Al-Qaeda and the American Counterterrorism Community: Shifting Practices, 1991-2013

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Abstract

This thesis examines variation in the practices of al-Qaeda and the American counterterrorism community. It posits that the interaction of two permissive factors, background knowledge and relational structure, goes a long way in explaining shifts in the practices of both communities. Through a case study of the interaction of the two communities between 1991 and 2013, it analyzes changes in these two variables to explain shifts in practice during that time period. The thesis demonstrates that through a process of mutual reaction, changes in al-Qaeda practices modify background knowledge and relational structure in the American counterterrorism community, and vice versa, encouraging the adoption of new practices by both actors.

Résumé

Ce mémoire examine les variations dans les pratiques d'al-Qaida et de la communauté américaine du contre-terrorisme. Il avance que l'interaction de deux facteurs permissifs, la connaissance pratique et la structure relationnelle, contribue considérablement à expliquer des changements dans les pratiques des deux groupes. Grâce à une étude de cas de l'interaction des deux communautés entre 1991 et 2013, il analyse des changements dans ces deux variables pour expliquer des changements dans les pratiques à travers cette période. Le mémoire montre que par un processus de réaction mutuelle, des changements dans les pratiques d'al-Qaida modifient la connaissance pratique et la structure relationnelle dans la communauté américaine du contre-terrorisme, et vice versa, encourageant l'adoption de nouvelles pratiques par les deux acteurs.

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Introduction

Between 2004 and 29 May 2013 the CIA conducted approximately 356 drone strikes in Pakistan, and 69 strikes in southern Yemen, resulting in the deaths of over 3000 militants and as many as 400 civilians.[1] This campaign of targeted strikes aimed at al-Qaeda and the Taliban constituted a substantial shift from pervious American counterterrorism practices. Prior to 9/11 the CIA's primary practice vis-à-vis al-Qaeda was tracking Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants' movements in hopes of staging a capture mission to render bin Laden to justice. As early as 1993 the FBI was focusing its anti-al-Qaeda efforts on criminal investigations following terrorist attacks. In just 20 years dominant American counterterrorism practices changed from reactionary criminal justice efforts, to proactive criminal justice efforts, to classified, high-tech, kill operations.

Al-Qaeda's principal practices also varied quite significantly during this time period. From 1991 to 1996 bin Laden's organization was focused mainly on financing terrorism and providing operational support and training to other actors who were intent on attacking Americans. The 1998 US embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania marked the adoption of large-scale suicide attacks, a practice that produced unprecedented levels of destruction on 9/11. Al-Qaeda practices began to shift again in 2002-2003, when the organization began the process of franchising. Thus, al-Qaeda changed from a supplier of terrorism, to the perpetrator of the most devastating terrorist attacks in human history, to the head of a loosely

[1] New America Foundation Database (Pakistan); New America Foundation Database (Yemen).

related series of terrorist franchises spanning several continents, all in the same 20 year period in which American counterterrorism efforts shifted so significantly.

These concurrent shifts in practice among two closely related communities raise an interesting question for social science studies of terrorism and counterterrorism: *to what degree can shifts in the practices of a counterterrorism community be responsible for shifts in the practices of a terrorist organization, and vice versa?* Before answering this question, however, one must first know the answer to the following: *what are the factors and conditions that allow for or encourage particular terrorism and counterterrorism practices to be adopted in the first place? What is the process by which this occurs?*

As the second question implies, it is important to remember that terrorism and counterterrorism are broad phenomena that can be enacted in myriad ways. Terrorist do not always 'do' terrorism in the same way: some attempt political assassinations, some take hostages, others carry out suicide-bombing campaigns. The same can be said for counter-terrorists. These two categories – terrorism and counterterrorism – can be made up of many different, more specific practices. As such, it is also important that we attempt to understand *why, in a given case, we see one set of practices adopted instead of another*. For example, why would a terrorist group adopt the practice of suicide terrorism instead of hostage-taking? This thesis does not attempt to explain the causes of terrorism and counterterrorism, but rather why shifts occur in the specific forms these phenomena take at different times.[2]

[2] I thank Professor Vincent Pouliot for highlighting the importance of this distinction.

In order to address these broader questions I structure my research around four questions that are particular to my case, the 20 year interaction between al-Qaeda and the American counterterrorism community:

(1) *What contributed to al-Qaeda adopting the following practices: financing and supporting terrorism; large-scale, coordinated suicide attacks; and franchising?*

(2) *What contributed to the US counterterrorism community adopting the following practices: post-attack criminal investigations; locational intelligence collection and leadership movement tracking; and targeted drone strikes against al-Qaeda members?*

(3) *How much influence, if any, did shifts in these al-Qaeda practices have on those US counterterrorism practices, and vice versa?*

(4) *Why were these particular practices adopted when they were instead of others?*

The task of this thesis is one of theory-building. As the title of Chapter 1 indicates, the ultimate objective is to move toward generating a theory of practice of terrorism and counterterrorism. In doing so, I do not pretend that the analysis here is exhaustive. This thesis examines two commonly overlooked factors, background dispositions and relational structures, which prove to be quite useful in explaining shifts in the specific practices of terrorists and counter-terrorists. Certainly, other variables (e.g. technological innovation or material limitations)

may also be crucial to such an explanation. Still, even without considering every variable, the focus in this thesis on the importance of background dispositions and relational structure contributes to our knowledge of how and why actors adopt new practices.

This thesis is also not a study in causality, but in scope conditions. The two variables posited in this these do not *cause* a particular community to adopt a specific set of practices. Rather, they are permissive factors that allow for or encourage one practice to be enacted instead of another. Even without causal weight, I believe that the interaction of background knowledge and network structure still contributes greatly to our understanding of why terrorism and counterterrorism practices shift the way they do.

This thesis makes several other contributions to knowledge as well. First of all, a practice theory of terrorism and counterterrorism would help overcome several limitations in current theoretical approaches to terrorism and counterterrorism behavior.[3] For one, a practice theory approach can help reconcile the disparity between theories of terrorism that prioritize agency (e.g. instrumental theories) and those that prioritize structure (e.g. organizational theories). Because practices reside at the intersection of structure and agency, studying terrorism and counterterrorism through the lens of practice theory requires considering both structural and agential variables.[4] A practice theory approach also encourages the study of terrorism and counterterrorism together. Much of the current literature focuses on only one or the other of these phenomena. Conceptualizing terrorists

[3] I expound on these claims in greater detail in the literature review.
[4] See Adler and Pouliot (2011: 15).

and counter-terrorists as operating within communities of practice compels the researcher to observe both communities simultaneously, as the nature of the relationship between two communities might have significant implications for the practices they develop.[5]

This thesis should also contribute to the growth of practice theory as a valuable approach to studying international phenomena. State actors will likely continue to have to deal with threatening non-state actors in the future. Developing theories that examine these interactions at the level of the practitioner can provide useful insights into the micro-processes of interaction and how they affect outcomes. This study endeavors to do just that for terrorism and counterterrorism.

Plan of the Thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters. In Chapter 1, I review the relevant literature and propose a theoretical framework for studying changes in terrorism and counterterrorism practices. I then present the methodology used to carry out the research and introduce the case study that makes up the remainder of the thesis.

In Chapters 2, 3, and 4, I apply the theoretical framework proposed in the first chapter to al-Qaeda and the American counterterrorism community from 1991 to 2013. Chapter 2 deals with the years that al-Qaeda spent in Sudan, 1991-1996. In this chapter I argue that background knowledge acquired during the war with the Soviets, enacted through the core structure of the new al-Qaeda network, allowed

[5] See Adler and Pouliot (2011: 18-21).

for the emergence of three practices: financing terrorism, training and supporting other terrorists, and alliance-building. At the same time, I show how a background disposition developed in the FBI after the Lockerbie bombing encouraged the Bureau to adopt the practice of post-attack criminal investigations.

In Chapter 3, I analyze the shifts in practice that occurred during al-Qaeda's time in Afghanistan, 1996-11 September 2001. I argue that improvements to al-Qaeda's network structure and a new association between martyrdom and suicide encouraged bin Laden's organization to adopt the practice of large-scale, mass-casualty, suicide terrorism. I then demonstrate how this new practice sparked several reactions within the CIA. First, standards of competency regarding the practice of collecting intelligence on the movements of al-Qaeda leaders were raised, leading eventually to the use of reconnaissance drones over Afghanistan. Second, there was an increasing tendency in the CIA to view killing, rather than capturing, as the ultimate outcome of the tracking practice. Finally, I argue that the FBI's 'office of origin' system and the success of the investigation of the 1993 World Trade Center attacks explain why the FBI's practice of post-attack investigation persisted almost unchanged, even following such a drastic shift in al-Qaeda practice.

Chapter 4 deals with new practices in the post-9/11 period. In particular, I argue that the increasing tendency within the CIA to view killing as the objective of locational intelligence collection, in combination with technical improvements to military hardware that was already part of locational tracking, allowed for the Agency to adopt the practice of Predator drone strikes in Pakistan and Yemen. I

also argue that severe damage to the core of al-Qaeda's network – inflicted by the coalition forces following the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 – hampered al-Qaeda's ability to carry out large-scale operations, forcing a change in practice that resulted in franchising.

Chapter 5 concludes the thesis. In this chapter I wrap up the arguments made in the case study and discuss the theoretical and empirical contributions made by this thesis to the field of International Relations and the study of terrorism and counterterrorism.

Chapter 1: Toward a Theory of Practice of Terrorism and Counterterrorism

In this chapter I introduce the theoretical framework that will be applied in the following chapters to explain how and why specific shifts in practice occurred. I begin with a review of the terrorism and counterterrorism literature, as well as the literature on practice theory. Next, based on the findings from this review, I justify the selection of the independent variables used in this thesis and situate them within a theoretical framework that explains how and why particular terrorism and counterterrorism practices are adopted. Finally, I outline the methodology that was used to conduct this project and introduce the case study.

Literature Review

Scholars have taken many different theoretical approaches to understanding how and why terrorists and counter-terrorists adopt certain strategies and take certain actions. I review the prominent approaches here.

The Instrumental or Strategic Theory of Terrorism

In the instrumental approach, terrorism is viewed as a means to a political end, as a strategy adopted by a group of collectively rational actors seeking specific political goals.[6] In this rational-choice model, terrorists make cost-benefit calculations based on their preferences and the options available to achieve their objectives, and only

[6] Crenshaw (2001b: 13-14); Crenshaw (2011: 111); McCorick (2003: 482). See Waterman (1981) for a discussion on collective rationality in instrumental theories of political action.

elect to take actions when those actions are in line with their incentive structures, either maximizing gains or minimizing losses.[7]

While this approach is insightful in its simplicity, it suffers from some weaknesses. For one, this approach necessarily requires taking actors' preferences as given at the time of the study, and struggles to explain where those preferences came from. On top of that, this theoretical approach cannot explain actions that deviate from the terrorists' preference structure, or that fail the cost-benefit test. Finally, as McCormick argues, instrumental theories of terrorist action "[do] not fully capture the processes by which real decisions are made within a terrorist group."[8] This is a severe weakness considering the impact that variations in decision-making processes might have on terrorist behavior.

Organizational Theories of Terrorism

Organizational theories of terrorism resolve some of these issues, and introduce some of their own.[9] Crenshaw provides a concise outline of the fundamental principles of the organizational approach:

> This explanation focuses on the internal politics of the organization. In suggesting that terrorism can become self-sustaining regardless of its political consequences, it assumes that the fundamental purpose of any political organization is to maintain itself. Terrorist behavior represents the outcome of the internal dynamics of the organization rather than strategic action.[10]

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[7] Crenshaw (2001b: 14); Crenshaw (2011: 117-119); McCormick (2003: 481); Sheehan (2007: 46-49). See also McCauley (2004).
[8] McCorick (2003: 485).
[9] In some cases, e.g. Richardson (2006), authors may offer explanations that bridge these two theoretical approaches.
[10] Crenshaw (2001b: 19). See also Cronin (2004: 27-30); Gunaratna (2002); Kenney (2007); Sinno (2008).

The focus of these theories on the internal dynamics of the terrorist organization solves two problems found in the instrumental approach. First, organizational theories provide an explanation for the origins of the group's preferences and incentive structure: they are determined by dynamic, internal political processes.

They also offer some insight into why terrorists might take actions that are deemed 'irrational' within the bounds of their preferences and the options available. As Barnett and Finnemore so effectively demonstrate, organizations and bureaucracies are susceptible to pathologies that may drive them to 'irrational' behavior.[11] In emphasizing the internal political dynamics of terrorist groups, the organizational approach allows the opportunity to identify the processes driving this unexpected behavior.[12]

Finally, organizational theories based on the works of James Q. Wilson present viable explanations as to why some terrorist organizations persist even when, from an instrumental strategic-choice perspective, the actors should abandon the group and search for new means of expediting political change. The argument drawn from Wilson is that the primary goal of any political organization is to preserve its existence.[13] As such, organizational theories of terrorism posit that over time, terrorist groups begin to substitute the more purposive incentives that instrumental approaches focus on (e.g. regime change) with the incentive to survive.[14]

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[11] Barnett and Finnemore (2004: 34-41).
[12] Note that some organizational theories focus more on terrorist groups as loose networks. See, for example, Sageman (2004).
[13] Crenshaw (2011: 75); Wilson (1973).
[14] See Crenshaw (2011: 80).

Still, approaching terrorism from an organizational perspective can be problematic. Applying an organizational theory to terrorism requires that the subject under study be an organization. However, not all terrorists operate from organizations in the traditional sense. Some, like Timothy McVeigh, operate independently. Others, like al-Qaeda, form complex transnational networks with varying density.[15] Hypotheses concerning terrorist action derived from organizational theories that assume a level of cohesion close to that found in a firm[16] will not hold when these conditions are not present. Finally, because organizational theories focus on the internal bureaucratic processes, they have a tendency to risk omitting agency from the analysis of terrorist behavior. In correcting for some of the shortcomings of the strategic approach, the organizational approach undervalues the terrorist as a purposive actor.

The Political Economy of Terrorism and Counterterrorism

Significant strides in the application of insights from economics to political phenomena have impacted the study of terrorism and counterterrorism in recent years. Enders and Sandler's *The Political Economy of Terrorism* is exemplary of the range of benefits that political-economic theories can bring to understanding terrorist and counter-terrorist behavior.[17] The political economy approach posits a rational-choice model of terrorism similar to that found in the instrumental approach, but then develops deductive models based in theories of economics to

[15] See Sageman (2004).
[16] This is a common comparison in organizational theories. See Crenshaw (2001b: 22).
[17] Enders and Sandler (2012).

make predictions on aggregate terrorist behavior.[18] The political economy approach affords researchers the ability to study cycles and trends and, unlike the organizational and instrumental approaches, the political economy approach is often explicitly concerned with elucidating the effects that counterterrorism policies have on terrorist behavior.[19] Because of their reliance on the assumption of rationality, theories of the political economy of terrorism suffer from many of the same pitfalls as the instrumental approach. Additionally, although the models developed in these studies can be quite useful in explaining long-term trends, their parsimonious nature makes it difficult to use them to trace micro-processes of interaction. This can be problematic if one hopes to explain how interaction between two closely linked actors, such as al-Qaeda and the American counterterrorism community, might lead to changes in behavior.

The Theory of Political Communication

The political communication approach to terrorism offers another method to study terrorism and counterterrorism together. Crelinsten writes:

> Violence is a form of communication used by those who cannot express what they feel in words or written tracts and publications, so they 'act it out' in violent ways. So, violence by the state or by the non-state actor can be conceived as a form of communication that coexists with other forms of communication, sometimes used in concert with them and sometimes in their stead.[20]

[18] See, for example, Enders and Sandler (2012: chapter 5).
[19] See, for example, Arce M. and Sandler (2005); Bueno de Mesquita (2005); Enders and Sandler (2012: 24, chapters 3, 6); Lee (1988).
[20] Crelinsten (2002: 77).

As such, "both terrorism and counter-terrorism can be conceived as reciprocal forms of political communication that take on different attributes either in response to changes in the other or in an attempt to impose change on the other."[21] Based on this conception, Crelinsten constructs a model that places terrorism within a context that depicts the different ways in which states and non-state actors communicate with each other.[22]

The focus on the communicative aspects of terrorism can be double-edged sword. On the one hand this approach provides a clear and concise model that is capable of explaining some of the reciprocal effects of terrorist and counter-terrorist actions. It also brings to the foreground the audiences, intended and unintended, of terrorism and counterterrorism, a feature which is missing from most other approaches to terrorism and counterterrorism. On the other hand, although the communicative model may be useful for determining the most effective method for responding to a particular form of political violence,[23] it only partially succeeds in explaining how and why particular actions are taken by terrorists and counter-terrorists in the first place. Communicating with an audience is only a portion of the objectives of these actors, a potential means to an end; the communication model cannot account for their underlying motivations.

[21] Crelinsten (1989: 245). See also McAllister and Schmid (2011: 246-248); Schmid and de Graaf (1982).
[22] See Crelinsten (2002: 79); Crelinsten (1989: 246).
[23] Crelinsten (2009).

The 'Best Practices' Approach to Counterterrorism

Many studies of counterterrorism are policy-oriented studies of the effectiveness of various counterterrorism methods. These studies are not usually founded in any particular theoretical approach, and are meant strictly to analyze past counterterrorism practices and determine whether or not they were successful. Some of these 'best practices' studies are case-study based historical accounts,[24] while others are large-n, cross-country analyses.[25]

The weakness in these accounts of counterterrorism behavior is that they typically do not look in a structured, focused way at the underlying causes of variation in counterterrorist behavior. Because this approach is concerned mainly with which methods work best, there is little thought put into how or why these methods come to be adopted in the first place.

Practice Theory as an Alternative

Practice theory offers a fresh alternative to the abovementioned theories of terrorism and counterterrorism behavior. Practices are "socially meaningful patterns of action which, in being performed more or less competently, simultaneously embody, act out, and possibly reify background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world."[26] Practices are also conceptually distinct from actions and behavior: a behavior is "a deed performed in and on the world; an action is a behavior imbued with meaning; and practices "are patterned actions that

[24] For example, Alexander (2002); Alexander (2006).
[25] For example, Chasdi (2010).
[26] Adler and Pouliot (2011: 6).

are embedded in particular organizational contexts and, as such, are articulated into specific types of action and are socially developed through learning and training."[27] For example, detonating a bomb is a behavior. Detonating a bomb in an embassy to frighten a foreign population is an action. The sustained Hezbollah suicide bombing campaign in Southern Lebanon starting in the 1980s, designed to force Israeli troops to leave the country, was a practice.

It can also be analytically useful to break practices down into 'specific' and 'general' types, especially when addressing the question of who names practices.[28] As their appellation suggests, general practices (e.g. terrorism or counterterrorism) are broader, more encompassing patterns of action. Specific practices (e.g. suicide bombing) fall within these more general practices; they consist of more particular actions, are carried out by narrower communities, and rest on more precise background knowledge. In this thesis, the designations given to various practices were not necessarily assigned by the practitioners performing them. I assign names to general and specific practices strictly for analytical purposes: to help distinguish between the shifting phenomena that I hope to explain. So, for example, I refer to the specific practice of 'suicide bombing' as one possible way of carrying out the more general practice of terrorism.

I argue that conceptualizing terrorism and counterterrorism as general practices enacted by communities of practitioners allows us to overcome some of the limitations found in the predominant approaches to the study of these phenomena. Understanding practice theory, and the advantages it can bring to the

[27] Adler and Pouliot (2011: 6).
[28] See Hansen (2011).

study of terrorism and counterterrorism, requires the unpacking of several key concepts, including 'background knowledge' and 'communities of practice.'

First is the background knowledge, or practical knowledge, on which practices rely and by which they are made possible. Background knowledge differs from other types of knowledge in that it is tacit, inarticulate, and often bound up in particular practices; it is an implicit know-how geared specifically towards action.[29] In the literature on organizational learning in terrorism and counterterrorism, practical knowledge is conceived of in different ways: by Kenney as local knowledge,[30] and as métis;[31] by Trujillo and Jackson as tacit knowledge;[32] and, to some extent, by Forest as operational knowledge.[33] Unfortunately, studies of organizational learning among terrorists often only focus on how terrorists come to obtain and transfer this type of knowledge. Practice theory offers a more definitive link between background knowledge and the process by which it is translated into action: certain stocks of practical knowledge make certain practices possible, and predispose actors to enact those practices given the right circumstances.[34]

Another key concept in practice theory is the community of practice. A community of practice is "a configuration of a domain of knowledge, which constitutes like-mindedness, a community of people, which 'creates the social fabric of learning,' and a shared practice, which embodies 'the knowledge the community develops, shares, and maintains.'"[35] In other words, communities of

[29] Adler and Pouliot (2011: 8, 16); Pouliot (2008: 270-271).
[30] Kenney (2006: 40).
[31] Kenney (2007: 143-147).
[32] B. Jackson (2006: 164-168); Trujillo and B. Jackson (2006: 56).
[33] Forest (2006a); Forest (2006b).
[34] See Pouliot (2008).
[35] Adler (2005: 15), quoted from Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002).

practice are groups of practitioners who share a stock of practical knowledge and, in acting on the basis of that knowledge, perform practices. Communities of practice are not fixed: "as persistent patterns or structures, communities of practice retain their collective understandings, despite the constant turnover of members, *as long as social learning and evolutionary processes do not lead to the replacement of patterns or structures*."[36] This suggests that changes in the structure of the community of practice could challenge collective understandings, and possibly encourage the adoption of new practices by the community.

So, what advantages come from studying terrorism and counterterrorism through the lens of practice theory? For one, practices occur at the intersection of structure and agency: they are carried out by individuals, but within the context of communities.[37] Thus, practice theory fills the gaps in instrumental theories, which are primarily agential, and organizational theories, which are more geared towards structural explanations. Practice theory also offers a deeper understanding of the motivations behind specific terrorist behaviors. Because the logic of practicality is ontologically prior to the logic of consequences,[38] studying background knowledge may provide explanations for why terrorists sometimes act against the expectations of rational-choice approaches. Finally, practice theory allows the researcher to delve deeper into the process of selecting, planning, and executing terrorist or counter-terrorist operations. The approaches outlined above are well geared to answering questions about why actions x, y, and z were taken at time t. What they

[36] Adler (2005: 16, emphasis added).
[37] See Adler and Pouliot (2011: 15); Schatzki (1996: 37, 103).
[38] Pouliot (2008: 276-277); see also Schatzki (1996: 60).

often fail to do (with the exception, maybe, of the organizational approach) is show how these actions were taken, and what the implications of that process might be. Studying terrorism and counterterrorism as general practices gives the researcher the ability to study the entire evolution of more specific practices and better understand why shifts in these specific practices occurred.[39]

Framework for Explaining Shifts in Practice

Having established some of the advantages of a practice theory approach to terrorism and counterterrorism, I now propose a framework of analysis for analyzing changes in practices in terrorism and counterterrorism communities. In this thesis I conceptualize al-Qaeda and the American counterterrorism community as communities of practice. Furthermore, I posit that the two communities exist within a state of symbiosis,[40] meaning simply that they have interacted closely over a long period of time. I do not mean to imply that al-Qaeda and the American counterterrorism community maintain a relationship of mutualism (in which both parties benefit from being close) or of parasitism (in which one party benefits at the expense of the other). They are, after all, adversaries. Thus, instead of being 'mutually reinforcing,'[41] I propose the relationship between these two communities is 'mutually reactive.'[42]

[39] See Adler and Pouliot (2011: chapter 1).
[40] Symbiosis is one of four possible relationships between communities of practice envisioned by Adler and Pouliot (2011: 20).
[41] The formulation used by Adler and Pouliot (2011: 20).
[42] I thank Professor Vincent Pouliot for offering this alternative formulation.

In this framework, two independent variables combine to make specific practices possible: background knowledge, and network structure. As the implicit knowledge on which practices rest and which predisposes actors to enact particular practices, I argue that changes in background knowledge will make previously unthinkable practices possible. Network structure, too, can have independent effects on practices.[43] Certain network structures may be more capable of producing the environment or resources needed to perform more demanding practices. Network structure can also combine with background knowledge to impact practices. Organizational hierarchies and decision-making processes determine who has the power to implement new practices or do away with old ones, and changes in these processes can bring out practical knowledge that previously did not factor into decision-making within a community of practice.

In all of these instances background knowledge and network structure can be referred to as the *explanans* – the thing doing the explaining – and practices can be called the *explanandum* – the thing that needs to be explained.[44] In the case of 'mutually reactive' relationships, the close and frequent interaction can lead to a reversal of the *explanans* and *explanandum*. For example, a new practice in Community A – now the *explanans* – may challenge previously taken-for-granted knowledge in Community B – now the *explanandum*. Return now to the first argument, that a certain background knowledge allows for particular practices to be adopted. In this case, the new stock of background knowledge in Community B – now again the *explanans* – allows for a new practice to emerge from Community

[43] See Nexon (2009).
[44] See Adler and Pouliot (2011: chapter 1).

B – now again the *explanandum*. This double reversal of *explanans* and *explanandum*, the 'mutually reactive' component, is the mechanism by which changing practices in one community bring about new practices in another, assuming the two exist in a 'mutually reactive' symbiotic relationship. Combining the two independent variables – background knowledge and network structure – with this mechanism gives a simple framework for studying changes in practices between symbiotic communities of practice. This framework is depicted in Figure 1.1.[45]

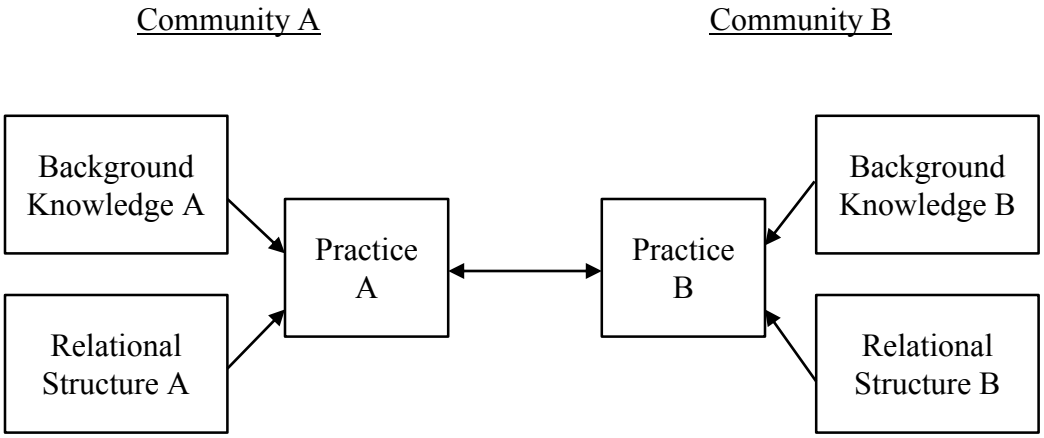

Figure 1.1 Framework of Analysis for Mutually Reactive Communities of Practice

The two independent variables, background knowledge and network structure, combine to encourage the enactment of certain practices. The arrows between the two practices signify the mutually reactive element, wherein *explanans* and *explanandum* are reversed. It is important to remember that changes to network

[45] I thank Professor Vincent Pouliot for suggesting this simplified depiction of my framework of analysis.

structure and background knowledge are not only driven by changes in practice in the other community. These variables can also be modified by exogenous forces. When explaining the emergence of a new practice in one community, it is important to be careful not to attribute to much weight to earlier changes in the other community's practices if there is the possibility that background knowledge or network structure were actually contested by exogenous forces. I make every effort in my case study to make it clear when this is happening.

Methodology

This study was carried out using a 4-step methodology.[46] Step 1 involved the recovery from the historical record of the terrorism and counterterrorism practices that needed to be explained. Using Adler and Pouliot's notion of practice,[47] I developed a set of indicators to identify shifts in practice, including the evolution of old practices or the emergence of new ones. According to Adler and Pouliot, a practice: (1) is a performance; (2) is patterned; (3) has recognizable standards of competency; (4) is founded on background knowledge; and (5) often includes material and discursive components.[48] The empirical indicators listed below, derived directly from this conceptualization of practice, can be applied to any case study to identify shifts in practices performed by a particular community.[49]

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[46] This methodology was inspired by Pouliot's (2007; 2010) "sobjective" methodology, though adjustments were made to allow it to fit better with this case study.
[47] See Adler and Pouliot (2011: chapter 1).
[48] Adler and Pouliot (2011: 7-8).
[49] Note that I omit an indicator related to background knowledge. This is because I theorize background knowledge as an independent variable which, when modified, is partially responsible for changes in practice. Thus I do not assume that a shift in background knowledge is necessarily indicative of a shift in practice.

1) A change in the actual action being performed
2) The emergence of a new pattern or the disappearance of an old one
3) A change in the standards of competency within the community
4) A change in the discourse or material components on which the action depends

These indicators serve a heuristic purpose only and there is no fixed rule regarding how many must be present to determine that a shift in practice has occurred.

Step 2 consisted of uncovering the background knowledge from which practitioners think. Inductively uncovering practical knowledge is an interpretive endeavor. Because most of the subjects in this case study are either dead or sworn to secrecy, at this stage I made use of various texts to uncover practical knowledge and dispositions, including: official statements, media interviews, training manuals, religious texts, official reports, and emails. Reading each text was an exercise in what Jackson calls textual ethnography, in which I took "field notes" not on the surface content, but on the types of taken-for-granted knowledge that would be necessary or conducive to the production of that text.[50] This step involved all of the following: questioning the underlying assumptions made by the author; searching for repeated latent themes; examining the vocabulary used; and looking for thoughts and ideas that could only come from very specific worldviews. I also relied, when necessary, on the secondary literature to help piece together the major components of background knowledge in both communities.

[50] See P. Jackson (2006: 273) and Pouliot (2010: 71).

In step 3, taking inspiration from Nexon's mapping of dynastic agglomerations in early modern Europe,[51] I recreated ideal-types of the network structures of al-Qaeda. I also looked for rules and processes governing oversight and decision-making in both communities based on their hierarchies. For the US counterterrorism community I relied mostly on information provided in *The 9/11 Commission Report*.[52] For al-Qaeda I relied on the literature on the relational structure of al-Qaeda,[53] as well as several CIA documents that outlined the organization's core network structure.[54]

In the final step I made use of a modified form of George and Bennett's process-tracing methodology[55] to historicize my independent variables, the practical knowledge and relational structures I uncovered in steps 2 and 3. By aligning changes in these variables with the shifts in practice uncovered in Step 1, I was able test to what extent changes in background knowledge and network structure were responsible for allowing or encouraging the two communities to adopt new practices, and to what extent changes in one community's practices brought on changes in the practices of the other community.

The Case of al-Qaeda and the US Counterterrorism Community

In this thesis I examine developments in the practices of al-Qaeda and the US counterterrorism community (primarily the FBI and the CIA) from 1991 to 2013,

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[51] Nexon (2009: chapter 4).
[52] 9/11 Commission (2004).
[53] Notably Gunaratna (2002); Kenney (2007); and Scheuer (2011).
[54] Including, but not limited to, CIA Report (1996 12 18); CIA Report (1996 12 19a); CIA Report (1996 12 19b); and CIA Report (2003 06 20).
[55] George and Bennett (2005: 202-232).

with special attention paid to those practices of each actor that relate specifically to the other community. This case is particularly useful for starting to build a theory of practice of terrorism and counterterrorism. For one, the 20 year period under study saw multiple, varying, noteworthy shifts in the practices of both communities, as well as in their background knowledge and network structure. This variation over a long period of time offers multiple opportunities to study practice as both *explanans* and *explanandum* and the 'mutually reactive' mechanism which allows one community to influence shifts in the practices of the other.

This case also offers a considerable degree of generalizability. Al-Qaeda maintained a prototypical terrorist wheel structure until it lost its sanctuary in Afghanistan.[56] Any findings based on that network structure should be applicable to other terrorist organizations with the same set-up.

Finally, the case of al-Qaeda and the US counterterrorism community is a difficult one for practice theory. Recovering practical knowledge is best done through participant observation or qualitative interviews.[57] However, the American counterterrorism community is a highly secretive, closed community of practice, and many of the relevant al-Qaeda actors are dead or in prison, making both of these methods impossible. The next best method for recovering practical knowledge, textual analysis, is also limited in this case by the barrier of top secret security clearance. Declassified CIA documents are available thanks to the Freedom of Information Act, but in many cases they are heavily redacted. This can

[56] See Kenney (2007).
[57] Pouliot (2010a: 66-71). For examples of participant observation in practice theory, see Barnett (2002); Neumann (2007). For examples of qualitative interviews in practice theory, see Adler-Nissen (2008); Pouliot (2010a).

make recovering practical logics difficult. As such, this study will test the limits of practice theory's applicability to secretive, closed communities of practice.

Chapter 2: The Sudan Period (1991-1996)

In this chapter I present the practices that marked al-Qaeda's entrance to the international terrorism scene, most notably financing and providing operational support for terrorism, and alliance-building. I also examine the American counterterrorism community's early response to al-Qaeda, the FBI's practice of post-attack investigation. I then explain how it was possible for these practices to emerge in both organizations through analysis of background knowledge and network structure.

Sudan Period Events

The fledgling al-Qaeda organization began to relocate from Afghanistan to Sudan in 1989 "at the behest of the National Islamic Front," a move which was completed in 1991 when Osama bin Laden joined the network in Khartoum.[58] It is from that significant moment that my analysis begins. Bin Laden and al-Qaeda remained in Sudan until 1996, when the NIF, under pressure from the international community, forced the organization to leave the country. While Bin Laden and his associates "had already begun discussing violence as a means to achieve Islamic goals by this stage,"[59] al-Qaeda would have limited *direct* involvement in terrorist operations during its stay in Sudan.

On 29 December 1992, bombs targeting American soldiers en route to Somalia exploded at two hotels in Aden, Yemen. While al-Qaeda personnel did not

[58] CIA Report (1996 11 26).
[59] CIA Report (1996 11 26).

carry out the attacks, the CIA later discovered that Osama bin Laden had been in communication with the attackers and that they had received training at one of his organization's training camps in Sudan.[60] Later reports indicate that bin Laden financed the operation.[61]

In early 1993 al-Qaeda began providing support for those Somalis who wished to fight against the Americans.[62] One CIA report indicates that al-Qaeda sent members to Somalia to disrupt the American mission there.[63] A later statement by the DCI confirms that al-Qaeda sent advisors to aid the Somali warlord Aidid in fighting the Americans.[64] Though it remains unclear whether or not al-Qaeda members participated in combat against Americans, the organization definitely provided operational support to Somali fighters until the American withdrawal in 1994.

On 26 February 1993 – around the same time al-Qaeda began supporting the Somalis – Ramzi Yousef detonated a bomb at the base of the World Trade Center's North Tower. Yousef had several ties to al-Qaeda: he was part of a group of radicals following the teachings of 'the blind sheikh' Omar Abdul Rahman, whom the FBI later discovered was being supported financially by Osama bin Laden,[65] and he had learned to build explosive devices at an al-Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan.[66]

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[60] 9/11 Commission (2004: 59-60); CIA Report (1997 03 05).
[61] CIA Report (2003 10 10: 9); DCI Report (2004 03 19); DCI Statement (2002 10 17: 3).
[62] Estimates regarding the level of support vary. Bin Laden claimed to have sent 250 men, while Saudi intelligence puts the number closer to "only a handful" according to Wright (2006: 214).
[63] CIA Report (1997 04 30).
[64] CIA Report (2003 10 10: 9); DCI Statement (2002 10 17: 3).
[65] Wright (2006: 200-201).
[66] Wright (2006: 201-202).

The most important event marking the practice of counterterrorism during these years was the investigation by the FBI following that 1993 attack on the World Trade Center. The New York Field Office of the Bureau quickly identified and arrested several of the plotters, including Mohammed Salameh, Nidal Ayyad, Mahmoud Abouhalima, and Ahmad Ajaj.[67] According to the 9/11 Commission, the arrests of these individuals led the FBI to 'the blind sheikh' Omar Abdul Rahman, who was also arrested.[68] The above-mentioned plotters were all prosecuted and convicted, though Yousef managed to escape by fleeing to Pakistan.

In early February 1995 the FBI received intelligence that Ramzi Yousef had been spotted in Islamabad, Pakistan. After coordinating a plan for his rendition the FBI, in cooperation with the Pakistani military, arrested Yousef in his hotel on the morning of 7 February 1995 and sent him to the United States to stand trial. His arrest marked the end of the successful investigation and preparation for prosecution of the key players in the 1993 World Trade Center attack.

Another attack took place on 13 November 1995, when "a car bomb exploded outside a Saudi-U.S. joint facility in Riyadh for training the Saudi National Guard." [69] Though not carried out by al-Qaeda members the attack was significant for several reasons: the perpetrators of the attack admitted to having been inspired by bin Laden;[70] their leader had trained at an al-Qaeda camp in

[67] 9/11 Commission (2004: 72).
[68] 9/11 Commission (2004: 72).
[69] 9/11 Commission (2004: 60).
[70] 9/11 Commission (2004: 60); Wright (2006: 241).

Afghanistan;[71] and there is some evidence pointing to bin Laden as the supplier of the explosive materials used in the attack.[72]

Finally, over the course of this entire period bin Laden and al-Qaeda worked at building alliances and cooperative networks at varying levels of formality with other terrorist organizations.[73] Figure 2.1 provides a visual representation of these significant events across time.

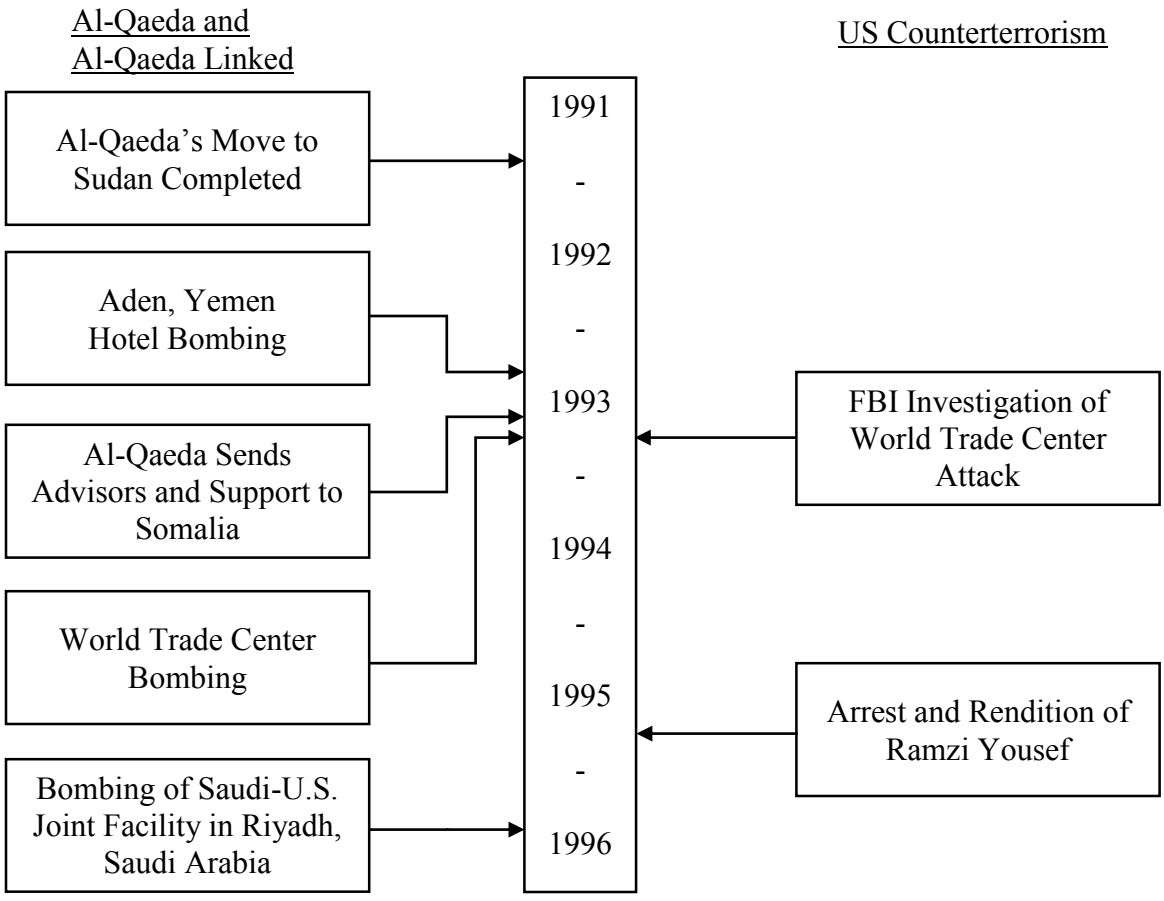

Figure 2.1 Sudan Period Timeline

[71] 9/11 Commission (2004: 60); Wright (2006: 240-241).
[72] CIA Report (1997 01 08).
[73] 9/11 Commission (2004: 58-59).

Emerging Practices

The Sudan period was a time of emerging practices in al-Qaeda and relative inactivity in the American counterterrorism community. Table 2.1 highlights the main practices of both communities from 1991 to 1996. In the rest of this section I use the abovementioned events as a guide to discuss the appearances of these practices in action during the Sudan period.

Table 2.1: Key Practices during the Sudan Period

Al-Qaeda	US Counterterrorism
• Financing terrorism • Supporting and training other actors targeting Americans • Alliance-building and Networking	• FBI: post-attack investigations with the intent of obtaining evidence leading to arrest, prosecution, and conviction of perpetrators

Financing terrorism was one of the primary practices of al-Qaeda during the Sudan period.[74] The perpetrators of the 1992 Aden hotel bombing, the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, and the 1995 Riyadh training facility bombing all received either funding or supplies from al-Qaeda to carry out their attacks. While in these cases al-Qaeda funding led to successful attacks against American interests, they were surely not the only instances in which al-Qaeda provided financial support to extremist groups during the Sudan period. For example, by the end of the Sudan period bin Laden was funding the Egyptian al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya, Algerian extremists, and Libyan extremists.[75]

[74] See DCI Statement (2003 04 24: 4).
[75] CIA Report (1997 06 17).

Al-Qaeda also frequently provided training and operational support for other actors targeting Americans. While the perpetrators of the 1992, 1993, and 1995 bombings had trained at al-Qaeda camps, the best example of this practice was the advising and operational support provided by al-Qaeda to the Somali warlord Mohamed Aidid in 1993-1994.

The last practice of bin Laden's organization from 1991 to 1996 was that of alliance-building and networking. There are no specific events in the narrative that stand out as striking examples of al-Qaeda alliance-building. The reason for this is that as a relatively low-key practice, alliance-building was a slow, essentially constant process that unfolded over the course of the Sudan period.

As for the American counterterrorism community, the dominant player during the Sudan period was the FBI. The primary practice of the Bureau during the Sudan period was the investigation of terrorist incidents with the intention of collecting enough evidence for successful prosecution of the perpetrators. This practice was already present to some degree, having emerged following the attack on Pan American Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland in December 1988.[76] The FBI's response to the 1993 World Trade Center attack reinforced this practice and "set a pattern for future management of terrorist incidents" that would continue into the Afghanistan period.[77]

To sum up, the Sudan period was a time of new practices for al-Qaeda, including financing terrorism, providing operational support for other extremists, and alliance-building. Save for the investigation and arrests following the 1993

[76] 9/11 Commission (2004: 72).
[77] 9/11 Commission (2004: 71).

World Trade Center attack there was little reaction to these practices from the American counterterrorism community. The rest of this chapter explains the development of these practices from 1991 to 1996. I analyze the background knowledge and relational structures developed at the time – in both al-Qaeda and the FBI – to show how it was possible that each practice emerged during the Sudan period.

Al-Qaeda Financing and Supporting Terrorism

The practices of financing and supporting terrorism often went hand-in-hand for al-Qaeda. As the first practices adopted by the al-Qaeda it is important to understand how they came to be the prominent practices during the Sudan period. Because these practices were so intertwined, I analyze together the different components of the background knowledge that helped make both practices possible. I then show how al-Qaeda's early structure helped leadership put that knowledge into action.

Lessons Learned from Fighting the Soviets

The practical knowledge that the al-Qaeda leadership brought to Sudan in 1991 was largely a product of experience they had acquired as mujahidin fighting the Soviet Union in Afghanistan during the previous decade. Nowhere was this more obvious than in the domain of fundraising and financing. Osama bin Laden had been a key financier of the mujahidin in their fight against the Soviets. As early as 1984 he was raising funds in the millions of dollars to support the fighters in Afghanistan, and soon he was providing tickets and a place of residence for any Arab who wished to

join the jihad.[78] Eventually bin Laden set up the Services Bureau in Peshawar, Pakistan, a centralized location where money – much of which was being channeled through NGOs – could be received, counted, and dispersed where most needed.[79] Throughout this process bin Laden was gaining practical experience in raising and managing funds for jihad. Whether or not the funds raised by bin Laden had a major impact on the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, Osama surely viewed his contribution as a great success, solidifying as background knowledge the experience he had gained through raising funds for the mujahidin. This practical knowledge he took with him when he moved his new organization to Sudan in 1991.[80] Coupled with assistance from the NIF and a wealth of practical experience in raising and distributing funds, this disposition towards financing jihad encouraged the practice of terrorism financing in al-Qaeda during the Sudan period.

Training had been another important factor in the Arab mujahidin's success in Afghanistan. Training camps were established in Pakistan in the 1980's to provide basic weapons training and logistical support to incoming Arab mujahidin.[81] Experience in these camps taught al-Qaeda leaders that military professionalism and proper weapons training led to a greater chance of success in the field. Granted, the skills necessary for guerilla strikes in the mountains of Afghanistan differed in many respects from those that urban terrorists would require in the future. Still, when they arrived in Sudan in 1991, al-Qaeda's military

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[78] Wright (2006: 116-117).
[79] 9/11 Commission (2004: 55-56); CIA Report (1997 04 18); Gunaratna (2002: 18-19); Wright (2006: 119).
[80] For example, bin Laden continued using NGO's as a way to funnel funds into al-Qaeda. See DCI Counterterrorist Center Report (1999 04 09).
[81] Gunaratna (2002: 19-20); Scheuer (2011: 66-67).

leaders already possessed a significant amount of practical knowledge related to not only the use of weapons and explosives, but also the importance of discipline, communications, transportation, etc.[82] This background knowledge provided al-Qaeda with the disposition and skills necessary to provide operational support to other actors with similar interests. Their experiences operating camps in Sudan continued to encourage the growth of this practical knowledge, providing them with the level of experience needed, for example, to advise the warlord Aidid on how to fight American troops in Mogadishu. Through such actions in Somalia, and with the help of the NIF, al-Qaeda continued to add to its knowledge.

The importance of martyrdom was the final key facet of the practical knowledge al-Qaeda's leaders brought to Sudan from their years as mujahidin. The possibility of becoming a martyr had drawn many Arab men to fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan,[83] and this was encouraged by al-Qaeda's co-founder Abdullah Azzam.[84] It is clear that the future leaders of al-Qaeda came to understand the potency of martyrdom as a lure for new recruits: sacrifice and the willingness to become a martyr is listed as the fourth qualification for becoming a member in the organization's training manual.[85] However, as will be seen in chapter 3, it would take more than a predisposition towards martyrdom for al-Qaeda to commit to offensive, martyrdom-based attacks as a primary practice.

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[82] This is evidenced by many of the lessons found in Al-Qaeda Training Manual (n.d.).
[83] For instance, Stout (2009: 883) cites one mujahidin who wrote, "I was one of the minority [of] Arabs who dedicated themselves for the 'Afghani jihad'… [For the rest] martyrdom was closer to their hearts."
[84] Wright (2006: 122-124). See also Hoffman (2002: 365).
[85] Al-Qaeda Training Manual (n.d.: UK/BM-15).

In brief, practical knowledge obtained through experience as mujahidin in Afghanistan helped to allow al-Qaeda leaders to successfully adopt and implement the practices of financing and supporting terrorism. Table 2.2 summarizes the key components of al-Qaeda's background knowledge during its time in Sudan.

Table 2.2: Key Components of Al-Qaeda Background Knowledge during the Sudan Period

Carried Over from the Mujahidin Years	Developed in Sudan
• Organizing and Financing Jihad • Military Discipline • Importance of Basic Training • Importance of Martyrdom	• Expertise particular to building and running efficient training camps

The Early Al-Qaeda Network

It is difficult to present a detailed depiction of the al-Qaeda network during the Sudan years. The earliest available declassified intelligence report on the subject was written in December 1996, and the secondary literature on the organization's network structure often relies on later reporting. I make use of what scattered facts are known to reconstruct as accurately as possible the configuration of al-Qaeda from 1991 to 1996 and analyze its implications for the practices of financing and providing operational support for terrorism. Figure 2.2 depicts the hierarchy of the core of the al-Qaeda network during the Sudan period.

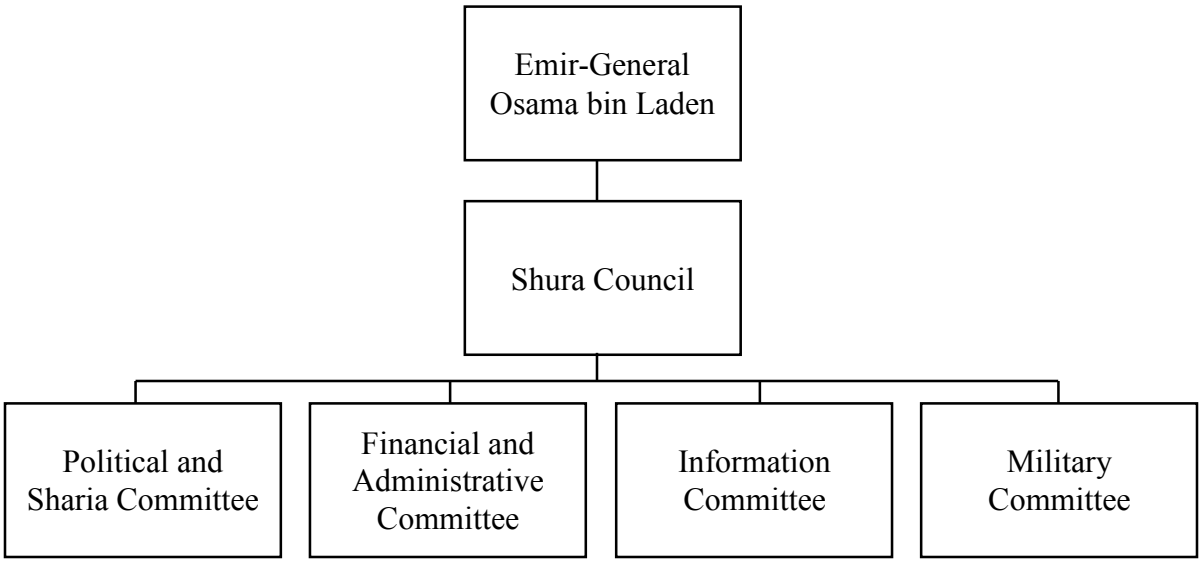

Figure 2.2 The Core of the Al-Qaeda Network

Osama bin Laden became the undisputed central figure and leader of al-Qaeda following the death of his mentor and co-founder of the organization, Abdullah Azzam, on 24 November 1989.[86] Bin Laden would come to be known as the Emir-General,[87] a post which gave him the power to appoint members to al-Qaeda's consultative council, the *shura majlis* or Shura Council,[88] and the responsibility of supervising its operation.

In the hierarchy of al-Qaeda, the Shura Council was located directly below Osama bin Laden. Composed of trusted, experienced members, selected based on kinship ties, the council served in part as an advisory committee to the Emir-General. More importantly, however, was its role as a coordinator of al-Qaeda's

[86] 9/11 Commission (2004: 56); Gunaratna (2002: 23, 55).
[87] Gunaratna (2002: 57); Kenney (2007: 149-150).
[88] CIA Report (1996 12 18).

various operational committees. There were four such committees: the Political and Sharia Committee; the Financial and Administrative Committee; the Information Committee; and the Military Committee.[89] Each of these committees was overseen by the Shura Council.[90] As the head of the Council, bin Laden had direct access to the leaders of the operational committees and could maintain as much control as necessary.

Al-Qaeda's operational committees, divided by function, were created sometime before 1996. Scheuer claims that the original four were created when the organization was founded,[91] though the available CIA reports only claim to have had knowledge of their existence definitively since early 1996.[92] The committees were all located on the same hierarchical level, directly below the Shura Council, and operated independently of each other. It is difficult to say how the committees themselves were organized. We know that there were committee level leaders who served as nodes connecting the committees to the Shura Council,[93] but if there was a further breakdown of intra-committee hierarchy, it has been redacted from the declassified record. Table 2.3 summarizes the functions and responsibilities of al-Qaeda's central bodies.

This particular network structure facilitated the process by which al-Qaeda leadership translated into practice the background knowledge described above. First of all, the Shura Council, composed mostly of ex-mujahidin, produced a

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[89] The committee names used here come from CIA Report (1996 12 18). Gunaratna (2002), Kenney (2007), and Scheuer (2011) sometimes use different names in reference to the same committees.
[90] CIA Report (1996 12 18).
[91] Scheuer (2011: 73).
[92] CIA Report (1996 12 18); CIA Report (1996 12 19).
[93] CIA Report (1996 12 19).

tightly-knit group with common practical experiences and shared practical knowledge. This allowed al-Qaeda to adopt practices based on particular background dispositions with little resistance. Second, having an experienced organizer and fundraiser at the top made it that much easier to initiate the practices of financing terrorism and supporting anti-American operations. Finally, the functionally distinct operational committees allowed these practices to be maintained and repeated with minimal bureaucratic obstruction from the Shura Council and bin Laden, who nonetheless retained the ability to interfere if necessary to keep the practices on course.

Table 2.3: Functions and Responsibilities of Al-Qaeda's Core Entities

Entity	Function/Responsibilities
Emir-General (Osama bin Laden)	Overseeing core entities; developing general strategy; giving final approval to large operations
Shura Council	Advising the Emir-General; overseeing operational committees; approving new policies and operations; coordinating with leaders of other Islamist groups
Political and Sharia Committee	Confirming that decisions made by bin Laden and the Shura Council are in line with Islamic Law; preparing fatwas
Financial and Administrative Committee	Managing al-Qaeda's businesses and investments; coordinating financial transfers
Information Committee	Disseminating al-Qaeda's objectives to the media; spreading information for recruitment
Military Committee	Managing terrorist operations; running terrorist camps; recruiting new members
Cell Handlers	Coordinating between operational committees/Shura Council/Emir-General and attack/logistic/surveillance cells

Building Alliances Outside of Sudan

Although not represented in the key events I presented at the beginning of this chapter, alliance-building was a very important practice for al-Qaeda during the Sudan period. Not only were informal alliances important to al-Qaeda in building its image as a respectable organization within the Islamist community, they also contributed to the transfer of valuable information and, in some cases, assisted bin Laden's organization in successfully performing the practices of financing and supporting other terrorist actors. I focus mainly on training camps to show how al-Qaeda was able to successfully develop informal ties with a large number of groups in a short period of time.

Training Camps as Terrorism Hubs

Understanding the process of alliance-building requires looking outside of al-Qaeda's core and focusing instead on training camps. Al-Qaeda operated training camps in both Afghanistan and Sudan until 1996; a few were left open in Afghanistan following the move to Sudan,[94] and according to the CIA, "by January 1994, al-Qa'ida had begun financing at least three terrorist training camps in northern Sudan."[95] Training Camps were a central feature in the al-Qaeda network during the Sudan period, and the purpose they served went beyond simply providing recruits with the technical skills necessary to fire weapons and build bombs. Al-Qaeda training camps were terrorist hubs, linking recruits and operatives

[94] Scheuer (2006: 141).
[95] DCI Statement (2002 10 17: 3).

from across the globe and providing them with a physical space wherein they could exchange knowledge, build relationships, plan operations, and more.

Al-Qaeda did not just train its own recruits and operatives at its camps in Sudan. Sometimes aspiring fighters would come, get basic training, and leave to fight in combat zones (e.g. Bosnia). In other cases active terrorists from organizations in the Middle East, Africa, or Asia would come to brush up on their weapons skills or train in more advanced tactics.[96] It was in these instances that training camps provided the most opportunity for al-Qaeda to construct informal alliances with other Islamist groups. Building these relationships worked very well for bin Laden's organization. The CIA reported that "al-Qa'ida had established cooperative relationships by 1996 with at least 20 Sunni Islamic extremist groups in the Middle East, South Asia, Africa, and East Asia, as well as within elements of the Saudi opposition," and that "[a redacted source] suggests that al-Qa'ida established relations with other Islamic extremists as well, largely in Africa and Asia."[97] Without training camps to act as hubs, the only real avenue for alliance-building would have been the Shura Council, which leaders from other terrorist groups sometimes sat on (e.g. Ayman al-Zawahiri, before he incorporated his organization into al-Qaeda in 1998).

Training camps were also important for maintaining the practices of financing and providing operational support for other terrorist groups. By maintaining in-person contact with other groups in camps al-Qaeda could prioritize who to fund, support, and train at any given time. Without the camps acting as hubs

[96] CIA Report (1999 01 27).
[97] CIA Report (2003 10 10: 3).

it would have been more difficult to keep up regular communication with groups which al-Qaeda hoped to back.

The FBI's Practice of Post-Attack Investigation

Following the 1993 World Trade Center bombing the FBI launched a full-scale criminal investigation, gathering evidence in hopes of arresting the perpetrators and providing enough proof to convict them for the attack. This was not the first time in history that the FBI took this approach to counterterrorism. It was, nevertheless, its first major interaction with al-Qaeda-linked entities. While one action may not constitute a practice, I refer to it as such because the investigation in response to the 1993 bombing was the first action of what would become an important practice in 1998. I analyze practical knowledge acquired in response to an attack a few years before the 1993 bombing to explain why the FBI adopted this response, setting a trend that would persist through 9/11. I also briefly outline the Bureau's location in the American counterterrorism community and speak to some of the implications its relational structure would have starting in 1998.

Lockerbie and FBI Background Knowledge

The FBI developed a particular set of practical logics through its experiences investigating the Lockerbie bombing in 1988 that would guide its approach to counterterrorism during the Sudan period. The beginnings of this practice had been made possible when "in 1986, Congress authorized the FBI to investigate terrorist attacks against Americans that occur outside the United States. Three years later, it

added authority for the FBI to make arrests abroad without consent from the host country."[98] As a bureau within the Department of Justice, it was already the objective of FBI investigations to obtain enough evidence for the indictment, prosecution, and successful conviction of criminals at the federal level. The authorization from Congress simply expanded this modus operandi to the international stage.

Success in identifying the individuals responsible for the Lockerbie attacks and their support from the Libyan government proved, at least to the FBI, that the investigative approach to counterterrorism worked. If it wasn't before, it was now taken-for-granted knowledge within the Bureau that the best tactic for countering terrorism was to investigate incidents when they occurred, to gather evidence, and to bring the individuals responsible to justice. As a result, after the 1993 World Trade Center attack the Bureau was already inclined to respond with a criminal investigation.

The FBI's Position in DoJ

The FBI is an investigative body located within the Department of Justice. While technically a federal-level organization, "much of its work is done in local offices called field offices," of which there were 56 prior to September 2001.[99] Each of these offices was relatively free to set its own agenda, and case priorities were often based on local concerns rather than on substantive issues.[100] This tendency on the

[98] 9/11 Commission (2004: 75).
[99] 9/11 Commission (2004: 74).
[100] 9/11 Commission (2004: 74).

part of field offices to operate independently of each other was reinforced by the FBI's 'office of origin' assignment system: once a field office begins an investigation on a particular actor, that field office becomes the sole office responsible for investigating all cases related to that actor in the future. In the case of al-Qaeda, the office of origin became the New York Field Office of the FBI following the investigation of the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center and the subsequent indictment of bin Laden.[101] As such, all matters regarding bin Laden or al-Qaeda passed through that office, and all post-attack investigations were handled by personnel from New York.

Summary

When Al-Qaeda moved to Sudan in 1991, its leadership brought with it background knowledge obtained in Afghanistan during the war with the Soviets. Key components of this knowledge included organizing and financing jihad, military discipline, and the importance of training. The establishment of a clear hierarchy in the core of the organization, accompanied by the establishment of several training camps, facilitated the implementation of this background knowledge. Together, these factors encouraged al-Qaeda to adopt the practices of financing terrorism, training and supporting other terrorist groups, and alliance-building.

As for the US counterterrorism community, their responses to al-Qaeda were minimal from 1991 to 1996. The predominant practice, performed following the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, was the FBI's use of post-attack criminal

[101] 9/11 Commission (2004: 74).

investigations to obtain enough evidence to arrest, prosecute, and convict perpetrators of terrorist operations. This practice was made possible largely because of the practical knowledge acquired by the Bureau a few years before during the Lockerbie investigation.

At this time, the 'mutually reactive' component of the relationship was only beginning to develop. There was too little interaction at this point between the two communities for it to have a strong effect. This is because, as will be seen later, the US counterterrorism community, specifically the CIA, did not view al-Qaeda as much of a threat during the Sudan period. It would take an important shift in al-Qaeda practice to spark a closer relationship between the two, allowing for 'mutual reaction' to impact practices.

Chapter 3: The Afghanistan Period (1996-11 September 2001)

In May 1996 al-Qaeda relocated to Afghanistan after being forced to leave Sudan by the NIF.[102] The move marked the beginning of a new era for the organization, one which would see a shift in practice to the use of large-scale suicide terrorism, culminating in the attacks of 11 September 2001. The Afghanistan period also saw a major increase in activity from the US counterterrorism community. The key FBI practice from the previous era persisted. At the same time a new practice was adopted by the CIA, namely the collecting of intelligence on al-Qaeda leadership's location and movements. Evolutions in that practice in 1998 and 2000 laid the foundation for even more significant shifts in the future. This chapter unfolds as follows. I begin with a brief narrative highlighting the most important actions taken by al-Qaeda and the American counterterrorism community following al-Qaeda's move to Afghanistan. I then use these events to demonstrate the key practices of both communities and show what shifts occurred from the previous period. The rest of the chapter explains, in turn, each of these shifts in practice through the analysis of changes from the previous period in background knowledge and network structures.

Afghanistan Period Events

On 25 June 1996 a truck bomb killed 19 members of the US Air Force at the Khobar Towers complex in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. Though the attack was

[102] The NIF was suffering from UN sanctions resulting from its refusal to release suspects in the attempted assassination of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. See Wright (2006: chapter 12) and 9/11 Commission (2004: 62-63) for details. See CIA Report (1997 02 13) for evidence of al-Qaeda's involvement in the assassination plot.

carried out by a Saudi branch of Hezbollah, intelligence suggested the possibility of some degree of al-Qaeda involvement.[103]

In mid-late 1996 the CIA established a unit of approximately 12 analysts specifically focused on Osama bin Laden.[104] Early efforts were focused on attacking bin Laden's financial assets. However, the CIA soon developed assets among Afghani tribes who were "near to providing real-time information about Bin Ladin's activities and travels in Afghanistan."[105] Using this intelligence, "by the fall of 1997, the Bin Ladin unit had roughed out a plan for these Afghan tribals to capture Bin Ladin and hand him over for trial either in the United States or in an Arab country."[106] One CIA report states that "a full rendition operation was designed, practiced and ready to go in May 1998,"[107] though on 29 May 1998 the capture mission was put on stand-down.[108]

On 7 August 1998 truck bombs exploded almost simultaneously at the US embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, resulting in the deaths of 23 Americans and 201 others, as well as over 5000 injuries.[109] The attacks, planned and executed solely by al-Qaeda members, marked the first direct action taken by the organization against Americans. Also of note is the use of suicide bombers to carry out the attacks, as well as the willingness on the part of al-Qaeda to kill innocents, including other Muslims, women and children.

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[103] 9/11 Commission (2004: 60).
[104] 9/11 Commission (2004: 109); DCI Statement (2002 10 17: 3).
[105] CIA Report (1997 08 25).
[106] 9/11 Commission (2004: 190).
[107] CIA Report (1998 09 02).
[108] For a detailed account of the planning process, as well as the decision to cancel the capture mission, see 9/11 Commission (2004: 111-115).
[109] 9/11 Commission (2004: 70).

The FBI sent a squad to Kenya to investigate the attack and gather evidence, just as they had done following the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.[110] At the same time the CIA was presenting intelligence to cabinet-level officials indicating that bin Laden and other terrorist leaders were planning to meet soon at a camp in Khost, Afghanistan.[111] On 20 August 1998, nearly two weeks after the African embassy bombings, the Americans took their first offensive action against bin Laden and al-Qaeda, striking training camps in Khost with Tomahawk cruise missiles launched from Navy warships in the Arabian Sea. The missiles hit their targets killing 20-30 people, but bin Laden and the other leaders escaped unharmed.[112]

In early 1999 the CIA developed a new comprehensive strategy for combatting bin Laden and al-Qaeda.[113] The primary objective of this plan was to capture Osama and key al-Qaeda leadership so that they could be tried in court.[114] In order to better track bin Laden and other al-Qaeda personnel the CIA increased intelligence collection and focused in on locational information, particularly terrorist sanctuaries. The agency also continued efforts to attack bin Laden's financial network.

In early 2000, after disappointment from high-level officials concerning the CIA's offensive efforts against bin Laden, one option that became a serious consideration was the unmanned Predator drone.[115] While an intelligence report

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[110] For details on the investigation see Wright (2006: chapter 16).
[111] 9/11 Commission (2004: 116).
[112] 9/11 Commission (2004: 117).
[113] DCI Statement (2002 10 17: 7).
[114] DCI Report (2004 03 19: 14); DCI Statement (2002 10 17: 7).
[115] 9/11 Commission (2004: 187-189).

from July cites mid-August as the target deployment date,[116] the first Predator flight over Afghanistan actually took place on 7 September 2000, and was a reconnaissance flight only.[117]

On 12 October 2000 al-Qaeda succeeded in a suicide attack on the *USS Cole*, a US Navy destroyer docked in Aden, Yemen. 17 crew members were killed and 40 more were injured when al-Qaeda operatives piloted a small fishing boat loaded with explosives up to the ship's hull.[118] Early intelligence reporting suggested that the cell responsible for the attack had received support from bin Laden and al-Qaeda.[119] The FBI responded with an investigation of the October 2000 attack on the *USS Cole*. As in previous cases, the objective of the FBI investigative squad was to gather enough evidence to indict and successfully prosecute those responsible. According to the 9/11 Commission, "the plot, we now know, was a full-fledged al Qaeda operation, supervised directly by Bin Ladin."[120]

The drone issue came up again when there were debates in spring 2001 about whether or not to use an armed version of the Predator equipped with Hellfire missiles to launch strikes against al-Qaeda and bin Laden in Afghanistan. However, even if upper-level American officials had agreed on this course of action, at that point in time the Predator would have been technically incapable of carrying out effective search-and-destroy missions: "the Hellfire warhead carried by the

[116] DCI Presentation (2000 07 14).
[117] 9/11 Commission (2004: 189-190).
[118] 9/11 Commission (2004: 190-191); Wright (2006: 360-361).
[119] DCI Counterterrorist Center Report (2000 11 10).
[120] 9/11 Commission (2004: 190).

Predator… had been built to hit tanks, not people," and "through mid-2001, the Predator's missile would not be able to hit a moving vehicle."[121]

Finally, on 11 September 2001 al-Qaeda operatives hijacked four passenger planes over the Northeastern United States. Two of the planes crashed into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York, one was piloted into the Pentagon in Washington D.C., and the fourth crashed into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania after passengers fought back against the hijackers.[122] The coordinated suicide attacks resulted in close to 3000 deaths and marked the last major action taken by al-Qaeda during the Afghanistan period. Figure 3.1 depicts the most important events relevant to both al-Qaeda and the US counterterrorism community in a condensed timeline.

[121] 9/11 Commission (2004: 11).
[122] For details on the hijackings and subsequent suicide attacks see 9/11 Commission (2004: chapter 1).

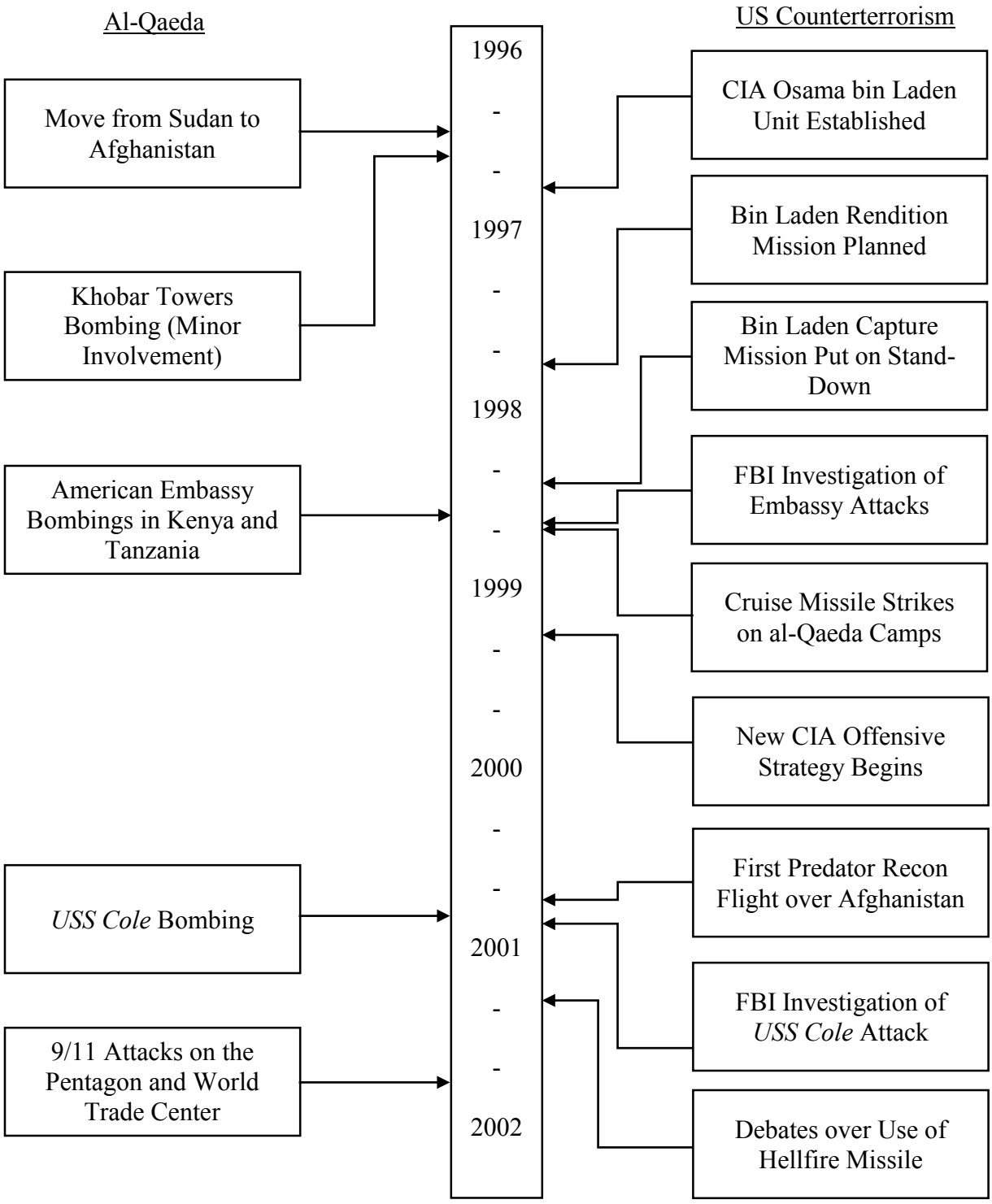

Figure 3.1 Afghanistan Period Timeline

Shifting Practices

The Afghanistan period was a time of incredible change in both al-Qaeda and American counterterrorism practices. With some old practices continuing, new ones emerging, and a few evolving in the run-up to 9/11, it is useful to break down the shifts that were occurring between 1996 and 11 September 2001. Table 3.1 summarizes the principal practices of both communities between 1996 and 11 September 2001. In the following section I refer back to the events described above to demonstrate how practices in the two communities developed, evolved, and interacted during the Afghanistan period.

Table 3.1: Key Practices during the Afghanistan Period

Al-Qaeda	US Counterterrorism
• Coordinated, large-scale, symbolic, suicide attacks targeting both military personnel and civilians	• FBI: post-attack investigations with the intent of obtaining evidence leading to arrest, prosecution, and conviction of perpetrators • CIA: collection of actionable intelligence regarding the location and movements of bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders • CIA: attacking al-Qaeda's financial network (mostly abandoned)

First of all, al-Qaeda's provision of support (both financial and operational) to other actors targeting Americans – some of the organization's most dominant practices during the Sudan period – was significantly reduced directly following the move to Afghanistan. The Khobar Towers bombing in June 1996 was the last

major evidence of this practice. Still, even if significant attacks weren't carried out by other terrorist groups during the Afghanistan period it is likely that Osama bin Laden continued financing and supporting some at that time. However, precautions taken by al-Qaeda following the move to Afghanistan hampered the CIA's efforts to track bin Laden's financial network, making it difficult to ascertain to what degree this practice continued.[123] For instance, we know that as of early 1996 bin Laden was financing the Egyptian al-Gamaat al-Islamiyya and several other Algerian and Libyan radical groups,[124] but it is not clear if this support continued after bin Laden reportedly liquidated most of his assets during the move to Afghanistan.[125]

Around the same time the establishment of the Osama bin Laden unit in the CIA marked the beginning of two new counterterrorism practices: collecting intelligence on the location and movements of key al-Qaeda leaders, and attacking bin Laden's financial network. The planning of a capture mission through 1997 was an outgrowth of the practice of collecting locational intelligence on bin Laden, though that project's suspension in May 1998 did not stop the practice, which persisted throughout the Afghanistan period. The targeting of al-Qaeda's finances did as well.

The 1998 East African embassy bombings were a significant turning point for practices in both al-Qaeda and the CIA. For al-Qaeda those bombings signified the emergence of the new practice of coordinated, large-scale, symbolic, suicide

[123] DCI Counterterrorist Center Report (2001 04 12: 3).
[124] CIA Report (1997 06 17).
[125] See DCI Counterterrorist Center Report (2001 04 12: 3).

attacks targeting both military personnel and civilians. The bombing of the *USS Cole* in 2000 and the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001 were other instances of that particular practice during the Afghanistan period. This aggressive practice was a significant shift away from the more passive, support-focused practices that predominated prior to 1998.

In an instance of 'mutual reaction', the new al-Qaeda practice enacted in Kenya and Tanzania triggered increasing expectations within the CIA, raising the standards of competency for locational intelligence collection. These standards, elevated again in 1999 and 2000 as the result of internal and external pressures, brought about an evolution in that practice which culminated in the first Predator drone reconnaissance flight over Afghanistan in late 2000. These changes also sparked renewed interest in capturing bin Laden, which was a key component of the CIA's 1999 plan to combat al-Qaeda. Interestingly, although the objective of collecting accurate intelligence on the movements of Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda associates was purportedly their eventual arrest and prosecution, the intelligence produced by this practice could also be used increase the success rate of targeted strikes against bin Laden. Using that intelligence in such a manner only occurred once during the Afghanistan period with the 1998 cruise missile attacks launched against al-Qaeda camps in retaliation for the Nairobi and Dar es Salaam bombings. However, the continually increasing demand for higher accuracy in locational intelligence and the growing possibility of equipping the Predator with Hellfire missiles would have serious ramifications in the post-9/11 environment.

Finally, the practice of post-attack investigation that the New York Field Office of the FBI had initiated in 1993 continued during the Afghanistan period. They responded to the 1998 East African embassy bombings and the 2000 attack on the *USS Cole* in much the same way as they had responded to the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center, in both instances sending a team overseas to carry out an investigation. It's also important to note that even as al-Qaeda's actions became much more violent and more destructive, the Bureau largely failed to adopt the practice of preemptive intelligence collection in the same way that the CIA did at that time. Some attempts were made, but were unsuccessful for reasons which will be explained later.[126]

In short, the Afghanistan period was a time of significant change in terrorism and counterterrorism practices. Al-Qaeda turned to carrying out its own large-scale suicide attacks. The FBI continued to investigate terrorist incidents after they occurred, but mostly failed to adopt any preemptive methods for combating al-Qaeda. The CIA became the leading agency in the increasingly recognized fight against bin Laden, beginning with early efforts to track and destabilize his financial network. The practice of collecting intelligence on the movements of al-Qaeda leadership emerged and continued to grow more intense and in-depth within the Agency, leading to several capture plans and a failed missile strike. The rest of this chapter explains how these shifts in practice were made possible during the Afghanistan period. I analyze changes in background dispositions and relational

[126] For details on attempts and subsequent failures to improve on the FBI's intelligence collection and other preemptive measures taken against al-Qaeda, see 9/11 Commission (2004: 76-80).

structures to explain why each practice either faded away, emerged, evolved, or remained constant from 1996 to 2001.

Large-Scale Suicide Attacks: A Drastic Shift in Al-Qaeda Practice

The practice originating with the 1998 East African embassy bombings (and continuing with the attack on the *USS Cole* and the 9/11 attacks) was radically different from any other that had come out of al-Qaeda up to that point. First, the operations were planned and executed by al-Qaeda operatives from start to finish, top to bottom. Second, the scale involved in this practice was much larger than any offensive action al-Qaeda had supported or participated in before. Third, the use of suicide was a key factor in the success of the attacks, but also in the effectiveness in 'terrorizing' Americans and inspiring al-Qaeda members and recruits. Finally, tied up in the practice was the intentional targeting of innocents, some of which were Muslims, women, and children. How was it possible that such a massive shift in al-Qaeda practices could occur between the Sudan and Afghanistan periods?

New Knowledge Built on the Old Background

Many components of the practical knowledge developed in the core of al-Qaeda during the Sudan period were carried over into the Afghanistan period and proved important in making the practice of large-scale suicide attacks possible. At the same time, early developments at the beginning of the Afghanistan period brought about significant changes to practical logics in al-Qaeda. Coupled with old dispositions,

these new components helped to allow the practice of large-scale suicide attacks to be adopted in 1998 and continue through 9/11.

One component of al-Qaeda background knowledge carried over from the Sudan period was the importance of martyrdom. As I argued in chapter 2, martyrdom had been a goal in and of itself for many of the Arab Afghans during the fight against the Soviets, and meetings with Hezbollah during the Sudan period likely reinforced this disposition towards martyrdom, particularly in regards to suicide terrorism.[127] Willingness to die for the cause of Jihad was also emphasized in al-Qaeda's 1996 fatwa declaring war against the United States, indicating that the centrality of martyrdom had not been lost in the move to Afghanistan.[128] However, a background disposition emphasizing martyrdom alone would not be sufficient to allow for the emergence of the practice of suicide terrorism. Suicide is expressly forbidden in Islam.[129] Thus, in order to argue that suicide operations were in part encouraged by the importance of martyrdom in al-Qaeda it must also be shown that martyrdom was in some way linked to suicide, and that for al-Qaeda this link justified Muslims committing suicide.

Wright claims that Ayman al-Zawahiri laid the foundation for this connection following a suicide attack by his followers on 19 November 1995 when he argued: "anyone who gives his life in pursuit of the true faith – such as the bombers in Islamabad – is to be regarded not as a suicide who will suffer the punishment of hell but as a heroic martyr whose selfless sacrifice will gain him an

[127] See CIA Report (1997 01 31).
[128] For references to self-sacrifice in English translation see CIA FBIS Report (2004: 25, 26-27).
[129] Quran (4: 29-30).

extraordinary reward in Paradise."[130] While there is no first-hand evidence of this link between martyrdom and suicide being made in al-Qaeda, Zawahiri did sit on the Shura Council of the Islamic Army and, in 1998, officially merged his organization with bin Laden's.[131] It is plausible, then, that he was a key player in instilling this link between martyrdom and suicide into al-Qaeda's background knowledge at the beginning of the Afghanistan period.

Another aspect of al-Qaeda's background knowledge which allowed the practice of large-scale suicide attacks to emerge was the justification for the killing of innocents. The taking of innocent life is forbidden in the Quran,[132] and as early as 1992 the issue of taking innocent life was being pondered by al-Qaeda leaders.[133] During the Sudan period Abu Hajer al-Iraqi, the acting Imam for al-Qaeda, issued a fatwa justifying the killing of innocents.[134] In this case the fatwa was more precautionary, issued to justify the deaths of any innocents who might be killed unintentionally in an attack (as had happened in the 1992 Aden hotel bombing).

A fatwa issued by al-Qaeda in 1998, however, states that "the ruling to kill Americans and their allies – civilians and military – is an individual duty for every Muslim."[135] This is important because the 1996 fatwa only refers to killing American soldiers occupying the Arabian Peninsula. The difference between the targets proposed in the two fatwas indicates that by 1998, the killing of innocents was no longer an afterthought but a fully embraced prospect, the necessity of which

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[130] Wright (2006: 248-249).
[131] CIA Report (1998 09 22).
[132] See, for example, Quran (5:32).
[133] See Wright (2006: 198-199).
[134] Wright (2006: 198-199, 423).
[135] CIA FBIS Report (2004: 58).

had become fundamental to al-Qaeda's background knowledge during the Afghanistan period. [136] This was a crucial step in making the practice of suicide attacks against non-military targets possible.

Finally, the massive scale of the suicide attacks was driven not only by the basic technical knowledge – such as bomb-making – carried over from the Sudan period,[137] but also more practical knowledge wrapped up in the action itself (e.g. the use of truck bombs, probably learned from interaction with Hezbollah).[138] New practical knowledge was also brought to al-Qaeda during the Afghanistan period which helped them to carry out more effective, devastating attacks. The African embassy bombings provide one example of al-Qaeda acquiring new practical knowledge, allowing for more effective attacks. One of the suicide bombers set off a stun grenade in the courtyard of the US embassy in Kenya prior to detonating the explosives. He did so because "one of the lessons Zawahiri had learned from his bombing of the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad three years before was that an initial explosion brought people rushing to the windows, and many more were decapitated by flying glass when the real bomb went off."[139]

In short, there were many facets of al-Qaeda's practical knowledge that helped make the practice of large-scale suicide attacks possible. Some were present during the Sudan period and were carried over into the Afghanistan period. Others were new, brought to al-Qaeda from other groups. When combined they produced a particular disposition that encouraged for bin Laden's organization to adopt and

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[136] See DCI Counterterrorist Center Report (2000 11 02: 3).
[137] See DCI Counterterrorist Center Report (2000 11 02: 7).
[138] See Pedahzur (2005: 100).
[139] Wright (2006: 307).

maintain a practice unlike any that preceded it. Table 3.2 summarizes the key components of al-Qaeda background knowledge from 1996 to 2001.

Table 3.2: Key Components of Al-Qaeda Background Knowledge during the Afghanistan Period

Carried Over from the Sudan Period	New to the Afghanistan Period
• Importance of Martyrdom • Military Discipline • Technical Skills (e.g. crafting explosives) • Practical Skills (e.g. methods of avoiding detection)	• Religious Justification for Suicide • Religious Justification for Killing Innocents • Practical Skills (e.g. using double explosions to maximize casualties)

Improvements to the Al-Qaeda Network

Several improvements made to the al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan also contributed to the practice of large-scale suicide. The first of these was the integration of Zawahiri's organization into al-Qaeda. I argued above that Zawahiri had already found a way to link suicide with martyrdom, and that in 1998 his organization was officially merged with bin Laden's.[140] In doing so he strengthened his position in al-Qaeda's policymaking process. Figure 3.2 shows the process by which important decisions were made in al-Qaeda during the Afghanistan period.[141] In Step 2, the Shura Council debated on proposed policies or attacks plans before making recommendations on the subject to bin Laden. Zawahiri already sat on al-Qaeda's Shura Council, and fully incorporating his organization into bin Laden's likely only solidified his influential position in the policy process. In doing so he

[140] CIA Report (1998 09 22).
[141] This process is derived from CIA Report (1996 12 19a).

improved the chances that his background disposition towards suicide terrorism could spread through the Shura Council and up to bin Laden, allowing for the tactic to be adopted.

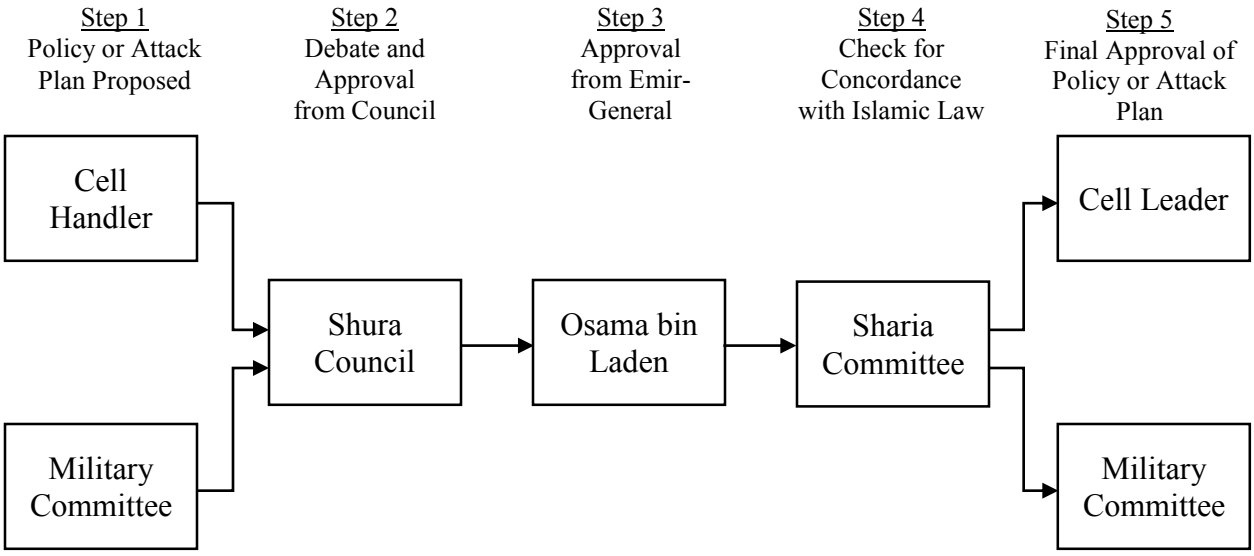

Figure 3.2 Al-Qaeda Policymaking Process

Another crucial factor allowing for the practice of large-scale suicide terrorism to be adopted and sustained was the massive expansion of training camp quantity and quality following al-Qaeda's move to Afghanistan in 1996. According to a DCI report from 2001, "a wide variety of reporting indicates that over two dozen training camps exist in Afghanistan" and "an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 fighters have trained in Bin Ladin-supported camps since Bin Ladin's return to

Afghanistan in 1996."[142] Accompanying this massive expansion in size compared to the Sudan period was an improvement in the quality of the courses being offered, enhanced from years of experience in Sudan.[143]

The improved training camps served another important purpose: they provided a safe haven from which al-Qaeda leadership could coordinate and support the much more complex operations planned and executed as part of this new practice of large-scale suicide attacks.[144] From the camps al-Qaeda leadership, including bin Laden, was able to participate in the recruitment of operatives for special assignments, such as the 9/11 attacks, ensuring that only the best recruits were selected for difficult missions.[145] The camps were also host to many planning meetings which were able to proceed without the fear of discovery that accompanies satellite phone calls; the meetings in December 1999 and early 2000 were particularly important in putting the final touches on the 9/11 attack plan.[146] The camps also served as centers of religious 'indoctrination' and solidarity, an important step when recruiting young men for martyrdom missions.[147] Finally, during the Afghanistan period the training camps became a reliable location at which cell leaders could report on ongoing operations and seek support from the core of the al-Qaeda network.[148]

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[142] DCI Counterterrorist Center Report (2001 03 27: 3-4).
[143] CIA Report (2003 10 10: 7). For details on the types of training available see CIA Report (2003 06 20: 3).
[144] DCI Report (2004 03 19: 11).
[145] For details on the recruitment selection process in the Afghanistan camps see CIA Report (2003 06 20: 2).
[146] CIA Report (2003 06 01); CIA Report (2003 06 20).
[147] See CIA Report (2003 06 20: 3, 5-6) and DCI Counterterrorism Center Report (2001 03 27: 5).
[148] Mohammed Atta reportedly maintained contact with the al-Qaeda core via training camps. See, for example, CIA Report (2003 06 20: 1).

The last improvement to the al-Qaeda network during the Afghanistan period was the extensive growth of al-Qaeda's web of semi-independent operational cells. Because of the structure of the relationship between operational cells and the al-Qaeda core, the growth of these 'peripheral nodes' is important for several reasons.[149] Michael Kenney describes this structure as follows:

> Peripheral nodes were often loosely coupled to the core and exercised considerable discretion in carrying out their day-to-day activities, including planning and conducting attacks… Peripheral nodes also contain their own decision-making hierarchies with leaders who supervise other member of the group. Peripheral nodes communicate with the core group through human couriers, oblique telephone conversations, and encrypted e-mail messages. If problems arise, such as personality clashes between group members, the core group may intervene to solve the problem. For the 9/11 attacks, al-Qaeda maintained a relatively flat organizational structure that ensured a degree of vertical accountability within individual nodes and administrative oversight of the overall operation.[150]

Figure 3.3 offers a graphical representation of this relationship. The arrows indicate the hierarchy of managerial oversight, and the oval surrounding the cell symbolizes to bounded independence offered to the cell by the al-Qaeda core.

[149] This terminology comes from Kenney (2007: chapter 5).
[150] Kenney (2007: 150-151).

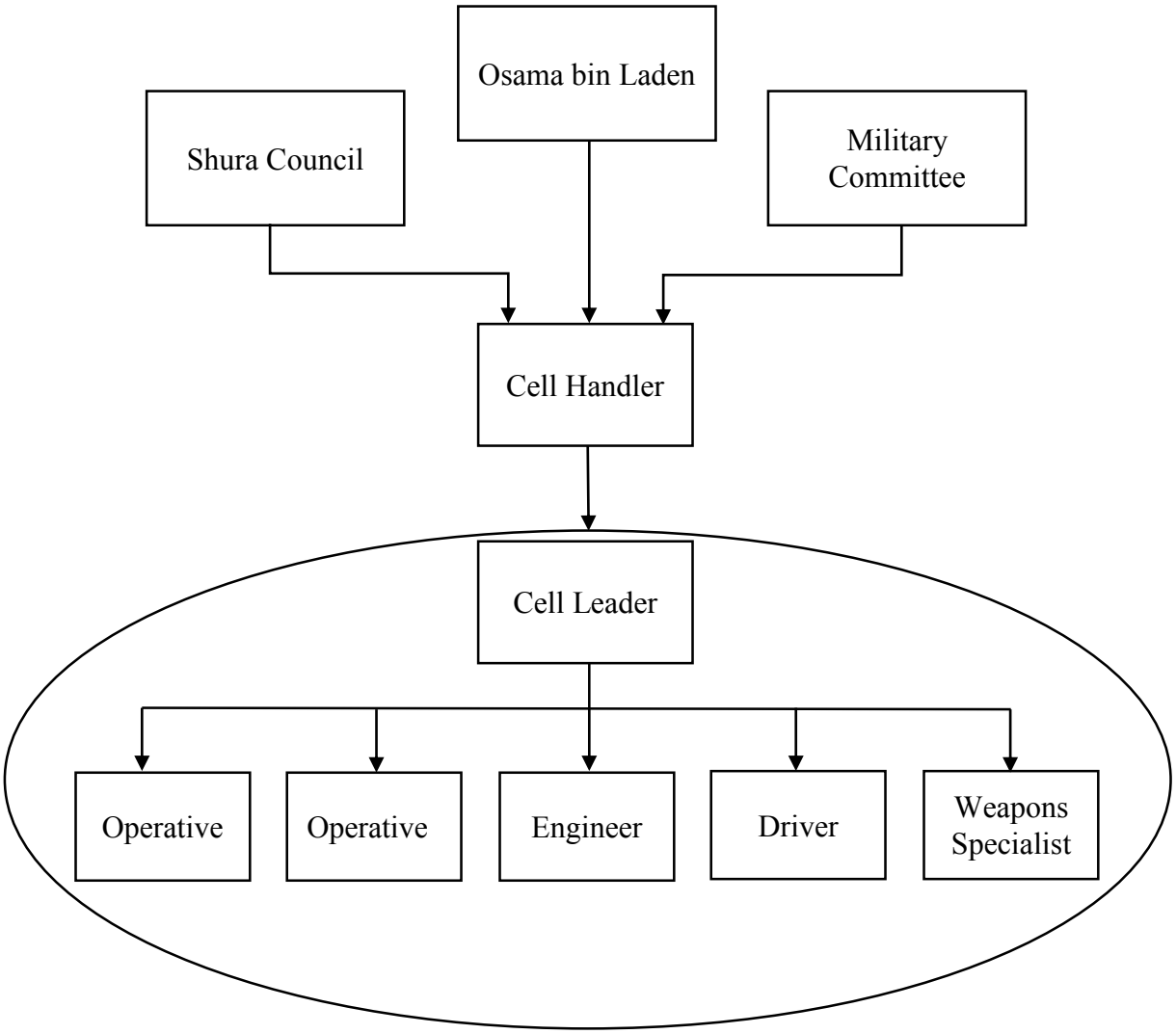

Figure 3.3 Managerial Oversight of Sample Al-Qaeda Cell

Increasing use of this relational structure led to improved effectiveness in planning and executing operations within al-Qaeda, allowing for larger scale missions. This was crucial in allowing for the practice of large-scale suicide terrorism to be adopted after 1996.[151] The structure, however, also produces a weak link in the al-Qaeda chain of command. The peripheral nodes need to maintain

[151] See Senior Executive Intelligence Brief (2001 02 06).

connection with the center to receive logistical support which they would be incapable of providing for themselves. Minimizing this contact via single leaders and cell handlers was the most secure way to ensure this contact. However, as will be seen in the study of the post-9/11 period, identifying and eliminating the crucial nodes connecting cells to the core became a very effective way of minimizing al-Qaeda's capabilities.

The CIA: Tracking the Movement of Al-Qaeda Leaders

The CIA was noticeably absent from the fight against al-Qaeda during the Sudan period. A 2004 report from the DCI explains this absence:

> [The] CIA's assessment of Bin Ladin during the early 1990's was that he was a major terrorist financier. The IC viewed him largely as a financial supporter of other terrorist groups and individuals, not as the center of a separate organization or network focused on carrying out terrorist attacks on the United States.[152]

Once the threat was recognized, the new practice adopted by the CIA – tracking the location and movements of bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders – was markedly different from any American counterterrorism practice that preceded it, particularly once the Predator drone was incorporated in late 2000. In this section I analyze the evolution of the capture or kill mentality in the CIA, as well as the Agency's location within the intelligence community before 9/11. This analysis is, in part, an answer to the question: why did the CIA prioritized the practice of tracking al-Qaeda leadership movements. It also serves as a necessary preface to arguments regarding the use of drone strikes in the post-9/11 period.

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[152] DCI Report (2004 03 19: 5).

HUMINT and the Agency's Customers

Understanding why the CIA adopted the practice of tracking the movement of al-Qaeda leaders requires at least a basic awareness of the Agency's position within the American intelligence community, how it collects intelligence, and who its customers are. The Central Intelligence Agency is an independent agency that collects and analyzes foreign intelligence, primarily from human sources (HUMINT). The Agency then produces intelligence reports for policy-makers at various levels in the US government, but their chief customer is the President of the United States.[153] Prior to 2004 the Agency's Director, the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), was also the head of the American intelligence community and the chief link between the intelligence community and the President. The CIA has also traditionally been the go-to intelligence agency for performing black operations on behalf of the President. However, it is important to note that many covert operations (including certain forms of intelligence collection) require Memoranda of Notifications signed by the President, authorizing very specific actions to be taken.[154] This requirement did not prevent the Agency from proactively pursuing new practices, but it did restrict them from implementing certain new ones (e.g. the Predator reconnaissance program) prior to Presidential authorization. Figure 3.4 depicts the CIA's customers and the pressure they can put on the Agency's intelligence collection practices.

[153] For a detailed list of Agency customers, see CIA OIG Report (2001 08).
[154] DCI Report (2004 03 19).

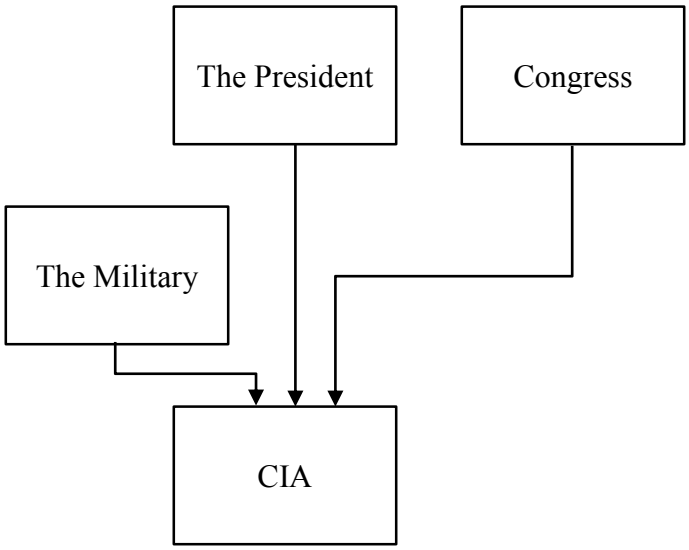

Figure 3.4 The CIA's Customers

The CIA's reliance on human intelligence meant that field officers were maintaining communication with local contacts who could help monitor bin Laden's movements.[155] Without the ability to penetrate terrorist groups, this was the closest the CIA could get considering its large dependence on human intelligence. What's more, because the policy-makers, and often the military, are the primary consumers of the product produced by the CIA, their demand often helps determine what the CIA prioritizes. In the case of al-Qaeda, particularly after the 1998 embassy attacks, the President and the military became increasingly interested in the possibility of acting against bin Laden.[156] Any such action would

[155] See 9/11 Commission (2004: 110).
[156] Sandler (2010) argues that this is a regular occurrence, particularly in liberal democracies, thanks to pressure put on the government by insecure publics. It seems, as Hoffman (2002) indicates, that this pressure would have been particularly poignant following the 1998 embassy attacks as a result of the high numbers of casualties. See also Crenshaw (2001a).

require first and foremost knowing where to find bin Laden, so that practice took priority.

The CIA's primary customers also helped dictate the evolution in the tracking practice over the course of the Afghanistan period. Whenever there was demand for more accurate, reliable intelligence, the CIA responded by looking for more efficient means of locational tracking. This happened first in 1999, when the CIA was becoming increasingly aware that a capture mission was not a realistic possibility because of operational limitations.[157] Under pressure to improve the quality of their tracking reports, the CIA began working with Ahmed Shah Masood,[158] a warlord fighting the Taliban in the north of Afghanistan that the CIA considered supporting in exchange for intelligence starting in late 1998.[159]

However, the military continued to lack confidence in the quality of the CIA's locational intelligence, forcing it to refrain from launching cruise missile strikes on several occasions.[160] Additionally, according to the 9/11 Commission, in 2000 "President Clinton expressed his frustration with the lack of military options to take out Bin Ladin and the al Qaeda leadership."[161] In response to dissatisfaction from the military and the President, the 'Afghan Eyes' Predator drone reconnaissance program – launched in June 2000 – was created to produce more reliable, time-accurate intelligence on al-Qaeda leadership movements. This time,

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[157] See, for example, DCI Presentation (1999 07 20) and DCI Presentation (1999 08 03). See also 9/11 Commission (2004: 126-143).
[158] DCI Presentation (1999 10 29); DCI Presentation (1999 11 12); DCI Presentation (2000 01 07); CIA EXDIR Presentation (2000 03 06); DCI Presentation (2000 04 03); CIA DDO Presentation (2000 05 22); CIA DDCI Presentation (2000 07 07).
[159] CIA Report (1998 11 19); CIA Report (1998 11 24: 2).
[160] DCI Report (2004 03 19: 26-27).
[161] 9/11 Commission (2004: 189).

increasing standards of competency were being imposed directly from the President on the CIA's primary practice, forcing the practice of locational intelligence collection to evolve.[162]

In short, the CIA's policy-maker customers were often instrumental in encouraging certain practices to be adopted. During the Afghanistan period, demand for locational intelligence on bin Laden encouraged the adoption of the tracking practice. Frustration in the usefulness of that intelligence from outside the Agency led to an evolution in the practice, first from using local tribals to enlisting the support of an Afghani warlord's network, and then to the use of the unmanned Predator drone.

Capture or Kill: A Changing Disposition

The emergence and growth of the tracking practice was also wrapped up in an Agency disposition shifting between capture and kill. There were two outcomes that could result from the intelligence the CIA was collecting: the capture and rendition of bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders, or their death. Evidence from the CIA reports that have been made available points to a shift over the course of the Afghanistan period from a disposition favoring capture to one that increasingly took for granted the possibility of –and maybe even preference for – targeted strikes designed to kill.

[162] According to DCI Report (2004 03 19: 62), "it is important to note that [in fall 2000, the] CIA and the policy community saw the objectives of the Predator program as two-fold: giving the United States 'eyes on the target' capability and collecting intelligence."

When the CIA first began gathering significant intelligence on bin Laden in late 1996 and early 1997, there was an underlying expectation that the ultimate objective would be to gather enough information for a successful rendition mission. A report from August 1997 indicates that by that time the CIA was already working towards using tribal connections for "providing real-time information about Bin Ladin's activities and travels in Afghanistan,"[163] and we now know that "by the fall of 1997, the Bin Ladin unit had roughed out a plan for these Afghan tribals to capture Bin Ladin and hand him over for trial."[164] It is not clear, given the evidence, the source from which this disposition towards capture came. The FBI was gathering evidence with the intention of asking a grand jury for an indictment of bin Laden at the same time, and the CIA was aware of these efforts,[165] so it is possible that this drove the Agency towards a capture-centric mentality.

Throughout the rest of the Afghanistan period it continued to be largely taken for granted in the CIA that the ultimate objective of the tracking practice was to provide enough intelligence to capture bin Laden.[166] However, the 1998 embassy attacks and the military's response raised an alternative possibility which began to take hold in the second half of the Afghanistan period.

According to the declassified record, the possibility of killing bin Laden was first raised in a CIA presentation made one week after the attacks on the

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[163] CIA Report (1997 08 25).
[164] 9/11 Commission (2004: 110). This planning continued through 1998, as evidenced by CIA Internal Email (1998 05 05).
[165] See 9/11 Commission (2004: 110).
[166] See CIA EXDIR Presentation (2000 03 06); CIA DDO Presentation (2000 05 22); CIA DDCI Presentation (2000 07 07); CIA DCI Presentation (1999 07 20); CIA Report (1998 11 18); CIA Report (1998 11 24); CIA Report (1999 02 10); (DCI Presentation (1999 08 03); DCI Presentation (1999 10 29); DCI Presentation (1999 11 12); DCI Presentation (2000 01 07); DCI Presentation (2000 04 03).

American embassies in East Africa.[167] References to targeting or killing bin Laden and al-Qaeda lieutenants continued to be made in official reporting throughout the rest of the Afghanistan period,[168] and several internal CIA emails – sent between Michael Scheuer, chief of the Bin Laden unit, and a redacted employee – show a dissatisfaction with the failure to launch targeted strikes on several occasions in 1998 and 1999.[169] Thus, while there continued to be an assumption that the ultimate objective was the capture of bin Laden, the 1998 embassy attacks and subsequent pressure from the military and the President instilled a growing belief that locational intelligence would be better used on targeted strikes against al-Qaeda leadership.

While it is difficult to tell from the declassified record, this growing tendency to view killing as a viable and perhaps preferential option may have also been important in encouraging the CIA to improve the tracking practice (though pressure from above demanded better intelligence, there was no specific request that the Predator be the tool used to improve the tracking practice).[170] After all, the method of targeted strikes available at the time, cruise missile attacks, was more time-sensitive than a capture mission would be: it took time to arm and fire the missiles, and even more time for them to travel to Afghanistan from US Navy warships in the Red Sea, time that could allow al-Qaeda leaders to leave the target area before the missiles hit. The Agency learned this important lesson following the

[167] CIA Presentation (1998 08 14).
[168] See, for example, CIA Report (1998 11 24); CIA Report (1999 02 10); DCI Presentation (2000 01 07).
[169] CIA Internal Email (1998 12 20); CIA Internal Email (1998 12 21); CIA Internal Email (1998 05 17).
[170] DCI Report (2004 03 19: 60).

failure of the military to hit bin Laden with the Tomahawk missiles launched in retaliation for the East African embassy bombings.

Debates within the Agency in fall 2000 over the appropriate use of the Predator seem to indicate that this issue was being considered, and that some CIA employees were predisposed to view killing bin Laden as a preferential outcome from the tracking practice. In fact, some within the Agency "argued that the opportunity to strike at Bin Ladin, if he could be located, would outweigh the risks involved in an aircraft being shot down over Afghanistan."[171] Whether or not the Predator was incorporated into CIA practice because of the kill disposition, it is important to note that as early as 2000 the Predator was being associated with targeted strikes against al-Qaeda leadership by some people within the Agency.

The FBI Continues Post-Attack Investigations

While the CIA was continually adjusting to the changing al-Qaeda threat, the FBI was maintaining the practice it had spawned following the Lockerbie bombing and the 1993 World Trade Center attack. Why, when such changes were occurring in al-Qaeda and the CIA, did the FBI not react and modify its practice during the Afghanistan period?

Reaffirmation of Old Background Dispositions

The FBI's practical knowledge remained mostly unchanged during the Afghanistan period. The reason for this is simple: there was little about the new al-Qaeda

[171] DCI Report (2004 03 19: 62).

practice of large-scale suicide bombing that challenged the New York Field Office's previously held understanding about how best to respond to a terrorist attack. Neither the suicide factors nor the scale of the attacks varied enough to shake the practical knowledge gained through investigating the Lockerbie and 1993 World Trade Center attacks. Moreover, even if the Bureau had less success in securing quick, clean-cut arrests and convictions following the 1998 embassy bombings, information obtained from the investigation and interrogations would prove an invaluable asset for mapping the al-Qaeda network.[172] This verified that although the investigative techniques being applied by the FBI may not always lead to arrests, they could still produce tangible, valuable intelligence. Instances such as this only served to reinforce the background disposition developed by the Bureau during the Sudan period.

The 'Office of Origin' System and its Effects

The 'office of origin' system described in chapter 2 dictated that the New York Field Office handle all cases involving al-Qaeda following the 1993 World Trade Center attacks. This meant that the same office was called upon for a response following the 1998 embassy bombings and the attack on the *USS Cole*. Thus, even if al-Qaeda's practices were changing, as long as the practice of post-attack investigation continued producing tangible results there was no reason for the practice to be challenged from FBI headquarters. On top of that, the 'office of origin' system guaranteed that practical knowledge, as long as it was not challenged

[172] Wright (2006: 312-315).

by al-Qaeda's actions, would remain 'sticky' across time since the same office would be responsible for dealing with the al-Qaeda threat. As seen in Figure 3.5, the system dictated that regardless of where an attack took place, the 'Office of Origin' for al-Qaeda the New York Field Office took the case. Imagine that a terrorist attack took place in L.A. or Washington. As the figure shows, the case would still be assigned to the New York Field Office if it was suspected that al-Qaeda was responsible, allowing for this 'stickiness' to persist.

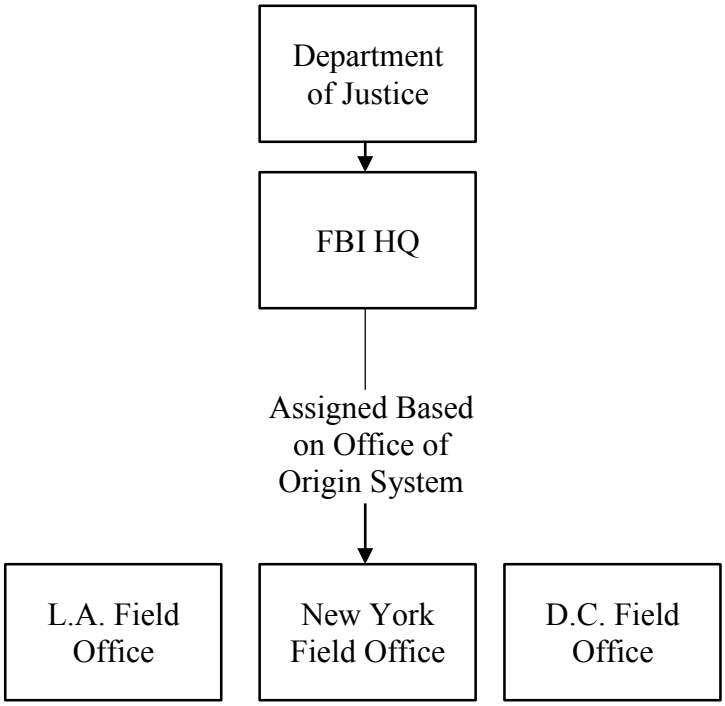

Figure 3.5 FBI Assignment of al-Qaeda Investigation after 1993

The 'office of origin' system may also have been partially responsible for the FBI's failure to adopt a preemptive, preventative practice as did the CIA following the 1998 East African embassy attacks. The relative independence of the

Bureau's various field offices could hamper projects that required more in-depth, focused, Bureau-wide participation, as intelligence collection and analysis would. In fact, according to the 9/11 Commission the FBI did craft a plan in 1998 to collect and analyze intelligence on terrorist activity, but the plan failed due in part to mismanaged resources.[173] Because counterterrorism was only being handled by one field office, it simply was not given the priority and resources needed to support a preemptive practice.

Summary

The Afghanistan period was a time of great change in both al-Qaeda and American counterterrorism practices. Following the move to Afghanistan in 1996, al-Qaeda reestablished and improved its training camps, and built up its network of peripheral cells. At the same time fatwas were released that provided religious justification for killing innocents, and the pre-existing disposition towards martyrdom was linked to suicide terrorism. Combined with technical mastery obtained during the Sudan period, al-Qaeda was able to implement the practice of large-scale, coordinated, mass-casualty suicide attacks.

This new practice had a substantial impact on US counterterrorism practices, which reacted accordingly. First, it challenged previous 'knowledge' that bin Laden was simply a financier of terrorism. It also spurred the CIA's policy-maker customers, such as the military and the President, to begin demanding intelligence on the location and movements of bin Laden, encouraging the adoption

[173] 9/11 Commission (2004: 76-77).

of the tracking practice. Growth in this practice was made possible by the CIA's location within the counterterrorism community, which requires that the Agency meet the demands of its core customers. As frustration in the usefulness of that intelligence from outside the Agency continued to grow due to the persistence of the large-scale suicide practice in al-Qaeda, the tracking practice evolved, first from using local tribals to enlisting the support of an Afghani warlord's network, and then to the use of the unmanned Predator drone. As that practice grew, so too did the disposition in the Agency to view killing, as opposed to capturing, as the expected outcome of the tracking practice. In short, this period saw the 'mutually reactive' process at work: new practices in al-Qaeda spurred the CIA to adopt and continually adjust an entirely new practice which was distinct from the FBI's that came before it.

Finally, the FBI's practice of post-attack investigations continued, largely unchanged. While the new al-Qaeda attacks were of a larger scale, early successes in the investigation of the 1998 embassy attacks reinforced the FBI's disposition. What's more, the Bureau's 'office of origin' system guaranteed that the same field office responded to every al-Qaeda attack, so this disposition could not be challenged by another office taking over.

Chapter 4: The Post-9/11 Period (11 September 2001-2012)

In this final chapter I show how it was possible for some of the most recent al-Qaeda and American counterterrorism practices to emerge, notably the franchising of al-Qaeda and the CIA's use of Predator drones to carry out targeted strikes in Pakistan and Yemen. I begin with a brief overview of the major events marking the post-9/11 period. Covering the entire War in Afghanistan is far beyond the scope of this thesis. As such, I focus on events that marked interaction between the US counterterrorism community and al-Qaeda, refraining largely from addressing details of military actions taken during the war by either side. As I explain later, this is also in part due to a lack of available data regarding CIA action during this time period. After outlining the main events that took place after 9/11, I turn to an analysis of the major shifts in practices in al-Qaeda and the CIA.

Post-9/11 Period Events

On 7 October 2001 American airstrikes marked the beginning of the US-led War in Afghanistan, targeting al-Qaeda and the Taliban, who had given bin Laden's organization the shelter it needed to succeed in the 9/11 plot. In the early stages of the war approximately 500 al-Qaeda members were captured or killed.[174] The rest of the central members, including surviving members of the 055 Brigade which had been integrated with the Taliban forces, retreated to the mountainous border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan.[175]

[174] Gunaratna (2002: 60).
[175] Gunaratna (2002: 58-60).

On 1 August 2002 the CIA launched its first targeted drone strike in Yemen, killing Ahmed Hijazi and Qaed Salim Sunian al Harithi, suspected mastermind of the attack on the *USS Cole*.[176] The CIA would not strike again in Yemen until 17 December 2009. Once that strike took place, however, they would strike continually all the way through May 2013.[177]

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi – the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, an insurgency group founded following the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 – swore allegiance to al-Qaeda in late 2004, marking the first major instance of al-Qaeda franchising.[178] Other key instances of franchising included the creation of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in early 2006,[179] and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in January 2007.[180]

On 19 June 2004 the CIA carried out its first Predator strike in Pakistan.[181] While the frequency of these strikes would remain relatively low until 2008, this strike was the first of many targeting al-Qaeda and Taliban militants in the Afghanistan/Pakistan border regions. Figure 4.1 depicts all of these significant events chronologically.

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[176] New America Foundation Database (Yemen).
[177] New America Foundation Database (Pakistan).
[178] Al-Zarqawi (2004 10 17).
[179] For details on this process, see Loidolt (2011: 103-104).
[180] See Steinberg and Werenfels (2007).
[181] New America Foundation Database (Pakistan).

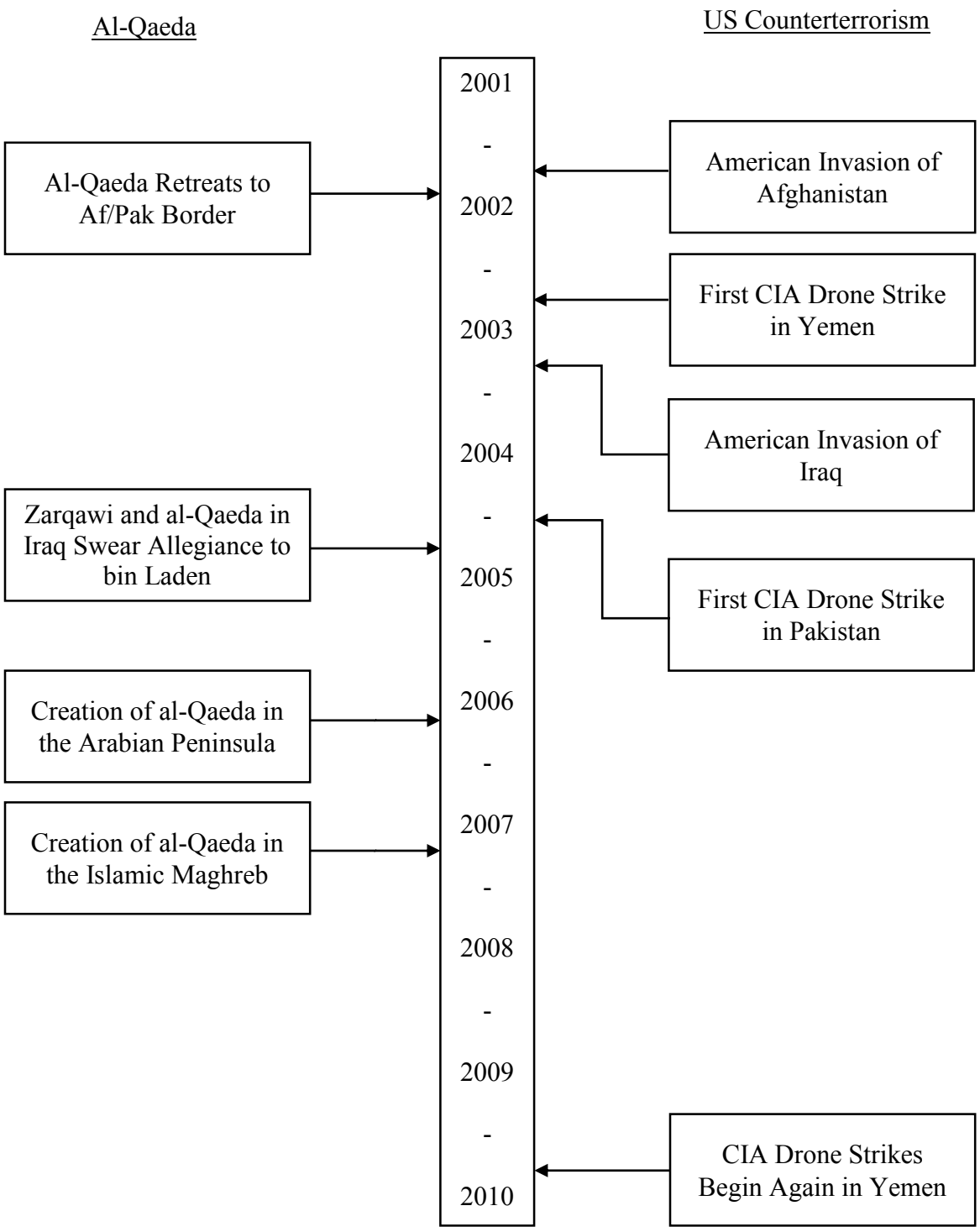

Figure 4.1 Post-9/11 Period Timeline

New Practices for the Post-9/11 Age

It should be clear from the events presented above that the post-9/11 period saw yet another major shift in practice in both the CIA and al-Qaeda. Because of a lack of transparency on the part of the US government, there is a significant lack of data available concerning the drone strike programs in Pakistan and Yemen. I present here a description of that practice and show how it has evolved based on what data is available.[182]

CIA testimony before the 9/11 Commission tells the story of how armed versions of the Predator drone first made their way overseas:

> In early September 2001, [the] CIA was authorized to deploy the [Predator Drone] system with weapons-capable aircraft, but for reconnaissance missions only. The DCI did not authorize the shipment of missiles at that time because the host nation had not agreed to allow flights by weapons-carrying aircraft… Subsequent to 9/11, approval was quickly granted to ship the missiles, and the Predator aircraft and missiles reached their overseas location on September 16, 2001. The first mission was flown over Kabul and Qandahar on September 18 without carrying weapons Subsequent host nation approval was granted on October 7 and the first armed mission was flown the same day.[183]

It is possible that strikes took place during the war in Afghanistan, but the practice of CIA targeted strikes against al-Qaeda leadership was only fully adopted starting in 2004, when the first strike was carried out in Pakistan. The practice continued to grow exponentially, peaking in 2010 when 122 strikes were made against targets in Pakistan.[184] The CIA continued to carry out strikes into 2013 with the total number of strikes per year decreasing annually. As of 29 May 2013, 356

[182] My primary source of information is the New America Foundation's database, initially published in February 2010 and revised in summer 2012.
[183] DCI Statement (2004 03 24: 19).
[184] New America Foundation Database (Pakistan).

total strikes have killed anywhere between 2000 and 3400 individuals.[185] Figure 4.2 depicts the number of strikes carried out annually by the CIA in Pakistan.

On top of the campaign targeting al-Qaeda leadership in Pakistan, the CIA also began an extended drone strike campaign against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in 2009. As of 21 May 2013, approximately 69 drone strikes have killed anywhere between 586 and 819 individuals.[186] It is clear from this data that Predator drone strikes have been one of the predominant practices of the CIA for countering the al-Qaeda threat in Aghanistan/Pakistan and Yemen in the post-9/11 period.[187]

[185] New America Foundation Database (Pakistan).
[186] New America Foundation Database (Yemen).
[187] Wilner's (2010: 310) distinction between targeted killing and assassinations reinforces my decision to view the CIA's use of targeted killings as a 'practice,' namely his emphasis on targeted strikes being part of "a much larger and iterated campaign."

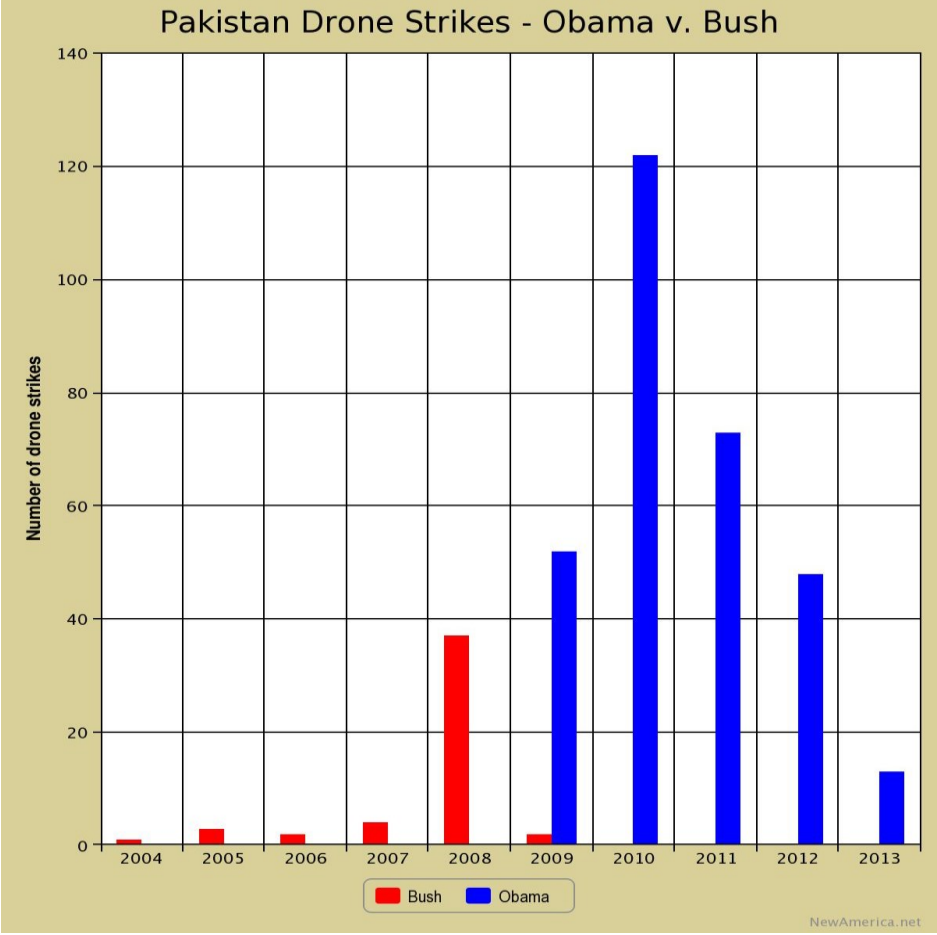

Figure 4.2 CIA Drone Strikes: 2004-2013[188]

As for al-Qaeda, the post-9/11 period saw yet another shift in practice, this time in the opposite direction of the changes that occurred during the Afghanistan period. Following the death or capture of many members of the al-Qaeda core and the loss of the organization's sanctuary in Afghanistan large-scale, mass casualty attacks were no longer carried out by the organization. Instead, al-Qaeda began to franchise, with regionalized groups claiming responsibility for smaller, more

[188] Available from New America Foundation Database (Pakistan).

frequent attacks.[189] Table 4.1 shows the key practices of the post-9/11 period covered here. In the rest of the chapter I explain how the practice of drone strikes and franchising were made possible.

Table 4.1: Key Practices during the Post-9/11 Period

Al-Qaeda	CIA

• Franchising
  ○ Iraq (2004)
  ○ Arabian Peninsula (2009)
  ○ Islamic Maghreb (2007)
	• Targeted Drone Strikes
	  ○ Pakistan (2004-Present)
	  ○ Yemen (2009-Present)

The CIA's Use of Targeted Drone Strikes

There is not enough data available in the declassified record to track changes in CIA background knowledge during the post-9/11 period. What's more, the abrupt increase in military participation in American counterterrorism efforts following the invasion of Afghanistan makes it even more difficult to determine what caused the CIA to adopt the practice of targeted drone strikes. As such, the explanation of this practice is less developed and nuanced than previous explanations. Still, given the information available I extrapolate from signs of changing dispositions within the CIA before 9/11 to show how it was possible that the practice of targeted drone strikes was adopted in 2004.

[189] See Hoffman (2004) for an analysis of a Singaporean Islamist cell coopted by al-Qaeda. In that same text he refers to al-Qaeda as an enterprise. Hoffman (2009: 360) also refers to al-Qaeda as "among the globe's most universally recognized and best known 'brands,'" indicating that the franchising practice may not always be proactive on the part of al-Qaeda.

The Old Disposition to Kill Put into Practice

In chapter 3 I argued that after the 1998 embassy attacks in Africa there was an uptake in the CIA's tendency to view targeted killing as a viable option, coming out of the Agency's tracking practice. I also presented evidence that there was frustration within the CIA when the American military repeatedly failed to act on Agency intelligence indicating bin Laden's location, refusing to launch cruise missile strikes against him and other al-Qaeda lieutenants. In addition, I demonstrated how by 2000 the practice of tracking al-Qaeda leadership movements had evolved to include the use of the unmanned Predator drone, which could provide more accurate, up-to-date intelligence than previously available, but remained incapable of being armed until early September 2001 due to technical limitations.[190] In short, prior to 9/11 there already existed within the CIA a disposition towards using locational intelligence as a tool for killing bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders, but that disposition was never translated into practice due to hesitancy on the part of the military and the technical limitations of the Predator drone.[191]

Given that a disposition towards killing al-Qaeda leadership existed in the CIA prior to 9/11, I argue that the CIA's practice of targeted strikes against al-Qaeda leaders in the post 9/11 period was made possible by an increase in this disposition following the 11 September attacks, accompanied by improvements to the Predator drone that allowed it to be equipped with air-to-surface missiles. For

[190] See DCI Statement (2004 03 24: 19).
[191] For details on the increasing normalization of extra-judicial killings, see Kurtulus (2012: 46-50).

one, it was after the high casualty attacks on the US embassies in 1998 that CIA personnel first began to consider killing bin Laden as the preferential outcome of their locational intelligence collection efforts. It seems reasonable to suspect that this disposition persisted and even grew following the much more devastating attacks on 11 September 2001.

Moreover, equipping the Predator with Hellfire missiles solved the timing and collateral damage problems that had held the military back from launching cruise missiles on previous occasions.[192] While collateral damage still results from Hellfire missiles, the ability to see the target offers a chance to minimize unwanted casualties, a possibility not afforded by cruise missiles. On top of that, the time delay between firing and impact is infinitely smaller for a Hellfire missile launched from directly above a target than from a cruise missile launched into Afghanistan or Pakistan from a Navy warship in the Red Sea.

In brief, while permission from the President was surely necessary to begin a drone-strike program against al-Qaeda, an old disposition carried over from the Afghanistan period, in combination with technical improvements to the hardware necessary to overcome previous reservations, made the practice of targeted strikes a much more realistic and probable CIA practice after 9/11.

The Al-Qaeda Franchise

It would be wrong to argue that the CIA's drone strike campaign was responsible for forcing al-Qaeda to scale back and franchise, as this was already occurring

[192] See, for example, 9/11 Commisison (2004: 138, 140-141).

before the Predator campaign picked up in 2008.[193] Rather, the most likely cause lies in the American-led military invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001. In this section I examine how the death or capture of many core members and the loss of the Afghanistan training camps forced al-Qaeda to alter its practices in the post-9/11 era. In doing so I return to some of the key components of that organization's network structure outlined in previous chapters.

Broken Links to the Core and Lost Training Camps

One reason al-Qaeda was forced to scale back terrorist attacks following the invasion of Afghanistan was the destruction of significant portions of the core of its network.[194] For instance, Muhammad Atef, al-Qaeda's military commander, was killed in Noveber 2001 and Abu Zubaydah, al-Qaeda's director of external operations, was captured in March 2002.[195] Eliminating key members, especially those sitting on the Shura Council or holding key positions in the Military Committee, limited al-Qaeda's ability to plan attacks on the same scale as those seen during the Afghanistan Period. At the same time, according to the arguments made in chapter 3, one of the factors in making large-scale attacks possible was the provision of logistical/material support and oversight from the center to the peripheral cells. However, if any of the casualties suffered by al-Qaeda following the invasion of Afghanistan were key nodes linking the center with peripheral cells,

[193] Remember that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, proclaimed allegiance to bin Laden in October 2004. See al-Zarqawi (2004 10 17).
[194] For a detailed account of the destruction of cells and the capture or deaths of key al-Qaeda leaders, see DCI Statement (2004 02 24: 1-3).
[195] Gunaratna (2002: 227-228).

it would be difficult to continue maintaining that communication, oversight, and support which was so crucial to allowing the semi-independent cells to operate and execute such large-scale attacks. With that chain broken, al-Qaeda cells would be forced to adapt and accept that smaller scale attacks were the only feasible possibility.

Another important factor contributing to the reduction in high-casualty attacks following the Afghanistan invasion was the loss of training camps. I argued previously that training camps were crucial to the success of al-Qaeda's large-scale, suicide bombing practice during the Afghanistan period, in particular the 9/11 attacks. It would seem, then, that the loss of these camps would be a significant blow to al-Qaeda's ability to carry out mass-casualty attacks. A CIA report from June 2003 came to a similar conclusion:

> Al-Qa'ida can feed off the fruits of its past labor in Afghanistan to continue conducting operations and conduct small-scale training in the near term… The orchestration of major attacks, however, will become increasingly difficult without a new safehaven that would give the al-Qa'ida leadership the freedom to operate and control the plotting. Without the Afghanistan camps to continue training thousands of men, al-Qa'ida will have a smaller pool of recruits to choose from… [and] those who are brought into the group may not enjoy the full confidence of al-Qa'ida's senior planners to operate independently over long periods of time with unwavering commitment to the cause.[196]

All of the advantages from the camps that allowed the practice of large-scale suicide attacks to be enacted were eliminated with the destruction of the camps, reducing al-Qaeda's ability to maintain that practice in the post-9/11 period.

Together, the hits to al-Qaeda's leadership and the training camp network helped to make franchising a more viable option for remaining al-Qaeda leadership.

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[196] CIA Report (2003 06 20).

As proven by the success of alliance-building during the Sudan period, they already possessed the knowledge necessary to build positive relationships with other Islamist groups.[197] There is evidence that they were already putting that knowledge to use by offering regional networks "operational training, consultation, and money."[198] With their own abilities to attacks the Americans weakened, why not back other groups – like al-Qaeda in Iraq – that were able to do damage to the United States, even if on a smaller scale than what was possible during the Afghanistan period? On top of the practice of direct franchising, some have argued that al-Qaeda made itself into an ideology that other groups were free to adopt, thus encouraging others carry out the operations that they were no longer capable of.[199]

Summary

The post-9/11 period saw another shift in practices from al-Qaeda and the US counterterrorism community. I focused specifically on the CIA's practice of targeted drone strikes against al-Qaeda members in Pakistan and Yemen and on al-Qaeda's use of franchising following the invasion of Afghanistan.

The CIA didn't begin the targeted drone strike practice until 2004, and it didn't reach peak levels until 2009-2010. However, the Predator drone had already been a key component of the tracking practice, and the disposition towards killing bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders had been growing since the 1998 embassy attacks. Once it was possible to equip the Predator drone with Hellfire missiles, and

[197] See Chapter 2.
[198] DCI Statement (2004 02 24: 3).
[199] See, for example, Turner (2010), Hoffman (2004), and Kenney (2007: 219-220).

the once the disposition to kill was solidified following 9/11, a CIA targeted strike practice became much more plausible.

Following the invasion of Afghanistan, al-Qaeda lost its training sanctuary, significantly reducing its ability to maintain the large-scale suicide attack practice. On top of that the deaths of lieutenants and mid-level coordinators during the first months of the war left the peripheral cells stranded from the core. Without logistical/material support or coordination, cells were no longer able to plan and execute operations on the scale of those during the Afghanistan period. Al-Qaeda already possessed the knowledge necessary to network, obtained during the Sudan years, so franchising was a viable option when the ability to maintain the practice of large-scale attacks was lost.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The period of 1991 to 2013 saw dramatic shifts in terrorism and counterterrorism practices. Al-Qaeda grew from a new organization born from the jihad against the soviets, to a well-settled network capable of terrorist attacks that produced casualties on an unprecedented scale, to the heart of a growing franchise spanning multiple continents. The US counterterrorism community's response changed as well. From addressing initial attacks as criminal matters to be investigated and dealt with by the Department of Justice, they soon adopted a more aggressive stance, first seeking to capture bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leadership, but eventually launching a campaign of targeted strikes launched from high-tech, remote controlled Predator drones equipped with Hellfire missiles. How was it possible that these shits in practice occurred in al-Qaeda and the American counterterrorism community? What was the process of interaction between these two actors, and did the adoption of new practices by one drive the other to change its practices as well?

In response to these questions, the primary argument of this thesis was: (1) that the interaction of two independent variables, background knowledge and network structure goes a long way in explaining why these specific practices were adopted by al-Qaeda and the US counterterrorism community; (2) that changes in practice were the result of changes to one or both of these variables; and (3) that because al-Qaeda and the US counterterrorism community existed in a state of 'mutually reactive' symbiosis, a new practice in one community sometimes acted

on background knowledge and network structure in the other community, resulting in new practices being enacted by the other community.

The case study confirms all three arguments by tracing shifts in practice, background knowledge, and network structure in both communities. First, the key practices of both communities were made possible by particular background knowledge and network structure. During the Sudan period, knowledge obtained by al-Qaeda leadership while fighting was mujahidin in Afghanistan, combined with a strong, hierarchical central core, allowed for the practices of financing and supporting terrorism to emerge. In the FBI, background knowledge from the investigation of the Lockerbie bombing and the 'office of origin' system predisposed the Bureau to respond to terrorist attacks with criminal investigations.

In the Afghanistan period, changes in background knowledge and network structure spurred the adoption of new practices. The large-scale suicide attack practice was allowed to emerge in al-Qaeda thanks to improved training camps, better cell development, a religious justification permitting the killing of innocents, and a new link connecting martyrdom to suicide. The CIA's location within the intelligence community mandated that it respond to the requests of the President and the military, whose reaction to the new al-Qaeda practice drove the adoption and improvement of the tracking practice. At the same time, a disposition towards viewing the ultimate outcome of this practice as kill instead of capture grew within the Agency, particularly after the African embassy attacks and, most likely, 9/11.

In the post-9/11 period the destruction of the training camp network and the death/capture of leaders and mid-level coordinators forced al-Qaeda to abandon the

large-scale suicide terrorism practice. Falling back on old background knowledge, they used their networking and alliance-building skills to begin franchising. In the CIA, the disposition to kill, inspired by al-Qaeda's use of mass-casualty suicide terrorism, was finally able to be put into practice thanks to technological advancements in the Predator drone. Together these allowed for the targeted drone strike practice to be adopted three years later. This process demonstrated the third argument. A new practice in al-Qaeda – large-scale suicide attacks – challenged previously taken-for-granted knowledge – that bin Laden was a minimal threat and that tracking his movements would ultimately lead to capture, rendition, and trial – leading to a change in the CIA's disposition. Once material constraints were overcome by equipping the Predator drone with the Hellfire missile, the new disposition to kill allowed for the practice of targeted strikes to be enacted. Table 5.1 summarizes the key shifts in practice in this case study.

Table 5.1: Summary of Practices, 1991-2013

	Al-Qaeda Practices	US Counterterrorism Practices
Sudan Period	• Financing Terrorism • Supporting and training other actors targeting Americans • Alliance-building and Networking	• FBI: post-attack investigations with the intent of obtaining evidence leading to arrest, prosecution, and conviction of perpetrators
Afghanistan Period	• Coordinated, large-scale, symbolic, suicide attacks targeting both military personnel and civilians	• FBI: post-attack investigations with the intent of obtaining evidence leading to arrest, prosecution, and conviction of perpetrators • CIA: collection of actionable intelligence regarding the location and movements of bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders
Post-9/11 Period	• Franchising o Iraq (2004) o Arabian Peninsula (2009) o Islamic Maghreb (2007)	• Targeted Drone Strikes o Pakistan (2004-Present) o Yemen (2009-Present)

Another important finding was that although key practices in both communities were influenced by changes in the other, many of the significant shifts in practice were the result of exogenous forces acting on the two key variables, background knowledge and relational structure. For example, the American-led invasion of Afghanistan was crucial in forcing al-Qaeda out of its sanctuary there. The resultant loss of training camps was a key factor in making the practice of large-scale suicide attacks possible and encouraging al-Qaeda to adopt the franchising model. Consequently, the adoption of the franchising practice was not the result of any practice coming from the CIA or FBI. To reiterate my previous

warning, the 'mutual reaction' mechanism by which practices in one community influence practices in another – by forcing a reassessment of background knowledge or a change in network structure – is one mechanism, but not the only mechanism, for driving shifts in practice.

Some of the findings in this case are also important for practice theory writ-large. One is that background knowledge and the right network structure alone may not be sufficient to bring about a change in practice due to material constraints. In the case of the Predator, even while there were many in the CIA who were willing and ready to send the Predator on kill missions, difficulties with the Hellfire missile rendered their dispositions moot. Cruise missiles took too long to load and were too destructive to be used in an extended targeted strike campaign, and without the armed Predator, the changed background disposition failed to generate a new practice. The claim here is simply that even while practice theory focuses on background knowledge, material factors should not be overlooked as they can have real constraining effects on practices.[200]

On a related note, the shortcomings of the framework employed here are instructive as well. For instance, there is a gap in the framework proposed in this thesis between practices being made possible or encouraged and practices actually being enacted. For example, even once the Predator was armed and sent overseas, the practice of targeted strikes did not begin until 2004, and only really gathered speed in 2008. The framework proposed in this thesis could only determine that as of late 2001 or early 2002, the practice of targeted strikes was possible. One area

[200] See also Pouliot (2010b).

for future research is in uncovering new mechanisms to explain the process by which communities come to adopt practices once they become possible or thinkable. Only then can the gap between a practice being made possible or encouraged and the actual performance of that practice be explained.

Given the recent debates surrounding America's drone program, it seems pertinent that we strive for a theory of terrorism and counterterrorism that can explain how practices like the CIA's targeted strike campaign came into being in the first place. While debating the morality and legality of Predator strikes is important, so is understanding how it was possible for such a practice to be adopted to begin with. This thesis laid down a basic framework for understanding the processes by which terrorists and counter-terrorists adopt new practices, and how the actions taken by one actor might impact those of the other. However, much still needs to be done before one can proclaim the existence of a theory of practice of terrorism and counterterrorism. Understanding how terrorism and counterterrorism practices got to where they are now is fundamental to being able to explain or predict what changes the future might bode. One thing is for sure: terrorists and counter-terrorists have adjusted to quite drastic changes in the past, and they will likely continue to do so in the future.

Appendix A: A Note on Sources

All of the declassified CIA documents used in this thesis were accessed in digital form from The National Security Archive, provided by the George Washington University. I specify the type of report or presentation to the most specific degree possible. In some cases the documents have had the title redacted. In these cases, I assign the first non-redacted line in the text as the title. The dates are all presented in YYYY MM DD format.

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