



Hurdles to International Terrorist Alliances: Lessons From al Qaeda's Experience

Tricia Bacon

To cite this article: Tricia Bacon (2015): Hurdles to International Terrorist Alliances: Lessons From al Qaeda's Experience, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, DOI: [10.1080/09546553.2014.993466](https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2014.993466)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2014.993466>



Published online: 23 Feb 2015.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 196



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Hurdles to International Terrorist Alliances: Lessons From al Qaeda's Experience

TRICIA BACON

Department of Justice, Law, and Criminology, American University,
Washington, DC, USA

Despite the threat posed by international terrorist alliances, the conditions that foster and inhibit these relationships remain poorly understood. When seeking allies outside of their primary conflict and political market, groups struggle to forge credible commitments, particularly the requisite 'shadows of the future' and reputations conducive to cooperation, without third-party enforcers. Given their suspicious nature and strong in-group identities, terrorist groups sometimes balk at relinquishing independence for security. Alliances risk precipitating counterterrorism pressure, alienating constituents, and increasing the risk of betrayal. Even groups that enjoy alliance success, like al Qaeda, experience these hurdles in their alliance. What helped to set al Qaeda apart from most groups was its ability to navigate these obstacles, though some bedeviled its alliances efforts. This offers under-utilized opportunities for alliance disruption.

Keywords al Qaeda's alliances, hurdles to terrorist alliances, international terrorist alliances, terrorist alliance behavior, terrorist cooperation

International terrorist alliances, particularly those forged by al Qaeda, have shaped the terrorism threat for decades. Given their shared reliance on violence, power disadvantage vis-à-vis their adversaries, and illicit status, terrorist groups have clear incentives to ally. While they do cooperate with one another, terrorist organizations struggle to commit to alliances. Overall, international terrorist alliances remain rare.¹ Moreover, when they do occur, a few organizations act as hubs within alliance networks.² This puzzling dynamic—alliances occurring rarely, but clustering around a small number of groups—strongly suggests that common hurdles hinder alliance efforts, and that some groups are more capable of overcoming these obstacles. Questions remain about what the obstacles are and why certain groups can more readily navigate them.

The claim that alliances are rare runs counter to the general public discourse on terrorist cooperation. There is a tendency to overestimate occurrences of terrorist alliances by mistaking instances of cooperation or public statements for the actual existence of an alliance. In fact, operations involving more than one group occurred

Tricia Bacon is currently a Professorial Lecturer with the Department of Justice, Law, and Criminology, American University. She will become an Assistant Professor at American University in the fall.

Address correspondence to Tricia Bacon, Department of Justice, Law, and Criminology, American University, 4400 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20016, USA. E-mail: bacon@american.edu

in less than one percent of terrorist attacks between 1970 and 2007, in only 417 of 81,799 terrorist attacks.³ Edward Mickolus—one of the first compilers of quantitative data on terrorism, including alliance activity—argued that they occurred infrequently because of: a) the required expenditure of resources involved in forging agreements; b) terrorist groups' propensity for ideological and personality disputes; and c) the risks posed by the increase in people with knowledge of the groups' activities.⁴

In fact, little subsequent research has examined and tested the hurdles to terrorist alliances. In particular, unanswered questions persist about how and why terrorist groups form international alliances, i.e., partnerships in which the allying groups do not compete in a shared political market. Substantial scholarship looks at relations among warring parties or terrorist groups within a common conflict.⁵ However, important differences exist between relations among competitors, rivals, and even adversaries within a conflict and international alliances involving groups that are not in direct competition.

Scholarship on al Qaeda is a clear exception to this gap in the literature on international alliances.⁶ Ample scholarship has examined the ideological, strategic, and organizational factors that facilitated and inhibited al Qaeda's efforts to forge alliances.⁷ But broader obstacles that partnering groups face when forging international alliances under anarchy—such as difficulties establishing reputations, a lack of enforcement mechanisms, the security-autonomy tradeoff—may also hinder international terrorist alliances. Groups must grapple with additional risks, such as provoking new enemies and counterterrorism (CT) pressure, alienating constituents, and the danger of leaks and infiltration.

The emphasis on al Qaeda's unique characteristics neglects the role of these structural obstacles, which may have also affected al Qaeda's alliance accomplishments as well as its failures. Understanding how al Qaeda surmounted these hurdles as well as when their efforts were stymied will help policymakers to anticipate when future alliance ventures will succeed, and to help them to design more effective alliance disruption policies. To this end, this article begins by defining international terrorism alliances. It details why this phenomenon needs to be explored separately in the violent non-state actor alliance literature. It then proposes potential hurdles that terrorist groups may face when seeking outside allies. Using primary sources, declassified materials, and secondary literature, the article proceeds to test these hurdles on al Qaeda's alliance experience. The article concludes by analyzing which hurdles impacted al Qaeda's alliance network and what these findings suggest about fruitful avenues for alliance disruption.

Defining International Terrorist Alliances

The internationalization of terrorism in 1968 brought with it a marked increase in terrorist groups' efforts to seek partnerships with one another outside their primary conflicts. Significant hurdles remained, but three developments prompted greater transnational collaboration. First, the prevailing ideologies that violently opposed the *status quo* fostered an overarching sense of solidarity and shared struggle against "Imperialism" and Capitalism.⁸ With the proliferation of Leftist as well as Left leaning ethno-nationalist groups, many organizations viewed themselves as part of a common revolution, although they maintained different parochial priorities. Second, advances in transportation and communication facilitated greater interaction among

terrorist groups operating in various conflicts.⁹ Organizations could more readily garner international attention through their attacks, and, in so doing, generate more awareness among terrorist groups of potential partners outside of their primary conflict, particularly organizations that undertook international attacks. Third, active and passive state sponsorship of militant groups increased. Most importantly for alliances, this sponsorship sometimes included the provision of safe haven, which offered venues for groups to build trust and personal relationships.¹⁰ As a result, for the first time on this scale, terrorist groups could turn to their comrades outside of their immediate conflict to fulfill organizational needs for training, sanctuary, experience, weapons, and other forms of assistance.

Palestinian militant groups functioned at the center of all of these currents—long-suffering and neglected victims of “Imperialism,” a national liberation movement *par excellence*, the recipients of various states’ tutelage, as well as cooperative partners and ready service providers for foreign terrorist groups. Fittingly, while perpetually competitive with one another, Palestinian militant groups broke new ground in international terrorist alliances during this period.¹¹ In particular, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Fatah built robust international alliance networks, demonstrating an ability to navigate alliance hurdles on par with al Qaeda.¹²

However, many subsequent efforts to emulate their alliance success did not fare as well. Perhaps most notably, the West German Red Army Faction benefitted from the expansion of international terrorist alliances in the 1970s, including cooperating with Fatah and allying with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, but its campaign to forge an alliance network with fellow European Leftist groups during the 1980s foundered.¹³ The Red Army Faction’s efforts produced fleeting alliances with the French *Action Directe*, the Belgium Communist Combatant Cells and, later, the Italian Red Brigades. All of these alliances proved unstable and short-lived. Notes from a meeting between Red Army Faction and Italian Red Brigades reflect the Red Army Faction’s alliance woes as the discussions became bogged down by arcane ideological debates.¹⁴ Soon thereafter, the much-feared “Euroterrorist” coalition collapsed, as did the organizations that comprised it.

Nonetheless, when international alliances do occur, they can pose a serious threat. Some of the most prolific attacks have been the product of international terrorist alliances. Notorious examples include the Japanese Red Army’s attack on Lod Airport in Tel Aviv in 1972, as well as the 1977 coordinated kidnapping and hijacking by the Red Army Faction and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. More recently, al Qaeda closely cooperated with Egyptian Islamic Jihad to conduct its attack on the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998. As these events suggest, terrorist groups with allies tend to conduct attacks that are more lethal.¹⁵ Allied groups also tend to be more resilient. For example, terrorist groups with allies are 50 percent less likely than those without allies to disband following leadership decapitation, arguably the most significant blow a terrorist group can experience.¹⁶

International relations scholar Ole Holsti remarked, “Alliances are apparently a universal component of relations between political units, irrespective of time and place.” As fundamentally political actors, this clearly applies to terrorist groups.¹⁷ Alliances refer to formal or informal relationships of security cooperation among two or more terrorist groups, involving some degree of ongoing coordination and mutual expectations of consultation in the future.¹⁸ For clandestine and illicit entities, this threshold is particularly difficult. Terrorist groups rely on secrecy about

their plans and activities. To do otherwise would risk their survival, which is one reason why alliances are such a rarity.¹⁹

International alliances involve partnerships between groups that do not rely on the same conflict market. In other words, the partnering groups do not directly compete with one another for personnel, resources, and support of a fixed constituency nor are they in direct conflict with one another. A shared political market creates a competitive dynamic among groups, particularly as groups proliferate in a conflict, which shapes their alliance behavior. Rival terrorist organizations constantly maneuver for primacy. As scholar Gordon McCormick explained, "They frequently compete with each other in radical rivalries for political market share."²⁰ Competitors seek to acquire their share of resources and position at the expense of one another, thus engaging in cooperation selectively, carefully, and often temporarily. In addition to shaping alliance behavior, competition influences the tempo and scale of violence and the tactics that groups employ.²¹ In competitive situations, groups sometimes increase the pace or broaden the scope of their attacks, such as in 2000 when Palestinian militant groups conducted suicide attacks as a way not only to strike Israel, but also to gain position over rivals.²²

Consequently, alliances within a shared political market fluctuate based on parties' assessments of relative power position in a shared and bounded conflict.²³ The alliance terrain constantly shifts in response to defections, betrayals, fracturing, losses, and counter-coalitions. Alliances thus tend to be tactical and temporary, governed by a desire to capture the maximum spoils with the smallest-winning coalition, when the risk of exploitation by partners in the coalition is acceptable.²⁴ The perpetual jockeying of Afghan factions after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and the shifting alliances between Palestinian factions are well-known examples of intra-conflict violent non-state actor relations. In contrast, this article focuses on relations among dyads of terrorist organizations that are not the product of the same primary conflict and therefore are not competing in the same political market and/or for the same resource base.

The notions of creating alliances to establish the smallest-winning coalitions and determining relative position do not readily apply to non-competitive, international relationships. They provide minimal insight on how to weigh the relative importance of different partners in creating an optimal coalition in international politics.²⁵ Resources among non-rivals can have a positive-sum value. Because they do not operate in the same political market, non-competitors can share assets, even members, funds, and safe haven, without the same concerns that doing so will negatively impact their position relative to one another. Gains benefit a group's partners in this non-competitive, positive-sum dynamic.

Importantly, the international-competitor dynamic operates along a spectrum, rather than as a strict dichotomy, especially since the scope of some conflicts transcends borders, and the communication, transportation, and information trends that fostered the internationalization of terrorism have continued to expand. As discussed, in order for prospective allies to operate in an international, i.e., primarily non-competitive, dynamic, they need to rely on different primarily political markets. Political markets traditionally have been circumscribed by conflicts delineated by borders and relative fixed populations within those conflicts from which the group seeks support and resources. For example, during the 1970s, the West German Red Army Faction's political market differed from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine's political market, and they behaved as international allies while

Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine shared a political market and acted as competitors. The distinction was fairly clear. Now, a small number of terrorist groups are not only international in their activities, but also in their composition and political markets, which necessitates examining how they fit on the spectrum.

Until recently, al Qaeda benefitted from being one of the only, if not the only, groups operating in a transnational political market that spanned the Middle East. This more expansive political market helped al Qaeda to minimize, although it did not necessarily eliminate, the competitive dynamic in its alliances with partners that functioned in more narrow political markets within the Middle East. For example, al Qaeda's political market overlapped with its closest ally, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, but their interactions fell on the non-competition side of the spectrum because al Qaeda did not rely primarily on Egyptian Islamic Jihad's Egyptian political market. In contrast, the Egyptian Islamic Group also depended on the Egyptian political market; consequently, the two Egyptian groups competed throughout the 1980s and 1990s, despite Osama bin Laden's attempts to unify them. In addition, al Qaeda had allies outside of the Middle East, such as in Southeast Asia, and the competition dynamic was further minimized, if not eliminated, because of their differing political markets.

However, al Qaeda now has a rival that clearly operates on the competitor side of the spectrum. Following its renunciation of al Qaeda, the so-called Islamic State has defined its political market sufficiently similarly and broadly that it operates as al Qaeda's competitor. The Islamic State is arguably the first full competitor al Qaeda has faced. Alliances are one arena where this competition is playing out, as Sunni terrorist groups publicly declare their alignment to one group or the other. In this era of globalization, groups can compete on a global scale. But this requires more than international attacks; the groups must also operate in political markets that expand that broadly as well. Most groups continue to function in narrower political markets, in part because an international market can be difficult and unwieldy.

Therefore, theories about relationships between warring parties within a conflict have limited utility for international terrorist alliances. In fact, the literature specifically examining the drivers of international alliances remains limited. The primary theoretical work on the topic, Ely Karmon's *Coalitions Between Terrorist Organizations*, draws on Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory of alliances to posit that terrorist groups ally in response to a shared sense of threat from the international order, as long as they share some kind of ideological common denominator.²⁶ Yet these conditions occur frequently, while alliances remain rare. Therefore, to help solve the puzzle of the rarity of alliances as well as better anticipate when these dangerous relationships will occur, this article seeks to identify and test the potential hurdles international alliances face.

Hurdles to International Alliances

Do terrorist organizations face the same hurdles as states when trying to form alliances in the anarchic international system, such as difficulties fostering credible commitments or establishing 'shadows of the future' or enforcement mechanisms? They must be even more cautious about the dangers that threaten their survival, given their weakness relative to their adversaries; therefore, the six hurdles discussed below may deter them from engaging in alliances. Simultaneously, they lack access

to the strategies—like institutions or third-party enforcers—that states and licit organizations use to mitigate the risk. Sacrificing autonomy for the security of an alliance runs counter to terrorist groups' tendencies to have highly insular cultures.²⁷ Furthermore, alliances risk instigating Counterterrorism (CT) pressure or censure from supporters. Most seriously, terrorist groups must be vigilant against existential threats of infiltration or betrayal.

Hurdle 1

By design and necessity, terrorist groups lack the requisite transparency to assure partners that they intend to honor future promises and obligations.²⁸ States deal with this by creating reputations that foster expectations for future interactions. Terrorist groups may be poorly positioned to project the requisite 'shadow of the future' or develop reputations to make cooperation worth the risk.²⁹ Therefore, terrorist organizations may have incentives to use cooperation opportunistically to improve their own security, rather than to form alliances.

Hurdle 2

Terrorist groups have limited options to enforce agreements, punish non-compliance, and police their partners. They cannot enter into contracts that an outside institution can enforce, as a firm would. Nor do they have access to international institutions, like states do.³⁰ Third-parties, even state sponsors, rarely serve this function and if they do, their motives would probably diverge from the partnering organizations' goals.³¹ Because terrorist organizations lack enforcement mechanisms, fears of free-riding and cheating may inhibit efforts to form alliances.

Hurdle 3

Alliances may also present a difficult security-autonomy tradeoff, in which an organization exchanges some independence for the improved security offered by the partner.³² Relinquishing autonomy can be untenable, as it creates vulnerabilities and compounds the risks of defection. Moreover, in surrendering independence to a partner with different priorities, a group may become distracted from its primary mission, which can endanger internal unity. By expanding security to its partner, a group reduces the resources available to protect itself and may thereby increase its vulnerabilities.

Hurdle 4

Allying with another terrorist organization may instigate new adversaries and increase CT pressure on the partnering groups. As discussed earlier, alliances have the potential to increase the threat groups pose. Thus, adversary governments may respond by increasing their CT efforts or working more closely with one another against them.

Hurdle 5

Terrorist groups may run the risk that their allies will undertake actions unacceptable to their constituencies and thereby cause them to lose support. Most terrorist

groups have either real or perceived supporters, ranging from the international community to specific ethnic or religious communities. Terrorist groups must consider supporters' responses to their decisions, including partner selection.³³ However, partners may not be sufficiently sensitive to their allies' constituents' views. A group may lose support if its allies engage in unacceptable violence or possess other objectionable characteristics. For example, Fatah distanced itself from its ally, the Italian Red Brigades, following the outcry against the group's murder of former Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro in 1978 because Fatah was seeking international legitimacy.³⁴ Therefore, groups must be cautious about allying with groups that may alienate their supporters.

Hurdle 6

Lastly, and of most concern to terrorist organizations, alliances may increase the possibility of betrayal or leaks. As clandestine organizations operating at a material disadvantage to their adversaries, terrorist groups must be vigilant to prevent enemy infiltration. Alliances increase the number of people with knowledge of a group's activities, thus heightening the possibility of security breaches. Allies may be a source of deliberate or inadvertent lapses in security. International allies in particular may not be proximately located, which requires travel or communication across distance, thereby risking interception by adversaries. Groups may struggle to verify that hostile services have not penetrated their partners and that their allies are adequately security conscious.

Testing the Posited Hurdles on al Qaeda

As is widely known, al Qaeda has demonstrated a superior aptitude for alliance building. Its alliance network spans decades and dozens of countries. Without allies, al Qaeda probably would not have survived the post-9/11 onslaught. Less often recognized, al Qaeda has also endured numerous alliance difficulties. Much of the literature on al Qaeda's successes and woes focuses on its specific ideological, strategic, and organizational characteristics, qualities that have been a double-edged sword in its alliance efforts. Without dismissing those factors, this article asks whether its alliance difficulties also resulted from problems faced by all terrorist groups that attempt international alliances. While ideological and organizational attributes motivated al Qaeda's quest for allies, its alliance aptitude may also stem from its ability to overcome the obstacles discussed above. Next, this article analyzes whether evidence exists that these factors affected al Qaeda's alliances:

Hurdle 1: Al Qaeda was better able to forge and sustain alliances when prospective partners viewed its commitments as credible and it projected a 'shadow of the future' that made cooperation worth the risk. Conversely, its alliance efforts suffered when others perceived that its commitments lacked credibility or a 'shadow of the future.'

Al Qaeda tended to incur a disproportionate amount of the attendant risk, which helped cultivate a sense that its commitments were credible. It often undertook the initial act of cooperation, such as providing money, materiel, training, advisors or even its name, without demanding immediate reciprocation. Al Qaeda

used this approach particularly successfully in its early years when it possessed a substantial treasury and cadre of experienced operatives—assets that few had in abundance or were as willing to share with partners. Thus, al Qaeda could be—and sometimes was—used opportunistically. It dispersed this risk among numerous prospective partners, and thereby increased the likelihood that some would reciprocate. With its resources and state sponsors prior to 9/11, it could more readily absorb defections. In so doing, it simultaneously cultivated a reputation as a reliable partner and thereby projected that it possessed a ‘shadow of the future.’³⁵

But al Qaeda’s ability to use this approach effectively varied over its lifespan. It worked fairly well during al Qaeda’s time in Sudan as groups regularly solicited bin Laden’s assistance for various causes, and he was able to support Sunni jihadists engaged in various ventures.³⁶ The credibility of accounts of bin Laden’s munificence vary, but he reportedly gave support to militants in the Philippines, Algeria, Jordan, Eritrea, Pakistan, Bosnia, Lebanon, Yemen, Libya, Chechnya, Somalia, and Egypt during this period.³⁷ While in Sudan, the CIA estimated that al Qaeda supported operations conducted by at least eight other groups.³⁸ It supported efforts consistent with its agenda, but did not levy requirements on groups that accepted its aid. In so doing, it incurred the risk of future defection while credibly signaling to others the prospects for future cooperation.³⁹

In Afghanistan, al Qaeda continued this approach of signaling credibility and encouraging future cooperation, but the resources it provided shifted from money to training.⁴⁰ The CIA characterized training as the “currency to increase its influence” in Afghanistan.⁴¹ In addition to training facilities, al Qaeda provided funding and trainers for others’ camps in Afghanistan, which fostered a sense of indebtedness and thereby decreased the likelihood of defection.⁴² As the CIA argued, al Qaeda deployed resources and personnel “to build an international network of trained Islamic terrorists to which it [al Qaeda] could later turn for support for its operations.”⁴³ In return, “allied groups shared members with al Qaeda . . . and allowed al-Qa’ida members to use their facilities and contacts. Bin Laden could call upon these groups for logistical support and, in some cases, assistance with terrorist operations.”⁴⁴ In other words, in Sudan and Afghanistan, al Qaeda created conditions that were conducive to building stable patterns of cooperation by fulfilling commitments and building a ‘shadow of the future.’⁴⁵

After 9/11, when money and haven grew scarcer, al Qaeda tried to continue this approach by publicly anointing groups as al Qaeda affiliates. In so doing, al Qaeda once again absorbed the risks of defection. Al Qaeda vetted prospective affiliates before recognizing them and withheld endorsements from some.⁴⁶ Still, after providing select partners with its name, al Qaeda was vulnerable to opportunism as its name could be—and sometimes was—used in ways not sanctioned by the group. This hazard was somewhat mitigated by al Qaeda’s requirement that affiliates provide public declarations of fealty.⁴⁷ But al Qaeda would learn that this was insufficient for affiliates to honor their commitments to al Qaeda.

Overall, al Qaeda’s decision to limit its allies to fellow militant Sunni jihadist organizations helped it to forge credible commitments within that *milieu*.⁴⁸ It engaged in temporary cooperation with non-Sunni groups on a few occasions, but these did not develop into full alliances.⁴⁹ While a shared Sunni jihadist ideology was insufficient for alliances to form, it did facilitate trust and discourage opportunism and defection. It also helped groups to establish expectations of al Qaeda and vice versa.⁵⁰

Despite the overall success of this strategy, some partners defected or used al Qaeda's cooperation opportunistically. For example, al Qaeda assisted the Algerian Armed Islamic Group during the 1990s, only to find that the group was subsequently unwilling to reciprocate. Al Qaeda and the Armed Islamic Group had a seemingly robust foundation for an alliance. In addition to their shared ideology, members built ties with one another during the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan during the 1980s. In its early years, several Arab Afghans—as fighters who participated in the anti-Soviet effort were known—led the Armed Islamic Group, which reinforced these connections.⁵¹ In addition, the Armed Islamic Group had personnel co-located with al Qaeda in Sudan. Bin Laden sought to influence events in Algeria the way he did with numerous conflicts during that period: by providing money, expertise, and guidance.⁵² Al Qaeda adopted a coordinating role in Sudan by forming a consultative Shura Council with representation from various groups, including Armed Islamic Group.⁵³ Al Qaeda also invested in the Armed Islamic Group's revolutionary jihad against the Algerian Government by deploying a lieutenant to advise the Armed Islamic Group and providing an estimated \$40,000.⁵⁴

Thus, the two groups shared personal ties, a history of interactions, an ideology, and common enemies—seemingly an ideal blend to produce credible commitments and expectations for future cooperation. However, the Armed Islamic Group subsequently declined al Qaeda's requests for reciprocation, in part because Algerian CT efforts shortened the Armed Islamic Group's 'shadow of the future.' The loss of several Armed Islamic Group leaders in quick succession and the ensuing internal struggles for power decreased its sense of obligation, and thereby increased its incentives to defect.⁵⁵ In particular, when Djamal Zitouni rose to fill the vacated Armed Islamic Group leadership position, he did not possess a sense of obligation towards al Qaeda for past assistance, and he balked at al Qaeda's efforts to influence the conflict in Algeria.⁵⁶ When bin Laden reportedly explored relocating to Algeria in 1994, Algerian jihadists declined his request.⁵⁷ Later bin Laden sought a *quid pro quo*: he would provide additional assistance in return for the Armed Islamic Group permitting the training facilities in Algeria. However, the Armed Islamic Group rejected bin Laden's request, bristling at the idea that his assistance had conditions attached.⁵⁸ Bin Laden angrily withdrew his support, and al Qaeda had little to show for its investment.⁵⁹

Al Qaeda was not only a victim of defections, but also found itself accused of failing to honor its commitments. The relationship between al Qaeda and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group was damaged by the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group's view that al Qaeda had reneged on its commitments, which stemmed from al Qaeda's acquiescence to the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group's expulsion from Sudan. In 1995, a hasty operation to free an injured Libyan Islamic Fighting Group operative from a hospital in Libya led to Tripoli's discovery of Libyan Islamic Fighting Group's covert network throughout Libya. This revelation forced the organization to reveal itself prematurely, precipitating a harsh Libyan Government crackdown and pressure on Khartoum to cease providing haven to the group.⁶⁰ Already under significant international pressure, the Sudanese Government demanded that the Libyans depart Sudan to ease tensions with its neighbor.⁶¹ The ousted Libyans were furious when bin Laden capitulated to Khartoum's ultimatum, which they saw as an abdication of jihad against Tripoli. Realistically, bin Laden may not have been able to dissuade Khartoum, as his own situation soon became precarious. Nonetheless, the loss of the haven in Sudan, at a time when the group was under siege in Libya, dealt a significant blow to the Libyan Islamic

Fighting Group.⁶² It subsequently refused to ally with al Qaeda in 1998 and 2001,⁶³ and many members repudiated efforts by a few Libyan Islamic Fighting Group members to merge with al Qaeda in 2007.⁶⁴

Al Qaeda's material resources were integral to its ability to forge credible commitments. Its ability to provide assistance without immediate demands of reciprocation helped it establish expectations of future cooperation among prospective allies. As Obama and Clinton Administration counterterrorism officials Ambassador Daniel Benjamin and Steve Simon explained, bin Laden fostered a situation whereby "in return for allying himself with the particular, local agendas of jihadist groups in so many parts of the world, he secured their support for his own evolving vision of the struggle."⁶⁵ Al Qaeda had to absorb the costs when prospective allies defected or were unwilling to reciprocate, and it was not immune from accusations that it failed to fulfill its commitments. But al Qaeda spread its wealth liberally enough that even though only a subset responded in kind, it still had an extensive roster of allies. Without its resources, especially in the 1990s, al Qaeda probably would have been unable to undertake such a risky cooperation strategy or accrue the benefits from it after its resources diminished in the face of international pressure.

Hurdle 2: Al Qaeda was better able to forge and sustain alliances when it developed enforcement mechanisms to punish non-compliance. Conversely, its alliance efforts suffered when no clear enforcement mechanism existed.

Al Qaeda possessed unusual enforcement capability for a terrorist group because it operated as a quasi-state during the pre-9/11 period when many of its relationships were forged. Prior to 9/11, al Qaeda provided partners with "training, safe haven, money-making opportunities, access to arms and illicit material, publishing and media facilities, communications, transportation, documentation, technical support, intelligence, counterintelligence, and liaison with other groups."⁶⁶ In other words, al Qaeda developed all the trappings of a state and could assist its partners in ways more typical of state sponsors.⁶⁷ In addition, it had similar enforcement capability, particularly in alliances in which partners were dependent on al Qaeda, as it could withhold these resources in response to non-compliance.

Enforcement grew more difficult for al Qaeda after 2001. It lost many of the assets that it used to entice cooperation and police compliance. It had to rely on other groups' sense of obligation based on debts accumulated, a position that grew weaker over time. It experienced a role reversal. Instead of providing training, it had to train with other groups or rely on partners to provide it.⁶⁸ Its alliance standing among its peers commensurately diminished.⁶⁹ With the erosion of al Qaeda's ability to entice cooperation through its assets, its ability to enforce cooperation weakened.

In the alliances that have dominated al Qaeda's post-9/11 relationships—the affiliates—enforcement has proven particularly difficult. Once al Qaeda anointed a group as an al Qaeda affiliate, the main punishment for non-compliance required rescinding its endorsement. Al Qaeda proved reticent to do this because it relied on affiliates to maintain relevance and strength post-9/11. Like parent companies and franchises, once al Qaeda terminates an affiliate, the prospects for future, mutually beneficial cooperation diminish significantly.⁷⁰ Thus, it attempted private rebukes and sometimes public appeals, but has struggled to police its affiliates. Its reputation, the very commodity that attracted affiliates, suffered as a result.

The clearest example of this tension occurred in the case of al Qaeda's relationships with al Qaeda in Iraq. Although the recent public break garnered significant attention, al Qaeda's frustrations with its inability to police Al Qaeda in Iraq began immediately after Al Qaeda in Iraq adopted al Qaeda's name in 2004. Al Qaeda leaders tried in vain to privately correct Al Qaeda in Iraq's behavior under Al Qaeda in Iraq's founding leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The now deceased al Qaeda leader Atiyah Abdel Rehman issued instructions to Zarqawi in which he acknowledged al Qaeda's lack of enforcement mechanisms and instead appealed to a higher "third party" enforcer:

Abstain from making any decision on a comprehensive issue (one with a broad reach), and on substantial matters until you have turned to your leadership; Shaykh Usamah and the Doctor [Zawahiri], and their brothers there, and consulted with them. . . . *I command you, my brother, and I am your brother and I have nothing except these words that are between the two of us and God as the third party.*⁷¹

However, this letter had a limited impact, and Al Qaeda in Iraq's responsiveness did not improve following Zarqawi's demise in 2006. By 2010, American al Qaeda member Adam Gadahn pleaded with bin Laden to publicly dis-associate with Al Qaeda in Iraq, by then called the Islamic State of Iraq, which he derided as a "group who believes the authenticity of their fictitious state."⁷² He wrote to bin Laden:

I do not see any obstacle or bad act if al-Qa'ida organization declares its discontent with this behavior and other behaviors being carried out by the so-called Islamic State of Iraq, without an order from al-Qa'ida and without consultation. . . . This is the only solution facing al-Qa'ida organization, otherwise its reputation will be damaged more and more as a result of the acts and statements of this group, which is labeled under our organization.⁷³

Al Qaeda's limited ability to influence Al Qaeda in Iraq/Islamic State of Iraq's behavior was evident in bin Laden's final days. A week before his death, bin Laden requested an update from Islamic State of Iraq as well as an explanation for its lack of communication.⁷⁴ Zawahiri publicly disassociated al Qaeda from Islamic State of Iraq in 2014, but he did not take this step until Islamic State of Iraq publicly rejected his leadership and legitimacy. As these were al Qaeda's only remaining bases for enforcing compliance, once Islamic State of Iraq denigrated them, Zawahiri had little choice but to cut ties.

Problems stemming from a lack of enforcement mechanisms were not limited to al Qaeda's affiliates or those located at a geographic distance. Al Qaeda attempted to police the behavior of the Pakistani Taliban (aka Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan) to no avail. Al Qaeda leaders demanded that the Pakistani Taliban reform in blunt terms, writing to Pakistani Taliban's now deceased Emir Hakimullah Mehsud, "We hope that you will take the necessary action to correct your actions and avoid these grave mistakes; otherwise we have to take decisive actions from our end."⁷⁵ Al Qaeda's promise of "decisive actions" implied that it had some enforcement or punishment capacity. But its rebuke did little to change the Pakistani Taliban's behavior, and revealed that al Qaeda could not follow through on its threat. Al Qaeda's inability to police the Pakistani Taliban, an ally with which it is co-located, demonstrates

its weakened enforcement capability. Consequently, al Qaeda will likely experience more defections, opportunism, and compliance failures.

Hurdle 3: Al Qaeda was better able to forge and sustain alliances when groups were willing to relinquish some autonomy in exchange for the security that al Qaeda could offer. Conversely, al Qaeda's alliance efforts suffered when other groups balked at relinquishing autonomy or did not require the security al Qaeda could offer.

Al Qaeda struggled to persuade prospective partners to relinquish independence in exchange for the resources and security it could provide. Al Qaeda wanted allies to pursue its mission, often at the expense of their own. Even when it was successful at creating alliances, most groups resisted this loss of independence. Weakened groups—or factions of them—were more willing to accept this tradeoff, especially when they could no longer survive without al Qaeda's assistance. For example, during internal Egyptian Islamic Jihad deliberations about whether to ally with al Qaeda, Zawahiri confided to one of his men that “joining with bin Laden [was] the only solution to keeping the Jihad organization alive.”⁷⁶ In other words, the loss of autonomy was acceptable in exchange for al Qaeda's ability to offer greater security when this security was tantamount to Egyptian Islamic Jihad's survival.

The reluctance to accept this tradeoff helps to explain al Qaeda's lackluster “International Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders.”⁷⁷ The 1998 statement described its grievances and declared war against the United States.⁷⁸ Benjamin and Simon characterized the declaration as “canonical bin Laden: a call to action to all Muslims, a summons to overcome imposed divisions, a demand that injustices be set right.”⁷⁹ It focused on three core grievances: a) the presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia; b) the impact of U.S. sanctions against Iraq; and c) the U.S. Government's support for Israel.⁸⁰ The declaration was also essential to al Qaeda's impending operations in that it expanded the set of permissible targets to civilians.

Less frequently recognized, al Qaeda used this declaration as an alliance-building effort. Bin Laden solicited signatories to publicly align with al Qaeda's agenda and form the nucleus of a counter-coalition against the “Zionist-Crusader alliance.” Al Qaeda intended the declaration to be a show of unity and sign of the strength of its alliances. It also reflected al Qaeda's desire to have other groups sacrifice their autonomy to come under its rubric.⁸¹ Despite naming themselves the “International Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders,” the signatories of this declaration fell well short of a jihadist quorum.⁸² Of the dozens of groups present in Afghanistan and despite al Qaeda's connections to “every noteworthy Islamic extremist group,” only four groups signed onto the declaration.⁸³ Exactly which groups bin Laden asked to sign remains unclear, but he sent envoys and messages to solicit signatures.

The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group was among the groups that declined bin Laden's invitation to join.⁸⁴ While Libyan Islamic Fighting Group was less notorious than the two Egyptian signatories, Egyptian Islamic Group and Egyptian Islamic Jihad, as one of the largest groups in Afghanistan, it would have provided additional heft to the coalition. In addition to the bad blood stemming from the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group's ouster from Sudan, a Libyan Islamic Fighting Group member attributed the group's refusal to its unwillingness to relinquish its autonomy: “merging with another group would have meant the LIFG losing its freedom to operate independently in Libya; it was an idea that we rejected from the outset.”⁸⁵

Even some of the signatories were uncomfortable with the autonomy loss implied in joining the coalition. Rifai Taha's signature, ostensibly as a representative of Egyptian Islamic Group based in Afghanistan, was arguably the most important. Of the five signatories, Egyptian Islamic Group was the largest and most well known, which gave the declaration influence that it did not otherwise command. Moreover, Taha's move suggested that Egyptian Islamic Group did not accept a recent ceasefire declared by the group's imprisoned leaders. However, the imprisoned Egyptian Islamic Group leadership in Egypt demanded that Taha revoke his signature and publicly announced that attacking the United States was not a priority for Egyptian Islamic Group.⁸⁶ Taha capitulated, alternatively claimed that he had signed for himself, not Egyptian Islamic Group as an organization, and that he was misled as he was only asked over the phone whether he would join a statement supporting the Iraqi people.⁸⁷ Regardless of the circumstances that led to Taha's signature, he withdrew it and Egyptian Islamic Group leaders removed him from the Shura Council abroad.⁸⁸ The Egyptian Islamic Group leadership was intent on retaining its autonomy and only the faction in Afghanistan would benefit from the security that al Qaeda could offer, which would eventually lead to a merger in 2007. For the rest of Egyptian Islamic Group, taking on the United States further threatened the group's tenuous security.⁸⁹

Even al Qaeda's Southeast Asian ally, Jemaah Islamiyah—the group that conducted the 2002 bombings of nightclubs in Bali, Indonesia, with financial support from al Qaeda—protected its autonomy in its relationship with al Qaeda.⁹⁰ In this case, it did not hinder the alliance. Al Qaeda provided funds, training, and supplemented Jemaah Islamiyah's operational capability, but Jemaah Islamiyah was unwilling to surrender its independence. This worked in this alliance as Jemaah Islamiyah produced violence that dovetailed with al Qaeda's vision without sacrificing its autonomy. Al Qaeda was so pleased with the Bali bombings that it provided Jemaah Islamiyah with another influx of funds, including a delivery of \$130,000, with no conditions attached.⁹¹ One Jemaah Islamiyah member likened the relationship to:

that of an NGO with a funding agency. The NGO exists as a completely independent organisation, but submits proposals to the donor and gets a grant when the proposal is accepted. The donor only funds projects that are in line with its own programs. In this case, al-Qaeda may help fund specific JI programs but it neither directs nor controls it.⁹²

Another Jemaah Islamiyah member invoked a similar comparison, describing Jemaah Islamiyah as “a business affiliate, we can ask them (i.e., al Qaeda) for an opinion, but they have no authority over us. We are free. We have our own funds, our own men. We are independent, like Australia and the U.S. But when it comes to an operation, we can join together.”⁹³

Since 9/11 and under constant pressure, al Qaeda can offer little security to its partners in exchange for their relinquishment of some autonomy. In fact, being co-located with al Qaeda increases the possibility of being targeted and association with al Qaeda often reduced its partners' security. Now al Qaeda tries to persuade partnering groups to relinquish autonomy without offering a security advantage, a difficult challenge given that al Qaeda grappled with resistance to the security-autonomy tradeoff in its alliances pre-9/11. Stronger groups had less need for security from al Qaeda

and tended to protect their autonomy and weak groups struggled to relinquish it, even when a clear need for additional security existed.

Hurdle 4: Al Qaeda was better able to forge and sustain alliances when groups already experienced high levels of CT pressure or shared al Qaeda's enemies. Al Qaeda's alliance efforts struggled when they provoked new enemies or heightened CT pressure on prospective allies.

Al Qaeda's alliances trigger strong CT reactions from threatened governments, particularly the United States, and while the group has considered this problem, it has not significantly influenced its alliance calculus. CT pressure on groups allied with al Qaeda escalated significantly after 2001 as the United States cooperated extensively with other governments threatened by al Qaeda and its allies. The United States even worked with governments that it had previously viewed suspiciously, such as the Libyan Government, and expanded ties with governments, such as Mali, with which the U.S. typically focused on non-security issues, like humanitarian concerns and democratization.

Even before the 9/11 attacks, signing onto bin Laden's anti-U.S. mission ran the risk of provoking U.S. CT pressure. For example, Egyptian Islamic Jihad experienced a marked increase in CT pressure following the 1998 International Front announcement and the 1998 embassy bombings in Africa. The United States responded by targeting Egyptian Islamic Jihad and working closely with the Egyptian Government, despite reservations about Cairo's human rights record.⁹⁴ This produced damaging arrests for Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Shortly thereafter, the Azerbaijani service—reportedly working with the CIA—captured Egyptian Islamic Jihad veteran member Ahmed Salama Mabruk in Baku. In the tightly compartmentalized group, Mabruk was one of few Egyptian Islamic Jihad members with extensive knowledge of the whereabouts and activities of Egyptian Islamic Jihad members worldwide.⁹⁵ Much of that information was on his seized computer, and the rest was extracted from him during interrogations back in Egypt.⁹⁶ In less than a year, hundreds of Egyptian Islamic Jihad associates were taken out of commission on the basis of Mabruk's information.⁹⁷

This left the already-weakened group in shambles and stoked dissent among those who viewed Zawahiri's signature on the 1998 declaration as further endangering the group.⁹⁸ Their conclusions had merit. The CIA and the Albanian service captured another five Egyptian Islamic Jihad members in Tirana later in 1998. Egyptian courts convicted them, and their confessions went on for thousands of pages.⁹⁹ They claimed that only 40 members remained in the organization, all residing outside of Egypt.¹⁰⁰ CT pressure in response to its alliance with al Qaeda had decimated the beleaguered Egyptian Islamic Jihad.

However, this weakness only pushed Egyptian Islamic Jihad closer to al Qaeda. Zawahiri advocated a merger with al Qaeda in 2001, arguing that it was the only "way out of the bottleneck."¹⁰¹ Several senior members objected, in part out of fear that CT pressure would further increase. They did not share Zawahiri's conviction that it was wise to confront a superpower. Expanding the battle against America "is a dangerous matter," warned Zawahiri's deputy.¹⁰² Another member argued that allying with al Qaeda against the U.S. was "a dead end, as if we were fighting ghosts or windmills. Enough of pouring musk on barren land."¹⁰³ Nonetheless, Zawahiri proceeded with the alliance and, as anticipated, the group experienced the ensuing CT consequences.

After 9/11, the CT impact caused al Qaeda to weigh the impact in its alliance decisions. Shortly before his death, bin Laden shifted al Qaeda away from publicly declaring alliances in part to avoid CT pressure. Specifically, in 2010, bin Laden opted not to announce al Qaeda's alliance with the Somali terrorist group al-Shabaab for this reason. He explained to al-Shabaab's leader:

If the matter [of affiliation] becomes declared and out in the open, it would have the enemies escalate their anger and mobilize against you; this is what happened to the brothers in Iraq or Algeria. It is true that the enemies will find out inevitably; this matter cannot be hidden, especially when people go around and spread this news. However, an official declaration remains the master for all proof.¹⁰⁴

But Zawahiri did not adhere to this approach when he ascended to the top position. One of Zawahiri's first acts as al Qaeda's emir was to announce al Qaeda's alliance with al-Shabaab.¹⁰⁵ In his estimation, the need to demonstrate al Qaeda's continued relevance outweighed the CT pressure the announcement might cause al Qaeda's partner. Thus, the increase in CT pressure caused some hesitation, but overall, it did not deter alliances, even in the case of tremendous international pressure on al Qaeda and its allies after 9/11.

Hurdle 5: Al Qaeda was better able to forge and sustain alliances when the partnering groups' supporters viewed al Qaeda and its actions favorably and vice versa. Al Qaeda's alliance efforts struggled when groups' constituents opposed al Qaeda and its methods or vice versa.

Even as an organization that justifies its actions in the name of religion and claims to undertake actions to please God, al Qaeda has sought to build support among the broader Muslim public and to prevent partners from alienating it. Initially, al Qaeda instilled this instruction in its training camps in Sudan and Afghanistan. After 9/11, it grew more reliant on propaganda and private communications to counsel its partners as well as the broader jihadist movement. Al Qaeda used private communications from its leaders and from individuals respected for their religious credentials to rebuke allies for actions that alienate Muslims. Such actions have become an increasing problem for al Qaeda since 9/11.

This problem has been the most pronounced with its first and now former affiliate, Al Qaeda in Iraq. For example, Al Qaeda in Iraq's 2006 attack in Jordan badly damaged al Qaeda's reputation. Zarqawi sought to export his violence to Jordan, the place that had animated his commitment to jihad. The bombing of three hotels in Amman killed sixty people, many of them guests at a Muslim wedding underway at the hotel.¹⁰⁶ From al Qaeda's perspective, the attack was a public relations disaster that alienated supporters in the Muslim world. In response, al Qaeda undertook a private effort to counsel Al Qaeda in Iraq. Atiyah Abdel Rehman implored Zarqawi to "strive, may God bless you, to avoid repeating the mistake of lack of precision in execution, like what happened in Jordan."¹⁰⁷ Atiyah went on to lecture Zarqawi on the need to build public support and maintain good relations with clerics and scholars. Atiyah advised Zarqawi that strengthening Al Qaeda in Iraq's relationship should be

Zarqawi's priority, even more so than external operations, as greater consultation would avoid such catastrophic actions that estrange Muslims.¹⁰⁸

Likewise, Zawahiri pleaded with Zarqawi to cease the practice of beheadings because of the adverse impact it had on Muslim public opinion. Zawahiri wrote to him:

Among the things which the feelings of the Muslim populace who love and support you will never find palatable are the scenes of slaughtering the hostages The general opinion of our supporter does not comprehend that, and that this general opinion falls under a campaign by the malicious, perfidious, and fallacious campaign by the deceptive and fabricated media. And we would spare the people from the effect of questions about the usefulness of our actions in the hearts and minds of the general opinion that is essentially sympathetic to us.¹⁰⁹

Al Qaeda's concerns about the impact of Al Qaeda in Iraq's actions on Muslim public opinion did not improve after Zarqawi's death in 2006. In 2007, an al Qaeda leader wrote to an Islamic scholar, urging him to reach out to Al Qaeda in Iraq's leaders to help them to correct their ways to no avail.¹¹⁰ While bin Laden was not willing to repudiate Al Qaeda in Iraq, now known as Islamic State of Iraq, he did publicly distance al Qaeda from it. In October 2007, he dis-associated al Qaeda "from any unlawful acts in Iraq" and urged greater unity there without referencing Islamic State of Iraq in the statement, a conspicuous oversight.¹¹¹ In early 2011, American al Qaeda member Adam Gadahn authored a letter sharply criticizing Islamic State of Iraq's targeting and tactics. Gadahn pointed out that the Islamic State of Iraq was widely known to be associated with al Qaeda, so its mistakes, like targeting churches during mass, harmed public opinion of al Qaeda and alienated the Iraqi people.¹¹²

In addition to its efforts with Al Qaeda in Iraq, al Qaeda counseled its affiliates on how to avoid further damage to al Qaeda's image. To correct for "the alienation of most of the nation from the mujahidin," bin Laden instructed one of his deputies to prepare a covenant for partner groups committing to avoiding the mistakes that had tarnished the reputation of jihadists. He planned to distribute policies on operations to the affiliates stressing the need to avoid Muslim casualties in their operations as part of an effort to rehabilitate Muslim public opinion towards al Qaeda.¹¹³ This problem with the affiliates led terrorism scholar Vahid Brown to conclude that "if anything, the rise of the franchises has rendered al-Qa'ida more vulnerable to losses in its appeal by the strategic and ideological aberrations of its new partners."¹¹⁴

This problem became sufficiently acute for al Qaeda to consider whether its name—arguably its greatest asset—had become a liability. An al Qaeda leader, probably bin Laden, authored a letter proposing that al Qaeda change its name in order to improve its connection to Muslims. He wrote:

I make mention to you of a very important matter that came to me, which is changing the name of (Qa'ida al-Jihad), because there are several necessary and attention-worthy reasons to change it, of them: Al Qaeda al-Jihad was abridged by the people and only a few people remember this name; *it has come to be known as (al-Qa'ida) and this name reduces the feeling of Muslims that we belong to them*, and allows the enemies to claim deceptively that they are not at war with Islam and Muslims, but they are

at war with the organization of al-Qa'ida, which is an outside entity from the teachings of Islam. . . . Al-Qa'ida describes a military base with fighters without a reference to our broader mission to unify the nation.¹¹⁵

This problem was not limited to partners that adopted al Qaeda's moniker. Those groups often operated at a distance from al Qaeda, which contributed to al Qaeda's inability to correct their errors. But al Qaeda experienced similar problems with allies with which it was co-located. Al Qaeda leaders chastised the Pakistani Taliban for alienating Muslims by "killing more people, taking them as shields without basing the action on the Shari'a, killing the normal Muslims as a result of martyrdom operations that take place in the marketplaces, mosques, roads, assembly places, and calling the Muslims apostates."¹¹⁶ But al Qaeda had no more success changing Pakistani Taliban's behaviors that disaffected Muslims in Pakistan than it did with Al Qaeda in Iraq. Al Qaeda thus remains vulnerable to actions by its allies that alienate Muslims, despite its efforts to ameliorate this problem.

Hurdle 6: Al Qaeda was better able to forge and sustain alliances when it assessed that prospective partners were not infiltrated and that they practiced good security and vice versa. Al Qaeda's alliance efforts struggled when it assessed that hostile services had infiltrated potential allies or that they utilized sloppy security practices.

Like all terrorist organizations, al Qaeda avoids alliances with infiltrated or careless groups. Pre-9/11, al Qaeda could more readily vet prospective partners prior to forging alliances, as it was co-located, accessible, and could interact with groups over time to build trust. Al Qaeda used liaisons to manage some of its allied groups, which also helped to reduce its exposure, even if an ally had been penetrated.¹¹⁷ It tightly compartmentalized information, especially on its operations, even from its allies. Zawahiri only learned of the 9/11 plot upon merging his group with al Qaeda and being anointed as bin Laden's deputy in the summer of 2001.¹¹⁸

Concerns about infiltration helped to thwart an alliance between al Qaeda and one of the most powerful groups in Pakistan, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba. In late 2001, al Qaeda fled across the border to Pakistan to find haven from the U.S. and Northern Alliance onslaught. Though Lashkar-e-Tayyiba had not been an al Qaeda ally in the years leading up to 9/11, it was well positioned to help in the aftermath of the U.S. invasion because of its extensive infrastructure throughout Pakistan.¹¹⁹ But Lashkar-e-Tayyiba also had—and maintains—a deep-seated relationship with the Pakistani security services due to Lashkar-e-Tayyiba's nationalism and commitment to the Pakistani state.

One senior al Qaeda leader, Abu Zubaydah, found shelter in a Lashkar-e-Tayyiba safe house in Faisalabad.¹²⁰ Pakistani intelligence subsequently captured him there in March 2002.¹²¹ Zubaydah's capture was the most significant post-9/11 arrest outside of Afghanistan. Islamabad subsequently rendered Zubaydah to the United States' custody where he underwent interrogation methods, such as waterboarding.¹²² Lashkar-e-Tayyiba's seeming betrayal made al Qaeda leery of further cooperation with Lashkar-e-Tayyiba. Lashkar-e-Tayyiba has maintained its close ties with the Pakistani state, which has contributed to the lack of alliance between these two formidable terrorist groups.

Because al Qaeda is no longer readily accessible, vetting prospective allies to ensure they are secure has become more difficult. For example, after al Qaeda's experience

with the Armed Islamic Group in the 1990s, it approached the merger with the Armed Islamic Group's offshoot, the Algeria Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, cautiously. Unable to vet the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat on its own and despite its problems with Al Qaeda in Iraq, al Qaeda requested Al Qaeda in Iraq's assistance in ensuring Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat's integrity.¹²³ In its weakened state, al Qaeda must be even more vigilant of this risk and, simultaneously, less able to mitigate it while maintaining its alliance position. Its ability to vet partners will continue to diminish after its years spent in hiding and the persistent loss of key personnel. Thus, opportunities exist to exploit this vulnerability.

Conclusion

Despite the threat alliances pose, CT efforts to date to disrupt them have unfortunately had little impact. None of al Qaeda's alliances have been severed due to CT actions. As natural barriers do exist to these relationships, government efforts should focus on exploiting these obstacles. At a minimum, they can cause strain within alliances, and under some conditions, they may prevent or disrupt alliances. While al Qaeda experienced the posited hurdles in its alliances with other terrorist organizations, they did not all affect al Qaeda's alliances to the same degree. Resistance to the security-autonomy tradeoff, difficulties forging credible commitments, and concerns about infiltration all demonstrated the ability to derail or prevent alliances. Therefore, uncertainty can be injected into alliance calculations using covert messaging that emphasizes issues like groups abandoning their founding causes by allying with another group, highlights unfulfilled promises, and sows suspicions about whether groups have been infiltrated. Early disruptions, such as intercepting money, manipulated to appear as unfulfilled commitments, can also hinder alliances. Targeting efforts that follow communications or meetings between al Qaeda and its allies may also create uncertainty about infiltration or betrayal and thereby damage alliance prospects. Enforcement problems and negative impacts on al Qaeda's perceived constituency caused strife within alliances, but did not sever them. Like credible commitments, governments can exploit the lack of enforcement mechanisms to create frustration with CT interventions masked to appear as reciprocation failures. The U.S. Government already highlights terrorist activities that harm civilians, especially Muslims. To date, these efforts have sought to erode public support for al Qaeda and its partners, but messaging that exploits this tension between al Qaeda and its allies may also degrade al Qaeda's partnerships. Surprisingly, although al Qaeda demonstrated concern about CT pressure, this did not weigh heavily in its alliance calculus, compared to the other hurdles. Policies, such as designations at the UN that levy sanctions based on association with al Qaeda, may not have much tangible effect on alliance decisions. Nonetheless, premature designation of a group as an ally will reduce the efficacy of CT pressure as a tool for alliance disruption, as it reduces one hurdle to allying, and thus should be avoided. Overall, while no silver bullets exist, some under-utilized obstacles offer avenues for exploitation.

Notes

1. Kent Layne Oots, *A Political Organization Approach to Transnational Terrorism* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 41; Navin A. Bapat and Kanisha D. Bond, "Alliances Between Militant Groups," *British Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 4 (2012): 793–824; Victor Asal, Hyun Hee Park, and R. Karl Rethemeyer, "Terrorist Networks Over Time," *Theory*

vs. Policy? *Connecting Scholars and Practitioners*, 2010 International Studies Association Conference.

2. Victor Asal and R. Karl Rethemeyer, *Project Fact Sheet: Big Allied and Dangerous*, last modified September 2013, http://www.start.umd.edu/sites/default/files/publications/local_attachments/STARTFactSheet_BAAD.pdf; Asal, et al., "Terrorist Networks" (see note 1 above), 31; Oots, *A Political Organization Approach* (see note 1 above), 114.

3. Victor H. Asal, Hyun Hee Park, R. Karl Rethemeyer, and Gary Ackerman, "With Friends Like These . . . : Why Terrorist Organizations Ally," Refereed conference paper, 2010 International Studies Association Annual Conference, New Orleans, LA: 14.

4. Edward F. Mickolus, "Combatting International Terrorism: A Quantitative Analysis" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1981).

5. Fotini Christia, "The Closest of Enemies: Alliance Formation in the Afghan and Bosnian Civil Wars" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2008); Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 61; Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2006): 49–80.

6. For a notable exception see: Ely Karmon, *Coalitions Between Terrorist Organizations: Revolutionaries, Nationalists and Islamists* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 2005).

7. Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman, eds., *Self-Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions within Al-Qa'ida and Its Periphery* (West Point: Combating Terrorism Center, 2010); Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Wahid Brown, *Cracks in the Foundation: Leadership Schisms in Al-Qa'ida 1989–2006* (West Point: Combating Terrorism Center, 2007).

8. Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 5.

9. Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 68.

10. David C. Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism," in Audrey Kurth Cronin and James M. Ludes, eds., *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 46–73.

11. Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (see note 9 above), 68–80.

12. Tricia Bacon, "Alliance Hubs: Focal Points in the International Terrorist Landscape," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 8, no. 4 (2014): <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/357/html>.

13. Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (see note 9 above), 77–78.

14. Yonah Alexander and Dennis A. Pluchinsky, *Europe's Red Terrorists: The Fighting Communist Organizations* (London: Routledge, 1992), 219–227.

15. Victor Asal and R. Karl Rethemeyer, "The Nature of the Beast: Organizational Structures and the Lethality of Terrorist Attacks," *Journal of Politics* 70, no. 2 (2008): 445. Oots, *A Political Organization Approach* (see note 1 above), 92.

16. Bryan C. Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists: How Leadership Decapitation Contributes to Counterterrorism," *International Security* 36, no. 4 (2012): 9–46.

17. Ole Holsti, P. Terrence Hopmann, and John Sullivan, *Unity and Disintegration in International Alliances: Comparative Studies* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973), 2.

18. Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 12; Michael N. Barnett and Jack S. Levy, "Domestic Sources of Alliances and Alignments: The Case of Egypt, 1962–73," *International Organization* 45, no. 3 (1991): 369–395.

19. Mickolus, "Combatting International Terrorism" (see note 4 above).

20. Gordon McCormick, "Terrorist Decision Making," *Annual Review of Political Science*, 6, no. 1 (2003): 473–507.

21. Bruce Hoffman, "The Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *The Atlantic Monthly* 291, no. 5 (2003): 1–10.

22. Bloom, *Dying to Kill* (see note 5 above), 61.

23. Christia, "The Closest of Enemies" (see note 5 above), 19–32.

24. Bruce Russett, "Components of an Operational Theory of International Alliance Formation," in Julian Friedman, Christopher Bladen, and Steven Rosen, eds., *Alliances in International Politics* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1970), 238–241; Christia, "The Closest of Enemies" (see note 5 above), 6–9.

25. Russett, "Components of an Operational Theory of International Alliance Formation" (see note 24 above), 286.

26. Karmon, *Coalitions Between Terrorist Organizations* (see note 6 above), 287.
27. Martha Crenshaw, "Theories of Terrorism: Instrumental and Organizational Approaches," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 10, no. 4 (1987): 13–31.
28. Bapat and Bond, "Alliances Between Militant Groups" (see note 1 above), 811.
29. David C. Rapoport, "Terrorism," in Mary Hawkesworth and Maurice Kogan, eds., *Encyclopedia of Government and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1992), 1061–1082; Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 173–174.
30. Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (see note 29 above), 180.
31. Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States That Sponsor Terrorism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 26–32.
32. James D. Morrow, "Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability Aggregation Model of Alliances," *American Journal of Political Science* 35, no. 4 (November 1991): 904–933.
33. C. J. M. Drake, "The Role of Ideology in Terrorists' Target Selection," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 10, no. 2 (1998): 53–85.
34. Yonah Alexander and Dennis A. Pluchinsky, eds., *European Terrorism Today and Tomorrow* (Washington, DC: Brassey's Terrorism Library, 1992), 67.
35. On establishing reputation: Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (see note 29 above).
36. United States Director of Central Intelligence, *Written Statement for the Record of the Director of Central Intelligence Before the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, DCI Written Statement for the Record (2004), 5.
37. Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror* (New York: Random House, 2002), 112; United States Central Intelligence Agency, *Terrorism: Usama bin Laden's Activities in Somalia and Sudanese NIF Support*, Declassified Intelligence Report (April 30, 1997), 2.
38. United States Central Intelligence Agency, *11 September: The Plot and the Plotters*, Declassified Intelligence Report (June 1, 2003), 4.
39. Benjamin and Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror* (see note 37 above), 114.
40. United States Central Intelligence Agency, *How Bin Laden Commands a Global Terrorist Network*, Declassified Intelligence Report (Jan. 27, 1999), 6.
41. United States Central Intelligence Agency, *Al-Qa'ida in Sudan, 1992–1996: Old School Ties Lead Down Dangerous Paths*, Declassified Intelligence Report (March 10, 2003), 1.
42. United States Central Intelligence Agency, *Afghanistan: An Incubator for International Terrorism*, Declassified Intelligence Report (March 27, 2001), 1–4; U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Al-Qa'ida in Sudan* (see note 41 above), 1–4.
43. United States Central Intelligence Agency, *Al-Qa'ida in Sudan* (see note 41 above), 1.
44. United States Central Intelligence Agency, *How Bin Laden Commands* (see note 40 above), 5.
45. Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (see note 29 above), 180–183.
46. Ayman Al-Zawahiri, "Zawahiri's Letter to Zarqawi (English Translation)," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (July 9, 2005), 10; "Letter Exposes New Leader in Al-Qa'ida High Command," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (2006); "Ansar al-Jihad in the Sinai Peninsula Pledges to Zawahiri," *Monitoring Service*, last modified January 15, 2014, <https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/ansar-al-jihad-in-the-sinai-peninsula-pledges-to-zawahiri.html>.
47. Don Rassler and Vahid Brown, *The Haqqani Nexus and the Evolution of al-Qa'ida* (West Point: Combating Terrorism Center, 2011), 10.
48. "Al-Qa'ida Bylaws (English Translation)," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (2002).
49. For information on these instances, see: Clint Watts, Jacob Shapiro, and Vahid Brown, *Al-Qa'ida's (Mis)Adventures in the Horn of Africa* (West Point: Combating Terrorism Center, 2007), 42–43; Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank, "Revisiting the Early Al Qaeda: An Updated Account of its Formative Years," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 35, no. 1 (2012): 1–36; United States Central Intelligence Agency, *Terrorism: Usama Bin Laden's Financial Support to the Egyptian Al-Gama'at Al-Islamiyya, as well as Algerian and Libyan Extremists*, Declassified Intelligence Report (June 17, 1997), 2; United States of America v. Usama Bin Laden, et al., indictment: S(9) 98 Cr. 1023 (S.D. New York 2000), 15; Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006),

270; National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), 61.

50. Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (see note 29 above), 146.

51. Evan F. Kohlmann, "Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria: the GIA, the GSPC, and Al Qaeda," *The NEFA Foundation* (2007): 7.

52. Wright, *The Looming Tower* (see note 49 above), 189.

53. United States Central Intelligence Agency, *Al-Qa'ida in Sudan* (see note 41 above), 1–2; Kohlmann, "Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria" (see note 51 above), 5.

54. United States Central Intelligence Agency, *Terrorism: Cooperation Among Usama Bin Laden's Islamic Army, Iran, and the NIF*, Declassified Intelligence Report (Jan. 31, 1997), 1–2; Camille Tawil, *Brothers in Arms: The Story of al-Qa'ida and the Arab Jihadists* (London: Saqi, 2010).

55. Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (see note 29 above), 183.

56. Kohlmann, "Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria" (see note 51 above), 7.

57. Souad Mekhennet et al., "A Ragtag Insurgency Gains a Qaeda Lifeline," *New York Times*, June 7, 2012.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Wright, *The Looming Tower* (see note 49 above), 190.

60. Tawil, *Brothers in Arms* (see note 54 above), 65–66.

61. National Commission on Terrorist Attacks (see note 49 above), 62.

62. United States of America v. Usama Bin Laden, et al., Trial Transcript: S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (S.D. New York 2001), 1280–1282.

63. Tawil, *Brothers in Arms* (see note 54 above), 95, 153; Camille Tawil, "The Changing Face of the Jihadist Movement in Libya," *Terrorism Monitor* 7, no. 1 (2009): http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34322&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=412&no_cache=1#.VMZoInDF-EQ.

64. Inal Ersan, "Zawahiri Says Libyan Group Joins al Qaeda," *Reuters*, November 3, 2007, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2007/11/03/us-libya-qaeda-idUSL032828220071103>; National Commission on Terrorist Attacks (see note 49 above), 62; Tawil, *Brothers in Arms* (see note 54 above), 95.

65. Benjamin and Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror* (see note 37 above), 114.

66. United States Central Intelligence Agency, *Sketch of a South Asia-Based Terrorist Training and Logistic Network*, Declassified Analytic Report (Dec. 1995), 5.

67. Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 16.

68. United States Central Intelligence Agency, *Afghanistan Camps Central to 11 September Plot: Can Al-Qa'ida Train on the Run?*, Declassified Intelligence Report (June 20, 2003), ii.

69. *Ibid.*, 6.

70. Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (see note 29 above), 179.

71. "Letter Exposes New Leader" (see note 46 above), 3–18.

72. "Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000005," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (2010), 7.

73. *Ibid.*, 8–9 (emphasis added).

74. "Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000010," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (2011), 4.

75. "Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000007," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (n.d.), 2.

76. Wright, *The Looming Tower* (see note 49 above), 185.

77. United States Central Intelligence Agency, *How Bin Laden Commands* (see note 40 above), 3; Open Source Center, trans., "Fatwa Urging Jihad Against Americans," Speech Given by Usama bin Laden, Declassified Intelligence Report (February 23, 1998), 5.

78. Open Source Center (see note 77 above), 2.

79. Benjamin and Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror* (see note 37 above), 150.

80. Bruce Riedel, *The Search for Al Qaeda: Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 59.

81. United States Central Intelligence Agency, *How Bin Laden Commands* (see note 40 above), 5.

82. *Ibid.*

83. United States Central Intelligence Agency, 11 September (see note 38 above), 3; Open Source Center (see note 77 above), 1; Wright, *The Looming Tower* (see note 49 above), 260.
84. Tawil, *Brothers in Arms* (see note 54 above), 153.
85. As quoted in Tawil, *Brothers in Arms* (see note 54 above), 180.
86. Wright, *The Looming Tower* (see note 49 above), 260; Gerges, *The Far Enemy* (see note 7 above), 155; Camille Tawil, "Interview with Hani al-Sibai: Part 4 of 4," *Al Hayat*, September 4, 2002, 15.
87. Tawil, "Interview" (see note 86 above), 15; Michael Scheuer, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2006), 186.
88. Omar Ashour, "Lions Tamed? An Inquiry into the Causes of De-Radicalization of Armed Islamist Movements: The Case of the Egyptian Islamic Group," *Middle East Journal* 61, no. 4 (2007): 596–625.
89. Scheuer, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes* (see note 87 above), 185.
90. Simon Elegant, "The Terrorist Talks," *Time*, October 5, 2003, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,493256,00.html>; International Crisis Group, *Indonesia Background: How the Jemaah Islamiyah Terrorist Network Operates* (Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2002), 29; Romesh Ratnesar "Al-Qaeda: Confessions of an Al-Qaeda Terrorist," *Time*, September 23, 2002, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1003276,00.html>.
91. Elegant, "The Terrorist Talks" (see note 90 above); U.S. Director of Central Intelligence, *Written Statement* (see note 36 above), 3.
92. International Crisis Group (see note 90 above), 30.
93. As quoted in Ressler and Brown, *The Haqqani Nexus and the Evolution of al-Qa'ida* (see note 47 above), 10.
94. Wright, *The Looming Tower* (see note 49 above), 268.
95. Lawrence Wright, "The Man Behind Bin Laden," *New Yorker*, Sep. 16, 2002, 56–85.
96. Gerges, *The Far Enemy* (see note 7 above), 169.
97. *Ibid.*, 169.
98. Tawil, "Interview with Hani al-Sibai" (see note 86 above), 15; Andrew Higgins and Alan Cullison, "Saga of Dr. Zawahri Sheds Light On the Roots of al Qaeda Terror," *Wall Street Journal*, July 2, 2002, 8.
99. Wright, *The Looming Tower* (see note 49 above), 269.
100. *Ibid.*, 336.
101. As quoted in Gerges, *The Far Enemy* (see note 7 above), 171.
102. Tawil, "Interview with Hani al-Sibai" (see note 86 above), 15.
103. Higgins and Cullison, "Saga of Dr. Zawahri" (see note 98 above), 10.
104. "Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000005" (see note 72 above), 1–2.
105. Bill Roggio, "Somalia's Shabaab Vows Allegiance to New al Qaeda Emir Zawahiri," *The Long War Journal*, June 17, 2011, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/06/somalias_shabaab_vow.php; Nelly Lahoud, "The Merger of Al-Shabab and Qa'idat al-Jihad," *CTC Sentinel* 5, no. 2 (2012): 1–5.
106. United States Department of State, *2005 Country Reports on Terrorism* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), 136.
107. "Letter Exposes New Leader" (see note 46 above), 16.
108. *Ibid.*, 3–18.
109. Al-Zawahiri (see note 46 above), 10.
110. "Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000011," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (2007), 1–5.
111. Nelly Lahoud, *Beware of Imitators: Al-Qa'ida Through the Lens of Its Confidential Secretary* (West Point: Combating Terrorism Center, 2012), 77.
112. "Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000003," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (2010), 6–7.
113. "Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (n.d.), 6–18.
114. Vahid Brown, "Classical and Global Jihad: Al-Qa'ida's Franchising Frustrations," in Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman, eds., *Fault Lines in Global Jihad: Organizational, Strategic, and Ideological Fissures* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 88–116.

115. "Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000009," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (n.d.), 1.
116. "Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000007," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (n.d.), 1.
117. Mary Anne Weaver, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi," *The Atlantic*, June 8, 2006, n.p.
118. Peter Bergen, "Al Qaeda: Post-Osama, Now What?," *New York Magazine*, August 27, 2011, <http://nymag.com/news/9-11/10th-anniversary/al-qaeda/>.
119. C. Christine Fair, "Lashkar-e-Tayiba and the Pakistani State," *Survival* 53, no. 4 (2011): 8; United States of America v. Tahawwur Hussain, Docket no. 09 CR 830, (N.D. Illinois E. Div. 2011), 83.
120. Stephen Tankel, *Storming the World Stage: The Story of Lashkar-e-Taiba* (London: C. Hurst and Co., 2011), 109.
121. United States Department of State, *2009 Country Reports on Terrorism* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010); Tankel, *Storming the World Stage* (see note 120 above), 150.
122. Scott Shane, "Waterboarding Used 266 Times on 2 Suspects," *New York Times*, April 19, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/20/world/20detain.html?_r=0.
123. "Letter Exposes New Leader" (see note 46 above), 10; Al-Zawahiri (see note 46 above), 12.