

9/11 commission staff statement No. 15

The text as submitted to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States
updated 4:24 p.m. ET, Wed., June 16, 2004

Overview of the Enemy

Staff Statement No. 15

Members of the Commission, with your help, your staff has developed initial findings to present to the public on the nature of the enemy that carried out the September 11 attacks. In this statement, we will focus on al Qaeda's history and evolution, and how this organization came to pose such a serious threat to the United States. These findings may help frame some of the issues for this hearing and inform the development of your judgments and recommendations.

This report reflects the results of our work so far. We remain ready to revise our understanding of events as our investigation progresses. This staff statement represents the collective effort of a number of members of our staff. Douglas MacEachin, Yoel Tobin, Nicole Grandimo, Sarah Linden, Thomas Dowling, John Roth, Douglas Greenburg, and Serena Wille did much of the investigative work reflected in this statement.

We were fortunate in being able to build upon a great deal of excellent work already done by the Intelligence Community. Several Executive branch agencies cooperated fully in making available documents and personnel for interviews.

Roots of al Qaeda

In the 1980s a large number of Muslims from the Middle East traveled to Afghanistan to join the Afghan people's war against the Soviet Union, which had invaded in 1979. Usama Bin Ladin was a significant player in this group, then known as the "Afghan Arabs." A multimillionaire from a wealthy Saudi family, Bin Ladin used his personal wealth and connections to rich Arab contributors to facilitate the flow of fighters into Afghanistan.

He provided extensive financing for an entity called the "Bureau of Services" or Maktab al Khidmat. This Bureau operated a recruiting network in Muslim communities throughout the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Western Europe, and the United States. It provided travel funds and guest houses in Pakistan for recruits and volunteers on the road to the Afghan battlefield. Bin Ladin also used his financial network to set up training camps and procure weapons and supplies for Arab fighters. Major Afghan warlords who led forces in the battle against the Soviets also benefited from the use of these camps. Following the defeat of the Soviets in the late 1980s, Bin Ladin formed an organization called "The Foundation" or al Qaeda. Al Qaeda was intended to serve as a foundation upon which to build a global Islamic army.

In 1989, the regime in Sudan, run by a military faction and an Islamic extremist organization called the National Islamic Front, invited Bin Ladin to move there. He sent an advance team to Sudan in 1990 and moved there in mid-1991. Bin Ladin brought resources to Sudan, building roads and helping finance the government's war against separatists in the south. In return, he received permission to establish commercial enterprises and an operational infrastructure to support terrorism.

By 1992, Bin Ladin was focused on attacking the United States. He argued that other extremists, aimed at local rulers or Israel, had not gone far enough; they had not attacked what he called "the head of the snake," the United States. He charged that the United States, in addition to backing Israel, kept in power repressive Arab regimes not true to Islam. He also excoriated the continued presence of U.S. military forces in Saudi Arabia after the Gulf War as a defilement of holy Muslim land.

In Sudan, Bin Ladin built upon the al Qaeda organization he had established back in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda had its own membership roster and a structure of "committees" to guide and oversee such functions as training terrorists, proposing targets, financing operations, and issuing edicts—purportedly grounded in Islamic law—to justify al Qaeda actions.

Included in the structure were:

- The “Shura” or Advisory Council, an inner circle of Bin Ladin’s close associates, most of whom had longstanding ties with him going back to the formative days in Afghanistan; Emir (al Qaeda Shura/ Advisory Council) Foreign Purchases Committee Sharia and Political Committee Finance Committee Training Subcommittee Camp Admin Subcommittee Security Committee Military Committee Information Committee Islamic Army
- A “Sharia” and Political Committee responsible for issuing fatwas—edicts purporting to be grounded in Islamic Law directing or authorizing certain actions—including deadly attacks;
- A Military Committee responsible for proposing targets, gathering ideas for and supporting operations, and managing training camps;
- A Finance Committee responsible for fundraising and budgetary support for training camps, housing costs, living expenses, travel, and the movement of money allocated to operations;
- A Foreign Purchases Committee responsible for acquiring weapons, explosives, and technical equipment;
- A Security Committee responsible for physical protection, intelligence collection and counterintelligence; and An Information Committee in charge of propaganda.

This organizational structure should not be read as defining a hierarchical chain of command for specific terrorist operations. It served as a means for coordinating functions and providing material support to operations. But once a specific operation was decided upon it would be assigned to a carefully selected clandestine cell, headed by a senior al Qaeda operative who reported personally to Bin Ladin.

With al Qaeda as its foundation, Bin Ladin sought to build a broader Islamic army that also included terrorist groups from Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Oman, Tunisia, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Somalia, and Eritrea. Not all groups from these states agreed to join, but at least one from each did. With a multinational council intended to promote common goals, coordinate targeting, and authorize asset sharing for terrorist operations, this Islamic force represented a new level of collaboration among diverse terrorist groups.

Bin Ladin set up training camps and weapons and supply depots in Sudan. He used them to support al Qaeda and other members of the Islamic army. Bin Ladin’s operatives used positions in his businesses as cover to acquire weapons, explosives, and technical equipment such as surveillance devices. To facilitate these activities, Sudanese intelligence officers provided false passports and shipping documents. At this time al Qaeda’s operational role was mainly to provide funds, training, and weapons for attacks carried out by allied groups.

Contrary to popular understanding, Bin Ladin did not fund al Qaeda through a personal fortune and a network of businesses. Instead, al Qaeda relied primarily on a fundraising network developed over time. Bin Ladin never received a \$300 million inheritance. From about 1970 until approximately 1994, he received about \$1 million per year—a significant sum, but hardly a \$300 million fortune that could be used to fund a global jihad. According to Saudi officials and representatives of the Bin Ladin family, Bin Ladin was divested of his share of his family’s wealth. Bin Ladin owned a number of businesses and other assets in Sudan, although most were small or not economically viable.

Launching attacks on the United States

A December 1992 explosion outside two hotels in Aden, Yemen—a stopover for U.S. troops en route to Somalia—killed one Australian tourist but no Americans. U.S. intelligence would learn four years later that the attack was carried out by a Yemeni terrorist group whose leader was close to Bin Ladin, and whose members reportedly trained at a Bin Ladin-funded camp in Sudan that was run by a member of the al Qaeda Military Committee.

In October 1993, two Black Hawk helicopters were shot down and 18 U.S. soldiers were killed in Mogadishu, Somalia. U.S. intelligence learned in the ensuing years that Bin Ladin’s organization had been heavily engaged in assisting warlords who attacked U.S. forces in Somalia. The head of the al Qaeda Military Committee, from a command center set up in Nairobi, Kenya, reportedly sent scores of trainers into Somalia, including experts in the use of rocket propelled grenades, the same kind of weapon used to shoot down the helicopters. Operatives dispatched to Somalia were told their mission was “to kill U.S. troops, incite violence against U.S. personnel, and undermine the success of the U.S. mission.” Sources have described several of these operatives bragging that their work had caused the defeat of the Americans. Bin Ladin and his senior associates touted the subsequent withdrawal of U.S. forces from Somalia in March 1994 as a victory for the mujahidin and a demonstration that the Americans could be forced to retreat. Two additional attacks on U.S.

forces in Saudi Arabia took place during 1995-96 for which the evidence of Bin Ladin's involvement is ambiguous.

On November 13, 1995, a car bomb exploded in Riyadh outside the Office of Program Management of the U.S.-trained Saudi Arabian National Guard. Five Americans and two officials from India were killed. Saudi authorities arrested four suspects, whom they quickly convicted and beheaded. The Saudis televised confessions of three perpetrators indicating that their actions had been influenced by Bin Ladin, but there was no charge that Bin Ladin was directly involved. Later, in a March 1997 CNN interview, Bin Ladin denied responsibility for the attack but said he was sorry he had not been a participant. By this time U.S. intelligence learned that a year-and-a-half before the bombing of the Saudi National Guard facility, al Qaeda leaders and members of other aligned groups had decided to attack U.S. targets in Saudi Arabia and directed a team to ship explosives there. The shipment was a case study in collaboration: Bin Ladin supplied the money for purchasing the explosives; the Sudanese Ministry of Defense served as the conduit for bringing them into Sudan; they were stored briefly in the warehouse of one of Bin Ladin's business facilities; transported in a Bin Ladin company truck under the cover of Ministry of Defense invoice papers; moved to a warehouse provided by the Ministry of Defense at Port Sudan on the Red Sea; and then transported on a Bin Ladin-owned boat to Islamic army operatives residing in Yemen. From there they were moved by land to the eastern part of Saudi Arabia. Bin Ladin and his organization's role in this attack remains unclear. The attack, however, was consistent with the described purpose of the shipment.

On June 26, 1996, an explosion ripped through a building in the Khobar Towers apartment complex housing U.S. Air Force personnel in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. Nineteen Americans were killed and 372 others were injured. Subsequent investigation concluded that the attack had been carried out by a Saudi Shia Hezbollah group with assistance from Iran. Intelligence obtained shortly after the bombing, however, also supported suspicions of Bin Ladin's involvement. There were reports in the months preceding the attack that Bin Ladin was seeking to facilitate a shipment of explosives, to Saudi Arabia. On the day of the attack, Bin Ladin was congratulated by other members of the Islamic army.

In light of the historical animosity between Shia and Sunni Muslims, the confirmation of the Hezbollah role in the attack led many to conclude that Bin Ladin's Sunni-populated organization would not have been involved. Later intelligence, however, showed far greater potential for collaboration between Hezbollah and al Qaeda than many had previously thought. A few years before the attack, Bin Ladin's representatives and Iranian officials had discussed putting aside Shia-Sunni divisions to cooperate against the common enemy. A small group of al Qaeda operatives subsequently traveled to Iran and Hezbollah camps in Lebanon for training in explosives, intelligence and security. Bin Laden reportedly showed particular interest in Hezbollah's truck bombing tactics in Lebanon in 1983 that had killed 241 U.S. Marines. We have seen strong but indirect evidence that his organization did in fact play some as yet unknown role in the Khobar attack.

Bin Ladin also explored possible cooperation with Iraq during his time in Sudan, despite his opposition to Hussein's secular regime. Bin Ladin had in fact at one time sponsored anti-Saddam Islamists in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Sudanese, to protect their own ties with Iraq, reportedly persuaded Bin Ladin to cease this support and arranged for contacts between Iraq and al Qaeda. A senior Iraqi intelligence officer reportedly made three visits to Sudan, finally meeting Bin Ladin in 1994. Bin Ladin is said to have requested space to establish training camps, as well as assistance in procuring weapons, but Iraq apparently never responded. There have been reports that contacts between Iraq and al Qaeda also occurred after Bin Ladin had returned to Afghanistan, but they do not appear to have resulted in a collaborative relationship. Two senior Bin Ladin associates have adamantly denied that any ties existed between al Qaeda and Iraq. We have no credible evidence that Iraq and al Qaeda cooperated on attacks against the United States. Whether Bin Ladin and his organization had roles in the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center and the thwarted Manila plot to blow up a dozen U.S. commercial aircraft in 1995 remains a matter of substantial uncertainty.

Ramzi Yousef, who was a lead operative in both plots, trained in camps in Afghanistan that were funded by Bin Ladin and used to train many al Qaeda operatives. Whether he was then or later became a member of al Qaeda remains a matter of debate, but he was at a minimum part of a loose network of extremist Sunni Islamists who, like Bin Ladin, began to focus their rage on the United States. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who provided some funding for Yousef in the 1993 WTC attack and was his operational partner in the Manila plot, later did join al Qaeda and masterminded the al Qaeda 9/11 attack. He was not, however, an al Qaeda member at the time of the Manila plot. A number of other individuals connected to the 1993 and 1995 plots or to some of the plotters either were or later became associates of Bin Ladin. We have no conclusive evidence,

however, that at the time of the plots any of them was operating under Bin Ladin's direction.

What is clear is that these plots were major benchmarks in the evolving Islamist threat to the United States and foreshadowed later attacks that were indisputably carried out by al Qaeda under Bin Ladin's direction. Like the later attacks, they were aimed at demolishing symbols of American power and killing enormous numbers of Americans. Like Bin Ladin, Yousef was willing to employ any means to achieve these ends, and contemplated use of non-conventional weapons. In one of his television interviews Bin Ladin characterized Ramzi Yousef as a "symbol and a teacher" that would drive Muslims suffering from U.S. policy to "transfer the battle into the United States."

In May 1996, Bin Ladin left Sudan and moved back to Afghanistan. His departure resulted from a combination of pressures from the United States, other western governments, and Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Libya, all three of which faced indigenous terrorist groups supported by Bin Ladin. The pressure on Sudan intensified in April 1996 when the UN sanctioned Sudan for harboring individuals from the group that had attempted to assassinate Egyptian President Mubarak in June 1995.

At the time of Bin Ladin's move to Afghanistan, the U.S. intelligence community had uncovered many details of his financial and business structures and their use to support terrorist groups. It was not until later in 1996, however, after he was back in

Afghanistan, that new sources disclosed the nature of his organizational structure, his commitment to attacking the United States, and the involvement of his organization in attacks that had already been carried out.

Changing fortunes in Afghanistan

Bin Ladin's departure from Sudan marked a setback for him. The Saudi government had frozen his assets three years earlier, and the Sudanese government expropriated his assets there after he left Sudan. The financial stresses contributed to strained relations with some of his associates, who used the move back to Afghanistan as an occasion to break from al Qaeda.

There were, nonetheless, some benefits to the move. In an effort to reduce external pressures, Sudan had made some efforts to keep Bin Ladin under control and prohibited him from making public diatribes. Afghanistan's lack of a central government gave him greater latitude to promote his own agenda. Moreover, al Qaeda had never entirely left the region: even when headquartered in Sudan, it had used Pakistan and Afghanistan as a regional base and training center supporting Islamic insurgencies in Tajikistan, Kashmir, and Chechnya.

In August 1996, Bin Ladin made public his war against the United States. In his "Declaration of Holy War on the Americans Occupying the Country of the Two Sacred Places" (Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia), Bin Ladin called on Muslims worldwide to put aside their differences and join in deadly attacks against U.S. forces to compel their withdrawal from the Arabian Peninsula.

A month after this declaration, the Taliban, an Afghan faction supported by Pakistan, seized control of Kabul, the nation's capital. Bin Ladin began cementing his ties with the Taliban, and they soon forged a close alliance. The Taliban paid a great price for this alliance in the form of outside pressure, isolation, UN sanctions, and, after 9/11, the destruction of its regime. But prior to 9/11, the Taliban also benefited from its relationship with al Qaeda: Bin Ladin provided significant financial support to the Taliban, and supplied hundreds, if not thousands, of fighters to support the Taliban in its ongoing war against other factions in northern Afghanistan. From al Qaeda's perspective, the alliance provided a sanctuary in which to train and indoctrinate recruits, import weapons, forge ties with other jihad groups and leaders, and plan terrorist operations. Al Qaeda fighters could travel freely within the country; enter and exit without visas or any immigration procedures; and enjoy the use of official Afghan Ministry of Defense license plates. Al Qaeda also used the Afghan state-owned Ariana Airlines to courier money into the country.

There were also ideological ties. Both the Taliban and Bin Ladin espoused the vision of a pure Islamic state. Bin Ladin reportedly swore an oath of loyalty to Taliban leader Mullah Omar. Relations between Bin Ladin and the Taliban leadership were sometimes tense, and some Taliban leaders opposed the al Qaeda presence. In the end, however, Mullah Omar never broke with Bin Ladin and al Qaeda.

Similarly, Pakistan did not break with the Taliban until after 9/11, although it was well aware that the Taliban

was harboring Bin Ladin. The Taliban's ability to provide Bin Ladin a haven in the face of international pressure and UN sanctions was significantly facilitated by Pakistani support. Pakistan benefited from the Taliban-al Qaeda relationship, as Bin Ladin's camps trained and equipped fighters for Pakistan's ongoing struggle with India over Kashmir.

By early 1998, Bin Ladin was also in the early stages of what would become a merger of his al Qaeda and another major terrorist group, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad. On February 23, 1998, Bin Ladin and the leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Ayman Zawahiri, published a fatwa that announced a "ruling to kill the Americans and their allies." It was also signed by the heads of three other groups, but their signatures were more a matter of show than substance. Unlike earlier statements, this fatwa explicitly instructed followers to kill "civilians and military." The decree said this ruling was "an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it."

New attacks on the United States

On August 7, 1998 nearly simultaneous truck bombs ravaged the U.S. embassies in the East African capitals of Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The Nairobi embassy was destroyed, and 213 people were killed, including 12 Americans. About 5,000 people were injured. In Dar es Salaam 11 more were killed, none of them American, and 85 were injured.

U.S. intelligence learned a few months later that the targeting of the U.S. embassy in Nairobi began in late 1993. It was one of more than a dozen potential targets analyzed by a team residing with the same Nairobi cell used to provide assistance to the Somalis. In January 1994, al Qaeda leaders concluded that the U.S. embassy in Nairobi would be easy to attack. Preparations for the attack did not begin in earnest until late spring 1998, and the bombs were only assembled a few days before the attacks. By the night before the embassy bombing, all al Qaeda members except the suicide squads and a few people assigned to clean up the evidence trail had left East Africa. Bin Ladin and other al Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan had also left for the countryside in expectation of U.S. retaliation. The attacks on the U.S. embassies in East Africa in the summer of 1998 demonstrated a new operational form—they were planned, directed, and executed by al Qaeda, under the direct supervision of Bin Ladin and his chief aides.

On October 12, 2000, an explosives-laden boat tore through the side of the U.S.S. Cole anchored in Aden, Yemen. Seventeen members of the Cole crew were killed, and another 39 were wounded. In the course of the ensuing investigation, U.S. officials learned that an earlier attempt to attack a U.S. warship had been made in January 2000, aimed at the U.S.S. The Sullivans, but had failed because the boat was overloaded with explosives and sank. The boat was salvaged, a new martyr crew was selected, and the attack was successfully executed ten months later.

The operational commander of the attack was Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, who had previously assisted one of the East African embassy bombers. He had arrived in Yemen in late 1999 to supervise the purchase of the boat used in the attack, and to direct the casing and execution of the attacks. Nashiri was assisted by an al Qaeda member close to Bin Ladin, Tawfiq bin Attash ("Khallad"), who supplied the explosives used in the attack.

This attack followed the operational pattern demonstrated in the East African embassy bombings—it was directed by key al Qaeda operatives, using equipment and explosives purchased with al Qaeda funds, and executed by members of al Qaeda willing to be martyrs for the cause. By mid-November 2000, U.S. investigators were aware of the roles Nashiri and Khallad had played in the attack, and that they were senior al Qaeda operatives. The one part that could not be ascertained at the time was whether the attack had been carried out under direct orders from Bin Ladin himself. This could not be confirmed until Nashiri and Khallad were captured in November 2002 and April 2003, respectively.

At the same time, however, two disrupted Millennium plots demonstrate that Bin Ladin remained willing to provide support to attacks initiated by more independent actors. Neither intended Millennium attack was a traditional al Qaeda operation: rather, both were planned and orchestrated by independent extremist groups which received training and assistance from al Qaeda-affiliated figures. One was a plot to destroy hotels and tourist sites in Amman, Jordan. It was planned and carried out by a Palestinian radical and his partner, an American citizen, who sought to kill Americans. The other was the attempted bombing of Los Angeles International Airport. It was orchestrated by Ahmed Ressam, who conceived and prepared for the attack on his own. Ressam commented after his arrest that he had offered to let Bin Ladin claim credit for the attack, in return for providing Ressam future funding. Both Ressam and the Jordanian cell took what they needed from

al Qaeda-associated camps and personnel, but did not follow the traditional al Qaeda top-down planning and approval model.

Terrorist training camps

Many of the operatives in the African Embassy and Cole attacks attended training camps in Afghanistan, as did all 19 of the 9/11 hijackers. There was a mutually reinforcing relationship between the camps and terrorist operations: the camps provided operatives for terrorist attacks, and successful attacks boosted camp recruitment and attendance. The training at al Qaeda and associated camps was multifaceted in nature. A worldwide jihad needed terrorists who could bomb embassies or hijack airliners, but it also needed foot soldiers for the Taliban in its war against the Northern Alliance, and guerrillas who could shoot down Russian helicopters in Chechnya or ambush Indian units in Kashmir. Thus, most recruits received training that was primarily geared toward conventional warfare. Terrorist training was provided mostly to the best and most ardent recruits. The quality of the training provided at al Qaeda and other jihadist camps was apparently quite good. There was coordination with regard to curriculum, and great emphasis on ideological and religious indoctrination. Instruction underscored that the United States and Israel were evil, and that the rulers of Arab countries were illegitimate.

The camps created a climate in which trainees and other personnel were free to think creatively about ways to commit mass murder. According to a senior al Qaeda associate, various ideas were floated by mujahidin in Afghanistan: taking over a launcher and forcing Russian scientists to fire a nuclear missile at the United States; mounting mustard gas or cyanide attacks against Jewish areas in Iran; dispensing poison gas into the air conditioning system of a targeted building; and, last but not least, hijacking an aircraft and crashing it into an airport terminal or nearby city.

Trainees in the camps did not focus solely on causing the deaths of enemies. Bin Ladin portrayed "martyrdom" in the service of jihad as a highly desirable fate, and many recruits were eager to go on suicide missions.

As time passed and al Qaeda repeatedly and successfully hit U.S. targets, Bin Ladin became a legendary figure among jihadists both inside and outside of Afghanistan. He lectured at the camps. His perceived stature and charisma reinforced the zeal of the trainees. Bin Ladin also personally evaluated trainees' suitability for terrorist operations. The camps were able to operate only because of the worldwide network of recruiters, travel facilitators, and document forgers who vetted would-be trainees and helped them get in and out of Afghanistan. There are strong indications that elements of both the Pakistani and Iranian governments frequently turned a blind eye to this transit through their respective countries.

We can conservatively say that thousands of men, perhaps as many as 20,000, trained in Bin Ladin-supported camps in Afghanistan between his May 1996 return and September 11, 2001. Of those, only a small percentage went on to receive advanced terrorist training.

Funding al Qaeda in Afghanistan

After establishing itself in Afghanistan, al Qaeda relied on well-placed financial facilitators and diversions of funds from Islamic charities. The financial facilitators raised money from witting and unwitting donors, primarily in the Gulf countries, and particularly in Saudi Arabia. The facilitators also appeared to rely heavily on certain imams at mosques, also primarily in the Gulf countries, who were willing to divert mandatory charitable donations known as zakat. Al Qaeda also collected money from employees of corrupted charities. Operatives either penetrated specific foreign branch offices of large, international charities, particularly those with lax external oversight and ineffective internal controls, or controlled entire smaller charities, including access to their bank accounts.

There is no convincing evidence that any government financially supported al Qaeda before 9/11 (other than limited support provided by the Taliban after Bin Ladin first arrived in Afghanistan). Some governments may have turned a blind eye to al Qaeda's fundraising activities. Saudi Arabia has long been considered the primary source of al Qaeda funding, but we found no evidence that the Saudi government as an institution or senior officials within the Saudi government funded al Qaeda. Still, al Qaeda found fertile fundraising ground in the Kingdom, where extreme religious views are common and charitable giving is essential to the culture and, until recently, subject to very limited oversight. The United States has never been a primary source of al Qaeda funding, although some funds raised in the United States likely made their way to al Qaeda. No persuasive evidence exists that al Qaeda relied on the drug trade as an important source of revenue, or funded itself through trafficking in diamonds from African states engaged in civil wars.

After raising money, al Qaeda frequently moved its money by hawala, an informal and ancient trust-based system for transferring funds. Al Qaeda also used couriers as a secure, albeit slower, way to move funds. Bin Ladin relied on the established hawala networks operating in Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, and throughout the Middle East to transfer funds efficiently. Hawaladars associated with al Qaeda may have used banks to move and store money, as did various al Qaeda fundraisers and operatives outside of Afghanistan, but there is little evidence that Bin Ladin or his core al Qaeda members used banks during this period.

Al Qaeda's money was distributed as quickly as it was raised—what was made was spent. The CIA estimates that al Qaeda spent \$30 million annually, including paying for terrorist operations, maintaining terrorist training camps, paying salaries to jihadists, contributing to the Taliban, funding fighters in Afghanistan, and sporadically contributing to related terrorist organizations. The largest expense was payments to the Taliban, which totaled an estimated \$10-20 million per year. Actual terrorist operations were relatively cheap. Although there is evidence that al Qaeda experienced funding shortfalls as part of the cyclical fundraising process (with more money coming during the holy month of Ramadan), we are not aware of any evidence indicating that terrorist acts were interrupted as a result.

Al Qaeda today

Since the September 11 attacks and the defeat of the Taliban, al Qaeda's funding has decreased significantly. The arrests or deaths of several important financial facilitators have decreased the amount of money al Qaeda has raised and increased the costs and difficulty of raising and moving that money. Some entirely corrupt charities are now out of business, with many of their principals killed or captured, although some charities may still be providing support to al Qaeda. Moreover, it appears that the al Qaeda attacks within Saudi Arabia in May and November of 2003 have reduced—perhaps drastically—al Qaeda's ability to raise funds from Saudi sources. Both an increase in Saudi enforcement and a more negative perception of al Qaeda by potential donors have cut its income.

At the same time, al Qaeda's expenditures have decreased as well, largely because it no longer provides substantial funding to the Taliban or runs a network of training camps in Afghanistan. Despite the apparent reduction in overall funding, it remains relatively easy for al Qaeda to find the relatively small sums required to fund terrorist operations. Prior to 9/11, al Qaeda was a centralized organization which used Afghanistan as a war room to strategize, plan attacks, and dispatch operatives worldwide. Bin Ladin approved all al Qaeda operations, often selecting the targets and operatives. After al Qaeda lost Afghanistan after 9/11, it fundamentally changed. The organization is far more decentralized. Bin Ladin's seclusion forced operational commanders and cell leaders to assume greater authority; they are now making the command decisions previously made by him.

Bin Ladin continues to inspire many of the operatives he trained and dispersed, as well as smaller Islamic extremist groups and individual fighters who share his ideology. As a result, al Qaeda today is more a loose collection of regional networks with a greatly weakened central organization. It pushes these networks to carry out attacks, and assists them by providing guidance, funding, and training in skills such as bomb-making or urban combat.

Al Qaeda remains extremely interested in conducting chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear attacks. In 1994, al Qaeda operatives attempted to purchase uranium for \$1.5 million; the uranium proved to be fake. Though this attempt failed, al Qaeda continues to pursue its strategic objective of obtaining a nuclear weapon. Likewise, it remains interested in using a radiological dispersal device or "dirty bomb," a conventional explosive designed to spread radioactive material. Documents found in al Qaeda facilities contain accurate information on the usage and impact of such weapons. Al Qaeda had an ambitious biological weapons program and was making advances in its ability to produce anthrax prior to September 11. According to Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet, al Qaeda's ability to conduct an anthrax attack is one of the most immediate threats the United States is likely to face. Similarly, al Qaeda may seek to conduct a chemical attack by using widely-available industrial chemicals, or by attacking a chemical plant or a shipment of hazardous materials.

The Intelligence Community expects that the trend toward attacks intended to cause ever higher casualties will continue. Al Qaeda and other extremist groups will likely continue to exploit leaks of national security information in the media, open-source information on techniques such as mixing explosives, and advances in electronics. It may modify traditional tactics in order to prevent detection or interdiction by counterterrorist forces. Regardless of the tactic, al Qaeda is actively striving to attack the United States and inflict mass

casualties.

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