly create a Sunni consciousness. Al Qaeda has made several critical mistakes that have severely affected its effectiveness, but it is clear that it remains a bigger threat than Obama would have his administration believe.



This index shows Al Qaeda's current effectiveness and therefore how to reduce its effectiveness both now and in the future, as the situation changes. It gives a much better strategy than undue focus on Al Qaeda's numerical or geographical capabilities or on the leaders of its general command, because it allows for counter-terrorism policy to be more tactical and nuanced than previous efforts in the so-called 'war on terror' including the current drone strategy. As a tool, it can be implemented on any scale and at any fixed point in time, so that even the evolution of a group's effectiveness can be accurately assessed.

By Noman Benotman and Jonathan Russell