Reassessing the Threat: the Future of al Qa'ida and its Implications for Homeland Security.

House Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing and Terrorism Risk Assessment.

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Peter Bergen, senior fellow at the New America Foundation, CNN's national security analyst, fellow at New York University's Center on Law & Security and adjunct lecturer at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

I. **Long Term Strategic Weaknesses of al Qaeda.**

(With thanks to Paul Cruickshank of New York University's Center on Law & Security for his input in this section).

After September 11, there was considerable fear in the West that we were headed for a clash of civilizations with the Muslim world led by Osama bin Laden, who would entice masses of young Muslims into his jihadist movement. But the religious leaders and former militants who are now critiquing Al Qaeda's terrorist campaign--both in the Middle East and in Muslim enclaves in the West-- make that less likely. The potential repercussions for Al Qaeda cannot be underestimated because, unlike most mainstream Muslim leaders, Al Qaeda's new critics have the jihadist credentials to make their criticisms bite.

Why have clerics and militants once considered allies by Al Qaeda's leaders turned against them? To a large extent, it is because Al Qaeda and its affiliates have increasingly adopted the doctrine of *takfir*, by which they claim the right to decide who is a "true" Muslim. Al Qaeda's Muslim critics know what results from this *takfiri* view: First, the radicals deem some Muslims apostates; after that, the radicals start killing them. This fatal progression happened in both Algeria and Egypt in the 1990s. It is now taking place even more dramatically in Iraq, where Al Qaeda's suicide bombers have killed more than 10,000 Iraqis, most of them targeted simply for being Shia. Recently, Al Qaeda in Iraq has turned its fire on Sunnis who oppose its diktats, a fact not lost on the Islamic world's Sunni majority.

Additionally, Al Qaeda and its affiliates have killed thousands of Muslim civilians elsewhere since September 11: hundreds of ordinary Afghans killed every year by the Taliban, dozens of Saudis killed by terrorists since 2003, scores of Jordanians massacred at a wedding at a U.S. hotel in Amman in November 2005. Even those sympathetic to Al Qaeda have started to notice. "Excuse me Mr. Zawahiri but who is it who is killing with Your Excellency's blessing, the innocents in Baghdad, Morocco and Algeria?" one supporter asked in an online Q&A with Al Qaeda's deputy leader in April that was posted widely on jihadist websites. All this has created a dawning recognition among Muslims that the ideological virus that unleashed September 11 and the terrorist attacks in London and Madrid is the same virus now wreaking havoc in the Muslim world, a trend that Paul Cruickshank of NYU's Center on Law & Security and I detailed in a cover story in *The New Republic* called "The Unraveling" in June 2008.

Around the sixth anniversary of September 11, Al Qaeda received a blow from one of bin Laden's erstwhile heroes, Sheikh Salman Al Oudah, a Saudi religious scholar. Al Oudah addressed Al Qaeda's leader on MBC, a widely watched Middle East TV network: "My brother Osama, how much blood has been spilt? How many innocent people, children, elderly, and women have been killed ... in the name of Al Qaeda? Will you be happy to meet God Almighty carrying the burden of these hundreds of thousands or millions [of victims] on your back?"

What was noteworthy about Al Oudah's statement was that it was not simply a condemnation of terrorism, or even of September 11, but that it was a personal rebuke, which clerics in the Muslim world have shied away from. In Saudi Arabia in February, I met with Al Oudah, who rarely speaks to Western reporters. Dressed in the long black robe

fringed with gold that is worn by those accorded respect in Saudi society, Al Oudah recalled meeting with bin Laden--a "simple man without scholarly religious credentials, an attractive personality who spoke well," he said--in the northern Saudi region of Qassim in 1990. Al Oudah explained that he had criticized Al Qaeda for years but until now had not directed it at bin Laden himself: "Most religious scholars have directed criticism at acts of terrorism, not a particular person. ... I don't expect a positive effect on bin Laden personally as a result of my statement. It's really a message to his followers."

Al Oudah's rebuke was also significant because he is considered one of the fathers of the Sahwa, the fundamentalist awakening movement that swept through Saudi Arabia in the '80s. His sermons against the U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia following Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait helped turn bin Laden against the United States. And bin Laden told me in 1997 that Al Oudah's 1994 imprisonment by the Saudi regime was one of the reasons he was calling for attacks on U.S. targets. Al Oudah is also one of 26 Saudi clerics who, in 2004, handed down a religious ruling urging Iraqis to fight the U.S. occupation of their country. He is, in short, not someone Al Qaeda can paint as an American sympathizer or a tool of the Saudi government.

Tellingly, Al Qaeda has not responded to Al Oudah's critique, but the research organization Political Islam Online tracked postings on six Islamist websites and the websites of Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya TV networks in the week after Al Oudah's statements; it found that more than two-thirds of respondents reacted favorably.

More doubt about Al Qaeda was planted in the Muslim world when Sayyid Imam Al Sharif, the ideological godfather of Al Qaeda, sensationally withdrew his support in a book written last year from his prison cell in Cairo. Al Sharif, generally known as "Dr. Fadl," was an architect of the doctrine of *takfir*, arguing that Muslims who did not support armed jihad or who participated in elections were *kuffar*, unbelievers.

So it was an unwelcome surprise for Al Qaeda's leaders when Dr. Fadl's new book, *Rationalization of Jihad*, was serialized in an independent Egyptian newspaper in November. The incentive for writing the book, he explained, was that "jihad ... was blemished with grave Sharia violations during recent years. ... [N]ow there are those who kill hundreds, including women and children, Muslims and non Muslims in the name of Jihad!" Dr. Fadl ruled that Al Qaeda's bombings in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere were illegitimate and that terrorism against civilians in Western countries was wrong. He also took on Al Qaeda's leaders directly in an interview with the *Al Hayat* newspaper. "[Ayman al] Zawahiri and his Emir bin Laden [are] extremely immoral," he said. "I have spoken about this in order to warn the youth against them, youth who are seduced by them, and don't know them."

Dr. Fadl's harsh words attracted attention throughout the Arabic-speaking world; even a majority of Zawahiri's own Jihad group jailed in Egyptian prisons signed on and promised to end their armed struggle. In December, Zawahiri released an audiotape lambasting his former mentor, accusing him of being in league with the "bloodthirsty betrayer" Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak; and, in a 200-page book titled *The Exoneration*, published in March, he replied at greater length, portraying Dr. Fadl as a prisoner trying to curry favor with Egypt's security services and the author of "a desperate attempt (under American sponsorship) to confront the high tide of the jihadist awakening."

Is Al Qaeda going to dissipate as a result of the criticism from its former mentors and allies? Despite the recent internal criticism, probably not in the short term. Last summer, U.S. intelligence agencies judged that Al Qaeda had "regenerated its [U.S.] Homeland attack capability" in Pakistan's tribal areas. Since then, Al Qaeda and the Taliban have only entrenched their position further, launching a record number of suicide attacks in Pakistan in the past year. Afghanistan, Algeria, and Iraq also saw record numbers of suicide attacks in 2007 (though the group's capabilities have deteriorated in Iraq of late). Meanwhile, Al Qaeda is still able to find recruits in the West. In November, Jonathan Evans, the head of Britain's domestic intelligence agency MI5, said that record numbers of U.K. residents are now supportive of Al Qaeda, with around 2,000 posing a "direct threat to national security and public safety." That means that Al Qaeda will threaten the United States and its allies for many years to come.

However, encoded in the DNA of apocalyptic jihadist groups like Al Qaeda are the seeds of their own long-term destruction: Their victims are often Muslim civilians; they don't offer a positive vision of the future (but rather the prospect of Taliban-style regimes from Morocco to Indonesia); they keep expanding their list of enemies, including any Muslim who doesn't precisely share their world view; and they seem incapable of becoming politically successful movements because their ideology prevents them from making the real-world compromises that would allow them to engage in genuine politics.

Which means that the repudiation of Al Qaeda's leaders by its former religious, military, and political guides will help hasten the implosion of the jihadist terrorist movement. As Churchill remarked after the battle of El Alamein in 1942, which he saw as turning the tide in World War II, "[T]his is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

These new critics, in concert with mainstream Muslim leaders, have created a powerful coalition countering Al Qaeda's ideology. According to Pew polls, support for Al Qaeda has been dropping around the Muslim world in recent years. The numbers supporting suicide bombings in Indonesia, Lebanon, and Bangladesh, for instance, have dropped by half or more in the last five years. In Saudi Arabia, only 10 percent now have a favorable view of Al Qaeda, according to a December poll by Terror Free Tomorrow, a Washington-based think tank. Following a wave of suicide attacks in Pakistan in the past year, support for suicide operations amongst Pakistanis has dropped to 9 percent (it was 33 percent five years ago).

Unsurprisingly, Al Qaeda's leaders have been thrown on the defensive. In December, bin Laden released a tape that stressed that "the Muslim victims who fall during the operations against the infidel Crusaders ... are not the intended targets." Bin Laden warned the former mujahedin now turning on Al Qaeda that, whatever their track records as jihadists, they had now committed one of the "nullifiers of Islam," which is helping the "infidels against the Muslims."

II. What is the status of al Qaeda the organization today?

Despite the fact that al Qaeda, as described above, is losing the long term ideological battle, the group has rebuilt its capacity as an insurgent/terrorist organization along the Afghan-Pakistan border and remains capable of launching large-scale terrorist attacks in the West.

Evidence for the resiliency of the al Qaeda organization.

1. The London attacks of July 2005, and al Qaeda's alarming reach into the United Kingdom.

The London bombings on July 7, 2005 were a classic al Qaeda plot. A British government report published in 2006 explains that the ringleader, Mohammed Siddique Khan, visited Afghanistan in the late 1990s and Pakistan on two occasions in 2003 and 2004, spending a total of several months in the country. The report goes on to note that Khan "had some contact with al Qaida figures" in Pakistan, and is "believed to have had some relevant training in a remote part of Pakistan, close to the Afghan border" during his two-week visit in 2003. According to the report, Khan was also in "suspicious" contact with individuals in Pakistan in the four months immediately before he led the London attacks.

Further, Khan appeared on a videotape that aired on Al Jazeera two months after the attacks. On that tape Khan says "I'm going to talk to you in a language that you understand. Our words are dead until we give them life with our blood."" He goes on to describe Osama bin Laden and his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri as "today's heroes." Khan's statements were made on a videotape that bore the distinctive logo of As Sahab, "The Clouds," which is the television production arm of al Qaeda. Khan's appearance on the As Sahab videotape shows that he met up with members of al Qaeda's media team who are based on the Afghan-Pakistan border. In 2006 a similar videotape of another one of the London suicide bombers appeared also made by As Sahab, further evidence of al Qaeda's role in the bombings.

The grim lesson of the London attack is that al Qaeda was able to conduct simultaneous bombings in a major European capital thousands of miles from its base on the Afghan-Pakistan border. While far from a 9/11-style attack, the London bombings showed the kind of planning and ability to hit targets far from its home base seen in pre-9/11 al Qaeda attacks such as the one mounted on the USS Cole in Yemen in 2000. Al Qaeda has therefore recovered sufficient strength that it can now undertake multiple, successful bombings aimed at targets in the West.

Similarly, the plot that was foiled in the U.K. in August 2006 to bring down half a dozen American airliners with liquid explosives, an event that would have rivaled 9/11 in magnitude had it succeeded, was directed by al Qaeda from Pakistan, according to the January 2007 testimony of Lt. General Michael Maples, head of the US Defense Intelligence Agency.

2. The vitality of al Qaeda's propaganda division, As Sahab.

Bin Laden has observed that 90% of his battle is conducted in the media. Al Qaeda

understands that what the Pentagon calls IO (Information Operations) are key to its successes. As Sahab's first major production debuted on the Internet in the summer of 2001 signaling a major anti-American attack was in the works. Since then, As Sahab has continued to release key statements from al Qaeda's leaders and has significantly increased its output in the last year or so. In 2007 As Sahab released more audio and video- tapes than any year in its six year history; at least eighty. These tapes are increasingly sophisticated productions with subtitles in languages such as English, animation effects and studio settings. As Sahab's increasingly sophisticated and regular output is evidence that al Qaeda has recovered to a degree that it is capable of managing a relatively advanced propaganda operation. That operation is unlikely to have a fixed studio location, but it does include a number of cameramen as well as editors using editing programs such as Final Cut Pro on laptops.

3. The continuing influence of bin Laden and Zawahiri.

Bin Laden may no longer be calling people on a satellite phone to order attacks, but he remains in broad ideological and strategic control of al Qaeda around the world. An indicator of this is that in 2004, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the then-leader of foreign fighters in Iraq renamed his organization "Al Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers" and publicly swore bayat, a religiously binding oath of allegiance, to bin Laden.

Moreover, the dozens of video and audiotapes that bin Laden and Zawahiri have released since 9/11 have reached hundreds of millions of people worldwide through television, newspapers and the Internet, making them among the most widely distributed political statements in history. Those tapes have not only had the effect of instructing al Qaeda's followers to kill Americans, Westerners and Jews, but some tapes have also carried specific instructions that militant cells have acted upon. For instance, on October 19, 2003 bin Laden called for action against Spain because of its troop presence in Iraq, the first time that al Qaeda's leader had singled out the country. Six months later, terrorists killed 191 commuters in Madrid. And in the spring of 2004, bin Laden offered a three-month truce to European countries willing to pull out of the coalition in Iraq. Almost exactly a year after his truce offer expired, an al Qaeda-directed cell carried out bombings on London's public transportation system that killed 52 commuters. In December 2004, bin Laden called for attacks on Saudi oil facilities and in February 2006, al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia attacked the Abqaiq facility, arguably the most important oil production facility in the world. (That attack was a failure.)

4. Al Qaeda's influence in Iraq.

For the moment, Al Qaeda in Iraq is a wounded organization. The number of foreign fighters coming in to Iraq has declined from 120 a month in 2007 to around 25 today. According to the US military foreign fighters are now trying to leave the country.

However, future withdrawals of U.S. troops from Iraq will obviously help Al Qaeda's ability to operate in the country. Al Qaeda also has a 'paper tiger' narrative about the United States based on American pullouts from Vietnam during the '70s, Lebanon in the '80s and Somalia in the '90s. American drawdowns from Iraq will be seen as confirming this narrative.

5. Al Qaeda continues to attract other militant groups to its standard.

In addition to Al Qaeda in Iraq stating on several occasions over the past three years that it takes overall direction from al Qaeda central, in September 2006 the Algerian Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC) announced that it was putting itself under the al Qaeda umbrella, re-branding itself Al Qaeda in the Islamic Mahgreb (AQIM). GSPC is considered the most significant terrorist movement in Algeria. Abu Musab Abdul Wadud, the leader of the GSPC explained that "the organization of al-Qaeda of Jihad is the only organization qualified to gather together the mujahideen."

6. The rapidly deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan over the past year is, at least in part, the responsibility of al Qaeda.

The use of suicide attacks, improvised explosive devices and the beheadings of hostages-- all techniques that al Qaeda perfected in Iraq--are methods that the Taliban has increasingly adopted in Afghanistan, making much of the south of the country a no-go area. Hekmat Karzai, an Afghan terrorism researcher points out suicide bombings were virtually unknown in Afghanistan until 2005 when there were 21 such attacks. US sources say there were 139 suicide attacks in 2007.

Mullah Dadullah, a key Taliban commander gave two interviews to Al Jazeera in 2006 before he was killed, in which he made some illuminating observations about the Taliban's links to al Qaeda. - Dadullah said, "We have close ties. Our cooperation is ideal," adding that Osama bin Laden is issuing orders to the Taliban. Indeed, a senior US military intelligence official says that "trying to separate Taliban and al Qaeda in Pakistan serves no purpose. It's like picking gray hairs out of your head." Dadullah also noted that "we have 'give and take' relations with the mujahideen in Iraq.

7. Pakistan

To the extent that al Qaeda has a new base, it is in Pakistan. From there bin Laden and Zawahiri have released a stream of audio and videotapes. Evidence of al Qaeda's growing strength in Pakistan can also be seen in the advice and personnel it is offering the Taliban in its campaign of suicide attacks in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda today clandestinely operates small training camps in Pakistan, "People want to see barracks. [In fact] the camps use dry riverbeds for shooting and are housed in compounds for 20 people where they are taught calisthenics and bomb making" says a senior US military intelligence official.

The fact that Pakistan is the new training ground for al Qaeda recruits indicates that the organization will continue to be a significant threat. Terrorist plots have a much higher degree of success if some of the cell's members have received training in bomb making and operational doctrine in person. For example, two of the London July 7, 2005 suicide bombers received al Qaeda training in Pakistan.

III.   The Future of al Qaeda Over the Next Five Years.

1. The leadership.

The single biggest variable about the future of al Qaeda is what happens to bin Laden. For six years he has already survived the most intense manhunt in history. It would be wishful thinking to believe that he won't survive another five years. However, if he were to be

captured or killed that would have a devastating effect on al Qaeda.

On several occasions bin Laden has said that he's prepared to die in his holy war - statements that should be taken at face value. In the short-term, bin Laden's death would likely trigger violent anti-American attacks around the globe, while in the medium-term, his death would deal a serious blow to al Qaeda as bin Laden's charisma and organizational skills have played a critical role in its success. However, bin Laden does have eleven sons, some of whom might choose to go into their father's line of work.

Should bin Laden be captured or killed, that would likely trigger a succession battle within al Qaeda. While Zawahiri is technically bin Laden's successor, he is not regarded as a natural leader. Indeed, even among the Egyptians within al Qaeda Zawahiri is seen as a divisive force. The loss of bin Laden would likely challenge the unity of the organization, a unity that al Qaeda's internal documents indicate has often been fragile.

2. Haven on the Afghan-Pakistan border, and al Qaeda's ideology and tactics increasingly being adopted by the Taliban.

The Pakistani military and its intelligence agency ISI have proven either unwilling, incapable, or both of destroying al Qaeda and its Taliban allies in their country.

Unless the Pakistani government takes real action the safe havens that Taliban and al Qaeda enjoy in Pakistan are unlikely to be extirpated unless there is a significant attack in the U.S. or U.K. that is traceable to the tribal areas, and subsequent intense political pressure from those countries results in the measures necessary to destroy the militant organizations and movements in Pakistan.

This has unfortunate implications for countries with large Pakistani diaspora populations such as the United Kingdom, whose citizens make 400,000 visits to Pakistan each year. A tiny minority of those visitors end up training with terrorist groups in Pakistan including al Qaeda. That problem is less pronounced in North America and Europe where Pakistanis make up a relatively small proportion of the Muslim population, but already in Spain and France, terrorism cases involving Pakistani immigrants are emerging.

In addition, the Taliban on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistan border are increasingly identified as the true guardian of Pashtun rights, but at the same time they have also increasingly adopted both al Qaeda tactics and ideology. As the Taliban and al Qaeda merge both tactically and ideologically, this could give al Qaeda a political constituency of sorts. This is worrisome as the Pashtun tribal grouping--the largest such grouping in the world--numbers some 40 million people on both sides of the border.

Further, should Afghanistan slide into chaos--at this moment a real possibility-that would also benefit al Qaeda as it would increase the number of safe havens along the border regions.

3. The influence of European militants in al Qaeda.

The Islamist terrorist threat to the United States today largely emanates from Europe, not from domestic sleeper cells or--as is popularly imagined--the graduates of Middle Eastern madrassas who can do little more than read the Koran. Omar Sheikh, for instance, the kidnapper of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl, is a British citizen of Pakistani descent who studied at the academically rigorous London School of Economics. The 9/11

pilots became more militant while they were students in Hamburg. Indeed, Robert Leiken of the Nixon Center has found that of 373 Islamist terrorists arrested or killed in Europe and the United States from 1993 through 2004 an astonishing 41 percent were Western nationals, who were either naturalized or second generation Europeans or converts to Islam. Leiken found more terrorists who were French than the combined totals of Pakistani and Yemeni terrorists!

Future terrorist attacks that will be damaging to American national security are therefore likely to have a European connection. Citizens of the European Union, who adopt al Qaeda's ideology, can both easily move around Europe and also have easy entry into the United States because of the Visa Waiver Program that exists with European countries.

The most likely perpetrators of another major terrorist attack on American soil come from an unexpected quarter: citizens of the United States' closest ally. Militant British citizens of Pakistani descent are the most significant terrorist threat facing the United States. Most of those arrested in the 2006 plot to bring down American airliners over the Atlantic, for instance, were young British Pakistanis.

4. Tactics and Targeting al Qaeda will use in the future.

a. Attacking Western economic targets, particularly the oil industry.

Since the 9/11 attacks, al Qaeda and its affiliated groups have increasingly attacked economic and business targets. The shift in tactics is in part a response to the fact that the traditional pre-9/11 targets, such as American embassies, war ships, and military bases, are now better defended, while so-called 'soft' economic targets are both ubiquitous and easier to hit.

Al Qaeda and its affiliated terrorist groups are also increasingly targeting companies that have distinctive Western brand names. In 2003, suicide attackers bombed the Marriott hotel in Jakarta. The same year in Karachi, a string of small explosions at eighteen Shell stations wounded four, while in 2002 a group of a dozen French defense contractors were killed as they left a Sheraton hotel, which was heavily damaged. In October 2004 in Taba, Egyptian jihadists attacked a Hilton Hotel. In Amman, Jordan in November 2005, Al Qaeda in Iraq attacked three American-owned hotels-- the Grand Hyatt, Radisson and Days Inn-- killing 60 people. Around the same time a Kentucky Fried Chicken was attacked in Karachi killing three.

Al Qaeda attacks on oil facilities accelerated sharply beginning in 2004. Suicide bombers struck Iraq's principal oil terminal in Basra on April 21, 2004. In Yanbu, Saudi Arabia, al Qaeda's Saudi Arabia affiliate attacked the offices of ABB Lummus Global, a contractor for Exxon/Mobil, on May 1, 2004 killing six Westerners. As noted above, in February 2006, al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia unsuccessfully attacked the Abqaiq facility, perhaps the most important oil production facility in the world. Al Qaeda will continue its attacks on oil installations, pipelines, and oil workers for the foreseeable future in both Saudi Arabia and Iraq, the two countries that happen to sit on the largest oil reserves in the world.

b. Attacking Israeli/Jewish targets

Attacking Jewish and Israeli targets is an al Qaeda strategy that has only emerged strongly post- 9/11. Despite bin Laden's declaration in February 1998 that he was creating the "World

Islamic Front against the Crusaders and the Jews," al Qaeda only started attacking Israeli or Jewish targets in early 2002. Since then, al Qaeda and its affiliated groups have directed an intense campaign against Israeli and Jewish targets, killing journalist Daniel Pearl in Karachi, bombing synagogues in Tunisia and Turkey, and attacking an Israeli-owned hotel in Mombasa, Kenya, which killed thirteen. At the same time as the attack on the Kenyan hotel, al Qaeda also tried to bring down an Israeli passenger jet with rocket propelled grenades, an attempt that was unsuccessful. In the future, al Qaeda will likely intensify its campaign of attacking Jewish and Israeli targets.

5. Tactics that al Qaeda is likely to deploy in the next five years that it has hitherto not used successfully.

There are two tactics that al Qaeda might successfully deploy in the next five years that for differing reasons would have significant detrimental effects on American interests. Both tactics are well within the capabilities of the organization so they do not represent Chicken Little scenarios (such as the use of nuclear devices).

The first tactic is the use of RPGs (Rocket Propelled Grenades) or SAMs (Surface to Air Missiles) to bring down a commercial jetliner. As mentioned above, al Qaeda already attempted such an attack against an Israeli passenger jet in Kenya in 2002. That attempt almost succeeded. A successful effort by al Qaeda to bring down a commercial passenger jet anywhere in the world would have a devastating effect on both global aviation and tourism.

The second tactic would be the deployment of a radiological bomb attack, most likely in a European city. Such an attack would have a much greater ability to terrorize than the small-scale chemical and biological attacks that terrorists have mounted in the past, as it would seem to most observers that the terrorists had "gone nuclear" even though, of course, a radiological bomb is nothing like a nuclear device.

6. Al Qaeda's strategy over the next five years.

As al Qaeda's number two, Ayman al Zawahiri, explained shortly after 9/11 in his autobiographical *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, the most important strategic goal of al Qaeda is to seize control of a state, or part of a state, somewhere in the Muslim world. He writes, "Confronting the enemies of Islam, and launching jihad against them require a Muslim authority, established on a Muslim land that raises the banner of jihad and rallies the Muslims around it. Without achieving this goal our actions will mean nothing."' Such a jihadist state would then become a launching pad for attacks on the American homeland. We have seen al Qaeda do this once before in Afghanistan. Now the goal is to establish a jihadist mini-state in Iraq, in the heart of the Middle East, rather than on the periphery of the Muslim world as al Qaeda was able to do under the Taliban. This will be al Qaeda's main strategic goal for the next few years.

Another key goal will be to maintain their base on the Afghan- Pakistan border. Al Qaeda seeks a safe haven that replicates some of the features of its Afghan haven before the fall of the Taliban. The tribal areas along Pakistan's western border are proving a congenial place for al Qaeda to regroup.

Al Qaeda's aim in the next five years will also be to stay relevant and to stay in the news. The organization will be opportunistic in spinning hot-button issues for Muslims around the world for their purposes, as they did during the Danish cartoon controversy and the month-

long conflict in Lebanon in 2006.

It's possible that al Qaeda may also seek to aim more attacks at Christians in the coming years. Attacks on the Pope both verbal and literal should be expected.

The situation in Darfur is also likely to be a flashpoint. Al Qaeda seems to view western humanitarian interventions in Darfur in the same way as it viewed the humanitarian mission in Somalia in the early '90s--as a western attempt to colonize Muslim lands. Al Qaeda fighters are likely to become embroiled in the Darfur conflict in the next few years.

7. Will al Qaeda (rather than "homegrown" terrorists) be able to attack the United States itself in the next five years?

In my view it is a low-level probability that al Qaeda will be able to attack the U.S. in the next five years.

In the past, when al Qaeda terrorists have tried or succeeded to launch attacks in the United States they have done so only after arriving from somewhere else. Ahmed Ressam for instance, who lived in Canada before he tried to blow up Los Angeles International airport in December 1999, was an Algerian who had trained with al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Similarly, the nineteen 9/11 hijackers hailed from countries around the Middle East. Ramzi Yousef, the mastermind of the first World Trade Center attack in 1993 that killed six, was a Pakistani who had also trained in an al Qaeda camp. None of these attackers relied on al Qaeda "sleeper cells" in the US and there is no evidence that such cells exist today. Moreover, the US is a much harder target than it was before 9/11, and the ability of an al Qaeda terrorist to enter the country and mount a successful operation has been greatly diminished by US government actions, the heightened awareness of the American public, and the weaker state of al Qaeda itself. This is not, however, to imply that American homegrown terrorists inspired by al Qaeda might not carry out a small-bore terror attack inside the United States in the next five years.

Of course, al Qaeda itself remains quite capable of attacking a wide range of American economic interest overseas, killing US soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, and targeting US diplomatic facilities in Asia, the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East.

IV. Steps that the Intelligence Community and Homeland Security Officials Can Take to Help Eliminate the Threat From al Qaeda.

(With thanks to Laurence Footer of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies who helped with the formulation of these ideas.)

1. **Without Fanfare Redouble Efforts to Find Bin Laden:** Given the continued importance of bin Laden, the bin Laden unit at CIA should be reopened and be run by one person who reports to the Director of National Intelligence to coordinate all CIA activities related to capturing or killing bin Laden with the Department of Defense, Central Intelligence Agency, State Department, and foreign intelligence services. Similar units should be set up targeting Ayman Zawahiri and Mullah Omar. These steps should be taken without fanfare so as to avoid providing al Qaeda with a propaganda victory.

2. **Learn to Speak their Language:** As illustrated by the fact that only three dozen FBI agents speak any Arabic at all, a new emphasis must be placed on teaching Arabic, Farsi, Pashtu, Bengali, Indonesian, Urdu and Punjabi. The funding at the Defense Language Institute (DLI) should be adjusted to support an increase in the number of students annually from 2,000 to 5,000 with an emphasis on these targeted languages. As language skills are perishable, ongoing investments in language maintenance should be made for DLI graduates. DLI's activities should both be coordinated with colleges and universities to attract new students as well as web-enabled to facilitate remote learning through online training. In order to increase the number of teachers, a National Language Institute should be created to train tomorrow's language instructors. Tuition grants and other financing should also be increased to reward students for reaching fluency in desired languages.

3. **Streamline and "Smart-line" the Security Clearance Process:** Certain hiring procedures which are relics of the Cold War have created obstacles to recruiting new talent. To make it easier for intelligence agencies to hire linguists and country experts, the President should mandate the streamlining of the hiring process, especially those background check policies that exclude new hires simply because they have lived in foreign countries. Right now, the process is too onerous and time-consuming, turning off potential recruits who are required to wait a year or more for clearances. The process needs to be "smart-lined."

4. **Report on Metrics:** To monitor public opinion, democracy-promotion, nation-building and terrorism metrics, an Office of Metrics should be created at the Department of National Intelligence. To inform policy, this new office should provide regular briefings to the public and Congress. The United States will know it is gaining ground when the following results occur: Consistent declines in the number of attempted Jihadist attacks; fewer terrorist and insurgent safe havens in the Muslim world; a rise in the level of good governance and open societies in the Muslim world; a steady rise in the number of leading Muslim figures critiquing al-Qaeda and its affiliates; a falling number of jihadi web sites and level of jihadi Internet activity; a continuing drop in support of suicide bombings in the Muslim world; a constant decrease in the level of support for militant jihad ideology; an improvement in world public opinion of the United States; and a decrease in the cost of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations.

5. **Hydrogen Peroxide Controls:** The U.S. Government should increase the monitoring of sales of industrial strength hydrogen peroxide, as it was the weapon of choice for terrorists in the London 7/7 2005 bombings, the failed plot against American airliners in the summer of 2006 in the U.K., and the failed attack directed at a US base in Germany in 2007.

6. **Universal Database to Trace and Track Foreign Fighters, Insurgents and Terrorists:** More than six years after the September 11th attacks, the U.S. government still does not maintain an integrated database of jihadists (foreign fighters, insurgents and terrorists). The database needs, above all, to map the "facilitative nodes" that bring young men (and increasingly young women) into the jihad, such as websites, operational planners, financiers, and jihadist underground networks. A building block of such a database should be identifying the suicide attackers in Afghanistan, Pakistan

and Iraq, a process that can be accomplished using DNA samples, accounts on jihadist websites, good intelligence work, and media reports. We know from former CIA officer Marc Sageman's investigations of the histories of hundreds of jihadist terrorists that friends and family are the ways most terrorists join the global jihad, and so this investigatory work should include an effort to identify friends and/or family members who brought the suicide attackers into the jihad.

Mapping the social networks of the terrorists, as outlined above, must also include identification of the clerical mentors of the suicide attackers, as it seems likely that only a relatively small number have persuaded their followers of the religious necessity of martyrdom. Armed with that intelligence, the United States and NATO can turn to the government of Pakistan where most of the suicide attackers in Afghanistan originate, and insist that it reins in particularly egregious clerics. A similar process can happen with governments of Middle Eastern countries who are disproportionately the sources of suicide attackers in Iraq such as Saudi Arabia and Libya.