

# Congressional Testimony

## **“Terrorism in Africa: The Imminent Threat to the United States”**

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**Hearing before House Committee on Homeland Security  
Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence**

Washington, DC  
April 29, 2015



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Chairman King, Ranking Member Higgins and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me here today to discuss the threat posed by jihadist groups in Africa. In Chairman King's announcement of this hearing, he rightly argued that while much attention has been given to the threats posed by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al Qaeda in the heart of the Middle East and South Asia, "we must also focus on the imminent and growing threat posed by their affiliates operating in Africa."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the jihadist organizations headquartered outside of Africa are strongly tied to various groups operating inside the continent. Both ISIS (or the Islamic State) and al Qaeda maintain international networks that stretch across Africa.

In preparing today's testimony, I reviewed the history of al Qaeda's plotting against the West. A number of facts demonstrate that al Qaeda's presence in Africa has been tied to these efforts. For instance, declassified documents recovered in Osama bin Laden's compound show that he ordered al Qaeda's branches in Africa to select candidates capable of striking inside the U.S. Bin Laden also ordered al Qaeda's African branches to coordinate their work with his "external operations" team, which was responsible for plotting attacks against Western interests. Some of al Qaeda's most senior leaders, including those who have overseen al Qaeda's planned attacks in the West, have come from Africa. Senior al Qaeda leaders embedded in Shabaab have also trained operatives to attack in Europe. I discuss this evidence in detail in the final section of my written testimony.

Complex tribal, ethnic, and religious dynamics mean that any summary of the situation in Africa will be necessarily incomplete. However, I will attempt to distill some themes that are important for understanding the rising jihadist threat in the continent. While there are important differences between ISIS and al Qaeda, and the two are at odds with one another in a variety of ways, they are both inherently anti-American and anti-Western. Thus, they constitute a threat to our interests everywhere their jihadists fight.

Since the beginning of the year, the ISIS branch in Libya has repeatedly attacked foreign interests. The group has bombed and/or assaulted with small arms the Algerian, Moroccan, Iranian, South Korean and Spanish embassies in Tripoli. Fortunately, these attacks have caused only a few casualties, as foreign governments pulled most of their diplomatic personnel out of Libya months ago. But these incidents show the organization's followers are deeply hostile to any foreign presence.

Other ISIS attacks on foreigners in Libya have been more lethal and at least two Americans have been killed by ISIS' so-called "provinces." In January, the group's fighters launched a complex assault on the Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli. Ten people, including David Berry, a former U.S. Marine serving as a security contractor, were

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<sup>1</sup> <http://homeland.house.gov/hearing/subcommittee-hearing-terrorism-africa-imminent-threat-united-states>

killed.<sup>2</sup> In August 2014, jihadists from the ISIS province in the Sinai killed William Henderson, an American petroleum worker.<sup>3</sup>

Some of ISIS' most gruesome acts in North Africa have come with pointed threats against the West. In February, the jihadists beheaded 21 Egyptian Copts. The propaganda video showing the murders was entitled, "A Message Signed with Blood to the Nation of the Cross." ISIS explicitly threatened Italy in the video and also made it clear that they would target Christians simply for adhering to a different faith. Earlier this month, ISIS' branch followed up by killing a large group of Ethiopian Christians.

In March, ISIS claimed responsibility for the massacre at the Bardo National Museum in Tunis. More than 20 people were killed in the assault, which targeted foreign tourists. Citizens of Britain, France, Colombia, Germany, Italy, Japan, Poland, and Spain were among the victims. Although ISIS was quick to lay claim to the museum slayings, the reality is more complicated.<sup>4</sup> The Tunisian government has blamed the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade, which is part of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), an official branch of al Qaeda.<sup>5</sup> Based on publicly-available information, it appears that the attackers may have joined ISIS, but the operation itself was planned by the AQIM brigade's leadership.

Al Qaeda's international network continues to launch high-profile attacks across the continent. Some of these operations directly target foreigners. Earlier this month, Shabaab, al Qaeda's official branch in Somalia, killed more than 140 people at the Garissa University College in Kenya. The gunmen reportedly separated out non-Muslims for killing, letting many Muslims go.<sup>6</sup> This shows that the organization, like other parts of al Qaeda, is very concerned about the impact of its violence in the Muslim-majority world. In this respect and others, the Garissa attack was similar to Shabaab's siege of the Westgate shopping mall in September 2013. More than 60 people were killed, with Shabaab's gunmen singling out non-Muslims. Shabaab's attacks in Kenya and other neighboring countries are part of what the UN has

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<sup>2</sup> Rich Schapiro, "Gunmen take hostages in luxury Libyan hotel, kill 8 including 1 American," *New York Daily News*, January 27, 2015; (<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/gunmen-hostages-libyan-hotel-kill-3-guards-article-1.2093208>).

<sup>3</sup> Cassandra Vinograd, Charlene Gubash and Gabe Gutierrez, "ISIS-Linked Ansar Beit al-Maqdis Says It Killed U.S. Oil Worker William Henderson," *nbcnews.com*, December 1, 2014; (<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/isis-linked-ansar-beit-al-maqdis-says-it-killed-u-n258786>).

<sup>4</sup> Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, "Did the Islamic State Exaggerate Its Role in the Bardo Museum Attack?," FDD Policy Brief, March 30, 2015; (<http://www.defenddemocracy.org/media-hit/gartenstein-ross-daveed-did-the-islamic-state-exaggerate-its-role-in-the-bardo-museum-attack/>).

<sup>5</sup> Yaqin Hussam al-Din, "Algeria and Tunisia join forces to fight 'terrorism'," *al-Araby al-Jadeed*, March 30, 2015; (<http://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/politics/2015/4/1/algeria-and-tunisia-join-forces-to-fight-terrorism>).

<sup>6</sup> "Somali Islamist rebels claim attack on Kenyan university: spokesman," Reuters, April 2, 2015.

identified as the group's "regional" strategy.<sup>7</sup> Shabaab has undoubtedly suffered setbacks since the height of its power in East Africa, but it still operates a prolific insurgency inside Somalia, while also seeking to expand its capabilities in the surrounding countries. In fact, America's counterterrorism efforts in East Africa seem to be principally aimed at the part of Shabaab tasked with exporting terrorism throughout the region.<sup>8</sup>

As we've seen over the past several years, al Qaeda-affiliated groups in Africa will attack American and Western interests when the opportunity presents itself. The September 11, 2012 attack on the U.S. Mission and Annex in Benghazi and the raid on the U.S. Embassy in Tunis three days later were carried out by al Qaeda-linked groups.<sup>9</sup> The Ansar al Sharia organizations in Libya and Tunisia, both of which are tied to AQIM, were involved in these assaults on America's diplomatic presence in North Africa. In early 2013, terrorists commanded by Mokhtar Belmokhtar killed dozens of foreign workers during the siege of the In Amenas gas facility in Algeria. Belmokhtar, who is openly loyal to Ayman al Zawahiri, claimed responsibility for operation on behalf of al Qaeda.

There is no doubt, therefore, that both ISIS and al Qaeda pose a threat to Western interests in Africa. Below, I explore current trends within both organizations, highlighting some ways these international networks may threaten Americans both home and abroad. But first, I briefly look at the different strategies ISIS and al Qaeda are employing to build up their networks.

## **Two rival jihadist models**

In Africa, as elsewhere, we are witnessing two rival models vying for power among jihadists. While ISIS and al Qaeda share some of the same long-term goals, the two sides have adopted radically different approaches to marketing their ideology and expanding their base of support.

ISIS uses consistent branding, describing its followers around the world as part of a growing "caliphate" led by Abu Bakr al Baghdadi (the self-proclaimed caliph "Ibrahim I"). ISIS branches are branded as the caliphate's "provinces," whether they control significant territory or not. ISIS also markets its over-the-top brutality to project strength and intimidate its enemies. (Al Qaeda long ago decided that ISIS'

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations Security Council, "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to Security Council resolution 2060 (2012)," July 12, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Bill Roggio, "US targets senior Shabaab intelligence official in airstrike," *The Long War Journal*, March 14, 2015; (<http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/03/us-targets-senior-shabaab-intelligence-official-in-airstrike.php>).

<sup>9</sup> The U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and other official entities have confirmed the role of multiple al Qaeda-affiliated groups in the Benghazi attack. See, for example: Thomas Joscelyn, "Senate report: Terrorists 'affiliated' with multiple al Qaeda groups involved in Benghazi attack," *The Long War Journal*, January 15, 2014; ([http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/01/intelligence\\_on\\_al.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/01/intelligence_on_al.php)).

tactics, such as beheadings, were counterproductive for its cause.) The organization wants both its supporters and its foes to believe it is an ever-expanding menace that cannot be stopped. Because the group is so heavily invested in this type of messaging, it is relatively easy to track the organization's international organization. Of course, certain aspects of ISIS's operations remain hidden from public view. But ISIS broadcasts its presence around the world as loudly as it can.

Al Qaeda, on the other hand, has adopted precisely the opposite approach. Whereas ISIS wants people to see its international footprint, al Qaeda goes to great lengths to hide much, but not all, of its organizational structure. Al Qaeda's strategy is far more clandestine in nature. In contrast to ISIS' uniform branding, al Qaeda has adopted numerous brands, which serve to mask the extent of its influence, inculcate al Qaeda's radical ideology in local populations, and attract support from individuals, organizations and governments that may not want to be seen as openly assisting al Qaeda. All of this makes tracking al Qaeda's international network a far more difficult task.

Al Qaeda has played this game – using multiple brands, masking the extent of its influence – repeatedly in Africa. Consider the following examples.

In February 2012, Shabaab in Somalia and al Qaeda's senior leadership announced their formal merger.<sup>10</sup> Some analysts have incorrectly argued that Osama bin Laden rejected a formal merger when he was alive, and it was his successor, Ayman al Zawahiri, who decided to merge with Shabaab. But documents recovered in Osama bin Laden's compound tell a different story. Bin Laden thought of Shabaab as part of al Qaeda's international network well before his death.<sup>11</sup> Bin Laden devoted al Qaeda's resources to helping Shabaab. For example, he assigned one of his key lieutenants to research Shabaab's governance efforts and the applicable sharia laws. The al Qaeda master simply didn't want to announce the relationship, because he feared it would bring more international pressure on the East African group and limit its ability to raise funds from wealthy donors throughout the Gulf.<sup>12</sup> In other words, bin Laden sought to conceal al Qaeda's relationship with Shabaab as much as possible.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Bill Roggio and Thomas Joscelyn, "Shabaab formally joins al Qaeda," *The Long War Journal*, February 9, 2012; ([http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/02/shabaab\\_formally\\_joi.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/02/shabaab_formally_joi.php)).

<sup>11</sup> See Government Exhibit 425 in the trial of Abid Naseer. The document, dated August 7, 2010, is a letter written from Osama bin Laden to Atiyah Abd al Rahman. It can be found here: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/257160502/Bin-Laden-raid-documents>.

<sup>12</sup> SOCOM-2012-0000005. The document, dated August 7, 2010, is a letter from bin Laden to Mukhtar Abu al Zubayr, who was the emir of Shabaab at the time. This document was released in 2012. Bin Laden sets forth his reasons for not announcing the relationship in this letter. It is an attachment to Government Exhibit 425, which is referenced above and was released earlier this year. Bin Laden also explains his reasoning in Exhibit 425.

<sup>13</sup> Bin Laden's two letters explaining why Shabaab should hide its relationship with al Qaeda are dated August 7, 2010. Incredibly, my colleague Bill Roggio reported just over one week later, on August 15, 2010, that bin Laden told Shabaab to keep the relationship secret. See: Bill Roggio, "Al

Similarly, AQIM does not typically advertise its links to the aforementioned Ansar al Sharia groups in Libya and Tunisia. However, both the United Nations' National Security Council and the U.S. government have formally recognized those connections.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Ansar al Sharia Libya was led by an al Qaeda loyalist named Mohammed al Zahawi. But Zahawi's past, including the fact that he had personally met with Osama bin Laden in the 1990s and adopted al Qaeda's jihadist program, did not become publicly known until after Zahawi's death was confirmed.<sup>15</sup> Astute observers could see from the beginning that these Ansar al Sharia groups were operating as part of al Qaeda's international network, but al Qaeda does not advertise this relationship the same way ISIS markets its presence in North Africa. This has led to much confusion in the public reporting.

In a report published in August 2012 ("Al Qaeda in Libya: A Profile"), the Defense Department's Combating Terrorism Technical Support Office (CTTSO) concluded that al Qaeda had a clandestine strategy for building up its presence inside Libya.<sup>16</sup> The CTTSO surmised that al Qaeda was using alternative names, such as Ansar al Sharia, to hide its designs and that senior terrorists inside the country were communicating with al Qaeda's senior leadership in Pakistan. Documents recovered in Osama bin Laden's compound show that al Qaeda operatives were, in fact, dispatched to Libya early on in the uprisings against Muammar al Qaddafi.<sup>17</sup> They were tasked with organizing al Qaeda's efforts, but their presence was unannounced.

These are just some examples of how al Qaeda deliberately hides its presence in African countries.<sup>18</sup> This simple tactic has led to some deep biases in the public reporting on jihadism in Africa and elsewhere. Namely, the extent of al Qaeda's international network is consistently *underestimated*. And, in some ways, ISIS'

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Queda advises Shabaab to keep low profile on links, attack US interests," *The Long War Journal*, August 15, 2010; ([http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/08/al\\_queda\\_advices\\_sha.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/08/al_queda_advices_sha.php)).

<sup>14</sup> See, for example: Thomas Joscelyn, "UN recognizes ties between Ansar al Sharia in Libya, al Qaeda," *The Long War Journal*, November 19, 2014; ([http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/11/un\\_designates\\_ansar.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/11/un_designates_ansar.php)).

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "Ansar al Sharia Libya leader met with Osama bin Laden, followed his 'methodology'," *The Long War Journal*, February 11, 2015; ([http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/02/ansar\\_al\\_sharia\\_liby\\_2.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/02/ansar_al_sharia_liby_2.php)).

<sup>16</sup> The report can be found here: <http://fas.org/irp/world/para/aq-libya-loc.pdf> For a summary of the report, see: Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda's plan for Libya highlighted in congressional report," *The Long War Journal*, September 21, 2012; ([http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/09/al\\_qedas\\_plan\\_for\\_l.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/09/al_qedas_plan_for_l.php)).

<sup>17</sup> See Government Exhibit 431 in the trial of Abid Naseer. This letter to bin Laden was written by Atiyah Abd al Rahman in early April 2011. For more on this issue, see: Thomas Joscelyn, "Osama Bin Laden's Files: The Arab revolutions," *The Long War Journal*, March 3, 2015; (<http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/03/osama-bin-ladens-files-the-arab-revolutions.php>).

<sup>18</sup> Al Qaeda has employed the same practice elsewhere. In Syria, for example, al Qaeda's leaders tried to hide their relationship with the Al Nusrah Front, a regional branch of the organization. Some of the other "rebel" groups in Syria are clearly unannounced al Qaeda front organizations.

international presence has been *overestimated*. For instance, when fighters loyal to ISIS held a parade in Derna last year, multiple press outlets reported that ISIS had taken full control of the Libyan city. Some reports make this claim to this day, even though it is obvious that other jihadist groups still have a significant presence in Derna and ISIS does not dominate the city in its entirety.

This observation is not intended to downplay the seriousness of ISIS' international expansion. ISIS' "provinces" have grown dramatically in some key areas. But exposing al Qaeda's clandestine strategy provides key context for understanding the unfolding story inside Africa.

### **Overview of the ISIS presence in Africa**

In this section, I provide a sketch of the ISIS presence in Africa. It is important to note that while ISIS has grown in Africa, numerous reports and analyses have inaccurately characterized the manner in which the organization has grown. For example, some claimed that AQIM was going to defect to ISIS. There is no evidence that this was considered a serious possibility by AQIM's senior leadership. The organization has explicitly rejected ISIS' claim to rule as a caliphate, reaffirming its allegiance to Ayman al Zawahiri in the process. Similarly, speculative reports have claimed that Shabaab may defect to ISIS. While it is certainly possible that factions within Shabaab may want to join ISIS, there is no indication that the overall organization plans to do so. In fact, Shabaab's propaganda over the past several months has continued to advertise its role in al Qaeda's network.

Still, the ISIS presence in Africa is worrisome for many reasons. As explained above, ISIS' branches have repeatedly attacked foreign interests, while also threatening the West. Consider the following additional observations:

- **The ISIS presence in Africa has grown significantly over the past year, especially in Libya, Tunisia, and the Sinai.** The ISIS announced its merger with a wing of Ansar Bayt al Maqdis ("ABM") late last year, turning the group into one of its so-called "provinces."<sup>19</sup> ISIS' growth in Libya and Tunisia has been fueled mainly by young jihadists. Fighters returning to their home countries from Iraq and Syria have provided a pool of resources for ISIS. As of this writing, ISIS has a major presence in the city of Sirte and significant contingents in Benghazi and Derna, as well as elsewhere in Libya. While Ansar al Sharia in Libya and Tunisia have not defected to ISIS, the "caliphate" has successfully poached some members and leaders from these groups. For example, Ansar al Sharia Libya's chief sharia official in Benghazi joined ISIS earlier this year.
- **ISIS gained a significant footing in West Africa by merging with Boko Haram earlier this year.** The first indications of the ISIS-Boko Haram

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<sup>19</sup> Another Egyptian group, Ajnad Misr, broke off from ABM and appears to be an al Qaeda front group. Ajnad Misr has not joined ISIS.



relationship could be seen in the latter's propaganda, which has been typically poor. Over the past several months, Boko Haram's propaganda became significantly better, showing multiple signs of ISIS' influence. ISIS likely sent a team to Nigeria to improve Boko Haram's media capabilities and to negotiate the alliance. Boko Haram now calls itself the Islamic State in West Africa, or the Islamic State's Province in West Africa.

- **In Algeria, a small group of AQIM commanders has defected to ISIS.** Prior to their defection, virtually no one had even heard of them. However, ISIS' Algerian arm has already committed some attacks, including the beheading of a French hostage last year.<sup>20</sup>
- **ISIS' "provinces" in Africa are part of an international network, so their operations are not confined to the continent.** For instance, Libya and Tunisia have probably contributed more jihadists, on a per capita basis, to the jihad in Iraq and Syria than any other countries. This facilitation pipeline has existed since the height of the Iraq War. ISIS has used this recruiting network to build its presence in North Africa by sending some key leaders and fighting units back to their home countries. Saudis, Yemenis and other nationalities have also been identified as being among ISIS' main leaders in Libya.
- **ISIS' expansion in Africa is not just aimed at growing support from local recruits, but is also part of its ongoing effort to attract foreign fighters from around the world.** Through mid-2014, the Islamic State was focused on recruiting foreigners for its battles in Iraq and Syria. Since then, the group has increasingly called for foreign fighters to join its cause in African hotspots. When announcing its merger with Boko Haram, for example, the Islamic State's spokesman specifically called on new recruits to join the "caliphate" in West Africa if they could not make the trip to the heart of the Middle East or elsewhere. "All Muslims, you should all come to your State, for we are calling on you to mobilize for jihad," ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad al Adnani said in March. He continued: "We incite you and call upon you to immigrate for jihad and to immigrate to your brothers in West Africa."<sup>21</sup> Just in the past few days, a Libyan ISIS fighter released a message calling on recruits to join him in North Africa. Similarly, there have been some limited efforts to turn the Sinai into a destination for foreign fighters.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ishaan Tharoor, "Islamic State-linked group beheads French national in Algeria," *The Washington Post*, September 24, 2014; (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/09/24/islamic-state-linked-group-beheads-french-national-in-algeria/>).

<sup>21</sup> SITE Intelligence Group, "IS Spokesman Threatens Enemy to Convert or Be Subjugated, Accepts Boko Haram's Pledge of Allegiance," March 12, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "Islamic State supporters advertise Sinai as jihadist destination," *The Long War Journal*, December 1, 2014; ([http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/12/islamic\\_state\\_support.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/12/islamic_state_support.php)).



- **There is evidence that at least one potential American recruit saw Libya as a viable destination for waging jihad on behalf of ISIS.** The FBI has alleged that Specialist Hasan R. Edmonds, a member of the Army National Guard in Illinois, intended “to travel overseas and fight on behalf of” ISIS. The investigation allegedly revealed that Edmonds was willing to join ISIS in North Africa. “I am fine being in Egypt, Sham, or Libya to be honest akhi [brother],” the defendant said in one conversation, according to the FBI. “I just want to answer the call.”<sup>23</sup> Edmonds reportedly wanted to join ISIS’ ranks in Derna, Libya.<sup>24</sup> Authorities have also charged Jonas Edmonds, Hasan’s cousin, with “planning an attack at a military base in Northern Illinois where Specialist Edmonds had been training.”<sup>25</sup> Of course, other Americans have been drawn to ISIS in Iraq and Syria.<sup>26</sup> There is a possibility that more of them will seek out jihad in Africa instead.
- **A notorious terrorist who helped recruit the 9/11 suicide pilots has reportedly helped ISIS grow its footprint in Egypt.** According to a credible report, Mohammed Zammar, who helped recruit al Qaeda’s Hamburg cell for the 9/11 plot, has joined ISIS. Zammar had been imprisoned by the Assad regime in Syria, but was freed as part of a prisoner exchange with ISIS. In return for securing his freedom, Zammar joined ISIS and reportedly helped the organization woo Ansar Bayt al Maqdis in the Sinai to its cause. Zammar even traveled to the Sinai to close the deal.<sup>27</sup> This is troubling because it means that a jihadist who is adept at recruiting Westernized jihadists is traveling freely. It is possible that Zammar could once again help recruit young jihadists for a special operation in the West.

## Overview of al Qaeda’s presence in Africa

While ISIS gets most of the headlines these days, al Qaeda is still a major player in Africa. In this section, I rely heavily on declassified documents captured in Osama

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<sup>23</sup> See Affidavit of FBI Special Agent Morgan A. Spurlock, March 25, 2015. The affidavit can be accessed online at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/r/2010-2019/WashingtonPost/2015/03/26/National-Security/Graphics/Edmonds%20Complaint.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Michael S. Schmidt, “National Guardsman Accused of Trying to Join ISIS in Libya,” *The New York Times*, March 26, 2015; (<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/27/us/guardsman-accused-of-trying-to-join-isis-in-libya.html>).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Just days ago, authorities charged six Somali-Americans with seeking to join ISIS. See Scott Shane, “6 Minnesotans Held in Plot to Join ISIS,” *The New York Times*, April 20, 2015; (<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/21/us/6-somali-americans-arrested-in-isis-recruiting-case.html>).

<sup>27</sup> Bruce Riedel, “Baghdadi vs. Zawahri: Battle for Global Jihad,” *Al-Monitor*, December 1, 2014; (<http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/12/01/baghdadi-vs-zawahri-battle-for-global-jihad>).

bin Laden's compound to explain how al Qaeda is structured in Africa.<sup>28</sup> The bin Laden files demonstrate that al Qaeda has a much more cohesive international infrastructure than is commonly believed. While that infrastructure has undoubtedly evolved, especially with the loss of some leaders, it is unwise to assume that it has been eliminated entirely. Indeed, there are multiple indications that the al Qaeda bureaucracy established under bin Laden lives on. The following points will hopefully illuminate the threat posed by al Qaeda's network inside the continent:

- **Al Qaeda has two official, regional branches in Africa: Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Shabaab in Somalia.** The leaders of both organizations have sworn *bayat* (oath of allegiance) to al Qaeda's senior leadership. The leaders of both organizations remain openly loyal to Ayman al Zawahiri, al Qaeda's emir. While AQIM and Shabaab are often called al Qaeda "affiliates," al Qaeda refers to them as "regions" or "branches." Osama bin Laden also used the phrase "regional areas" to describe al Qaeda's presence in various places.<sup>29</sup> This terminology helps to better understand how al Qaeda is actually organized. Each regional emir oversees al Qaeda's efforts in his designated area. So, AQIM emir Abu Musab Abdel Wadoud (a.k.a. Abdelmalek Droukdel) is in charge of al Qaeda's efforts in North Africa, west of Egypt, stretching down into Mali. Shabaab's emir, Ahmed Diriye (a.k.a. Sheikh Ahmad Umar and Abu Ubaidah), is generally in charge of al Qaeda's efforts in Somalia and East Africa.
- **Al Qaeda designates certain operatives to work on what it calls "external operations," or "external work," which includes spectacular terrorist attacks against Western interests. Osama bin Laden ordered al Qaeda's regional emirs, including the head of AQIM, to coordinate their efforts with the deputies he put in charge of al Qaeda's "external work."** The al Qaeda deputy in charge of "external operations" from 2010 until his capture in September 2011 was Yunis al Mauritani. Al Mauritani was recently sentenced to a lengthy prison in his home country. Bin Laden set forth a specific chain of command to oversee "external operations." Yunis al Mauritani reported to Atiyah Abd al Rahman (then al Qaeda's general manager), who answered to bin Laden himself.

In his letters to Rahman, Bin Laden stressed that each of al Qaeda's "regions" must coordinate all "external work" with his deputies. He even wanted Rahman to inform "the brothers in Yemen" (AQAP) "that working in the sea, even within

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<sup>28</sup> All of the bin Laden files referenced in this section can be found on two web sites: <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/letters-from-abbottabad-bin-ladin-sidelined> and <http://www.scribd.com/doc/257160502/Bin-Laden-raid-documents>.

<sup>29</sup> SOCOM-2012-0000019. This is a letter written by Osama bin Laden in May 2010 and addressed to Atiyah Abd al Rahman. Bin Laden wrote, "We are now in a new phase of assessing Jihad activities and developing them beyond what they were in the past in two areas, military activity and media releases. Our work in these two areas is broad and sweeping, encompassing the headquarters and regional areas."

the territorial waters of the [Arabian] Peninsula, is to be considered external work that requires coordination with you.”<sup>30</sup> In another declassified document, bin Laden made it clear that al Mauritani was “in-charge of the external operations in Africa, except the Islamic Maghreb states, starting from Libya to Mauritania, which is under the control of brother Abu Musa’b ‘Abd-al-Wadud [the emir of AQIM], and the African horn, which is under the control of the Emir of Al-Shabaab Mujahideen Movement.”<sup>31</sup>

- **Osama bin Laden ordered each of al Qaeda’s branches, including AQIM in Africa, to identify recruits capable of launching attacks inside the U.S.** “It would be nice if you would ask the brothers in all regions if they have a brother distinguished by his good manners, integrity, courage, and secretiveness, who can operate in the U.S.,” bin Laden wrote to his top manager, Atiyah Abd al Rahman, in May 2010.<sup>32</sup> Bin Laden explained that an operative selected to attack the U.S. should be able to “live there, or it should be easy for him to travel there.”<sup>33</sup> And each regional emir “should tell us this without taking any action and also tell us whether or not [the chosen operative] is willing to conduct a suicide operation,” bin Laden wrote.<sup>34</sup> Bin Laden continued: “It would be nice if you [Rahman] would send two messages – one to Brother Abu Mus’ab ‘Abd-al-Wadud [the emir of AQIM], and the other to Brother Abu Basir Nasir al-Wuhayshi [the emir of AQAP] – and ask them to put forward their best in cooperating with Shaykh Yunis in whatever he asks of them.”<sup>35</sup> Al Qaeda’s founder wanted AQIM to help pay for the operations: “Hint to the brothers in the Islamic Maghreb that they provide [Yunis al Mauritani] with the financial support that he might need in the next six months, to the tune of approximately 200,000 euros.”<sup>36</sup>
- **Some of al Qaeda’s most senior leaders, including those tasked with overseeing external operations, have come from Africa.** Saleh al Somali was al Qaeda’s external operations chief until his death in late 2009. Somali’s jihadist pedigree stretched back to al Qaeda’s earliest efforts in eastern Africa, when the terror organization trained Somali militia to attack American forces. At the time of his death, Somali’s close ties to Shabaab were considered especially problematic, given Shabaab’s ability to recruit Americans.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> SOCOM-2012-0000019, p. 33.

<sup>31</sup> Government Exhibit 427 in the trial of Abid Naseer. The letter is addressed to “Hajji Uthman,” who is likely Saeed al Masri, al Qaeda’s general manager at the time. It was presumably authored by bin Laden. The context suggests it was written sometime after December 2009. The letter can be found here: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/257160502/Bin-Laden-raid-documents>.

<sup>32</sup> SOCOM-2012-0000019, p. 32.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Bill Roggio, “Al Qaeda’s external operations chief thought killed in US strike in Pakistan,” *The Long War Journal*, December 11, 2009; ([http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/12/al\\_qaedas\\_external\\_o.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/12/al_qaedas_external_o.php)).

The aforementioned Yunis al Mauritani was al Qaeda's external operations chief from 2010 until his capture in 2011. Al Mauritani "participated in the formation" of AQIM.<sup>38</sup> He joined the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC), AQIM's predecessor, in 2001 and was sent by GSPC's leadership to cement their deal with al Qaeda in 2007.<sup>39</sup> In 2010, he was in charge of a plan, backed by bin Laden, "to ostensibly damage the economy of Europe."<sup>40</sup>

The biographies of terrorists such as Somali and Mauritani show that al Qaeda has used its presence in Africa to build a deep roster of talent.

- **Senior al Qaeda operatives embedded within Shabaab's ranks have planned attacks in the West.** As I testified before this committee in July 2011, senior al Qaeda operatives have held some of Shabaab's most important positions since its earliest days.<sup>41</sup> And these operatives have been responsible for plotting attacks against Western and other foreign interests. One of these leaders, Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, was killed in 2011. Authorities found plans for attacking London in Fazul's possession.<sup>42</sup> A group known as the "London Boys" was trained by Fazul and reportedly tasked with executing attacks in the UK.<sup>43</sup>
- **AQAP's leaders are now al Qaeda's general management team and they have worked closely with Shabaab, as well as with AQIM.** Given that AQAP has led al Qaeda's attempts to attack the U.S. Homeland in recent years, it is possible that the group will seek to employ al Qaeda's African assets against the West. In previous testimony, I highlighted the close ties between Shabaab and AQAP.<sup>44</sup> Since that time, AQAP's emir, Nasir al Wuhayshi, was named al Qaeda's global general manager.<sup>45</sup> This role gives him broad power across all of al Qaeda's branches. (Indeed, this is the same position that was held by Atiyah Abd al Rahman, who is discussed above.) Al Qaeda documents first published by the

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<sup>38</sup> U.S. Treasury Department, "Treasury Targets Three Senior Al-Qa'ida Leaders," September 7, 2011; (<http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1289.aspx>).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> [http://homeland.house.gov/sites/homeland.house.gov/files/Testimony%20Joscelyn\\_0.pdf](http://homeland.house.gov/sites/homeland.house.gov/files/Testimony%20Joscelyn_0.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> Michelle Shephard, "Star Exclusive: Documents found on body of Al Qaeda's African leader detail chilling plans for kidnapping, attacks," The Toronto Star, July 11, 2012; ([http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2012/07/11/star\\_exclusive\\_documents\\_found\\_on\\_body\\_of\\_al\\_qaedas\\_african\\_leader\\_detail\\_chilling\\_plans\\_for\\_kidnapping\\_attacks.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2012/07/11/star_exclusive_documents_found_on_body_of_al_qaedas_african_leader_detail_chilling_plans_for_kidnapping_attacks.html)).

<sup>43</sup> "London 'sleeper cell' told to carry out wave of terror attacks by Bin Laden before his death," *The Daily Mail* (UK), May 15, 2011; (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1387332/Osama-Bin-Laden-dead-London-sleeper-cell-told-carry-attacks-death.html>).

<sup>44</sup> [http://homeland.house.gov/sites/homeland.house.gov/files/Testimony%20Joscelyn\\_0.pdf](http://homeland.house.gov/sites/homeland.house.gov/files/Testimony%20Joscelyn_0.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> Bill Roggio and Thomas Joscelyn, "AQAP's emir also serves as al Qaeda's general manager," *The Long War Journal*, August 6, 2013; ([http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/08/aqap\\_emir\\_also\\_serve.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/08/aqap_emir_also_serve.php)).

Associated Press also show that Wuhayshi has been in close contact with the leadership of AQIM.<sup>46</sup>

- **In addition to its two official branches, there are a number of other jihadist groups in Africa that are part of al Qaeda’s international network.** The most significant organizations include: Afnad Misr (Egypt), Ansar al Din (Mali), Ansar al Sharia Libya, Ansar al Sharia Tunisia (which has been inactive of late), Ansaru (Nigeria), Al Mourabitoun (North Africa and Mali) and the Uqba bin Nafi Brigade (Tunisia). Just recently, another new group called Al Muhajiroun (the “Emigrants of East Africa”) was established. In its founding video, the group says it “owes allegiance” to the emir of Shabaab and Ayman al Zawahiri.

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<sup>46</sup> <http://www.longwarjournal.org/images/al-qaida-papers-how-to-run-a-state.pdf>