Hellfire over the Tribal Areas: An Analysis of the Impact of United States Drone Strikes on Al Qaeda Central in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, 2004-2011

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ABSTRACT

This thesis assesses how United States drone strikes against al Qaeda Central in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, in Pakistan, between 2004 and 2011, affected the broader organization of al Qaeda. This research was conducted by means of a 7-S analysis of al Qaeda's broader organization throughout two timeframes: from 1988 until 2001, the pre-drone phase, and from 2001 until 2011, the intra-drone phase, across seven organizational factors, namely Shared Values, Strategy, Structure, Systems, Style, Staff and Skills. This paper found that US drone strikes directly impacted al Qaeda's Structure, Style, Staff, Skills and Systems and indirectly its Shared Values. Al Qaeda's Strategy remained unaffected. The drone program affected al Qaeda mostly by denying al Qaeda secure communications, killing large numbers of operatives, thereby accelerating al Qaeda's educational and promotional processes, and by disrupting the intergenerational transfer of skills and knowledge.

ABBREVIATIONS

AQ - al Qaeda

AQAP – al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

AQI - al Qaeda in Iraq

AQIM - al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

AQIS - al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent

AQKB - al Qaeda Kurdish Battalions

AQY – al Qaeda in Yemen

AUMF – Authorization for Use of Military Force

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

COIN – counterinsurgency

CT – counterterrorism

CTC – Combatting Terrorism Center

EIJ - Egyptian Islamic Jihad group

F3EA – Find, fix, finish, exploit, analyze-cycle

FATA – Federally Administered Tribal Areas

GICM – Groupe Islamique Combattant Marocain [Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group]

GWOT – Global War on Terror

HUMINT – human intelligence

HVT – high-value target

IS – Islamic State

JSOC – Joint Special Operations Command

KSA – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OSINT – open source intelligence

SIGINT – signals intelligence

UCAV – unmanned combat aerial vehicle

UK – United Kingdom

UN – United Nations

US - United States

USSR – Soviet Union

VBIED – vehicle-borne improvised explosive device

WMD – weapon of mass destruction

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Despite the United States' (US) efforts to defeat al Qaeda (AQ) following the events of 9/11, the latter has managed to survive into 2021, while even expanding its organization globally (Farrall, 2011; Goepner, 2016, p. 116; Taylor, 2019; Stanford University, 2019). AQ expanded either by erecting new affiliates or by absorbing already present regional groups. Between the years 2000 and 2019, AQ gained, respectively, al Qaeda in Yemen[1] (AQY) (2000 – 2009)[2]; al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula[3] (AQAP) (2009)[4]; al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) (2004 – 2014)[5]; al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb[6] (AQIM) (2007); al Qaeda Kurdish Battalions[7] (AQKB) (2007); al Shabab[8] (2007); al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent[9] (AQIS) (2014); Jabhat al Nusra[10] (2014 - 2017)[11]; and Tandhim Hurras al Deen[12] (2018). Besides establishing these direct affiliates AQ also forged cooperative relationships with dozens of other regional groups, most of which are located in southeast Asia, central Asia and Africa. Closeness of cooperation between AQ's central structures and said affiliates and groups vary per case (New America, n.d.; Stanford University, 2019). AQ's three-decade survival is significant considering the means utilized by the US to fight the group: an invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and its subsequent occupation until 2021; and a targeted killing campaign by means of unmanned combat aerial vehicles[13] (UCAVs) over Afghanistan, Somalia since 2001, Yemen since 2002, and Pakistan since 2004,

[1] Merged with al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in 2009 (Stanford University, 2019).
[2] The dates provided here refer to an organization's year of affiliation (and if relevant, break) with AQ's command. The dates of affiliation are not always the same as an affiliate's year of founding, i.e., an organization might have already been founded before joining AQ. Affiliation as it is understood here ends with cessation of cooperation or defeat or disappearance of the group in question. No end date means group is assumed active to date (that is, 2021).
[3] AQAP, just like AQY, has been predominantly active in Yemen (Carboni & Sulz, 2020).
[4] AQY was absorbed by AQAP in 2009) (Stanford University, 2019).
[5] Following internal discord with AQ Central, AQI evolved into Islamic State (IS) in February 2014 (Stanford University, 2019).
[6] Predominantly active in Algeria, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger (European Council on Foreign Relations, n.d.).
[7] AQKB has been predominantly active on the Iranian-Iraqi border (U.S. Department of State, 2012).
[8] Predominantly active in Somalia, but also in Ethiopia and Kenya (Barnett, 2018).
[9] Predominantly active in Afghanistan, India, Kashmir and Bangladesh (Counter Extremism Project, n.d.).
[10] Predominantly active in Syria (Newlee, 2018).
[11] Jabhat al Nusra became known as Jabhat Fatah al Sham in 2016, after it merged with another group. In 2016, Fatah al Sham became known as Hayat Tahrir al Sham, after it merged again with other groups. It is subject of debate whether or not al Nusra can still be considered an AQ affiliate after giving rise to the various aforementioned offshoot groups in 2017 (Stanford University, 2019).
[12] Tandhim Hurras al Deen was founded by disenchanted members of Hayat Tahrir al Sham who wanted closer ties to AQ (New America, n.d.).
[13] Also referred to as 'drones'.

with the goal of eliminating so-called 'high-value targets'[14] (HVT)s (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism; The Bureau of Investigative Journalism; The Bureau of Investigative Journalism; The Bureau of Investigative Journalism).

This thesis examines the US drone campaign against AQ in Pakistan which took place predominantly over the Federally Administered Tribal Areas[15] (FATA), a region in northwestern Pakistan on the Afghan-Pakistani border[16]. Having had a special administrative status within Pakistan's national borders since the establishment of the Pakistani state, on 14 August, 1947, the FATA, consisting of seven districts and six frontier regions, has always been largely self-governed by Pashtun tribes according to tribalistic, traditional Islamic values. As a result, the FATA is characterized by strongly distinct cultural and legal traditions (Government of FATA, 2008; International Crisis Group, 2018). Following the joint US-NATO[17] invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001 named Operation Enduring Freedom, a variety of armed groups, some of them fleeing Afghanistan, gradually began settling down in the FATA, linking up with regional factions like the Haqqani Network and the Pakistani Taliban. Among these groups settling down across the border were AQ's core command structure (AQ Central) and the Afghan Taliban (National Counterterrorism Center, n.d.). From the FATA, AQ Central would continue organizing attacks and (re-)establish communications with their (future) affiliates around the globe (Williams B. G., 2010, p. 873; McCormick, 2014).

Between November 2004 and November 2011 the US carried out approximately 306 drone strikes on AQ Central in the FATA. At least one strike was carried out per year from June 2004 to December 2007. However, March 2008 marked an acceleration in US drone sorties over Pakistan, and a few surges in strikes stand out: 9 strikes in October 2008; 12 strikes in January 2010; 23 strikes in September 2010; and 13 strikes in 2011. Most of these strikes took place in the provinces of North Waziristan, South Waziristan, Kurram, Khyber and Orakzai, respectively (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, n.d.). Between June 2001 and November 2011, an estimated 1.992 minimum to 3.113 maximum people were killed in the FATA drone strikes. Minimally 408 casualties can be attributed to adult civilians and 171 to minors. At least

[14] Defined in US military circles as "A target the enemy commander requires for the successful completion of the mission. The loss of high-value targets would be expected to seriously degrade important enemy functions throughout the friendly commander's area of interest" (Department of Defense, 2007, p. 240).
[15] Although as of 2021 what is here referred to as the FATA technically and geographically does not exist anymore, as the FATA region merged with the neighboring province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa on May 28, 2018, this paper will still use the term 'FATA' to refer to the specific region that historically comprised the districts of Mohmand, Bajaur, Khyber, Orakzai, North Waziristan, South Waziristan, Kurram; and the frontier regions of Peshawar, Bannu, Kohat, Lakki Marwat, Tank and Dera Ismail Khan (International Crisis Group, 2018).
[16] The larger Afghanistan-Pakistan region will hereafter be referred to as the 'AfPak region'.
[17] North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

946 people have been reported injured in the strikes (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, n.d.). If the reported figures are correct, the remaining number can be ascribed to groups designated as terrorist and or insurgent, such as AQ. Throughout the years 2001 to 2011 AQ Central lost roughly around seventy explosives experts, trainers, mid- to high-level commanders and liaisons in the FATA alone (Roggio, Senior al Qaeda, Taliban, and Allied Jihadist Leaders Killed in US Airstrikes in Pakistan, 2004 – 2017, 2017). Notable AQ Central personnel killed by US UCAVs in the FATA between 2004 and 2011 include[18]: Abu Hamza Rabia[19] in 2005; Mohsin Musa Matawalli Atwah[20] in 2006; Sheikh Abu Khabab al Masri[21] and his team in 2008; Khalid Habib[22] in 2008; Abu Mohammad Ibrahim bin Abi al Faraj al Masri[23] in 2008; Abdullah Said al Libi[24] in 2009; Sheikh Said al Masri[25] in 2010; Mohammad Ilyas Kashmiri[26] in 2011; and Atiyah Abd al Rahman[27] also in 2011. This raises the broader question of the impact of US drone strikes on AQ.

[18] List is non-exhaustive and based on relevance for this paper.

[19] Head of AQ's Special Section starting from 2003 (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1061). Rabia was involved in two AQ conspiracies to assassinate the Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf (Roggio, Senior al Qaeda, Taliban, and Allied Jihadist Leaders Killed in US Airstrikes in Pakistan, 2004 – 2017, 2017).

[20] Egyptian national. AQ bombmaker involved in the 1998 US embassy bombings (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, n.d.).

[21] Egyptian national. AQ's senior explosives expert and head of AQ's weapons of mass destruction program (Roggio, Senior al Qaeda, Taliban, and Allied Jihadist Leaders Killed in US Airstrikes in Pakistan, 2004 – 2017, 2017; Mir, 2018).

[22] A.k.a. Khaled al Harbi. Killed in the same strike as Khabab al Masri. Khalid Habib was the president of AQ's Military Committee since 2005 (Roggio, Al Qaeda Commanders al-Magrabi and Habib Killed in Damadola, 2006). Additionally, Habib headed AQ's Lashkar al Zil [Shadow Army], a special operations fighting force made up of different groups related and allied to AQ, active in the AfPak region (Roggio, Senior al Qaeda, Taliban, and Allied Jihadist Leaders Killed in US Airstrikes in Pakistan, 2004 – 2017, 2017). Habib also headed post-9/11 AQ's General Section. The General Section is a sub-part of AQ's Military Committee and consists of a combat component and a training component (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1061; Al Qaeda, p. 1).

[23] Egyptian national. Influential AQ theologian (Roggio, Senior al Qaeda, Taliban, and Allied Jihadist Leaders Killed in US Airstrikes in Pakistan, 2004 – 2017, 2017).

[24] Libyan national. Took over presidency over AQ's Military Committee after his predecessor, Khalid Habib, was killed by a US drone earlier in 2008 (Roggio, Al Qaeda Shadow Army Commander Thought Killed in Dec. 17 Strike, 2010).

[25] A.k.a. Mustafa abu al Yazid; Mustafa Muhammad Ahmad. Egyptian national. Post-9/11 AQ's most senior financial official and general manager (Lumpkin, Shaikh Saiid al-Masri: Al-Qaeda Financial Chief, 2006). Said al Masri was also post-9/11 AQ's emir (ruler) of Qaidat al Jihad fi Khorasan [The Base of the Jihad in the Khorasan] (Roggio, Al Qaeda Appoints New Commander for Afghanistan, 2010). 'The Khorasan' refers to the region of Tajikistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan (Roggio, Al Qaeda Appoints New Commander for Afghanistan, 2010).

[26] Pakistani-Kashmiri national. Assumed presidency over AQ's Military Committee after his predecessor, Abdullah Said al Libi, was killed in a US drone strike in 2009 (Zahid, 2014). Ilyas Kashmiri Also headed AQ's Lashkar al Zil and Harakat-ul Jihad Islami, an Indian-Pakistani terrorist group (Roggio, Senior al Qaeda, Taliban, and Allied Jihadist Leaders Killed in US Airstrikes in Pakistan, 2004 – 2017, 2017; United Nations Security Council, n.d.).

[27] A.k.a. Shaykh Mahmoud. Libyan national. Post-9/11 AQ's third in command and close adviser to AQ's emir Osama bin Laden (Roggio, Senior al Qaeda, Taliban, and Allied Jihadist Leaders Killed in US Airstrikes in Pakistan, 2004 – 2017, 2017; Stanford University, 2019).

The main research question posed in this paper is 'how have US drone strikes against AQ Central in the FATA, between 2004 and 2011, affected the broader organization[28] of AQ?' The thesis will assess this question through a comprehensive examination of AQ's broader organizational development throughout two timeframes: from 1988 until 2001[29], the pre-drone phase; and from 2001 until 2011[30], the intra-drone phase, along with seven organizational factors (Shared Values, Strategy, Structure, Systems, Style, Staff, Skills[31]). The following will be analyzed: first, how have US drone strikes affected these organizational factors as time progressed; second, how is 'droned' AQ's broader organization different from its pre-drone predecessor; and third, can we ascribe the organizational changes in question to the US' kinetic intervention? For the purpose of answering the main question, the main question will be divided into two sub question, respectively: 'what was the state (i.e., the collective of the aspects of Strategy, Structure, Style, Staff, Skills, Systems and Shared Values) of pre-9/11 AQ's broader organization?'; and, 'what was the state of post-9/11 AQ's broader organization and how was this shaped by US drone strikes on AQ Central in the FATA?'.

This paper will argue that the US drone strikes on AQ Central, between 2004 and 2011, affected AQ's broader organization in a variety of ways, directly, and indirectly. It is argued that AQ's broader organization was mostly affected across the elements of Structure, Style, Staff, Skills and Systems. Indirectly, US drone strikes affected AQ's Shared values, while AQ's Strategy seems to have been minimally impacted. Arguably, AQ was mostly affected due to the constraints posed on its communications by the US surveillance systems supportive of the drone program, the constant need to replace its leaders and experts killed by US drones, and a general loss of ability and knowledge on specific skills, such as explosives.

The research of this paper is of an explanatory nature. It seeks to examine the interaction between AQ Central's broader organizational development and resilience on the one hand, and the influence of US drone strikes on the other. As such, this paper aims to move beyond the typical debates regarding the US drone program, which have until now revolved predominantly around notions of law, ethics, morality and effectiveness (Byman, Do Targeted Killings Work?, 2006; Cronin, 2013; Whetham, 2013). The thesis moves beyond these debates by examining effectiveness with a focus on the terrorists' experience of the drone program through an analysis

[28] Broader organization meaning AQ Central and its network of affiliates.
[29] Referred to in this thesis as the 'pre-9/11' period.
[30] Referred to in this thesis as the 'post-9/11' period.
[31] Taken from The McKinsey 7-S Framework. The McKinsey 7-S framework is a tool developed by McKinsey Consultancy to assess specific developments within an organization and to see whether these development are either beneficial or detrimental for the said organization to achieve its goals (Jurevicius, 2013). This model will be explained in more detail in the conceptual framework below.

of intended and unintended consequences. It is understood that AQ is no mere spectator to US counterterrorism (CT) policies, but an active participant, capable of adaptation and adjustment. Taking this into consideration, this thesis aims to contribute to the academic field of CT studies, on the subject of drone-centered targeted killing, an insight into the consequences of such kinetic CT policies. Additionally, this paper provides an insight into AQ's organizational development throughout the pre-9/11-post-9/11 period.

From a societal perspective, the subject of this paper is related to the empirical observation that drones, armed and unarmed, have become increasingly popular tools for states in pursuing CT, surveillance and warfare operations. The US, Israel, and the United Kingdom (UK), among others, already have decades of experience with UCAVs, however, other actors are also increasingly acquiring and utilizing UCAVs. France, for example, executed its first lethal drone mission, in Mali, in December 2019, killing seven alleged terrorists (Agence France-Presse, 2019). With over 36 countries in possession of UCAVs and the number steadily rising, this perhaps signals and era in which targeted killings by UCAVs become 'normalized' (New America, n.d.). One of the latest examples of this increased normalization of UCAV utilization by the US arguably is their assassination of the Iranian general, Qasem Soleimani, on 3 January, 2020. This event sparked outrage in Iran, but also raised questions globally regarding the role of UCAVs and the future of remote warfare (Warrell, 2020). Given the normalization of unmanned technologies, it has become increasingly relevant for society to understand the effects that these tools can have on their respective targets, and to see how targets develop under such circumstances.

This paper will now first engage with the current state of the debate on US drone warfare and review the McKinsey 7-S model as a conceptual framework able to measure the impact of US drone strikes across AQ's broader organization. Thereafter, the paper's research methods will be discussed and justified in the methodology section. This will be followed by the analysis which will engage with the state of AQ, first examining pre-9/11 AQ across seven organizational elements, after which examining post-9/11 AQ across seven organizational elements, and reviewing how US drone strikes contributed to the development of AQ's various organizational factors throughout time. The conclusion will summarize the research paper and conclude that US drone strikes on AQ Central, between 2004 and 2011, indeed affected AQ's broader organization in a variety of ways, directly, and indirectly.

1. THE CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH AND A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The State of the Drone Debate

The United States' (US) Global War on Terror (GWOT) that followed the events of 9/11 saw the institutionalization of a US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)-US Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC)-led unmanned combat aerial vehicle (UCAV)-centered targeted killing program to fight al Qaeda (AQ) (Fuller, 2015). The US' drone-centered targeted killing program has been praised as well as criticized.

According to former US president and then commander-in-chief of the US armed forces, Barack Obama[32], UCAVs were effective because they allowed the US to remove highly skilled AQ commanders, experts and fighters from the battlefield, while simultaneously undermining their capacity to plan attacks on the US, America's Western allies, or friendly militaries stationed abroad. Additionally, he argued, drones allowed the US to attack terrorists in countries of which its respective rulers were either unwilling or incapable to address the terrorist presence there, although with less (political) risk involved. America's utilization of drones abroad was legal, he claimed, because it was approved by Congress under the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) and the US was officially at war with AQ (The White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2013; Currier, Drone Strikes Test Legal Grounds for War on Terror, 2013; Authorization for Use of Military Force, 2001). The benefits of UCAVs for counterterrorism (CT) purposes provided by Obama are supported, as well as contested in academic literature on the subject.

Proponents of UCAV-based targeted killing programs claim it can derail terrorist organizations through 'leadership decapitation'. This refers to the theory that the elimination of commanders in hierarchical organizations can cause chaos and a loss of direction down the chain of command of the targeted network (Price, 2010, p. 8). Whether the organizational derailment is definite, however, depends on the organizational makeup of the targeted network in question and whether the targeted group can cope with such disruptive interventions or not (Mir, 2018, p. 54; The Bureau of Investigative Journalism; Purkiss, Somalia: Reported US Actions 2019, 2019; Purkiss & Fielding-Smith, Pakistan: Reported US Strikes 2018, 2018; Burke, Bin Laden Letters Reveal Al-Qaida's Fears of Drone Strikes and Infiltration , 2016).

Parallel to the persistent decapitation of an organization's leadership is the possibility of the gradual erosion of skillful management. In a situation where the pressure exerted by

[32] Incumbent January 20, 2009 - January 20, 2017 (The Library of Congress, 2019).

targeted killings is high and of a constant nature, the targeted organization can find it increasingly hard to install capable persons on the right posts in a quick manner. This can lead to a gradual de-professionalization of the targeted organization in question, as junior personnel increasingly needs to fill senior roles and educational processes are 'completed' early. This raises the chances of the organization in question making avoidable, but costly, mistakes (Byman, Why Drones work: The Case for Washington's Weapon of Choice, 2013, p. 33).

Moreover, it is argued that the way the US manages its UCAV-based targeted killing program aids in containing the expansion and development of targeted organizations. The US drone program operates largely on the basis of signals intelligence[33] (SIGINT) (Scahill, 2015). Because of the electronic surveillance techniques that lie at the base of SIGINT operations, targeted groups are confronted with restraints on electronic and digital communications. This generally discourages them from utilizing certain means of communication, because of the risks involved. By denying terrorists fast, modern means of communication, the US can constrain the scope of their expansion and speed of operations (Williams B. G., 2010, p. 871).

Finally, it is argued that targeted killings can to some extent complicate the interaction between terrorist groups and the 'outside world'. As the drone program often amounts to collateral damage, i.e., killed civilians, 'outsiders' to terrorist groups might feel increasingly reluctant to interact with persons they suspect of being high value targets (HVTs) on a terrorism watchlist, for they do not want to become collateral damage to the targeted killing, or to be perceived guilty by association. Additionally, the US uses human intelligence (HUMINT) provided by (assumedly) friendly and/or hired private entities in areas of interest to plan strikes and map HVTs and their movements. Increased reluctance of the outside world to associate with local terrorist groups and the relevant threat for terrorists of exposing themselves to possible hostile informants outside of their network make that local terrorist groups and local inhabitants can remain, to a certain degree, separated from one another. Simultaneously, the informant threat can increase mutual distrust within targeted groups themselves (Williams B. G., 2010, p. 879; Mir, 2018, p. 54).

However, other scholars and analysts in the fields of Middle Eastern Politics, Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency and Political Science voice critique of the way in which the US organizes and exercises its UCAV-based targeted killing program. For critics, the program is morally wrong for the prevalence of civilian casualties in drone attacks (Johnston & Sarbahi, 2015, p. 2; Byman, Do Targeted Killings Work?, 2006, p. 101). Civilian casualties can

[33] 'Signals intelligence' is intelligence based on metadata, gathered through the tracking of digital behavior and personal electronic devices, such as phones and personal computers (Scahill, 2015).

be caused by faulty intelligence and negligent drone operators, but also by flaws seemingly characteristic to drone warfare itself, such as 'blinking'[34] and seeing the world as though through a 'soda straw[35]' (Begley, 2015). These factors, it is argued, make drones an impractical and dangerous CT tool.

Cronin extends this critique and argues that although drones are highly effective at the tactical level[36], their benefits at the strategic level[37] may be grossly overestimated. He argues that 'botched' drone strikes, which cause severe collateral damage, only help to strengthen anti-American sentiments and pro-Jihadist attitudes. In turn, this sets into motion processes which stand in perpendicular contrast to the original goals of the US' GWOT, namely the eradication of terrorism globally (Cronin, 2013, p. 44). At the core of this argument lies the idea that exporting aggressive American CT policies overseas will contribute to only more anti-American sentiment, which in turn leads the US to retaliate again against this anti-American sentiment, leading once more to the development of more negative attitudes on the receiving end, all feeding into a cycle of violence, terrorism and retaliation with every interaction (Johnson, 2004).

Beyond ethical objections, critics have also questioned the legal basis of UCAV-based targeted killings. Despite the AUMF, the US' targeted killing program is illegal, they argue, because it sees the US carrying out 'extrajudicial executions' of 'civilians' instead of aiming to prosecute those suspected of terrorism in a court of law. In a 'healthy' democracy, it is argued, one should be presumed innocent until proven otherwise (Williams B. G., 2010, p. 881; Byman, Do Targeted Killings Work?, 2006, p. 101; Price, 2010, p. 10). Moreover, CIA drone operators have in the past systematically and overtly breached international humanitarian law by

[34] A 'blink' occurs when a drone needs to leave one area of observation to go elsewhere (e.g. for refueling and or rearming). Until a new drone takes the position of the drone that left, there is no surveillance of the area in question. It might be unclear to the observers what happened to the person(s) they were following during the period outside of the observation. The goal of US military and intelligence agencies is to develop a system capable of providing them with what they call a 'persistent stare', but this has proved difficult in reality (Begley, 2015).

[35] Whereas the UCAVs used by the US for carrying out targeted killings, such as the MQ-1 Predator and the MQ-9 Reaper drones, are able to zoom in with their camera's in order to observe significant details regarding their target, zooming in does narrow the operator's field of view, making it appear as if peering through a soda straw. Because of this visual effect, (relevant) context of what happens outside of the soda straw vision is lost. Unbeknownst to the operators observing the target, outside of the field of vision might be civilians or essential infrastructure still within the blast radius of the strike. This soda straw vision is a major factor in collateral damage (Bergen & Rothenberg, 2015, p. 57).

[36] The tactical level refers to the 'lowest' level of military operations, and comprises the actual combat activities on the ground (USAF College of Aerospace Doctrine, Research and Education (CADRE), 1997).

[37] The strategic level is the level which defines an entity's national policy, or, in AQ's case, their organizational policy. The strategic level encompasses an overarching policy goal, and an idea of the means which are necessary to achieve this policy goal. It is thus the level of organizational philosophy, master-planning and *raison d'être* (USAF College of Aerospace Doctrine, Research and Education (CADRE), 1997).

employing so-called 'double tap'[38] strikes in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) during the GWOT campaign (Gusterson, 2019).

On a more practical level, it is also argued that targeted killings by drone can undermine CT and counterinsurgency (COIN) operations. Generally, US CT and COIN strategies are based on a cycle that incorporates the tasks of 'find', 'fix', 'finish', 'exploit' and 'analyze' (F3EA cycle). Every end of the F3EA cycle is the beginning of a new cycle; every HVT leads to a new one. However, UCAVs can often only execute the first three tasks - they cannot descend upon the targeted HVT or compound to collect follow-up information, nor harvest HUMINT to support the next cycle. By contrast, humans would be able to complete the intended cycle of CT and COIN operations, highlighting the strategic shortcoming of UCAV-based targeted killings (Currier & Maass, Firing Blind: Flawed Intelligence and the Limits of Drone Technology, 2015; Faint & Harris, 2012).

Such critiques have been widely debated. Obama notes that whilst he recognizes the aforementioned shortcomings of drone warfare mentioned by its critics, he emphasizes that international conflict inherently "… invites tragedy" (The White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2013) and when it comes to conducting overseas CT operations drones are the lesser evil option (The White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2013). Indeed, the debate surrounding UACVs is one of multifaceted ethical and moral considerations at the center of the US-led GWOT. Notwithstanding the importance of these debates on law, ethics and effectiveness or the broader study of drone warfare (Byman, Do Targeted Killings Work?, 2006; Cronin, 2013; Whetham, 2013), for this specific paper they are not of particular relevance, as this paper conducts a case study analysis into how US drone strikes vis-à-vis AQ Central affected the broader organization of AQ. In short, the purpose of this research is not to argue in favor of or against the legality or morality of targeted killings by drones *per se;* it is to engage with the experience and organizational development of AQ under drones.

This research builds on existing research on targeted killings by UCAVs that examines the impact of US drone strikes on terrorism and terrorist organizations. Most notably this includes the work of Patrick B. Johnston and Anoop K. Sarbahi, which examined the impact of the US drone program in Pakistan, and Colin P. Clarke, who conducted a 7-S analysis of AQ's general organizational development over the scope of three decades (Johnston & Sarbahi, 2015)

[38] Double tapping is a practice where drone operators, after having fired a first strike on the main target, loiter in the skies above the first strike with the aim of launching a second strike on the first responders to the scene of the first strike. The idea behind double tapping is that the first responders to a HVT-targeted strike are probably accomplices of the hit HVT and are thus legitimate targets for US UCAVs. As such, double tapping is based on assumptions rather than intelligence (Gusterson, 2019).

(Clarke, 2019). This thesis draws on these insights and approaches by extending the analysis of AQ's organizational development under the US drone program in the FATA region.

The McKinsey 7-S Framework: A Conceptual Framework

In order to answer the research question, of how US drone strikes against AQ Central in the FATA between 2004 and 2011 have affected the broader organization of AQ, this paper will deploy the McKinsey 7-S framework as a conceptual framework. The 7-S framework and its suitability for this research will be explained below.

The McKinsey 7-S framework was developed in the 1980s by McKinsey Consultancy employees Tom Peters, Julien Philips and Robert Waterman with the help of Harvard Scholar Anthony G. Athos. The 7-S model enables one to assess whether and to what extent a company, brand or organization is organized in an optimal fashion, and, if not, what elements of the subject are organized inadequately or are underdeveloped. The 7-S model does so by evaluating the subject's seven *S*s, which are divided into two groups: the hard *S*s, i.e., Strategy, Structure and Systems; and the soft *S*s, i.e., Style, Staff, Skills and Shared Values (Shared Values being at the center of the hexagon-shaped model). If all of the *S*s are aligned, then the company or organization is allegedly calibrated in a way that maximally benefits its strategic potential and it can be said of to be in a good state. If one or more *S*s are out of balance with the rest, then the unbalanced *S*s in question will need to be realigned with the rest of the whole before the subject can be regarded as functional again. As all the *S*s in the network are interconnected, only one unaligned *S* will discredit the total balance, and thus, affect the overall state of the assessed organization in a negative manner. The 7-S framework is not a hierarchical system: all elements are equally important for the organization's performance. The hard *S*s (Strategy, Structure and Systems) are called 'hard' because they are easier to identify and to adjust than the soft *S*s (Style, Staff, Skills, and Shared Values). The soft *S*s, less tangible, however, pose as the foundation for any organization and, when aligned, can help the company to gain an advantage over its competitors (Jurevicius, 2013).

In the 7-S model, Strategy refers to the collective of goals deemed necessary by the leadership to be achieved in order to secure a position relatively advantageous with regard to its opponents and competitors, while simultaneously coping with challenges in its internal and external environment. Thus, Strategy encompasses a set of actions which would ideally strengthen the position of the organization in question with respect to its competitors in a

dynamic environment (Waterman, Peters, & Phillips, 1980, p. 20; Clarke, 2019, p. 3).

Structure refers to the way an organization is organized hierarchically. Structure regards the division of tasks and chains of communication. Structure is thus concerned with how the tasks are divided within the organization, how the execution of these tasks is coordinated among the various components of an organization, and who answers to whom (Waterman, Peters, & Phillips, 1980, p. 19; Jurevicius, 2013; Clarke, 2019, p. 4).

Style denotes the way a company or organization is managed and led by its top managers, i.e., organizational culture. For instance, how does the leadership interact with it subordinates, and what symbolism is attached to their behavior (Waterman, Peters, & Phillips, 1980, p. 22; Jurevicius, 2013; Clarke, 2019, p. 4)?

Staff refers to an organization's employees in two ways. First, Staff refers to training programs, pay scales, promotion cycles, etc.; asking how talent is exploited efficiently within the organization. Second, Staff refers to the attitudes of these people who are situated within the organization under assessment. Do its employees behave according to the explicit and implicit rules set; are they motivated; and what is the state of their morale (Waterman, Peters, & Phillips, 1980, p. 23; Jurevicius, 2013)?

Skills refer to an organization and its employees' their special abilities and/or dominating attributes. For an organization to be successful it is important that its available skillset can support the strategy envisaged by its leadership (Waterman, Peters, & Phillips, 1980, p. 24; Jurevicius, 2013). An organization itself can be known for certain skills (institutional skills) while individual personnel can also possess special skills (individual skills). In the context of AQ, when thinking of skills, one can think of practices such as bomb-making, counterfeiting and propaganda development (Clarke, 2019, p. 4).

Systems describe all the formal processes which are involved the particular organization's daily routine: budgeting systems; cost accounting procedures; training systems; capital budgeting systems; internal security etc. Together, systems support the organization as a whole (Waterman, Peters, & Phillips, 1980, p. 21; Jurevicius, 2013).

Last, at the center of the 7-S model, we can find Shared Values. The Shared Values element describes the norms and standards that influence and lead the behavior of an organization its leadership and subordinates (Jurevicius, 2013). Shared Values provide an organization with a moral code which determine which actions are acceptable in the pursuit of the envisioned strategy and which are not (Clarke, 2019, p. 4).

Although the 7-S model was originally intended to serve marketing and business ends, designed for analyzing corporate organizations, it is applicable elsewhere. Indeed, AQ is a

global terrorist organization, which exhibits many elements of a modern commercial multinational enterprise, including a business strategy, work ethic, human resources departments, public relations offices, budgeting procedures and even a corporate-style standard job application form (Al Qaeda; Vittori, 2004). As such, one should be able to assess AQ's organization using the 7-S model like with any other global corporate venture.

However, there are also dissimilarities between the global terrorist organization AQ and the more 'traditional' multinational enterprises that sell, for example, food and or beverages or software. Because of the specific nature of AQ's trade, terrorism, AQ operates in a different, and perhaps more critical security environment than non-terrorist organizations. This reflects upon AQ's ability to operate and communicate, as this cannot happen open and freely everywhere[39] (Clarke, 2019, p. 3). In a normal setting, 'traditional' multinational corporations might be less constrained in their movement than AQ – that is, if these companies are not facing prosecution by local governing bodies of those areas in which they operate for, for example, political reasons. For the 7-S analysis, however, what matters is the organizational makeup of the organization under assessment, not the background against which this organization operates. That is why, despite AQ not being a traditional multinational company, it can still be analyzed according to the 7-S framework.

The 7-S framework is not only an effective model for analyzing an organization's condition and or performance, but can also be deployed to study an organization's development. If one were to analyze an organization on a periodical basis using the 7-S model, one could create a timeline of the subject under observation and map how the organization's various elements are either improving or deteriorating, or are either converging or diverging. This paper will see the application of the 7-S model to the case of AQ's organization under US drones in a longitudinal case study from 2004 to 2011.

That the 7-S model also serves CT studies in practice was demonstrated by author Colin Clarke in his 2019 article *Using the McKinsey 7S Framework to Assess Al-Qaeda over Three Decades: Lessons for the Future* (2019). Clarke was the first scholar to apply the 7-S model in CT studies. In his paper, Clarke concluded that AQ's three-decade survival should be largely credited to the organization's Structure, Skills and Systems. According to Clarke, regarding Structure, AQ managed to maintain a large bureaucratic apparatus even during the height of the

[39] For terrorist organizations, their freedom of movement and communications also depends on whether they are situated and or operating within so-called 'terrorist safe havens'. Terrorist safe havens are defined as "… ungoverned, under-governed, or ill-governed physical areas where terrorists are able to organize, plan, raise funds, communicate, recruit, train, transit, and operate in relative security because of inadequate governance capacity, political will, or both" (Bureau of Counterterrorism, 2019, p. 204).

War on Terror and integrated a sense of flexibility into its hierarchical system. AQ's Skills element was mostly maintained because of the importance that the group attached to knowledge transfer, within the organization, as well as outside of it. This allegedly allowed the group to recover from personnel losses. Most importantly, according to Clarke, AQ's Systems allowed the group to successfully manage a large global organization in which different disciplines needed to support each other. The large-scale attacks successfully carried out by the group, he argued, are a direct consequence of how well AQ functioned as a whole (Clarke, 2019, p. 25).

This thesis builds further on Clarke's research, however, in a more specific fashion. Whereas Clarke assessed AQ's development in a broad manner, this thesis provides a longitudinal case study specifically focused on the question of how US drone strikes against AQ Central in the FATA, between 2004 and 2011, have affected the broader organization of AQ. In the following paper the 7-S framework, as explained above, will be utilized to study AQ's organizational development. How were broader AQ's 7-S elements influenced by US drone strikes on its command structure in the FATA between 2004 and 2011?

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The following paper utilized a longitudinal case study design to assess how United States (US) drone strikes against al Qaeda (AQ) Central in the Federally administered Tribal Areas (FATA), between 2004 and 2011, affected the broader organization of AQ. This research was conducted by means of a qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis enables one to assess a wide variety of qualitative data, derived from a wide range of sources. It also provides one with the means to analyze longitudinal data and to see change. Moreover, it allows the researcher to triangulate contradictory and confirmatory data inductively, and to draw balanced conclusions out of supporting examples (Julien, 2012, p. 121).

Case Selection

The rationale behind studying how US drone strikes on AQ Central in the FATA affected the broader organization of AQ is multifold. First, what sets the Pakistani case of the US drone program apart is that it provides one with a fairly isolated case of a counter-terrorism (CT) approach chiefly centered around unmanned capabilities, and subsequently, the consequences that emanate from such a strong (over)reliance on unmanned technologies for CT ends. This uniquely strong dependence on unmanned platforms contrasts starkly with the observation that in most modern conflicts, CT and counterinsurgency (COIN) operations alike, unmanned capabilities are deployed alongside manned capabilities and boots on the ground (Jordan, 2021). Were one to inquire into the costs and benefits of CT operations based solely on unmanned capabilities, the case of the US vis-à-vis AQ Central in the FATA could be of scientific value.

The particular timeframe assessed in the case study was selected because it denotes an important period in AQ's development generally, as well as specifically in the context of the Global War on Terror (GWOT). Broadly, one can distinguish three periods in AQ's development: the pre-9/11 years (1988-2001); the post-9/11 years (2001-2011); and the al Zawahiri years (2011-2021). In order to research how US drone strikes against AQ Central in the FATA between 2004 and 2011 affected the broader organization of AQ, a 7-S analysis of AQ throughout the pre-9/11 and post-9/11 periods was conducted. This specific timeframe allows one to observe the original AQ, without the added external factor of US UCAVs, and the GWOT AQ, that is, the original AQ but which since 2004 found its leadership and broader

organization increasingly confronted by US drone strikes. This demarcation of time should give the observer an authentic insight in AQ's first organizational responses to the post-9/11 drone intervention and how AQ adapted to this external interference. Arguably, AQ adapted to the interference because they still existed as of 2021 and have thus not been defeated in the meantime. Additionally, the peak of US drone sorties over the FATA occurred in September 2010, this means that this way AQ's organizational development under both minimum as well as maximum interference by US drones is observed (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, n.d.).

Second, this timeframe was chosen because it exclusively covers AQ under Osama bin Laden's leadership. Originally, AQ was intended as a hierarchical organization in which the emir yielded the most power. AQ's emir thus has the power to influence the way the organization works (Al Qaeda). Hypothetically, this means that, were one emir traded for another, the organization under this second emir could be vastly different from the organization under his predecessor – even if only for personal reasons so. Due to this, performing a 7-S analysis of AQ's organizational development from 1988 until 2021, with the explicit goal of assessing how drones impacted various elements of the organization, could not *per se* tell us what we wanted, because the detected organizational changes might as well have been caused by personal influences from the emir. Hence, in order to maximize the isolation of the current case study with regard to its goals, the timeframe of the case study ends in May 2011, with the death of Osama bin Laden.

Data Collection and Analysis

In order to assess how US drone strikes on AQ Central in the FATA, between 2004 and 2011, have affected the broader organization of AQ, the author utilized both primary and secondary sources.

Regarding the first part of the analysis, dedicated to the state of pre-9/11 AQ, the research relied largely on primary sources in the form of internal documents from AQ's organization. Particularly informative were *Al-Qa`ida Goals and Structure [English]* (Al Qaeda) and *Al-Qa`ida's Structure and Bylaws [English]* (Al Qaeda). Both these official documents contain important information on AQ's original organizational structure as envisioned by its founding members and such have been vital for this research in determining the state of pre-9/11 AQ. These primary documents have been accessed via the website of West

Point's Combating Terrorism Center[40] (CTC). Also Osama bin Laden's *fatwas*[41], *Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places* (Bin Laden, 1996) and *Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders: World Islamic Front Statement* (Bin Laden, Al Zawahiri, Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, Hamzah, & Rahman, 1998), and his 1997 interview by CNN (CNN: 1997, Osama Bin Laden declares jihad, 1997) have been valuable for engaging with pre-9/11 AQ's organizational philosophies.

Regarding the second part of the analysis, dedicated the state of post-9/11 AQ and how US drone strikes on AQ Central between 2004 and 2011 affected the broader organization of AQ, letters sent by AQ Central members to one another have been examined in order to assess how AQ members experienced how their organization was being affected by US drone strikes. Key primary documents here relate mostly to letters sent from and between three important AQ Central individuals: Osama bin Laden, AQ's emir; Ayman al Zawahiri, AQ's deputy; and Atiyah Abd al Rahman, post-9/11 AQ's third in command and adviser to Bin Laden. Of these documents, crucial for this research have been *Letter of Osama bin Laden to Atiyah Abd al Rahman* (Bin Laden), *Al Zawahiri's Letter to Al Zarqawi [English translation]* (Al Zawahiri, 2005), letters found in the collection *Osama Bin Laden Letters [English Translations]* (Combatting Terrorism Center, 2012) and, finally, the evidence section of the United States v. Abid Naseer trial proceedings[42] (United States v. Abid Naseer, 2015). Ultimately, most of these primary documents originate from a larger repository of documents called *The Abbottabad Documents*[43]. The Abbottabad Documents are up for display at the website of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence[44] and the CTC, accessible for the public. Additionally, in order to inquire into post-9/11 AQ's values and philosophy, various interviews with Bin Laden have been accessed (CNN, 2001; CNN, 2002; Al Jazeera, 2004). In case primary sources were unavailable or inaccessible the author consulted secondary sources such as *The 9/11 Commission Report* (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004), which is a comprehensive inquiry into the events of 9/11 and all the parties involved, *Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution* (Gunaratna & Oreg, 2010), in which international terrorism expert Rohan Gunaratna provides a thorough overview of AQ's internal workings,

[40]To visit AQ's database on the CTC website: https://ctc.usma.edu/terrorist-groups/al-qaida-affiliates/ .
[41] A *fatwa* is a ruling expressed by a higher Islamic religious leader or authority.
[42] AQ member Abid Naseer was eventually convicted in the US to 40 years in prison for plotting bombings in the United Kingdom (UK) (Clifford, 2015).
[43] *The Abbottabad Documents* are a cache of documents that were seized from Osama Bin Laden by US special forces during the mission that saw his killing. These documents contain remarkable insights into the organizational development of AQ on various levels of organization.
[44]To view the Abbottabad Documents visit the website of the Director of National Intelligence: https://www.dni.gov/index.php/features/bin-laden-s-bookshelf?start=1 .

and Stanford University's *Mapping Militant Organizations: Al Qaeda* (Stanford University, 2019), which contains a wide array of data on AQ and its relations with its affiliates in particular.

Regarding data on drone strikes, casualty figures and targeted AQ Central individuals, the author consulted also both primary and secondary sources. Internal AQ documents, such as the letters referred to above, would comment on such events incidentally, but not always (clearly). In the latter case, the author consulted secondary sources by investigative journalists. These secondary sources were found in databases such as *The Drone War in Pakistan* (New America, n.d.); *Our Monitoring of Civilian Harm* (Airwars, 2019); *CIA and US Military Drone Strikes in Pakistan, 2004 to Present* (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism); *Strikes in Pakistan* (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, n.d.); and *The Bush Years: Pakistan strikes 2004 – 2009* (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, n.d.). Additionally, *The Drone papers* (The Intercept, n.d.) by The Intercept have been key providing insights into the inner workings of the drone program. Because the US government has not always been transparent regarding its usage of drones, the sources mentioned here compiled information on the US drone themselves (Niva, 2017). These organizations did so by collecting information through open source intelligence (OSINT) investigation and conducting interviews with affected locals and US whistleblowers.

Finally, the author also consulted several works of independent, well-informed insiders. This includes reports by Bill Roggio, senior fellow and editor of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies' Long War Journal. Bill Roggio has been tracking the progress and results of the US GWOT and the independent Long War Journal is often referred to by established media organizations. Furthermore, the author used the book *The Exile: The Stunning Inside Story of Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda in Flight* (Levy & Scott-Clark, 2017) by Adrian Levy and Cathy Scott-Clark. In the book the two journalists describe AQ's organization based on insider stories. Finally, articles from the security and defense intelligence platform GlobalSecurity.org, founded by security expert John E. Pike, were utilized. The databases of GlobalSecurity.org contain official and unofficial information on terrorist organizations and their individual members. The secondary sources by these various aforementioned independent well-informed insiders have been of great value for this research as these authors have written and published on important but sensitive matters in a way that US government officials could not always do. All the sources mentioned in this section are publicly available via the internet.

Limitations

In the ideal scenario, the researcher performing the 7-S analysis would be located within the organization under assessment. Preferably, this researcher would have access to this particular organization's employees, as well as its accountancy register and other formal document databases. Even then, the 7-S analysis would be a process of iteration; one of continuous repetition of analysis until the picture is balanced (Jurevicius, 2013).

The 7-S analysis of AQ portrayed in this essay does not fit this perfect description. Because of the physical distance between the researcher and its subject, with regard to this particular research, it could be possible that the results shown here do not resonate seamlessly with personal accounts from within AQ itself. However, the analysis of this research project has been, as much as possible, arranged in such a manner, that the results that emanate from it are balanced. To overcome the challenges of physical distance between the observer and the subject, throughout this paper sources have been triangulated and juxtaposed to one another with the goal of minimizing the chance of overly one-sided outcomes. To establish this, personal accounts were complemented with secondary observations and *vice versa.*

3. ANALYSIS

To reiterate, the main purpose of this paper is to analyze how United States (US) drone strikes against al Qaeda (AQ) Central in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), between 2004 and 2011, affected the broader organization of AQ. This analysis will be supported by inquiring into two specific sub-questions, namely: 'what was the state of pre-9/11 AQ's broader organization?'; and, 'what was the state of post-9/11 AQ's broader organization, and how was this shaped by United States (US) drone strikes on AQ Central in the FATA?' The following analytical section will engage with these two issues consecutively.

3.1 THE STATE OF PRE-9/11 AL QAEDA

The following section will assess the state, i.e., the collective of Strategy, Structure, Style, Staff, Skills, Systems and Shared Values (7-S) of pre-9/11 AQ's broader organization. It will do so by, first, describing the context within which pre-9/11 AQ existed and operated, after which it will engage with pre-9/11 AQ's 7-S status.

Pre-9/11 Al Qaeda: Context

AQ was established on 11 August, 1988, in Peshawar, Afghanistan, by Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden was born to a wealthy family in Saudi Arabia and had traveled to Afghanistan in the 1980s to join the *mujahideen*[45] in their fight against the Soviet invasion and subsequent occupation which lasted from 1979 until 1989. Throughout the Soviet-Afghan War, Bin Laden would support the Mujahideen with the necessary resources to sustain their *jihad*[46]; predominantly by providing money and means of training (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 55).

In 1984, together with the Palestinian Abdullah Azzam, Bin Laden established the group

[45] *Mujahideen* (plural) (singular: *mujahid*), refers to persons fighting a holy war (a *jihad*), allegedly to advance the Islamic cause.

[46] The term *jihad* can be understood in several ways. According to the Quran, a jihad is holy assignment for mankind to confront and overcome its inner evils. A second understanding of jihad refers to Muslims and their duty to promote Islam and the well-being of Islamic community as a whole. Last, jihad can refer to a holy armed struggle, waged in order to promote the cause of the Islam and elevate the Islamic faith and community to a position of global political dominance (Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid, n.d.). Jihad in the context of terrorism is understood as the latter variant.

Makhtab al Khidamat[47]. Makhtab al Khidamat would train and transport foreign mujahideen in Afghanistan (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 56). Around 1985, the Pashtun Jalaluddin Haqqani, head of the Haqqani Network, offered Bin Laden permanent access to locations in the provinces of Khost, Nangarhar, and Paktia, mountainous areas in the AfPak region. Here, Bin Laden set up training camps which would come to provide the mujahideen with skilled fighters. He established his headquarters on the other side of the border, in the FATA. These AfPak-based training camps would become known as al Qaida al Askariya[48] (Jones, Rebuilding the Base: How Al Qaeda Could Resurge, 2017, p. 3; Raddler & Brown, 2011, p. 24).

After the Soviet Union (USSR) retreated its forces from Afghanistan, Bin Laden and Azzam formally merged their mujahideen structures in 1988, establishing what is now known as AQ. Emboldened by their success against the USSR, Bin Laden wanted to expand the local jihad - that is, the jihad to liberate Afghanistan and to improve the foothold of the political Islam in Central Asia - into a 'truly' global jihad, aimed against what he regarded a western interventionism, such as the US. Azzam opposed this idea, and instead proposed maintaining AQ's regional role, focused on preserving their dominance in Afghanistan and challenging Israel. Bin Laden and Azzam strongly disagreed on the preferred course of direction for AQ. The impasse was resolved with Azzam's assassination, in 1989 [49]. Bin Laden was now the sole leader of AQ (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 56).

In 1989 Bin Laden received requests from Hassan al Turabi, leader of the Sudanese Islamist National Islamic Front party, to come to Sudan with AQ. Al Turabi wanted Bin Laden's help in his struggle against Sudanese Christians - a request Bin Laden honored. This led AQ to also establish a presence in Sudan (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 57).

When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, Bin Laden proposed to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) that he and his mujahideen fight the Iraqis in Kuwait. The Saudi royal family, however, did not accept his offer, and instead, accepted military assistance offered by the US. Bin Laden felt betrayed by his own countrymen and saw his dismay for what he regarded as a strengthened form of contemporary colonialism grow, and entered into a dispute with the Saudi royal family. As a result, the KSA renounced Bin Laden's citizenship. Bin Laden returned to

[47] Translated to English as "Bureau of Services".
[48] Translated to English as "The Military Base" (Jones, Rebuilding the Base: How Al Qaeda Could Resurge, 2017, p. 3).
[49] It remains unclear who was responsible for Azzam's assassination, although some sources suspect Bin Laden of having played a role in it (Lea-Henry, 2018).

Sudan (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 57).

Following this 'betrayal' by the KSA, Bin Laden began working on 'globalizing' AQ. He proceeded to train mujahideen in AQ's Sudanese and AfPak facilities. Meanwhile he forged connections with private firms, governments and non-governmental organizations around the world. Most importantly, he forged alliances with other Islamist groups in, among others, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mali, Nigeria, Jordan, Burma, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Oman, Iraq, Lebanon, Tunisia, Algeria, Chad, and Thailand (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 57).

AQ increasingly started meddling in conflicts on a global scale. Insurgents in the Philippines, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Indonesia received training by AQ, and were provided with weapons and other resources necessary for fighting and carrying out terrorist attacks. As AQ grew increasingly (in)famous in the world of terrorism, the Sudanese authorities started to become uncomfortable with hosting Bin Laden in Sudan. Ultimately, the international community pressured Sudan into ending its relationship with Bin Laden. The latter returned to Afghanistan where he leased territory from the Taliban for up to USD$20 million annually (Stanford University, 2019).

In 1996, Osama Bin Laden declared war on the US by means of a fatwa, published in the London newspaper Al Quds al Arabi. Titled *Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places* (Bin Laden, 1996), the fatwa saw Bin Laden officially reject the American presence in Arabic countries, as well as the US' relationship with Israel, and he called upon his fellow Muslims to join him in his struggle (Bin Laden, Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places, 1996). In 1998, Bin Laden – for the first time referring to himself as *sheikh*[50] Bin Laden – publishes a second fatwa in Al Quds al Arabi, this time in cooperation with Ayman al Zawahiri[51], Abu Yasir Rifa'i Ahmad Taha[52], Sheikh Mir Hamzah[53] and Fazlur Rahman[54] (Bin Laden, Al Zawahiri, Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, Hamzah, & Rahman, 1998). In this fatwa titled *Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders: World Islamic Front Statement* (Bin Laden, Al Zawahiri, Rifa'i Ahmad Taha,

[50] *Sheikh* refers to an "Arab ruler or head of a group of people" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).
[51] In 1996 al Zawahiri was still the *emir* of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad group (EIJ) (Bin Laden, Al Zawahiri, Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, Hamzah, & Rahman, 1998). *Emir* refers to "a ruler of particular countries in the Muslim world" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).
[52] Leader of the Egyptian Islamic Group (Bin Laden, Al Zawahiri, Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, Hamzah, & Rahman, 1998).
[53] Secretary of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Pakistan (Bin Laden, Al Zawahiri, Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, Hamzah, & Rahman, 1998).
[54] Emir of the Bangladeshi jihadist group Harakat-ul-Mujahedeen (Bin Laden, Al Zawahiri, Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, Hamzah, & Rahman, 1998) (Stanford; Center for International Security and Cooperation, n.d.).

Hamzah, & Rahman, 1998), Bin Laden, al Zawahiri, Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, Hamzah, and Rahman write:

> *We - with Allah's help - call on every Muslim who believes in Allah and wishes to be rewarded to comply with Allah's order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it. We also call on Muslim ulema, leaders, youths, and soldiers to launch the raid on Satan's U.S. troops and the devil's supporters allying with them, and to displace those who are behind them so that they may learn a lesson*. (Bin Laden, Al Zawahiri, Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, Hamzah, & Rahman, 1998)

In June 2001 the EIJ merged with AQ and EIJ's emir, al Zawahiri, became Bin Laden's deputy (Thomas, 2018, p. 2).

On August 7, 1998, Bin Laden put his fatwa into practice when AQ simultaneously bombed two US embassies by means of vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs) in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and in Nairobi, Kenya. The attacks amounted to 224 deaths and around 4.500 wounded (Homeland Security Digital Library, n.d.). In another VBIED attack, on October 12, 2000, a member of al Qaeda in Yemen (AQY) drove a boat laden with explosives into the USS Cole, which was at anchor in the port of Yemen. The attacker detonated his boat upon impact, killing 11 and injuring 39 US sailors (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 190). Finally, on September 11, 2001, AQ members hijacked four US passenger airplanes in what would become AQ's most lethal attack. AQ members flew two of the planes into the World Trade Center buildings, one plane into the Pentagon, and a fourth plane crashed in Pennsylvania. The attack killed 2.996 people, and wounded more than 6.000. The financial damages amounted to around USD$2 trillion. The events of 9/11 were the que for the US GWOT (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004). Were one to break down pre-9/11 AQ's organization into the various 7-S elements at the height of its 1988-2001 span, the following could be distinguished.

Pre-9/11 Al Qaeda's Strategy

For pre-9/11 AQ its Strategy, i.e., the collective of goals deemed necessary by the leadership to be achieved in order to secure a position relatively advantageous with regard to its opponents and competitors, while simultaneously coping with challenges in its internal and external

environment, can be argued to be the instigation of violence on a local and global level, as well the exploitation of grievances held among the global Muslim population vis-à-vis 'the West' (Waterman, Peters, & Phillips, 1980, p. 20; Clarke, 2019, p. 3).

In his fatwa *Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders: World Islamic Front Statement* (Bin Laden, Al Zawahiri, Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, Hamzah, & Rahman, 1998), Bin Laden elaborates on this strategy, saying:

> *The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies -- civilians and military -- is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty Allah, "and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together," and "fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah.* (Bin Laden, Al Zawahiri, Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, Hamzah, & Rahman, 1998)

Locally, AQ pursued this strategy by supporting and empowering already present insurgent groups. In the Philippines, for example, AQ had been supporting the Moro Islamic Liberation Front since the early 1990s, providing 600 of its fighters with training in Afghanistan and supplying their group with money and weapons (Abuza, 2002, p. 435). Mainly in Indonesia, but also in Malaysia and Singapore, AQ supported Jemaah Islamiyah. From 1997 until 2002, AQ supplied the group with over USD$135.000 in order to support its efforts to establish a Southeast Asian caliphate (Sunday Straits Times, 2002).

Globally, AQ pursued its strategy by staging complex attacks on vital American targets, such as the US embassies in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi, the US Navy vessel USS Cole and the World Trade Center Twin Towers (Stanford University, 2019). By attacking symbols of Western military, political and economic power, AQ wanted to lure the US and its allies into an unwinnable and costly, protracted conflict, with the goal of exhausting them into surrendering (Al Jazeera, 2004). Consequently, AQ reasoned, the US' reaction to AQ's attacks would only increase anti-American, pro-jihadist sentiments throughout Central Asia and the broader global Islamic community. This would in turn only deepen and widen AQ's base of support around the world and turn AQ into the ultimate defender of the Islamic community. As

such, AQ aimed to create its own moral base for expanding the pursuit of violence against the enemies of Islam (Riedel, 2007).

Pre-9/11 Al Qaeda's Structure

Pre-9/11 AQ can be regarded as a predominantly hierarchical organization, encompassing at least one official affiliate, AQY, and one merger, with EIJ. This early AQ was headed by a AfPak-based core group, AQ Central, which made up of various committees. At its height, pre-9/11 AQ Central was estimated to encompass some 500 to 1.000 members (Stanford University, 2019).

Documents captured upon AQ in raids, published by West Point's Combating Terrorism Center (CTC), reveal clearly AQ's originally envisioned organizational structure. These documents, *Al-Qa`ida Goals and Structure [English translation]* (Al Qaeda) and *Al-Qa`ida's Structure and Bylaws [English translation]* (Al Qaeda), estimated to have been produced around 1996, reveal that pre-9/11 AQ envisioned a strictly regulated, hierarchically structured organization. AQ's founders had witnessed first-hand how a poorly developed organizational structure is capable of destroying an organization from within. Makhtab al Khidamat, for example, eventually fell prey to corruption, squabbles and infighting. This damaged the performance of the organization itself and obstructed a successful pursuit of jihad. AQ Central was keen to not repeat past mistakes (Gartenstein-Ross & Barr, 2018).

Pre-9/11 AQ's hierarchical structure was as follows.[55] Heading AQ's hierarchy is the emir - in the case of pre-9/11 AQ, Osama bin Laden. The emir bears the ultimate responsibility for internal as well as external affairs, within the AfPak region, as well as anywhere globally (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1054; Al Qaeda, p. 5). Alongside the emir is the secretary. The emir's secretary is responsible for supporting the emir in his daily work. In pre-9/11 AQ, this position was first held by Nassir al Wahishi. After Nassir, the position was held by Wadih el Hage until 1998 (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1056). AQ's deputy can be regarded as the second leader after the emir. His tasks are anything the emir tasks him with. After the publication of the 1998 fatwa and the merger of EIJ with AQ, the position of deputy was taken by Ayman al Zawahiri (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1056).

[55] Structured hierarchically from high to low.

Situated under the emir and his deputy is located a horizontal branch of AQ's various committees referred to as the command council or *Shura*. The Shura is AQ's highest decision making group, and follows the deputy in the hierarchy. Its seven to ten members are hand-picked annually by the emir and they head AQ's various sub-committees. In addition, important men from units within the sub-committees are eligible for election to the Shura, as well as certain members from affiliate or befriended organizations (Al Qaeda, p. 4).

Pre-9/11 AQ's Shura was headed by the following men. Presiding over pre-9/11 AQ's Shura were Osama bin Laden and al Zawahiri. Mohammed Atef[56] headed and represented AQ's Military Committee as a deputy chief until he was killed by a US drone in November 2001 (Zenko, 2011). Abu Fadhl al Makkee[57] headed and represented AQ's Administrative / Financial Committee (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1056). Saif al Adel[58] headed AQ's Security Committee until 2003. Suleiman abu Gheith fulfilled the position of spokesperson for AQ and the Shura until he left the group in 2003. Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah[59] represented the Operational Committee in the Shura, and as such, was responsible for overseeing AQ's attack on the American embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998. He left AQ in 2003 and went to Iran where he would be arrested. Mamdouh Mahmud Salim[60] was a co-founder of AQ and responsible for 'procurement'. Salim was arrested following the attacks on the US embassies (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 437). Nashwan Abdulrazaq Abdulbaqi[61] was the head of General Affairs (sub-committee of the Military Committee) until his arrest in 2006 (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1057). Sheikh Said al Masri headed AQ's Administrative / Financial Committee. In 2010, Said al Masri was killed by a US drone (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1057; The Jamestown Foundation, 2007; Roggio, Senior al Qaeda, Taliban, and Allied Jihadist Leaders Killed in US Airstrikes in Pakistan, 2004 – 2017, 2017). Khalid Sheikh Mohamed[62]

[56] A.k.a. Abu Hafs al Masri (Dawoud, 2001).
[57] A.k.a. Madani al Tayyib; Abu Fadhl al Makkee Madani al Tayyib; Madani Sidi al Tayyib (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1056).
[58] A.k.a. Ibrahim al Madani (Lumpkin, Saif Al-Adel: Al-Qaeda Security Chief, n.d.).
[59] A.k.a. Abu Mohamed al Masri; Abu Muhammad al Masri; Abu Mariam; Abu Mohammed (Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.)
[60] A.k.a. Abu Hajer al Iraqi (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1057).
[61] A.k.a. Abd al Hadi al Iraqi (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1057).
[62] A.k.a. Ashraf Refaat Nabith Henin; Khalid al Shaykh al Ballushi; KSM; Hashim Abdulrahman, Hashim Ahmed; Khalid Adbul Wadood; Salem Ali; Abdulrahman A.A. Alghamdi; Mukhtar al Baluchi; Fahd Bin Adballah bin Khalid (Globalsecurity.org, n.d.).

headed AQ's Special Operations Unit and the Information / Media Committee (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 150). Khalid Sheikh Mohamed is regarded as one of the main architects behind the attacks of 9/11. He was arrested in Pakistan, in February 2003. Abu Hafs al Mauritani[63] was a major spiritual representative for AQ, and headed AQ's Religious Committee from its establishment until 2003, when he left for Iran with several other AQ Central members (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1057).

In pre-9/11 AQ, the various committees and units coordinated activities through monthly Shura meetings attended by the various members mentioned above. In the Shura, the deputy and the chairmen of the various committees and units would come together to discuss a set agenda. Emergency meetings could be called by the emir, by the deputy, or by a majority of Shura representatives. Were a member of the Shura to miss more than two meetings, he would be dismissed and replaced. Decisions were agreed on by majority vote. The voting itself would either be anonymous or open, depending on the subject. Decisions made during the Shura were to be relayed back to the deputy and the emir. The latter would consult the decisions made in the Shura with his deputy when making the final decision (Al Qaeda, p. 7).

Pre-9/11 AQ's hierarchical communication explicitly left room for intraorganizational debate, vertically, as well as horizontally. Implicitly, however, the Structure of pre-9/11 AQ Central was less open than appears - the emir wielded powerful tools to dictate the direction, for Shura members were appointed or dismissed by the emir. They could advise him, but he could dismiss this advice, as well as the person giving him the actual advise. Indirectly, this meant that those Shura members who wanted to have at least some degree of control of AQ's direction needed to go along with the ideas that came from the top (Al Qaeda, p. 9).

This way of Structure, however, also meant that there was a certain mix of centralized and decentralized decision making. The emir and the deputy were open to ideas from down the hierarchical ladder. Although the embodiment of the attacks of 9/11, Bin Laden was not the main architect - Khalid Sheikh Mohamed was. He proposed the idea of flying passenger planes into certain targets first to Bin Laden in 1996. However, at this time Bin Laden was not yet convinced by the plan. It took several years for Khalid Sheikh Mohammed to prove his worth, and a good word for him by Mohammed Atef to Bin Laden, before the latter gave him the green light for the 9/11 operation in early 1999. Ultimately, in pre-9/11 AQ, ideas would not see

[63] A.k.a. Mahfouz Ould al Walid; Khalid al Shanqiti; Mahamedou Ouid Slahi (U.S. Department of State, 2019; Singapore Government Agency, 2002).

implementation before approval by the emir (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 145).

Pre-9/11 Al Qaeda's Style

Pre-9/11 AQ's Style – Style being the way a company or organization is managed and led by its top managers – can be said of to be highly personal and participative (Waterman, Peters, & Phillips, 1980, p. 22; Jurevicius, 2013; Clarke, 2019, p. 4). Aimen Dean, a former mujahid and MI6[64] double agent who fought alongside AQ in 1996 was asked whether Bin Laden impressed him and recalled:

> *Absolutely. Someone [Osama bin Laden] who […] could have had a luxury life in Saudi Arabia, someone basically who could have had an easy life, and yet, gave all that up in order to serve a cause bigger than him, even if that cause was mistaken and deluded, but nonetheless, he served that cause faithfully to the end. […] To many of my comrades also, I mean, he was the epitome of what jihad was at that time.* (Dean, 2018)

This personal story of former jihadist turned-double agent, Aimen Dean, seems to accurately summarize an opinion more widely held throughout the ranks of pre-9/11 AQ, namely that Bin Laden sacrificed his luxurious life to fight 'the good fight'. This 'honest' and 'down-to-earth' image found further emphasis in the way Bin Laden interacted with AQ members themselves (DeAngelis, 2011).

As emir of pre-9/11 AQ, Bin Laden was ultimately responsible for the ways through which AQ would pursue its goals (Al Qaeda, p. 7). In practice, this meant that, for larger operations – such as the 1998 embassy bombings, the attack on the USS Cole, or the 9/11 Twin Towers attack – his approval was required. As such, it has to be noted that Bin Laden was not the main 'architect' of AQ's most infamous attacks. However, often he was the final person to consider the plan; to balance the costs and benefits involved against one another, and to review if they were in line with AQ's strategy (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 149).

In order to be able to actively engage with the ideas of his subordinates, during the years

[64] MI6 refers to the UK's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS).

prior to 9/11, Bin Laden was approachable and his management style personally involved. He, for example, personally selected the four operatives who would train for, and develop further, the 9/11 attacks. Among these persons was for example also Ibrahim al Thawar[65], who eventually would conduct the suicide attack on the USS Cole (Globalsecurity.org, n.d.; National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 156). The leadership style of Bin Laden helped establish the 'brand' of AQ as a strong name in the jihad industry. Both Bin Laden and al Zawahiri were personally involved in connecting mujahideen and vetting the right people for the right places, which further inspired outsiders from around the globe to join AQ (Lia, 2008).

Al Zawahiri, however, claimed a less vocal role in the group's leadership. Additionally, he was considered to be less charismatic than Bin Laden. Al Zawahiri was more than Bin Laden, involved in the operational planning of high-profile attacks, although he never enjoyed the same attractiveness. Whereas Bin Laden generally condemned intra-Islamic violence and refrained from reprimanding other Islamist groups, al Zawahiri picked favorites and, on several occasions, criticized those groups which had, in his view, strayed of the path of 'true' Islamism. While Bin Laden was primarily concerned with expressing anti-Western views, al Zawahiri also sought to challenge groups such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood[66] (Byman, Al Qaeda After Osama, 2011). Apart from their difference in popularity there was, however, little to no competition between Bin Laden and al Zawahiri (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1055).

The same personal atmosphere AQ's leadership tried to create at the lower levels of AQ to minimize internal competition. Developing mutual kinship through arranged marriages was promoted throughout pre-9/11 AQ on a wide scale. This involved not only marrying family members of fellow AQ fighters to one another, but also marrying AQ members to locals living in the AfPak region and the FATA specifically. The goal of arranged marriages was to minimize the chances of AQ members betraying one another or the organization itself (Watts, 2014).

[65] A.k.a. Nibras (Globalsecurity.org, n.d.).

[66] Whereas al Zawahiri argued his feud with the Muslim Brotherhood was of an ideological nature, others allege that he was in fact renounced by the group because he had betrayed them when he was tortured by former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak's security forces in the 1980s (Byman, Al Qaeda After Osama, 2011).

Pre-9/11 Al Qaeda's Staff

Pre-9/11 AQ recognized the importance of development of its Staff element, that is, the exploitation of talent and well-being of its forces (Waterman, Peters, & Phillips, 1980, p. 23; Jurevicius, 2013). Among others, they did this by facilitating training programs on a global scale. Around 1985, Bin Laden received permanent access to the provinces of Khost, Nangarhar, and Paktia in Afghanistan. Bin Laden used these camps to train the mujahideen and, later, AQ operatives (Jones, Rebuilding the Base: How Al Qaeda Could Resurge, 2017, p. 3; Raddler & Brown, 2011, p. 24). AQ's largest Afghan training camp, al Faruq, in Khost, functioned as a 'basic' training camp[67]. In this camp, AQ recruits received general education in subjects such as physical fitness, small-arms skills, but also in navigation and communication according to guerrilla tactics. During the course, senior headhunters would be scouting for exceptionally talented students to take upon themselves higher positions within AQ (Stenersen, 2017, p. 99; Al Qaeda). Most of the 9/11 hijackers started their AQ careers in al Faruq and several of them were hand-picked from the group by head hunters. For example, Hani Hanjour, one of the 9/11 hijacker pilots, followed basic training at al Faruq until one of the seniors[68] discovered that he was a certified airline pilot. This led to Hanjour being recruited for the 9/11 plot (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 225).

Upon completion of basic training, there was specialized training for specific operations. For example, four of the 9/11 operatives received follow-up training in Karachi, Pakistan, by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. In their two-week specialization course they studied basic English speaking; reading phone books and flight schedules; using coded communication; utilizing the internet; and making travel arrangements. Additionally, the students watched movies of hijackings; played flight-simulation games; made use of actual flight simulator hardware ordered for the occasion; studied the behavior of plane personnel and security staff on the ground alike; and immersed themselves into international customs requirements. In a later stage of their course, the hijackers traveled to Kuala Lumpur, from where they boarded other flights to 'case study' smuggling contraband on planes and navigating on board during flights (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 157). In this respect, pre-9/11 AQ's training programs seem quite adequate with regard to the demands posed

[67] Al Faruq was hit by a US cruise missile strike on August 20, 1998, as a retaliation for the USS Cole bombing. Several AQ instructors were killed and the facility was badly damaged. It remained, however, in use (Stenersen, 2017, p. 99).

[68] Either Mohammed Atef or Osama Bin Laden (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 225).

by the operations.

Pre-9/11 AQ attempted to build strong institutions which would assure all of those fighters in its ranks of equal pay. Policy documents captured on pre-9/11 AQ reveal that the Administrative / Financial Committee would arrange for their fighters to be paid sufficient salaries in accordance with the stipulations in the job description. Additionally, there were certain special social arrangements for fighters. For example, every fighter would be allotted an extra Rs. 300 per month for every child; or an extra Rs. 700 per month for every additional wife of the fighter in question. There were also arrangements with regards to travel allowance, which dictated that every AQ member would get his first ticket home, paid for by the organization, after completing one and a half years of service (Al Qaeda, p. 12). AQ's leadership argued that the more important one's task was, the more intense one's training would be, but also the better one's accommodation and treatment would be (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 157).

Psychologically, those joining pre-9/11 AQ were largely motivated by jihadist, anti-American, anti-colonialist sentiments. They were largely driven by the desire to liberate the Islamic world from occupation. The eruption of the Russo-Chechen conflict in the 1990s, and the subsequent bloody videos that surfaced of Muslims being oppressed by their 'Christian rulers', drew a new, large generation of mainly Arab fighters into AQ's ranks. Another important factor for joining AQ was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Stenersen, 2017, p. 106). Bin Laden argued that the successful 'deed' itself - i.e., the act of terrorism - was the best motivation for AQ to propel the morale along its own ranks (Rabasa, et al., 2006, p. 26).

Pre-9/11 Al Qaeda's Skills

On an institutional level, the organization of pre-9/11 AQ was known for several skills, of which most important its ability to export its ideology to a wide array of countries, some of which previously not significantly influenced by extremist Islamic values, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Mali, Nigeria, Jordan, Burma, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Oman, Iraq, Lebanon, Tunisia, Algeria, Chad, and Thailand (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 57). In these countries, AQ skillfully developed alliances with already-present militant groups and disenfranchised minorities and supported them in their respective struggles. An important aspect of this practice was the establishment of 'exchange programs'. As part of this scheme, AQ provided third-party groups with access to AQ's knowledge and

resources. In exchange, these groups, however, needed to open up themselves to AQ and share their own regional knowledge and resources with them (Byman, Buddies or Burdens? Understanding the Al Qaeda Relationship with Its Affiliate Organizations, 2014, p. 450). Examples of arrangements are AQ's support for the Filipino Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the early 1990s, with AQ providing 600 of their fighters with training in Afghanistan and supplying their group with money and weapons (Abuza, 2002, p. 435). Another example is AQ's financial support for Jemaah Islamiyah, active in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. From 1997 until 2002, AQ supplied Jemaah Islamiyah with over USD$135.000 in order to support the group's efforts to establish a Southeast Asian caliphate (Sunday Straits Times, 2002). AQ's ability of communicating and exchanging expertise on a global scale with other groups contributed to pre-9/11 AQ's mission of pursuing the global jihad.

Concerning individual skills, pre-9/11 AQ was mainly known for its members being able to utilize a wide arrange of small arms, such as automatic weaponry, long-range weaponry and mortars. These skills helped AQ to defend and expand its territories locally. The more 'gifted' members also possessed these basic skills, which all AQ members were taught during training, but they also practiced more advanced skills in follow-up training, such as bomb making (Keating, 2010). For pre-9/11 AQ, the ability to work with explosives became a trademark, as echoed by notorious suicide attacks such as the 1998 US embassy attacks and the USS Cole operation. Whereas the former saw the use of trucks laden with TNT, the latter one utilized a small fiberglass boat laden with C4 explosives (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 190; Homeland Security Digital Library, n.d.).

Nevertheless, although bombmaking skills were of significance in AQ's early development, one important skill that most strongly distinguished pre-9/11 AQ members from their contemporaries was their specialized technical skills. These technical skills have been pivotal in, indeed, bombmaking, but even more so in conducting more sophisticated attack such as the attacks of 9/11. Pre-9/11 AQ had the capabilities to (further) educate its members in very specialized skills, such as piloting a large Boeing aircraft. This allowed AQ to utilize everyday vehicles as highly destructive weapons, which would become their trademark (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 5).

Pre-9/11 Al Qaeda's Systems

Pre-9/11 AQ's Systems describe a complex but encompassing and functional construction of organs, jointly responsible for the groups day-to-day management. Pre-9/11 AQ comprised the following organs: the emir (and his Secretary); the deputy; the Command Council; the Political Committee, the Religious Committee, the Administrative / Financial Committee, the Security committee and the Information / Media Committee (Al Qaeda; Al Qaeda).

The emir is involved in planning on the strategic; operational; tactical; logistical; and organizational level. Planning and budget proposals need to be approved by the emir before seeing execution. The emir plays an important role in the division of roles and positions within AQ and is also responsible for the appointment of commanders of the various committees and units (Al Qaeda, p. 5). The secretary is responsible for supporting the emir with his daily work. This involves arranging meetings and planning appointments. The emir's deputy is tasked with whatever the emir tasks him with. The Shura advises the emir on day-to-day issues that need solutions. Shura members approve budgets, policy plans, internal and external organization regulations, as well as pick members for their various units (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1054).

According to official AQ documents, the goal of the Political committee is:

> *... Spreading political awareness between working individuals and Islamic republics, preparing political reports and the needed studies for work, interaction with Jihad movements in general, preparation of qualified political cadre and likewise crediting the general politics for the operation in the field of legitimate officers.* (Al Qaeda, p. 3)

The committee consists of the committee president, a representative of the committee president, the Political Section and the Operational Politics officers (Al Qaeda, p. 4). Within the Political Committee, the ultimate controls are with the president. He appoints and dismisses his representative, as well as the leaders of the Political Section and Operational Politics. The president of the Political Committee draws up annual plans and draws up periodic reports for the president of the Shura. The president of the Political Committee is also allowed to consult foreign actors with regard to 'jihad matters'. In this context, jihad matters can refer to situations which see AQ operating in or from certain host countries. In that situation, the Political Committee is tasked with developing and maintaining relations with the host country in a way which benefits AQ's organization. The duties of the president's representative are to aid the

president with his agenda or to fill in for him in case of absence (Al Qaeda, p. 5).

The Religious Committee (also referred to as the 'law committee' or 'fatwa committee') is responsible for ensuring whether the policies and regulations pursued by the various committees of AQ do not collide with the values upheld by the *Sharia*[69] (Al Qaeda, p. 4). In pre-9/11 AQ, the position of head of the Religious Committee was held by Abu Hafs al Mauritani, who also held a seat in the Shura (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 435; Joscelyn, Al Qaeda Fighter Properly Detained at Gitmo, Court Finds, 2011).

The Administrative / Financial Committee is tasked with facilitating AQ's administrative and financial affairs. This includes offering general administrative services to AQ and its members (including the families of these members); facilitating hospitality services for visitors; maintaining oversight over AQ's financial books; and controlling incoming and outgoing financial flow (Al Qaeda, p. 6). AQ's Administrative / Financial Committee was first headed by Abu Fadhl al Makkee, who held the position until his capture in 1997. He was responsible for approving any expenditure that surpassed USD$1000 (Gunaratna & Oreg, 2010, p. 1056). He was replaced by Shaikh Saiid al Masri (Lumpkin, Shaikh Saiid al-Masri: Al-Qaeda Financial Chief, 2006). The committee itself was divided in various financial and administrative sub-units (Al Qaeda, p. 7). Pre-9/11 AQ operated on a basis of around $30 million annually. After the 1998 embassy bombings, however, AQ found that its ingoing and outgoing financial flow became increasingly monitored by governments and agencies around the world. In addition, they had to deal with the problematic financial infrastructure characteristic of the their area of operations in the AfPak region. Hence, modern, digital banking systems became increasingly troublesome to utilize. Therefore, pre-9/11 AQ (re-)adopted the *hawala*[70] system. The hawala system is less dependent on the traditional global (digital) banking infrastructure and harder to monitor. This allowed AQ to regain some control over its finances (Lumpkin, Al-Qaeda Finance Committee, 2006).

The Security Committee is tasked with the facilitation of security for AQ Central, its members and its infrastructure; the improvement of safety awareness of individual members of AQ; the improvement of the security of administrative proceedings in foreign countries; and

[69] Islamic law (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1074).

[70] The *hawala* system is a financial system predating the modern banking system. It was developed in eighth century India. Hawala refers to a system where money is transferred from *A* to *B* without the money ever physically moved. The system relies on 'hawala brokers' that intermediate between senders and recipients, and functions on the basis of mutual trust and familiarity, not on rules, laws and or legislation, unlike the contemporary global banking system. Although the *hawala* system is not exclusively utilized by criminal entities, its design does lend itself for money laundering and off-book transfers of liquidities (Jost & Sandhu).

the collection of intelligence to further AQ's security position (Al Qaeda, p. 27). Pre-9/11 AQ's Security Committee was specifically focused on digital and physical security services; member recruitment; and, subsequently, member screening (Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2010). The chairman of the Security Committee was the Egyptian Saif al Adel, who held the position until 2003 (Lumpkin, Saif Al-Adel: Al-Qaeda Security Chief, n.d.). The chairman of the Security Committee is responsible for the admission and/or dismissal of committee members; communication with the chairmen of the other committees; the organization of emergency meetings; and the drawing up of evacuation plans for AQ Central personnel. The chairman constantly reviews the work of the committee members; tries to make sure they meet their goals; and reports his findings to the Shura on a weekly basis (Al Qaeda, p. 27).

The Military Committee is tasked with the preparation of men for combat through training; the organization of combat on the battlefield; the organization of military programs; and the acquisition of military-technological capabilities in order to further combat goals (Al Qaeda, p. 1). The committee consists of several units, among which the General Section; the Nuclear Weapons Section; the Library and Research Section; and the Special Operations Unit. Some of these units, again, consist of sub-units. The General Section consists of a combat component and a training component; and the Special Operations Unit consist of a training component, a combat component, but also a document forgery component (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1061; Al Qaeda, p. 1).

The Military Committee is headed by the committee president. The president is tasked with appointing and dismissing leaders for the various units and sub-units; overseeing their performance; attending Shura meetings; drawing up plans and discussing these with other committee presidents; and presenting 'special' plans to the Shura, deputy and emir (Al Qaeda, p. 2). The Special Operations Unit, a sub-unit of the Military Committee, was, among others, responsible for planning and executing the 1998 US embassy bombings and the 9/11 attacks (Lumpkin, Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani: Dar Es Salaam Embassy Bombing Cell Operative, 2007; Dawoud, 2001). Between 1991 and 1996 Abu Ubaidah al Banshiri[71] was the president (commander) of the Military Committee. After al Banshiri was killed in a ferry accident in 1996 on Lake Victoria, his position was taken over by Mohammed Atef, who held the position until he was killed in a US drone strike in Kabul, Afghanistan, on November 14, 2001 (Dawoud, 2001). Starting around 1990, the General Section of the Military Committee was led by Saif al Adel (Lumpkin, Saif Al-Adel: Al-Qaeda Security Chief, n.d.). From 1988, the Special Section

[71]A.k.a Adel Habib; Shaikh Abu Banshiri; Karim (Lumpkin, Abu Ubaidah al-Banshiri: Founder of Al-Qaeda, 2006).

was headed by Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah (Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.). Around 1998, Abdullah's post was taken by Khalid Sheikh Mohamed, who held this post until his arrest in 2003 (Globalsecurity.org, n.d.). Pre-9/11 AQ's Nuclear Weapons Section is thought to have been headed by Ali Sayyid Muhamed Mustafa al Bakri[72] (Diplomatic Security Service / Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.).

The Information / Media Committee is tasked with calling on Muslims from all over the world to join the global jihad; the spreading of the concepts and rules of the Sunni Islamic community across the world; the "intellectual and informational prudence with the Islamic Republics" (Al Qaeda, p. 5); setting up interdisciplinary partnerships with other scientific and legal jihadist groups; and the establishment of informational cooperation and integration with AQ's various countries of residence (Al Qaeda, p. 5). Pre-9/11 AQ's Information / Media Committee consisted of a vast selection of various units. These were, respectively, the sections of phonetics; video editing; printing services; archival services; photography services; the secretariat; liaison services; translation services; the computers department; and As Sahab (al Qaeda's media production house), a sub-unit of the Computers Department (Al Qaeda, p. 5). The president of the Information / Media Committee appoints his representative for the committee, as well as the representatives for the various units; draws up periodic reports for the Shura; and sets up annual budgets for the committee. From 1988 to 1999 the Information / Media Committee was led by Abu Musab Reuter, after which Khalid Sheikh Mohammed took over his position (Globalsecurity.org, n.d.).

Pre-9/11 Al Qaeda's Shared Values

Pre-9/11 AQ's Shared Values, that is, the norms and standards that influence and lead the behavior of an organization its leadership and subordinates, was strongly informed by jihadist tendencies (Jurevicius, 2013). Bin Laden's interpretation of the jihad is that of a holy armed struggle, waged in order to promote the cause of the Islam and elevate the Islamic faith and community to a position of global political dominance. According to this understanding, the jihad is the obligation for Muslims worldwide to collectively reject Western ideas and practices, by means of violence, for contemporary Western values are regarded as only a manifestation of imperialist, neo-colonialist tendencies (Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, n.d.; Lahoud, 2010; National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 51).

[72] A.k.a. Abd al Aziz al Masri (Diplomatic Security Service / Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.).

These values were evident in the fatwas sanctioned by Bin Laden in 1996 and 1998, as well as in an interview given by him to CNN, in 1997.

In his first published fatwa, *Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places* (Bin Laden, 1996), Bin Laden rejects the American presence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), because, for him, the KSA constituted a sacred land for all Muslims. Additionally, Bin Laden discusses the gradual 'Westernization' of the KSA under the influence of its relationship with the US, which is aligned with Israel. This alleged anti-Islamic alliance he refers to as the 'Crusader Alliance'. According to Bin Laden, the negative influence of the Crusader Alliance vis-à-vis the KSA can be seen reflected mostly in the latter's gradual rejection of the Sharia and the subsequent introduction of 'man-made' law, and the increased economic hardship inflicted on the country (Bin Laden, Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places, 1996). The above message is further supported in Bin Laden's 1997 interview for CNN, in which AQ's jihadist, anti-imperialist values come more to the fore. In the interview, Bin Laden restates his rejection of the US presence in the KSA (Bin Laden, CNN: 1997, Osama Bin Laden declares jihad, 1997). Bin Laden says:

> *The US government has committed acts that are extremely unjust, hideous and criminal, through its support of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. And we believe the US is directly responsible for those killed in Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq.* (Bin Laden, CNN: 1997, Osama Bin Laden declares jihad, 1997).

Bin Laden continues, saying, "For this, and other acts of aggression, we have declared jihad against the US" (Bin Laden, CNN: 1997, Osama Bin Laden declares jihad, 1997).

3.2 THE STATE OF POST-9/11 AL QAEDA

The following section will assess the state, i.e., the collective of Strategy, Structure, Style, Staff, Skills, Systems and Shared Values of post-9/11 AQ's broader organization. It will do so by, first, describing the context within which post-9/11 AQ existed and operated, after which it will engage with post-9/11 AQ's 7-S status. Particularly, it will evaluate how US drones influenced the development of each 7-S element.

Post-9/11 Al Qaeda: Context

Post-9/11 AQ existed and operated within the context of the US-led GWOT. This contrasts with the context in which its pre-9/11 organization operated, which was an environment characterized by a multitude of largely locally contained struggles. The onset of the GWOT commenced in October 2001 with the joint US-NATO[73] mission, "Operation Enduring Freedom", in Afghanistan. Bin Laden and his fellow AQ commanders and fighters - AQ Central - fled the US / NATO troops to the mountains of Tora Bora, after which they slipped into the FATA, where they reestablished themselves with the help of the Taliban, and from where they would constitute 'the face' of a global AQ (Stanford University, 2019; Bulut, 2020). Eventually, AQ's flight to the FATA would prompt the US to deploy UCAVs in order to pursue and target AQ Central high-value targets (HVTs). The first US drone strike over the FATA occurred in 2004 (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, n.d.).

Post-9/11 AQ can be considered increasingly more global than its pre-9/11 organization. This can be discerned by noting the expansion of AQ between September 2001 and May 2011. In 2001, the United Nations (UN) officially recognized the Malaysian / Singaporean Jemaah Islamiyah as an AQ affiliate – this is the same group which AQ supplied with over USD$135.000 in order to support its pursuit of a Southeast Asian caliphate (Stanford University, 2019; Sunday Straits Times, 2002). In 2004, the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM[74]) became an AQ affiliate (United Nations Security Council, n.d.). In October 2004, AQ also gained the affiliate al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), after Abu Musab al Zarqawi, leader of what was then known as Jama'at al Tawhid wa'al Jihad, pledged allegiance to AQ, renaming his organization to Tanzim Qaidat al Jihad fi Bilad al Rafidayn [al Qaeda in Iraq][75]. In 2006,

[73] North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).
[74] Abbreviation of Groupe Islamique Combattant Marocain.
[75] AQI evolved into Islamic State (IS) in February 2014 (Stanford University, 2019).

AQ gained the affiliate al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). In March 2007 the al Qaeda Kurdish Battalions (AQKB) affiliate was established. Finally, al Qaeda in Yemen (AQY), which had been with AQ since 2000, joined forces with AQ's Saudi wing, creating a joint-Yemeni-Saudi affiliate called al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) (Stanford University, 2019).

Whereas AQ significantly expanded its global network of affiliates in the period following 9/11 it also managed to stage several high-profile attacks on its opponents. In Istanbul, Turkey, from November 15 until November 20, 2003, AQ targeted two synagogues, a bank, and the British consulate with four truck VBIEDs, killing 67 and wounding an additional 700 persons (Stanford University, 2019). In Khobar, KSA, on May 29, 2004, AQ militants staged a hostage-taking at two buildings associated with the local oil industry – Khobar being a center of the Saudi oil industry – releasing only Muslims unharmed. Twenty-two foreign oil industry employees were killed in the attack (Bakier, 2006). On March 11, 2004, AQ struck in Europe, bombing the train systems of Madrid, killing 191 people and wounding over 1,800 (Williams P. , 2008, p. 23). Evidence suggests the GICM was responsible for the attack (Pike, 2011). On July 7, 2005, four native British men affiliated with AQ detonated several bombs in the London Underground and one bomb in a double-decker bus. The attack caused 56 deaths and injured over 770 people (Herrington, 2015, p. 24). Later, AQI staged a series of attacks in Sadr City, Iraq, by detonating several VBIEDs and engaging in mortar attacks. These attacks, which took place on November 23, 2006, killed over 200 people and wounded over 250. Then AQ struck in its 'host' country - Pakistan. On December 27, 2007, AQ members assassinated the former prime minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto. Next, on September 20, 2008, AQ, detonated a VBIED in front of the Marriot Hotel in Islamabad, Pakistan, killing over 40 people (Stanford University, 2019).

After these successful attacks, however, AQ experienced a series of failed attacks. On December 5, 2009, a Nigerian AQAP operative, Umar Farouk Abdul Mutallab, attempted to detonate an explosive device hidden in his underwear while on board of Northwest Airlines flight 253 from Amsterdam, Netherlands, to Detroit, US. Umar Farouk, however, failed and his attack was foiled and no casualties were casualties suffered. Later, in October 2010, AQAP tried to down planes heading for the US by hiding bombs in mail and attempting to send these in the plane's cargo area. This however failed too; the mailbombs passed several checks but were ultimately discovered in the cargo area of the plane (Stanford University, 2019).

Ultimately, post-9/11 AQ's period of mixed successes was concluded by a major shock to the organization. On May 2, 2011, US Navy SEALs kill AQ's emir, Osama bin Laden during

a raid on his safehouse in Abbottabad, Pakistan. One and a half months after Bin Laden's death, on June 16, 2011, it was announced that Ayman al Zawahiri, Bin Laden's former deputy, would replace him as emir of AQ (Price, 2010, p. 45).

Post-9/11 Al Qaeda's Strategy

Post-9/11 AQ's Strategy, i.e., the collective of goals deemed necessary by the leadership to be achieved in order to secure a position relatively advantageous with regard to its opponents and competitors while simultaneously coping with challenges in its internal and external environment, resembled a developed version of its pre-9/11 Strategy (Waterman, Peters, & Phillips, 1980, p. 20; Clarke, 2019, p. 3). AQ's pre-9/11 Strategy revolved around the instigation of violence on a local and global level, as well the exploitation of grievances held among the global Muslim population vis-à-vis the West. Its post-9/11 Strategy, too, pursued this instigation of violence on the local and global level, however, there seems to be a greater emphasis on the need to entrench AQ's presence locally, that is, in Middle Eastern, Central Asian and Southeast Asian countries, as well as a greater emphasis on AQ functioning as the forefront of the global Islamic struggle (Bin Laden, Al Zawahiri, Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, Hamzah, & Rahman, 1998; Al Jazeera, 2004; Al Zawahiri, 2005).

On March 20, 2003, the US invaded Iraq under the banner of Operation Iraqi Freedom. According to the American intelligence community, Iraq, under then president Sadam Hussein, possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Former US president George Bush moved to strike Iraq 'preemptively' to, in his words, "… deal with threats before they fully materialize …" (United States Government Printing Office, 2010, p. 1706). Ultimately, Iraq turned out to possess no such WMDs (The Commission on the Interlligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, 2005, p. 2). The US swiftly won the conventional war over Iraq and proclaimed victory in May 2003, they overthrew Sadam Hussein and attempted to effectuate regime change. This would however only be the beginning of a protracted conflict. Around the end of 2003 the US forces started noticing an uptick in the number of attacks instigated by non-state actors in Iraq. This marked the beginning of the insurgency phase of the US war in Iraq which saw the country erupt into civil war under extremist sectarian terrorism (International Crisis Group, 2006, p. 6).

Operation Iraqi Freedom and the subsequent eruption of insurgent and sectarian violence is of great relevance to the development of post-9/11 AQ's strategy. This can be

observed from a letter sent by post-9/11 AQ's deputy, al Zawahiri, to AQI's leader, Abu Musab al Zarqawi. In *Zawahiri's Letter to Zarqawi [English Translation]* (Al Zawahiri, 2005), Al Zawahiri wrote that post-9/11 AQ's main goal was to "… in this age … the establishment of a caliphate in the manner of the Prophet … in the heart of the Islamic world …" (Al Zawahiri, 2005, p. 3). According to al Zawahiri, the way to this goal was as follows: first, AQ was to "… expel the Americans from Iraq" (Al Zawahiri, 2005, p. 3); second, to "… establish an Islamic authority or amirate, then develop it and support it until it achieves the level of a caliphate …" (Al Zawahiri, 2005, p. 3); third, to "… extend the jihad wave to the secular countries neighboring Iraq" (Al Zawahiri, 2005, p. 3); and, finally, to "… clash with Israel, because Israel was established only to challenge any new Islamic entity" (Al Zawahiri, 2005, p. 3). According to al Zawahiri, in this mission, "… the strongest weapon which the mujahedeen enjoy … is popular support from the Muslim masses in Iraq, and the surrounding Muslim countries" (Al Zawahiri, 2005, p. 4). This last remark can be interpreted as a strategy that envisaged AQ as the forefront of the global Islamic struggle, the jihad, that required the global participation of affiliates. Indeed, an analysis of patterns of AQ-instigated attacks shows that most of the attacks were carried out on behalf of AQ by its affiliates, who had often been encouraged and enabled to do so by AQ Central (Celso, 2012, p. 5)

Post-9/11 Al Qaeda's Structure

Post-9/11 AQ's Structure, i.e., its hierarchical organization, the division of tasks and chains of communication, can be said of to represent a top-down hierarchical structure, like its pre-9/11 version (Waterman, Peters, & Phillips, 1980, p. 19; Jurevicius, 2013; Clarke, 2019, p. 4). However, in the post-9/11 context, AQ's Structure experienced strong pressures as a result of US drone strikes, and consequently became increasingly open to bottom-up organization. Post-9/11 AQ's communication, an integral aspect of Structure, had been severely negatively impacted with regard to its pre-9/11 variant development (Bin Laden, Letter of Osama bin Laden to Atiyah Abd al Rahman, p. 4; McDermott & Meyer, 2012, p. 172; United States v. Abid Naseer, 2015, p. 36; Levy & Scott-Clark, 2017, p. 204).

The US invasion of Afghanistan had forced AQ's original core group to flee and the group split up across three different regions – the FATA; Pakistan's Sindh and Punjab provinces; and Iran. Among the AQ seniors who fled to Iran were Saif al Adel and Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah. These prominent individuals were only part of a larger group of seniors that

left (Levy & Scott-Clark, 2017, p. 90). In Iran, AQ's 'escapees' lived in between freedom and captivity, and their relationship with the Iranian authorities was complicated. Nevertheless, according to the US Department of State and the US Department of Treasury, Iran did allow these AQ seniors to engage with AQ's global operations and day-to-day affairs from their captivity (Joscelyn, State Department: Iran Continues to host al Qaeda's 'Sore Facilitation Pipeline', 2017). Al Zawahiri settled in the FATA together with several hundreds of other AQ Central members and militants; Bin Laden travelled between safe-houses in Pakistan, ultimately settling in Abbottabad, north of the country's capital, Islamabad in 2005 (Gartenstein-Ross & Barr, 2018).

AQ's hierarchical organizational structure was under pressure due to their exodus following 9/11. In November 2002, the Iran-based AQ members convened for a Shura. Here, AQ Central member Musab al Suri, a known ideological force within AQ, proposed to divert from pre-9/11 AQ's hierarchical structure and to instead develop the idea of a 'leaderless jihad'. To Musab al Suri, AQ Central's spread over Pakistan and Iran seemed like the ideal opportunity to propose this idea once more (Stalinsky, 2011). His proposal, however, was rejected. For post-9/11 AQ, scattered and momentarily weakened, organizational change was not regarded as the solution. According to AQ's deputy, al Zawahiri, this would contradict AQ's role as the forefront of the global jihad (Gartenstein-Ross & Barr, 2018).

To be clear, throughout the post-9/11 period, AQ Central remained ultimately in control of operations carried out by AQ and its affiliates. This is apparent from investigations into high-profile attacks perpetrated by and in the name of AQ between 2001 and 2011. For example, the AQ members who carried out the bombing attacks in Turkey, in 2003, had met with Bin Laden in Afghanistan in the pre-9/11 period and had also followed one of AQ's explosives courses. The Istanbul bombing operation was financed by Luayy Sakka, an elder member of AQ and close friend of AQI's Abu Musab al Zarqawi (Gartenstein-Ross & Barr, 2018). Members of the GICM, the perpetrators of the Madrid bombings, also had close ties to AQ Central. Some of them had attended AQ's al Faruq training camp, where they were educated in counterfeiting identification and specialized in making explosives and detonating these via phones. They had also attended meetings with AQ Central in the FATA around the beginning of 2003. In these meetings, AQ Central instructed members of the GICM to bring jihad to Morocco and neighboring countries – such as Spain (Reinares, The Evidence of Al-Qa`ida's Role in the 2004 Madrid Attack, 2012; Reinares, Al-Qaeda's Revenge: The 2004 Madrid Train Bombings, 2018). Mohammed Siddique Khan and Shehzad Tanweer, the main leaders of the AQ cell responsible for the bombings on London's public transport system, in 2005, were also in close contact with

AQ Central in the FATA. The two men travelled to the FATA, attended explosives training, and recorded personal video messages detailing their involvement in the plot. These video messages only surfaced after British police and intelligence incorrectly concluded that AQ had nothing to do with the 2005 United Kingdom (UK) bombings. Khan and Tanweer were instructed by AQ Central to strike the UK, and were followed and instructed remotely by the British AQ militant Rashid Rauf (Pantucci, 2012).

These examples reveal that AQ Central was heavily involved in plot planning processes. There are also cases of lesser direct control. For example, in January 2002, Bin Laden traveled to Karachi to receive updates on AQ's latest plots. There and then he approved of several plots that involved British operatives boarding planes with bombs hidden in the soles of their shoes. Bin Laden also met some of the operatives in person and hugged them good luck. However, the plots failed. Nevertheless, this instance does illustrate a tread running from AQ's highest echelons to the lowest. It also illustrates that the top-down division of tasks and responsibilities remained largely unchanged with regard to pre-9/11 AQ, although the people that constituted the organization itself changed (Levy & Scott-Clark, 2017, p. 126).

Another essential aspect of Structure is communication. Intraorganizational communication became increasingly troublesome for AQ to maintain and develop following 9/11. This was mainly due to the US' adoption of signals intelligence (SIGINT) methods for targeting HVTs. One such landmark SIGINT-based strike took place in November 2002, over Yemen. In this strike, the US killed the leader of AQY, Abu Ali al Harithi, while he was driving in a pickup truck trough the desert of Yemen. The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) managed to locate al Harithi by tracking his phone signal and killed him per drone strike. Two years later, the US also introduced this targeting technique to its Pakistani drone program. Subsequently, this led the US to expand and deepen its electronic surveillance over the AfPak region as this was needed to support its UCAVs in their pursuit of AQ Central (Mazzetti, 2014, p. 74).

The expansion of the US' electronic surveillance over the AfPak region led to increased paranoia on part of AQ Central and slowed down the speed of the group's communications in general. Volunteers traveling from Europe to AQ Central in the FATA recall an "… almost neurotic concern about invisible 'chips' supposedly planted by spies to guide in missile attacks. Fear of interception meant no use of mobile phones, only radio and notes carried by hand …" (Burke & Black, Al-Qaida: Tales from Bin Laden's Volunteers, 2009).

Khalid Sheikh Mohamed, head of AQ's Special Operations Unit, AQ's Information / Media Committee, and architect of the 9/11 attacks, tried to circumvent electronic detection

through a variety of ways. He used different sim cards for his various phones and used these phones in a random manner at different times during the week from different locations, in order to avoid operating in a obvious pattern. He sent physical coded messages from the FATA to Afghanistan by means of a donkey. He 'sent' e-mails by typing them – but not sending them – and saving them in the 'draft' folder, instructing the receiving party elsewhere to log in with the same email address and password and to read the message in the draft folder. When on the phone with fellow AQ members Khalid Sheikh Mohammed would speak in code only, often confusing the recipients of the message about what he actually meant, which resulted in several miscommunications (McDermott & Meyer, 2012, p. 172).

Meanwhile, AQ's emir, Bin Laden, was forced to travel from safehouse to safehouse, living in hiding and completely dependent on his couriers. Bin Laden's personal aide and courier, Ibrahim Saeed Ahmad[76], almost yielded under the pressure of his responsibility (Levy & Scott-Clark, 2017, p. 204). His task was to enable Bin Laden to send and receive messages in a secure manner, i.e., without using phones or internet:

> *Any journey Ibrahim made was perilous. Every time he left the valley with the Sheik's messages or met a courier bringing notes from Waziristan or cash from Khalid in Karachi, he had to pass through a phalanx of army and ISI[77] checkpoints … . He varied his route. He took the back roads. He changed vehicles when he could. He bought different clothes, cut his hair, and shaved or grew a beard. He sought new rendezvous points: a pomegranate juice stall in Charsadda, the covered mall in Hayatabad, Peshawar.* (Levy & Scott-Clark, 2017, p. 204)

Ibrahim Saeed Ahmad's story well conveys how post-9/11 AQ's security environment forced them to become more careful, but also how their increased caution complicated day-to-day affairs.

Another effect of the constant threat of US UCAVs over Pakistan was that AQ's leadership could no longer convene physically – or at least not without taking strict security measures. As Atiyah Abd al Rahman, post-9/11 AQ's third in command and close adviser to

[76] A.k.a. Abu Ahmad al Kuwaiti.
[77] Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan's main intelligence agency.

Osama bin Laden, wrote to Bin Laden on June 19, 2010, in an illustrative description of post-9/11 AQ's operational environment:

> *The roads leaving northern Waziristan are still difficult. The strikes by the spy planes are still going on … . The planes are still circling our skies nearly every day. Sometimes there are fewer of them because of weather conditions like thunder, wind, clouds and the like, then they come back when the sky is clear.* (United States v. Abid Naseer, 2015, p. 36).

Not adhering to Bin Laden's security recommendations, which held that one should only move about on cloudy days, could have deadly consequences. With regard to a group of twenty AQ operatives who killed in the FATA in a US drone strike because they were ignoring AQ's security measures, Atiyah Abd al Rahman wrote to Bin Laden on November 23, 2010:

> *They gathered for the holidays, despite our orders and emphasizing to avoid gathering in large numbers. Before the holidays I reiterated that their numbers in one place should not exceed five, but sometimes they … take their own decisions.* (United States v. Abid Naseer, 2015, p. 113)

Bin Laden, however, believed, that the US' technological superiority over AQ could be nullified by AQ members strictly adhering to counter-drone security protocols. He describes his view on the matter in a letter to Atiyah Abd al Rahman, and says:

> *The facts prove that the American technology and advanced systems cannot capture a mujahid if he does not make a security violation that will lead them to him. Commitment to operational security makes his technological advancement a waste. Security procedures in our circumstances should be practiced at all times and there is no room for mistakes. Some people are not disciplined and cannot do this, and these people should be treated differently - perhaps a job in the field might be best for them.* (Bin Laden, Letter of Osama bin Laden to Atiyah Abd al Rahman, p. 4)

This excerpt reveals that Bin Laden attached great importance to operational security; such a great importance that there was no place in AQ Central's power structure for those who did not abide by the safety standards.

However, the examples cited in this section show how the introduction of UCAVs over Pakistan in 2004 had a profound impact on AQ's ability to communicate quickly and freely, and how they required AQ to improvise in order to overcome the US' technological superiority. Post-9/11 AQ tried, and largely succeeded, to retain its pre-9/11 hierarchical structuring. However, its intra-organizational communication was severely impacted by the threat of US drones and the SIGINT system that supported it. Hence, one can argue that US drone strikes influenced AQ's Structure negatively in terms of communication; this became slower, less flexible and at times more confusing.

Post-9/11 Al Qaeda's Style

Post-9/11 AQ's Style, i.e., the way its organization is managed and led by its top managers, its organizational culture, can be said of to be less participative and more cautious than its pre-9/11 Style (Waterman, Peters, & Phillips, 1980, p. 22; Jurevicius, 2013; Clarke, 2019, p. 4). Although before 9/11, AQ's Style was highly participative, mainly because of Osama Bin Laden's presence in the midst of AQ's members, after 9/11, AQ's Style became typified by an increasingly closed, paranoid, distanced society. This was in large part due to the increasing threat of drone strikes on AQ senior members in the FATA (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004; Gartenstein-Ross & Barr, 2018; United States v. Abid Naseer, 2015, p. 63; Levy & Scott-Clark, 2017, p. 202).

Prior to 9/11, Bin Laden and his fellow AQ commanders would be able to move around most parts of the world relatively freely, visiting camps, vetting fighters, discussing the operations that would take place in-person. After 9/11, this became increasingly hard to arrange at times, if not impossible. By means of human intelligence (HUMINT) and SIGINT the US attempted to trace Bin Laden and other AQ Central operatives in the FATA. In order to evade detection by the US, Bin Laden was stuck moving between safe houses and corresponded with al Zawahiri and other AQ Central members almost exclusively by means of hand-written notes. These notes needed to be delivered manually. Meanwhile, al Zawahiri and the other AQ Central commanders took on themselves the management of AQ's day-to-day affairs. Bin Laden, although still emir of AQ, and still in the loop of the larger strategic choices that lay before AQ,

began to gradually disappear from the public eye following 9/11, only receiving visitors or leaving his safehouse with great exception, and at great risks, burdening those responsible for his security. Although less in direct contact with AQ's lower echelons like prior to 9/11, the Bin Laden in hiding still boasted significant attractiveness in the world of jihad, inspiring volunteers from around the world to join AQ as the forefront of the Islamic struggle. In hiding, Bin Laden became an almost mythical appearance, the legendary but untouchable mujahid; global (counter)terrorism's center of attention (Levy & Scott-Clark, 2017, p. 202).

Describing the paranoia that began taking hold of AQ's highest echelons, Atiyah Abd al Rahman writes several letters to Bin Laden. On July 17, 2010, Atiyah Abd al Rahman informs Bin Laden of a plan he discussed with 'the brothers' on how to secure AQ's base of commanders and operatives and he notes:

> *… We decided that … until further notice, we should not show up in the media. This will reinforce our invisibility and security and help us avoid monitoring by spies [The US]. The war of espionage is causing us to suffer, and we are drawing American pressure on Pakistan. We have thought about moving out of Waziristan soon, we might go to Nuristan, some of us, and some may stay. I mean the leaders, and the members of the different organizations like media, the Sharia Committee and the like. We will divide ourselves, one group stays and the other goes.* (United States v. Abid Naseer, 2015, p. 63)

Despite taking preventive measures, however, the US pressure on AQ Central remained significant. In November 2010, six years after the drone strikes on AQ Central in the FATA had started, Atiyah writes another letter to Bin Laden, illustrative of the constant pressure they felt, saying, "we are facing difficulties due to the grave shortages in personnel in some cadres and the abundance of spies operating in our areas, which plagued the environment …" (United States v. Abid Naseer, 2015). In order to prevent the attrition from spreading to the higher echelons, some in AQ Central were of opinion that even stricter anti-detection measures had to be taken, which meant becoming even less visible (United States v. Abid Naseer, 2015, p. 113).

Ultimately, one can argue that the introduction of US UCAVs over the FATA affected AQ's Style in a negative manner. The methods of intelligence gathering supportive of drone strikes on AQ HVT's, i.e., SIGINT and HUMINT, forced AQ Central to drastically decrease

it's face-to-face interaction and visibility. For post-9/11 AQ's commanders and personnel, in order to survive, caution, suspicion and hiding became the rule. This greatly contrasts with pre-9/11 AQ's Style, which was characterized by mutual trust and public interaction between the command cadres and the lower echelons.

Post-9/11 Al Qaeda's Staff

Post-9/11 AQ's Staff element, that is the element concerned with, first, training programs, pay scales, promotion cycles; and, second, with the attitudes of those situated within the organization under assessment, was severely negatively impacted by the introduction of US UCAVs over the FATA (Waterman, Peters, & Phillips, 1980, p. 23; Jurevicius, 2013). The most negatively affected in this area were AQ's training programs and promotion cycles (Lodhi, 2011, pp. 60-61, as cited in Mir, 2018, p. 74; United States v. Abid Naseer, 2015, p. 39).

Whereas pre-9/11 AQ ran several training camps which offered a variety of courses, post-9/11 AQ faced increasing troubles in this respect. Operation Enduring Freedom had forced AQ to relocate its training camps to the FATA. Here, AQ built camps with permission of the Pakistani Taliban, or utilized the latter's respective training facilities. The investments AQ needed to make to rebuild its training infrastructure in Pakistan, however, were significant (Gartenstein-Ross & Barr, 2018).

In addition, in 2004, the US introduced its UCAVs over the FATA and began targeting not only AQ's personnel but also AQ's training infrastructure and that of the Taliban. The US specifically began focusing on AQ's various experts, thereby increasing the pressure on the organization. A successful strike on an important node can have long-lasting, negative consequences for the struck party in question, and can have a ripple effect throughout the hit organization. One example of such a case is the targeted killing of Sheikh Abu Khabab al Masri, AQ's senior explosives expert and head of AQ's weapons of mass destruction program. He was killed in the FATA by a US UCAV together with the rest of his team, in 2016 (Mir, 2018) (Roggio, Senior al Qaeda, Taliban, and Allied Jihadist Leaders Killed in US Airstrikes in Pakistan, 2004 – 2017, 2017). According to a member of the Pakistani Taliban, a group closely working with AQ Central, who was interviewed on this particular case in 2016 by Asfandyar Mir (2018), Abu Khabab al Masri was regarded as one of the most knowledgeable people in the FATA on explosives, and taught both AQ and Pakistani Taliban operatives how to handle explosives. With the assassination of Abu Khabab al Masri and his team, a lot of practical skill

and knowledge was lost. According to the interviewed member of the Pakistani Taliban, these losses could be seen reflected in the educational institutions of organizations like AQ and the Pakistani Taliban, and directly translated themselves into postponed plans and failed attacks (Mir, 2018, p. 71).

The above is but one example of the impact of the constant US drone strikes on AQ's training infrastructure. Not only the training component was under pressure though, also the promotional processes and the intraorganizational hierarchical relationships. Writing on AQ's precarious position between 2004 and 2011, an AQ commander, under the pseudonym of 'Hikmatullah Lodhi', writes:

> *We need to do our utmost to recover from the losses due to drone strikes . . . if leaders continue to be killed, the jihadi movement's entire direction and pace can suffer; if field commanders continue to die, training will be poorer and the operational capabilities of mujahideen will suffer, and the … next generation of mujahideen will not be of high quality. In short, drone strikes can overwhelm the strength of the mujahideen.* (Lodhi, 2011, pp. 60-61, as cited in Mir, 2018, p. 74)

Lodhi's story adequately reflects the extent to which losses at the higher echelons ripple through to the lower echelons, impacting the core of the organization. Atiyah Abd al Rahman confirms the degrading effects of US drone strikes on AQ's Staff element in a letter dated June 2010 to Bin Laden, stating, "the mid-level commands [*sic*] and the staff members are hurt by the killings. Compensating for the loss is going slowly, God grants aid, and the ongoing war of espionage does not give us much chance" (United States v. Abid Naseer, 2015, p. 39).

One can see the far-reaching consequences of US drone strikes for AQ's training and promotion cycles above. Another important aspect of the Staff element is motivation. AQ Central recognized the importance of this element and, consequently, made great efforts to reinforce this factor. With regard to monetary motivation, post-9/11 AQ aimed to sustain its salary scheme of the years prior to 9/11, and even tried to export this practice to its affiliates. The aim of this was to keep militants on the side of AQ. Echoing the importance of financial compensation, in a letter dated May 2010[78], Bin Laden wrote to Atiyah Abd al Rahman: "your earmarking of the budget should set aside enough salaries for the brothers and the families for

[78] Date estimated by Combatting Terrorism Center, West Point, US (Combatting Terrorism Center, 2012, p. 2).

a year, regardless of the finical [*sic*] forecast for the coming days" (Combatting Terrorism Center, 2012, p. 190). AQAP, for example, aimed to provide its fighters with a higher salary than Yemeni soldiers were provided with by their government, in order to make AQAP more attractive than its state adversaries. As such, an AQAP operative would receive a monthly salary of USD$200 on average, while a Yemeni soldier would only receive up to USD$150 monthly (International Crisis Group, 2017, p. 17).

In addition to AQ's attempt to use money to reinforce its cadres' external motivation, its operatives were also highly intrinsically motivated in the post-9/11 period. According to a poll conducted in the FATA, in 2010, nine out of ten inhabitants in the FATA opposed the US and its interference in the region, six out of ten regarded suicide attacks against US military targets as 'just', and more than 85% of the surveyed opposed the US drone program in the region. This regional support meant post-9/11 AQ saw its presence in the region relatively secured. Additionally, it provided AQ with a significant pool of new recruits to pick from; indeed, suicide bombers were widely respected in the FATA and many of AQ's suicide bombers originated from this region (Ballen, Bergen, & Doherty, 2010)

However, despite financial and emotional motivations to join AQ, US drone warfare significantly affected post-9/11 AQ's morale, and subsequently, its Staff element. Describing the demoralizing effect US drone strikes had on AQ's organization, an AQ Central commander - assumedly[79] Osama bin Laden - wrote to AQAP leader Nasir al Wahishi[80]:

> *Our Waziristani brothers … said that they were frankly exhausted from the enemy's [US'] air bombardments. The enemy has been given almost a worldwide approval to violate the air space of other countries and to attack anyone whom it views as its enemy.* (Combatting Terrorism Center, 2012, p. 140).

From the above excerpt, one can observe that drones had a significant impact on post-9/11 AQ's morale; it exhausted their operatives. According to Bin Laden there was an urgent need for action – or inaction – and he writes to Nasir al Wahishi:

[79] Assumedly Osama bin Laden. Not all documents seized from AQ bear the respective author's real name. I.e., many letters and documents by AQ authors were purposefully undersigned with aliases or *noms de querre*. In this case, Bin Laden was estimated to be the author. The respective source was found among the documents seized at his Abbottabad compound.

[80] A.k.a. Abu Basir. Yemeni national (Department of State, n.d.).

> *In the meanwhile, we do not want to send the reserves to the front line, especially in areas where the enemy [US] only uses air strikes [drone strikes] to attack our forces. So, the reserves will not … be effective in such conflicts. Basically, we could lose the reserves to enemy's air strikes. We cannot fight air strikes with explosives!* (Combatting Terrorism Center, 2012, p. 140).

The last excerpt also conveys a sense of powerlessness; Bin Laden seems to accept the fact that AQ cannot actively counter US drone strikes.

In sum, the 2004 introduction of US UCAVs over the FATA negatively influenced AQ's Staff element by impinging on post-9/11 AQ's training and promotional cycles. Additionally, AQ's morale was affected by the continuous drone strikes which drew constant losses on AQ's cadres. The American drone war on AQ did seem to contribute to AQ's resolve, however. AQ Central further sought to reinforce the group's morale by providing them with external stimuli, such as consistent and above average salaries. Ultimately, the state of post-9/11 AQ's Staff element contrasts with pre-9/11 AQ's Staff element, which was characterized by better functioning training and promotional components.

Post-9/11 Al Qaeda's Skills

On an institutional level, pre-9/11 AQ was renown for its ability to export its ideology to a wide array of countries; regarding individual skills, pre-9/11 AQ was known for its members being able to utilize a wide arrange of small arms. on an individual level AQ was is possession of highly specialized technical knowledge, such as bombmaking an piloting large civilian airliners. Mainly skills that required training, such as utilizing a wide arrange of weaponry and bombmaking, were negatively impacted by the 2004 onset of US drone strikes (Zelin, 2012; Mir, 2018; Herrington, 2015, p. 20; Gartenstein-Ross & Barr, 2018).

The events of 9/11 had transformed AQ. Its ability to export its ideology to a wide array of countries had rewarded them with multiple international affiliates and a following across the globe. Subsequently, AQ attempted to deepen and broaden its knowledge of bombmaking and tried to elevate this skill to an institutional level. They seemingly succeeded in this. Most of the 'successful' plots perpetrated by post-9/11 AQ involved explosives made by the group members themselves. AQ's institutional skill in explosives interacted strongly with AQ's individual skills

in explosives; skills which were maintained and developed by men such as Sheikh Abu Khabab al Masri, who shared his knowledge on explosives with AQ's broader organization, and taught militants in the FATA how to independently handle explosives. In turn, AQ's individual operatives applied the knowledge they gained in attacks (Mir, 2018). Many post-9/11 AQ militants who carried out bombings had either followed trainings in the FATA or had received secondary knowledge from someone who had been there (Herrington, 2015, p. 20) (Gartenstein-Ross & Barr, 2018).

Conversely, it was exactly AQ's individual, and thus, institutional skill of bombmaking that was impacted by the onset of the US drone strikes over Pakistan. For example, as was noted earlier, the killing of Abu Khabab al Masri by a US UCAV in 2016 meant a significant loss for AQ in terms of its institutional skill of bombmaking – Abu Khabab al Masri conveyed his knowledge and practical skills to his students, who would then absorb this knowledge, internalize it, and relay it again to a younger generation (Mir, 2018). As such, AQ's ideal educational cycle resembles a hierarchical pyramid structure.

However, Abu Khabab al Masri was not the only AQ explosives expert killed in the FATA between 2001 and 2011. Between 2004 and 2011, of AQ's explosives experts alone, US drones killed Haitham al Yemeni, in May 2005; Mohsin Musa Matawalli Atwah, - the AQ bombmaker involved in the 1998 African US embassy bombings - in 2006; Abu Sulayman Jazairi, in May 2008; Abu Hamza, in September 2008; Abu Zubair al Masri, in November 2008; and Abu Musa al Masri, in October 2009 (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, n.d.; Roggio, Senior al Qaeda, Taliban, and Allied Jihadist Leaders Killed in US Airstrikes in Pakistan, 2004 – 2017, 2017). Moreover, US drones did not only kill AQ's instructors, but also displaced them. In order to prevent from being targeted AQ had to relocate more often and refrain from spending too much time outside with large numbers of people (United States v. Abid Naseer, 2015, p. 113). A combination of all these factors may have contributed to a general decline in individual skills with regard to explosives. As a result, it is likely that more of AQ's plots may have failed.

A key example is that of Faisal Shazad. Inspired by AQ's propaganda, on May 1, 2010, Faisal Shazad attempted to detonate a car bomb on New York's Times Square. However, the plot failed, as the bomb failed to explode (United States Department of Justice, 2010). In preparation for his attack, Shazad had followed an explosives course with the Pakistani Taliban in the FATA. Post-9/11 AQ and the Pakistani Taliban upheld tight connections and trained together in the FATA (e.g., AQ explosives expert Abu Khabab al Masri also taught the Pakistani Taliban). However, Shazad's training only lasted five days, whereas in the pre-drone period, that same training in the FATA would have lasted at least a month. Ultimately, a combination

of a decline in institutional skill and loss of freedom to roam and essential infrastructure, caused by the continues targeting by US UCAVs, might have contributed to the failure of his attack (Zelin, 2012).

As an unintended consequence, the presence of US UCAVs over the FATA, however, seemed to spur on the development of post-9/11 AQ's counterintelligence capabilities on an institutional level. On June 19, 2010, Atiyah Abd al Rahman writes to Bin Laden on AQ's urgent need to develop 'counterespionage' capabilities in order to survive as an organization. According to Atiyah Abd al Rahman, AQ was not yet capable of defending itself against their adversaries' technological means. He writes:

> *We do our best with the resources available: mostly … using passive methods, with some active attempts to strike them or their bases. We also work hard using jamming technology against them, and try to hack them (there are many attempts going on, but no results so far. However, they are continuing) … . Praise be to God, lord of the universe.*
>
> *Our current view of the situation: we need to reduce operations and activities, focus on "persevering and survival". We will focusing [sic] on defensive security (counterespionage) by … striking the spy plane [US drone] bases using special operations, and on patience, persistence, hiding as well as decreasing our presence at least this year … . Next July is the date of the American withdrawal from Afghanistan, God willing, broken and defeated.* (United States v. Abid Naseer, 2015, p. 39)

In accordance with post-9/11 AQ's increased need for counterintelligence capabilities, Bin Laden agreed to the establishment of units solely focused on killing spies suspected of helping the US target HVTs in the FATA (Plaw, Fricker, & Williams, 2011, p. 60). According to this idea, within 24 hours of a drone strike, these units would try to find the spy responsible for coordinating the strike. AQ's counterintelligence squad would then kill this person, often documenting the retaliation and disseminating the images among the FATA's inhabitants and beyond, demonstrating the world what would happen with traitors. Although only successful to a limited extent, counterintelligence measures like these did pose constraints for US HUMINT operations in the FATA as they scared off potential collaborators (Burgers & Romaniuk, 2017).

In the post-9/11 era, AQ's Skills element was strongly adversely influenced by US drone strikes. Most notably, US drone strikes negatively affected AQ's individual and institutional skills in explosives and disrupted the development and retention of AQ's most important skills, bombmaking. Regarding AQ's weapon skills and knowledge, the individual level shaped the institutional level and vice versa. By eliminating important nodes of individual explosives skills, the US also impacted AQ's institutional skill. AQ did however seek to introduce counterintelligence capabilities on an institutional level in order to defend itself from US drones.

Post-9/11 Al Qaeda's Systems

Post-9/11 AQ's Systems, i.e., all the formal processes which are involved in an organization's daily routine, such as budgeting systems, cost accounting procedures, training systems, capital budgeting systems, and internal security, was structured the same as that of its pre-9/11 counterpart (Waterman, Peters, & Phillips, 1980, p. 21; Jurevicius, 2013). However, because of US drone strikes, individual committees often saw their leadership change for various reasons, which also meant that there were changes to the staffing of the Shura, as well as challenges to the performance of individual committee. (Bin Laden, Summary on Situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, p. 2; Combatting Terrorism Center, 2012, p. 110; Soufan, 2021; Loidolt, 2021).

As prior to 9/11, post-9/11 AQ Central and broader AQ was led by the emir; who was supported by his secretary. Second to the emir was the deputy; and advising the emir and the deputy in strategic questions was the Shura. All the individual committees and their subcommittees, respectively the Political Committee[81]; the Religious Committee; The Administrative / Financial Committee; the Security Committee; the Military Committee; and the Information / Media Committee operated under the Shura (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 54).

Bin Laden held the position of emir until May 2, 2011, the date of his killing. This date also marks the end of what is understood in this research as the 'post-9/11 period'. Throughout this period, Ayman al Zawahiri, as during pre-9/11 AQ, held the position of deputy (Stanford University, 2019). It is not known who succeeded Bin Laden's Secretary, Wadih el Hage, who

[81] It should be noted that after the events of 9/11, not much is known about AQ's Political Committee. This can have several reasons. It can be that 9/11 turned AQ into a political pariah with which states did not want to engage anymore. It can also be that the committee was quietly absorbed by AQ Central's leadership, as they were already the de facto leaders of the committee, and as such, the formal committee was not regarded as of added value. These are, however, only assumptions. No clear motivations were given by AQ.

held the position until he was captured in 1998 (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1056).

Post-9/11 AQ's Religious Committee was led by Abu Hafs al Mauritani until his flight to Iran in 2003, where he was taken into custody. Abu Yahya al Libi[82] took command of the committee in the second half of 2005. It is unclear who commanded the committee between 2003 and the second half of 2005 (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1066). On July 28, 2008, AQ's most prominent theologian, Abu Mohammad Ibrahim Bin Abi al Faraj al Masri was killed by a US UCAV (Roggio, Senior al Qaeda, Taliban, and Allied Jihadist Leaders Killed in US Airstrikes in Pakistan, 2004 – 2017, 2017).

Post-9/11 AQ's Administrative / Financial Committee was commanded by Sheikh Said al Masri, AQ's most senior financial official and general manager (Lumpkin, Shaikh Saiid al-Masri: Al-Qaeda Financial Chief, 2006). Said al Masri was killed by a US UCAV on 21 May, 2010 (Roggio, Senior al Qaeda, Taliban, and Allied Jihadist Leaders Killed in US Airstrikes in Pakistan, 2004 – 2017, 2017). Said al Masri was also post-9/11 AQ's emir of Qaidat al Jihad fi Khorasan. After Said al Masri's killing, Sheikh Fateh al Masri assumed the role of emir of Qaidat al Jihad fi Khorasan. It is, however, unclear who took over the then vacant role of AQ's financial and general manager. Possibly this was intentionally left unclear because of the importance of the position; revealing this information could have compromised the operational security of post-9/11 AQ's organization, appreciating the vital role finance and administration plays (Roggio, Al Qaeda Appoints New Commander for Afghanistan, 2010).

US UCAVs impacted post-9/11 AQ's Administrative / Financial Committee in a severely negative manner. UCAVs not only removed important nodes in control of financial and managerial structures; they also disrupted the financial processes themselves. A document, assumedly written by Bin Laden, acknowledges the hardships inflicted on AQ's financial system by US drones. Bin Laden acknowledges: "… there is the financial problem, which is a problem in jihad …" (Bin Laden, Summary on Situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, p. 2).

Even AQ's preferred transaction system of hawala system relied to a certain extent on electronic communication, as the various brokers involved in hawala would need to communicate with one another across the globe. This would often happen via electronic communication. As the US pursued AQ into the AfPak region and ramped up its electronic surveillance, for AQ, electronic communication became increasingly risky because it could get

[82] Abu Yahya al Libi would become al Zawahiri's Deputy after the latter succeeded Bin Laden as emir (Jones, Al Qaeda Is Far from Defeated, 2012).

them detected by US SIGINT. Consequently, this affected AQ's financial interaction, internally and externally, slowing down the process chain as a whole. In order to remain in control of financial flows, post-9/11 AQ had to resort to more 'analog' means. In a letter to Atiyah Abd al Rahman, dated October 21, 2010, Osama Bin Laden shares an insight into the impact of electronic surveillance on AQ's financial endeavors, and what he thinks would be a safe, practical approach to the issue:

> *Many mistakes can happen when you receive the money. This also applies to donation money. You should take all security precautions. My suggestion is to rent a house in Peshawar and the money should be delivered in it. After the mission, the brother leaves the house.*
>
> *Make sure to get the money exchanged at money exchangers. You should also get rid of the bag that the money was in because it might have a chip. The brother should take the money, get in a taxi, and go to the center of the market and get to a roofed section of the market. Two brothers should be waiting for him there and he should give them the money to bring it to you. The money should be in euro or dollars. After that, he should evade surveillance and stay away from the brothers that he gave the money to.*
>
> *Negotiators should not be met in Wasiristan (the area where the American aerial photography is active), unless there is a perfect plan that would prevent the enemy [the US] for tracking those negotiators or the brothers. You should know that the news of the negotiations might reach the Americans.*
>
> *…*
>
> *Note: the brother should not be one of the leaders.* (Combatting Terrorism Center, 2012, p. 110)

Here, it is clear that US SIGINT and drone reconnaissance exerted great stress and pressures on AQ, severely complicating the organization's day-to-day affairs.

Pre and post-9/11 AQ's Security Committee was headed by Saif al Adel. Following

AQ's expulsion from Afghanistan he joined the selection of senior members that left for Iran in 2002-2003. In Iran, al Adel and the other seniors lived in between freedom and captivity, but were always monitored by the Iranian intelligence services (Al Libi, 2010). It is unclear whether at this point Saif al Adel still formally represented the head of AQ's Security Committee. He remained, however, of significant importance and maintained contact with his fellow AQ commanders around the world, not refraining from voicing critique – even of Bin Laden (Soufan, 2021).

Especially Osama bin Laden was, in Saif al Adel's eyes, attracting dangerous amounts of attention to AQ in a time which was already proving challenging enough. After 9/11, AQ had become the primary enemy of the US, a powerful force. When Khalid Sheikh Mohammed captured the British journalist Daniel Pearl in 2002 with the intention of killing him, Saif tried to dissuade Khalid Sheikh from doing so to avoid drawing even more attention to AQ. Nonetheless, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed killed Pearl, which moved Saif al Adel to write a series of letters detailing his frustration (Soufan, 2021). In one letter, dated June 13, 2002, Saif wrote to Khalid Sheikh: "you are the person solely responsible for all this because you undertook the mission, and in six months we have lost what took years to build" (Al Adel, 2002, as cited in Soufan, 2021). According to Saif al Adel, plots such as the 9/11 attacks and the killing of Daniel Pearl threatened AQ's future because they forced the organization to go underground; AQ, according to Saif al Adel, lacked a long-term vision.

Saif al Adel's criticism towards AQ's behavior may have caused frustration with Bin Laden. Saif al Adel was long seen as a potential successor to Bin Laden and generally regarded as more popular than al Zawahiri among his peers. Saif was also a proponent of supporting the establishment of AQI, in 2004, and was responsible for convincing Bin Laden to provide the young affiliate with the resources it needed to become operational (Soufan, 2021). Saif however, kept himself in the background, becoming interim leader after Bin Laden's passing only to ensure a 'clean' transfer of power to post-9/11 AQ's new emir, al Zawahiri (Roggio, Al Qaeda Appoints Ayman al Zawahiri Successor to Bin Laden, 2011). Taking into account the personal experience of the head of AQ's Security Committee, Saif al Adel, it can be argued that the heightened pressures on post-9/11 AQ's security situation, caused by the US' pursuit of the group, added to a sense of insecurity, as well as caused division between those who propagated AQ lay low and those who were looking for confrontation.

Post-9/11 AQ's Military Committee seemed also significantly impacted by the onset of the US drone strikes. Most notably, Mohammed Atef, the Military Committee's president, was killed by a US UCAV in Kabul, Afghanistan, in November 2001. He was replaced by Saif al

Adel. This marks the first direct killing of an AQ Central figure in the AfPak region by a US UCAV (Dawoud, 2001). Saif Adel was replaced by Abu Faraj al Libi as president of the Military Committee, who held the position until his capture in 2005 (Department of Defense, 2008, p. 7). Abu Faraj al Libi was replaced by Khalid Habib, who was killed in the same drone strike that killed Abu Khabab al Masri (Roggio, Al Qaeda Commanders al-Magrabi and Habib Killed in Damadola, 2006). Khalid Habib was most likely succeeded by Abdullah Said al Libi, who led the committee until he was also killed in a US drone strike, on December 17, 2009, in North Waziristan, the FATA (Roggio, Al Qaeda Shadow Army Commander Thought Killed in Dec. 17 Strike, 2010).

AQ's General Section was led by Saif al Adel until he was replaced in 2001 by Abdul Hadi al Iraqi, who held the position until he was captured in 2006 (The Gitmo Observer, n.d.). After Abdul Hadi was captured, Khalid Habib also took on himself the task of leading post-9/11 AQ's General Section, an office he held until his killing by a US drone in 2008 (Roggio, Al Qaeda Commanders al-Magrabi and Habib Killed in Damadola, 2006). Khalid Habib's position was taken over by Abdullah Said al Libi. who was killed by a US drone in the FATA on December 17, 2009 (Roggio, Al Qaeda Shadow Army Commander Thought Killed in Dec. 17 Strike, 2010). Abdullah Said al Libi was replaced by Ilyas Kashmiri, who was killed by a drone in the FATA in June 2011 (Zahid, 2014).

Post-9/11 AQ's Special Section was headed by Khalid Sheikh Mohamed, who held the post until his arrest in 2003 (Globalsecurity.org, n.d.). He was replaced by Abu Hamza Rabia, however, Abu Hamza Rabia was killed by a US drone in December 2005. Rabia was then replaced by Abu Abeida al Masri, who died of hepatitis in 2007 (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1061). Abu Abeida al Masri was replaced by Abu Saleh al Somali[83]. Abu Saleh al Somali was killed by a US drone on December 8, 2009, in the FATA (Roggio, Al Qaeda's External Operations Chief Thought Killed in US Strike in Pakistan, 2009). The head of post-9/11 AQ's Nuclear Weapons Section, Ali Sayyid Muhamed Mustafa al Bakri, purportedly diverted to Iran in 2005 (United Nations, 2005). It is unclear who filled the void left by Abu Saleh al Somali in post-9/11 AQ's Special Section.

It is evident that the continuous killing of post-9/11 AQ's command cadre presented Osama bin Laden with a serious crisis. Several letters written by post-9/11 AQ Central seniors indicate that the constant losses of commanders drained post-9/11 AQ's talent pool faster than they could replenish it. For example, Abu Saleh al Somali was already not AQ Central's

[83] A.k.a. Abu Havez (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1061).

primary choice to replace Abu Abeida al Masri after the latter's passing and now the senior appointed to look for Saleh's successor had even more trouble finding an appropriate replacement. At least two candidates proposed to take over Saleh's position were rejected by Bin Laden. Meanwhile, the organization lost valuable time plotting external operations (Loidolt, 2021). Arguably, post-9/11 AQ's Systems element was negatively impacted by the arrival of drone warfare. AQ's Military Committee was hampered by the constant losses of vital members, and the replacement processes did not work out as smoothly as they should have, diverting attention away from operation planning and fighting to administrative tasks such as replacing lost commanders.

Post-9/11 AQ's Information / Media Committee was initially led by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010, p. 1066). Around 1999 Khalid selected Muhammad Abbatay[84], who was at that moment still following training at AQ's al Faruq camp, to become AQ's future leader of the Information / Media Committee. In the post-9/11 years, Abbatay gradually took up the lead role in this committee (Gunaratna & Nielsen, Al Qaeda in the Tribal Areas of Pakistan and Beyond, 2008, p. 794). Post-9/11 AQ's deteriorating security situation forced Abbatay to relocate to Iran. He returned to the FATA a few years later and has been able to evade US detection ever since (Rewards for Justice, 2022).

It seems, however, that in comparison to AQ's other committees, relatively few seniors of the post-9/11 Information / Media Committee were killed by UCAVs. Additionally, earlier research showed that the post-9/11 increase in drone strikes did not decrease post-9/11 AQ's propaganda output, but, conversely, saw an increase in drone-related propaganda output. As such, for post-9/11 AQ, US drone strikes seemed to serve as a kind of fuel, providing the group with a *raison d'être*; whenever an AQ senior, or innocent civilians, were killed by a drone, the Information / Media Committee would lament the seniors as 'martyrs' and the slain civilians as victims of America's senseless crusade against Islam. In so doing, the Information / Media Committee tried to reinforce already-present beliefs among AQ's fighters and to increase the anti-American sentiment among Pakistan's local population (Smith & Walsh, 2013, p. 324). Considering that the physical impact of UCAV strikes on post-9/11 AQ's Information / Media Committee remained relatively limited compared to the impact on post-9/11 AQ's other committees, and the fact that post-9/11 AQ used the strikes to reinforce its own beliefs and stimulate anti-Americanism among the local population, it is therefore argued that drone strikes

[84] A.k.a. Abd al Rahman al Maghrebi (Rewards for Justice, 2022).

did not negatively impact this branch, but moreover, moderately enabled them.

Post-9/11 AQ's Systems were under severe pressure because of US drone strikes on AQ Central. Most of this pressure emanated from the continuous removal of high-level committee members, and the subsequent need to replace them with a new suitable person in a timely manner. The disruption of AQ's financial structures was another problem caused by US drone-related SIGINT mechanisms. Only post-9/11 AQ's Information / Media Committee seemed to be enabled by the continuous drone strikes. Generally, one could state that the presence and activity of US drones over the FATA had a disorganizing effect of AQ's Systems. This is in stark contrast with pre-9/11 AQ's Systems element, which was a relatively well-organized, well-functioning whole.

Post-9/11 Al Qaeda's Shared Values

Pre-9/11 AQ's Shared Values, i.e., the norms and standards that influence and lead the behavior of an organization its leadership and subordinates, was strongly characterized by jihadist, anti-Western imperialist, anti-neocolonialist, anti-American sentiments (Jurevicius, 2013; Bin Laden, Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places, 1996; Bin Laden, CNN: 1997, Osama Bin Laden declares jihad, 1997; Bin Laden, Al Zawahiri, Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, Hamzah, & Rahman, 1998). Post-9/11 AQ's Shared Values largely followed this tradition, although AQ's global expansion, in combination with the constraints posed on AQ's intraorganizational communication due to US surveillance, enabled AQ's affiliates to divert from AQ Central's preferred Shared Values without being corrected by AQ Central commanders in the AfPak region (Abd al Rahman, 2005, p. 5; Al Zawahiri, 2005, p. 5; Levy & Scott-Clark, 2017, p. 263) .

Post-9/11 AQ's Shared Values clearly echoed in public contributions made by AQ's emir, Osama bin Laden. However, whereas in earlier contributions he made references to perceived injustices in Palestine and Lebanon, the post-9/11 political context saw an increasing focus on Iraq and Afghanistan. In a speech, broadcast by the media outlet Al Jazeera following the US invasion of Afghanistan, Bin Laden referred to the injustices taking place against Muslims around the world. These injustices were, according to him, perpetrated by the West. Bin Laden says:

> *And there are civilians, innocent children being killed every day in Iraq without any guilt, and we never hear anybody. We never hear any fatwah from the clergymen of the*

government.

And every day we see the Israeli tanks going to Jenin, Ramallah, Beit Jalla and other lands of Islam. And, no, we never hear anybody objecting to that.

So when the swords came after eight years to America, then the whole world has been crying [sic] for those criminals who attacked. … They supported the murder against the victim, so God has given them back what they deserve. (CNN, 2001)

Later, in an interview with Al Jazeera, Bin Laden specified his idea of jihad further, and he notes: "This battle is not between al Qaeda and the U.S.. This is a battle of Muslims against the global crusaders" (CNN, 2002). Violence, even against supposedly innocent civilians, Bin Laden argued, was a necessary evil to advance the freedom, peace and independence of the Islamic world. In 2004 he explains this point further:

… Oppression and the intentional killing of innocent women and children is a deliberate American policy. Destruction is freedom and democracy, while resistance is terrorism and intolerance.

This means the oppressing and embargoing to death of millions as Bush Sr did in Iraq in the greatest mass slaughter of children mankind has ever known, and it means the throwing of millions of pounds of bombs and explosives at millions of children – also in Iraq – as Bush Jr did, in order to remove an old agent and replace him with a new puppet to assist in the pilfering of Iraq's oil and other outrages.

So with these images … as their background, the events of September 11th came as a reply to those great wrongs, should a man be blamed for defending his sanctuary?

Is defending oneself and punishing the aggressor in kind, objectionable terrorism? If it is such, then it is unavoidable for us. (Al Jazeera, 2004)

This represents a continuation of Bin Laden's 1998 fatwa, and as such, a continuation of AQ's original line of reasoning (Bin Laden, Al Zawahiri, Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, Hamzah, & Rahman, 1998). According to Bin Laden there are two ways of stopping the war between the Islam and the West: either the West retreats and leaves the Islamic world in peace, or AQ "… is to continue

to escalate the killing and fighting …" (Public Intelligence, 2010).

Bin Laden seemingly does not reject the label of terrorist *per se*. However, the opinions of insiders and fellow Muslims did matter to him. In 2005 Bin Laden started feeling increasingly uncomfortable with the way Abu Musab al Zarqawi was leading AQI. Al Zarqawi's AQI had embarked on a killing spree in Iraq, not only targeting Westerners but also Iraq's Shia Muslims. According to al Zarqawi, the latter were 'apostates'. In this period AQI also introduced the world to the notorious on-camera beheadings. This practice would become a trend among other terrorist organizations around the world. Al Zawahiri tried to intervene on behalf of AQ Central, first by addressing al Zarqawi through a message aired on Al Jazeera, in June 2005, and later by sending a letter to al Zarqawi (Levy & Scott-Clark, 2017, p. 263).

In his letter to al Zarqawi, al Zawahiri shared with him his and Bin Laden's perspective on al Zarqawi's behavior in Iraq. In the letter, al Zawahiri declared that, "… the mujahed movement must avoid any action that the masses do not understand or approve, if there is no contravention of Sharia in such avoidance …" (Al Zawahiri, 2005, p. 5). Fundamentally, AQ Central was worried that AQI was scaring away, rather than rallying Muslims around, AQ. Al Zawahiri also addressed the brutal executions organized by AQI under al Zarqawi, and noted:

> *Among the things which … the Muslim populace who love and support you will never find palatable … are the scenes of slaughtering the hostages. You shouldn't be deceived by the praise of some of the zealous young men and their description of you as the shaykh of the slaughterers, etc. They do not express the general view of the admirer and the supporter of the resistance in Iraq, and of you in particular by the favor and blessing of God.* (Al Zawahiri, 2005, p. 10)

Such remarks from prominent AQ Central figures were ignored by al Zarqawi. He justified his behavior by emphasizing he had sworn allegiance to AQ's leadership and did not pose a threat. In terms of Shared Values, AQI increasingly started drifting away from AQ Central's leadership. Eventually, their disagreement on organizational core values, as well as a disagreement on how to engage with the conflict which in Syria, led to a formal split between AQI and AQ in 2014, which led to the establishment of Islamic State (IS) (Thomas, 2018, p. 4).

This detrimental value divergence within broader post-9/11 AQ was further exacerbated by the US' disruption of broader AQ's intraorganizational communication. US HUMINT and

SIGINT efforts made it hard for AQ Central to communicate freely and securely within the broader organization and to contact their commanders, subordinates and affiliates. In addition, geographical factors played a significant role; the further away the recipient, the harder clear and secure communication. Due to the presence of drones, AQ sought to avoid digital means of communication and instead tried to increase their reliance on in-person communication by using couriers (Gartenstein-Ross & Barr, 2018).

The post-9/11 AQ Central-AQI relationship suffered considerably under this lack of consistent and reliable communication caused by the above factors. A letter sent by post-9/11 AQ's third in command, Atiyah Abd al Rahman, to al Zarqawi, in 2005, reveals some of AQ Central's powerlessness and dependence of their affiliates in such a scenario. In his letter, Atiyah wrote to al Zarqawi:

> *Forgive us also if our conception of your situation there and your circumstances is lacking and unclear, for this is possible and not unlikely, especially with the disruption that exists and the loss of communications. We advise you to maintain reliable and quick contact, with all the power you can muster.* (Abd al Rahman, 2005, p. 15).

In the same letter Atiyah also asks al Zarqawi to send couriers to the FATA to reopen lines of communication with AQ Central, because the leadership in the FATA was unable to send messengers out without them being detected (Abd al Rahman, 2005, p. 5)

Arguably al Zarqawi's AQI exploited AQ Central's inability to exert meaningful control over all of its affiliates abroad in times of disruption. It is not to say that the AQ Central-AQI value divergence occurred because of US intervention, but the US drone program and its accessory system of surveillance did disrupt AQ's lines of communication and hence contributed to an increased chance for intraorganizational disagreement. In this case, the 'disobedient' subordinate, i.e., al Zarqawi, was permitted to act like it had not received clear directions, using hostile surveillance efforts as a pretext for not having received the message, and argue that he was 'forced' to act according to his own plan (Byman, Buddies or Burdens? Understanding the Al Qaeda Relationship with Its Affiliate Organizations, 2014, p. 465; Gartenstein-Ross & Barr, 2018).

Ultimately, US surveillance efforts, i.e., the support system of the drone program, hindered the extent to which post-9/11 AQ Central was able to maintain meaningful control over broader post-9/11 AQ's Shared Values, as it imposed on AQ Central limits that reduced its freedom of movement and communication. This allowed 'roque' affiliates, like AQI, to

ignore the rules set by their command. It is true that post-9/11 AQ upheld the same jihadist, anti-Western imperialist, anti-neocolonialist, anti-American sentiment as it did prior to 9/11. However, post-9/11 AQ Central also aimed to unite the Islamic world in this cause, whereas some of its affiliates, such as AQI, did not abide by these values. Unable to correct them, partly because of US surveillance, AQ Central seemingly failed in its mission to have their broader organization pursue the same Shared Values. In so doing, the US drone program over the FATA negatively affected post-9/11 AQ's Shared Values.

3.3 THE STATE OF POST-9/11 AL QAEDA COMPARED TO THE STATE OF PRE-9/11 AL QAEDA AND THE ROLE OF UNITED STATES DRONE STRIKES IN AL QAEDA'S ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In order to answer the main research question of this paper, namely, 'how have US drone strikes against AQ Central in the FATA, between 2004 and 2011, affected the broader organization of AQ?', the following section will compare the findings of the 7-S analyses of pre and post-9/11 AQ and assess how US drone strikes impacted their development.

How United States Drone Strikes Affected Al Qaeda's Strategy

US drone strikes against AQ Central in the FATA shave not seemingly impacted broader AQ's Strategy over time. Pre-9/11 AQ's Strategy revolved around the instigation of violence on a local and global level, as well the exploitation of grievances held among the global Muslim population vis-à-vis the West (Bin Laden, Al Zawahiri, Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, Hamzah, & Rahman, 1998; Al Jazeera, 2004). Post-9/11 AQ largely followed this line, however, with a greater emphasis on the need to entrench AQ's presence in the Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian theatres, as well as a greater emphasis on AQ's function as the forefront of the global jihad (Al Zawahiri, 2005). US drone strikes did not influence nor impact AQ's Strategy.

How United States Drone Strikes Affected Al Qaeda's Structure

US drone strikes against AQ Central in the FATA greatly negatively affected broader AQ's Structure. Pre-9/11 AQ's organization was strictly hierarchically organized and intraorganizational communication took place in a relatively organized manner (Al Qaeda; Al Qaeda; Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010). Post-9/11 AQ's organization was larger than its pre-9/11 version, however, under closer scrutiny by the US. Because of the US' HUMINT and SIGINT systems in the FATA, AQ Central could no longer freely move, convene or communicate. Because of these limitations, AQ's hierarchical structure became less rigid than that of pre-9/11 AQ; this was necessary in order to keep the organization running under high external pressure. AQ's intraorganizational communication did not cease completely, but it did become slower, increasingly inflexible and confusing at times. This, in turn, functioned as a brake on broader AQ's organizational development (Bin

Laden, Letter of Osama bin Laden to Atiyah Abd al Rahman, p. 4; McDermott & Meyer, 2012, p. 172; United States v. Abid Naseer, 2015, p. 36; Levy & Scott-Clark, 2017, p. 204) . As such, the US drone program drastically impacted AQ's Structure.

How United States Drone Strikes Affected Al Qaeda's Style

US drone strikes against AQ Central in the FATA significantly impacted AQ's Style in a negative manner. Pre-9/11 AQ's Style was characterized by a strongly participative atmosphere, where commanders interacted with militants from the lower echelons on a very personal level. Prior to 9/11, for example, AQ's emir, Osama bin Laden, could meet his commanders and operatives themselves and discuss matters with them in person (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004; Gartenstein-Ross & Barr, 2018). The US' pursuit of AQ Central and the HUMINT and SIGINT surveillance efforts that formed the base of the UCAV-based targeted killing program forced AQ Central to hide and minimize its social interaction. Osama bin Laden had to go into hiding, only rarely leaving the protection of his safehouse in Abbottabad (United States v. Abid Naseer, 2015, p. 63; Levy & Scott-Clark, 2017, p. 202). The US drone war in the FATA had turned AQ in an increasingly cautious and suspicious organization.

How United States Drone Strikes Affected Al Qaeda's Staff

AQ's Staff element was strongly adversely impacted by US drone strikes in the FATA. Pre-9/11 AQ's Staff element was characterized by well-functioning educational and promotional processes (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 157). Additionally, pre-9/11 maintained its fighters with stable financial and social arrangements (Al Qaeda, p. 12). The constant drones strikes forced AQ to shorten the educational processes of their cadres, and also forced them to accelerate the promotional processes. This was necessary for AQ in order to keep its organization running in the face of mounting losses of high-value personnel due to drone strikes (Lodhi, 2011, pp. 60-61, as cited in Mir, 2018, p. 74; United States v. Abid Naseer, 2015, p. 39). US drone strikes in the FATA did motivate some volunteers to join AQ, nonetheless were AQ's operatives in the FATA becoming increasingly exhausted by the relentless bombing campaign (Ballen, Bergen, & Doherty, 2010). To reinforce motivation among its cadres AQ Central tried to maintain essential services, such as the

payment of salaries (Combatting Terrorism Center, 2012, p. 140). Ultimately, however, the quality of post-9/11 AQ's cadres decreased because the continuous drone strikes in the FATA forcibly shortened educational processes and sped up promotional cycles. In so doing, US drones strikes encroached on AQ's Staff.

How United States Drone Strikes Affected Al Qaeda's Skills

On an institutional level, pre-9/11 AQ boasted the ability to export its ideology to a wide array of countries. On an individual level, pre-9/11 AQ was best known for its members' their abilities of utilizing a wide arrange of small arms. Additionally, pre-911 AQ was in possession of highly specialized technical knowledge, such as bombmaking (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p. 57; Byman, Buddies or Burdens? Understanding the Al Qaeda Relationship with Its Affiliate Organizations, 2014, p. 450). US drone strikes over the FATA most strongly impinged on AQ's highly specialized and technical Skills. AQ managed these highly specialized and technical skills by means of intergenerational knowledge transfer. By eliminating important individuals in drone strikes, such as AQ's explosives expert Abu Khabab al Masri, the US erased years of skills and knowledge. This reduced AQ's operational capabilities which resulted in failed plots and postponed attacks (Zelin, 2012; Mir, 2018; Herrington, 2015, p. 20; Gartenstein-Ross & Barr, 2018). The onset of US drone strikes did move post-9/11 AQ Central to develop counter-intelligence capabilities, but these could not nullify the devastating force of US drones (United States v. Abid Naseer, 2015, p. 39). Ultimately, the continuous US drone strikes on AQ's various experts in the post-9/11 period undermined AQ's Skills as a whole.

How United States Drone Strikes Affected Al Qaeda's Systems

Whereas pre-9/11 AQ's Systems element was characterized by a high degree of organization and AQ's various committees seemed sufficiently able to carry out their respective responsibilities, the onset of the US drone strikes over the fata infringed on AQ's Systems (Gunaratna & Oreg, Al Qaeda's Organizational Structure and its Evolution, 2010). US drone strikes over the FATA especially obstructed the work of AQ's Administrative / Financial Committee and complicated the organization's transferring of finances, which caused for financial problems within post-9/11 AQ (Combatting Terrorism Center, 2012, p. 110; Bin

Laden, Summary on Situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, p. 2). Furthermore, the continuous killing of the heads of AQ's various committees posed a strain on AQ's organization and it became increasingly troublesome for the organization to find the appropriate replacements in time. This resulted in the postponement of plots (Loidolt, 2021). Moreover, this also caused for intraorganizational tension as debate erupted over whether to step up external operations or to lie low in order to prevent detection (Soufan, 2021). The only committee which was not *per se* negatively influenced by the drone strikes was AQ's Information / Media Committee. The latter actually used the US drone program in its propaganda material (Smith & Walsh, 2013, p. 324). However, taking into account the overall derailing effect of US drone strikes on AQ's daily organizational processes, it is argued that US drone strikes on AQ Central in the FATA heavily impacted AQ's Systems.

How United States Drone Strikes Affected Al Qaeda's Shared Values

Last, AQ's Shared Values element, although in its core consistent throughout the two decades under consideration, was also affected by the US drone intervention. Post-9/11 AQ upheld the same jihadist, anti-Western imperialist, anti-neocolonialist, anti-American sentiments as did pre-9/11 AQ (Bin Laden, Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places, 1996; Bin Laden, CNN: 1997, Osama Bin Laden declares jihad, 1997; CNN, 2001; CNN, 2002; Al Jazeera, 2004) . However, post-9/11 AQ Central also aimed to unite the wider Islamic world in this cause, whereas some of its affiliates, such as AQI, did not share this intention (Levy & Scott-Clark, 2017, p. 263; Al Zawahiri, 2005, p. 5). Because of US surveillance efforts, AQ Central was unable to exert meaningful control over roque affiliates, such as AQI (Abd al Rahman, 2005, p. 5). AQI took advantage of AQ Central's inability to meddle in their affairs, ignored their requests to align with AQ Central's Shared Values, and gradually drifted away from AQ Central. Ultimately, this led to a formal break between AQ Central and AQI (Thomas, 2018, p. 4; Gartenstein-Ross & Barr, 2018). As such, US drone strikes against AQ Central in the FATA did not directly impact AQ's Shared Values, but the SIGINT and HUMINT systems at the base of the drone program did create an environment which contributed to the disruption of AQ's intraorganizational communication, and this created the conditions which allowed insubordinate affiliates, such as AQI, to disregard broader AQ's Shared Values without repercussions.

CONCLUSION

This thesis examined how United States (US) drone strikes against al Qaeda (AQ) Central in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), between 2004 and 2011, affected the broader organization of AQ. The research was conducted by means of a 7-S analysis of AQ's broader organization throughout two timeframes: from 1988 until 2001, the pre-drone phase, and from 2001 until 2011, the intra-drone phase, across seven organizational factors, namely Shared Values, Strategy, Structure, Systems, Style, Staff and Skills.

This study found that US drone strikes against AQ Central in the FATA affected the broader organization of AQ in several ways. First, US drone strikes greatly affected AQ's Structure in a negative manner. Particularly intraorganizational communication, an important aspect of Structure, suffered as a consequence of US surveillance systems supportive of the drone program. Second, AQ's Style was impacted by the continuous US drone strikes in the FATA. In order to avoid being detected by the US, AQ Central commanders and operatives were forced to live in hiding and minimize their social interaction, digitally, as well as in-person. Third, AQ's Staff element deteriorated under the influence of the US drone program over the FATA. This was mainly due to disrupted educational and promotional processes, as the continuous killings of AQ's cadres by US drones forced the organization to speed up the promotion of its operatives to prevent running out of fighters. Fourth, US drones negatively affected AQ's Skills by killing experts of specific skills, such as bomb making. AQ's educational system was based on intergenerational transfer of skills and knowledge, hence, by taking out the source of certain skills and knowledge, the US impeded the spread of these. Fifth, AQ's Systems were adversely affected. Mainly the Administrative / Financial Committee was hampered in its day-to-day affairs. This was due to the drone program's comprehensive electronic surveillance system. Additionally, AQ became preoccupied with replacing committee leaders lost to drone strikes. This diverted attention from other issues. Finally, US drone strikes did not directly affect AQ's Shared Values but the drone program and its surveillance element did create a situation which increasingly isolated AQ Central from its affiliates, and which allowed roque affiliates, such as al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), to divert from the prescribed Shared Values. It does not appear that the US drone program directly or indirectly affected AQ's Strategy.

The findings in this paper resonate with several theories from within the community of counterterrorism (CT) scholars. First, the findings of this paper seem to confirm the mechanism

of leadership decapitation, as provided by Bryan Price (2010). In the FATA, the US deliberately attempted to eliminate important nodes for AQ's organization, such as explosives experts and committee leaders. These strikes had a very real effect on AQ's performance; AQ's operational capabilities were affected and AQ had to allocate resources to find appropriate replacements for those operatives killed. Nonetheless, AQ's organization as a whole did not come to a halt. As such, AQ seems to be a flexible organization that can take blows but recover afterwards.

Additionally, the case of AQ as presented in this paper seemingly validates the theory that targeted killings by drones can indeed contribute to an erosion of skillful management within the targeted organization, an idea proposed by Daniel Byman (2013). The case study in this paper showed that AQ Central superiors were in fact worried that the continuous killing of important commanders could have an effect of gradual de-professionalization on AQ; that they were losing professional operatives faster than they could replenish them.

Finally, this case study seems to confirm the deterrent function of a signals intelligence (SIGINT)-based targeted killing program, a process suggested by Brian Glyn Williams (2010). According to this function, targeted networks may avoid electronic means of communication in order to evade detection. The case of AQ Central under drones in the FATA proves that this theory can be seen reflected in practice, as AQ Central went to great lengths in order to evade detection.

This case study also reaffirms that there are certain drawbacks to the US' drone-centered campaign against AQ. Audrey Cronin (2013) argued that collateral damage caused by US drones would only amount to more anti-Americanism. So did Chalmers Johnson (2004) argue that aggressive American policies overseas increase anti-American attitudes around the globe. This case study observed that AQ's Information / Media Committee actively exploited the US drone program over Pakistan and turned it into anti-American propaganda material. AQ's propaganda material, in turn, was successful in driving some people to take up arms against the US. Faisal Shazad, the Times Square bomber, for example, was also motivated by AQ propaganda.

While the findings of this paper can give us valuable insights into how the US drone program affected AQ's organization, they only cover one part of the bigger picture. The US has not only been fighting AQ with drones in Pakistan, but also in Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen. In order to fully comprehend the larger image of how US remote warfare against AQ is influencing the latter it would be helpful if future research was also to engage with the US drone program in Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen, and to see how AQ here was impacted across its organization. This future research could deploy the 7-S analysis method in doing so,

as the method proved helpful in this research as well.

To conclude, the author would like to share a practical recommendation for those in the intelligence and or security domain. If anything, this case study showed that military technological superiority on the battlefield does not *per se* result in strategic victory for the more advanced party. The case of AQ has demonstrated that those targeted by military technological superpowers can choose to abandon digital means and go into hiding for as long as is necessary. Meanwhile their organization carries on. Albeit slower and perhaps less efficient than before, it still poses a threat. Although drones are able to eliminate the people within an organization, they do not seem to take away the motivation of those volunteers joining the said terrorist group. Moreover, at times, tools of remote warfare, such as drones, seem to contribute to jihadist, anti-American attitudes, and only drive volunteers into the arms of terrorist groups. This case study of AQ Central reflects this mechanism. Therefore it is recommended that CT and counterinsurgency (COIN) campaigns should ideally also include efforts that help undermine popular support for targeted groups within certain regions, while simultaneously increasing support for the counterterrorism state. These efforts can be programs aiming to improve local communities' their socioeconomic well-being, for example. This would mean to not only fight the symptoms, but also the causes.

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