Al Qaeda

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Introduction

Al Qaeda (Arabic for “the base”) is a complex international Islamist terrorist network made up of regional affiliate organizations and clandestine cells with varying degrees of communication with Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, the group's ideological and operational leaders.

In order to achieve its ultimate goal of establishing its version of Islamic rule across all Muslim territory, Al Qaeda continually adopts new patterns of operations in response to global counter-terrorism efforts, which have in recent years resulted in the capture and death of several of its top commanders. In its current incarnation, Al Qaeda relies less on centralized operations, such as a hierarchical command structure and training camps. Instead, much of its activities are carried out by independent cells and like-minded organizations with loose ties to its core leadership. It has also increased its reliance on the Internet for communication and propaganda.

Al Qaeda is responsible for executing some of the most deadly terror acts in the past decade, including the September 11th attack on New York City and the Pentagon, the 1998 bombing of two American embassies in East Africa and the March 2004 Madrid train bombings. Following the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq by American and coalition forces, Al Qaeda has also been associated with much of the terror and guerrilla war in those two nations.
Structure

Al Qaeda's core leadership and operatives are made up of veterans of the war against the Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan during the 1980s. It is commanded, to a degree, by Osama bin Laden and his deputy, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri. Since 1998 Al Qaeda has operated through a coalition of terror organizations known as the International Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and Crusaders. The Front was formed to coordinate activities through a council (shura) led by bin Laden. At its formation it included bin Laden's Al Qaeda, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad led by Zawahiri, and other organizations engaged in terrorism around the world. The U.S.-backed toppling of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan following the September 11th terrorist attacks, which forced bin Laden to go into hiding, drastically changed the previously hierarchical nature of Al Qaeda.

Veterans of more recent conflicts, in particular the wars in the Balkans and Chechnya, make up the second generation of Al Qaeda commanders, who, although more loosely affiliated with the central command, have helped consolidate Al Qaeda's dominance over the global Jihad movement. Al Qaeda has also expanded by aligning itself with regional groups, including Al Qaeda in Iraq, whose leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the most well-known insurgent commander in Iraq, swore allegiance to bin Laden.

Al Qaeda also relies on other Islamic militants whose talents it can exploit. For example, Khalid Sheik Mohammed, who masterminded the September 11th attacks, and Mohamed Atta, leader of the operation's Hamburg cell, did not rise through the ranks of the organization by fighting in a guerrilla war. Instead, they were recruited into Al Qaeda to fill a specific role. The alliance was mutually beneficial since these operatives felt that Al Qaeda was best suited to help them realize their radical ideology and schemes. Other key figures contracted by Al Qaeda, such as Indonesia-born terrorist Riduan Isamuddin (Hambali), who is currently held in U.S. custody, maintain their independence by not swearing allegiance to bin Laden.
Outside the circle of Al Qaeda activists and affiliated organizations there are terrorist individuals, cells and ad hoc organizations that may have little direct contact with Al Qaeda operatives but nevertheless carry out attacks in its name. For example, based on information currently available, the attacks on resort towns in the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt (Taba in October 2004 and Sharm el Sheik in July 2005) were planned and carried out primarily by locally organized Bedouins with no apparent help from the outside. Yet an organization claiming to be affiliated with Al Qaeda, the Abdullah Azzam Brigades in Syria and Egypt, took responsibility for the attacks, which employed tactics characteristic of Al Qaeda. More importantly, the Sinai attacks, as well as a subsequent Al Qaeda missile attack on American warships in nearby Aqaba, Jordan, have in effect opened a new front in the global Jihad movement dominated by Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda’s ideological pull also attracts many would-be terrorists, including some Americans.

It is debated exactly how much independent operational capability Al Qaeda's central command holds at the present. The extent to which it may control and direct the various affiliated, or Al Qaeda-inspired, organizations around the world is unclear. Some view Al Qaeda more as a movement than an organization, and bin Laden as a source of incitement for the international jihad movement, rather than its commander. But evidence suggests that despite official assessments by the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, Al Qaeda's control in at least some of the fronts in which the global Jihad movement is engaged is unbroken and its network of operators still fill important roles in terrorist plots carried by local radicals.

Al Qaeda's continued capability following the Taliban's demise was underscored as it launched a new terror campaign in 2002 to destabilize Saudi Arabia, relying on its own operatives and command, when its high commanders were supposedly on the run. A top Al Qaeda commander, Moroccan Karim Mejjati, was sent with orders from Afghanistan to activate Al Qaeda cells inside the Kingdom. Al Qaeda's
campaign started with the May 2003 attack on a residential complex in Riyadh and continued with several bombings and kidnappings. Mejjati apparently also directed a May 2003 attack in Casablanca, Morocco, initially thought to be entirely the work of a local group. He was killed in a gun battle with Saudi security in March 2005, but speculations regarding other terrorist operations he might have put in motion abound, including a possible plan for an attack on U.S. soil, where he spent several months between 1997 and 1999.

Similarly, the London bombings on July 7, 2005, and a second wave of bombs, which did not detonate, were initially thought to be the work of homegrown radicals with no substantial outside help, or at least no Al Qaeda connection. However, evidence suggests that the London bombers were part of an international network connected to Al Qaeda operatives who were contracted by the top Al Qaeda leadership. One of the bombers, Mohammad Sidique Khan, was an Al Qaeda recruit, and in 2001 he met Hambali, Al Qaeda’s top operative in Southeast Asia. Also, based on information obtained by British security agency, MI5 from a terrorist caught in Pakistan, it appears that an Al Qaeda-trained bomb-maker, Azhari bin Husin, helped make the explosives used in the London attacks. Husin, killed by Indonesian forces in November 2005, was involved in a number of Al Qaeda related attacks around the world.

**Goals & Strategies**

In the near term, Al Qaeda seeks to expel Westerners, specifically Americans, from historically Muslim lands, such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia and North Africa. Al Qaeda has long considered American influence and power to be one of the largest impediments to the establishment of a pan-Islamic nation, as they believe it is propping up “apostate,” or non-Islamic, governments in the region.

Al Qaeda’s strategy to drive the U.S. out of Muslim lands is to wage an extended campaign of terror causing substantial physical, political and economic damage that would force the U.S. to withdraw from the region. The central Al Qaeda leadership, however, does not have the capability to wage this war by itself; rather, it depends on local affiliates and allies to strike at U.S. and Western interests. Al
AQA's leaders believe that the removal of U.S. and Western power would significantly weaken and allow them to topple “the apostate rulers,” creating a power vacuum which Al Qaeda and its affiliates could fill. This strategy includes not just terror attacks on U.S. interests within the region, but around the world, including within the U.S. itself. Al Qaeda and its affiliates also attack the “apostate rulers” themselves, attempting to weaken them directly and incite Islamic revolution.

After their short-term goals are realized and local leaders begin to fall, Al Qaeda seeks to establish Islamic rule in their place. Realizing that not all regimes will fall at the same time, it advocates immediately replacing fallen regimes with a religious autocracy similar to the former Taliban rule in Afghanistan. In most cases, these governments will be formed by local Al Qaeda affiliates in conjunction with local leaders who join the Al Qaeda cause. These governments will then be used as foundations for expanding jihadi influence and rule around the region.

Ultimately, Al Qaeda hopes join all of these separate Islamic governments to resurrect the Islamic empire, known as a caliphate, that would rule all Muslim lands and fight to expand them.

**Tactics**

Al Qaeda employs a number of different terrorist tactics, including suicide bombing, car bombing, roadside bombing, hijackings and paramilitary operations against civilian and military targets. Most of the organization’s attacks are well-planned and often evolve over a number of months, if not years. One of Al Qaeda’s most distinguishing tactics is the multiple suicide bombing; examples of this are the July 2005 bombings in London and the November 2005 bombings in Amman. In this type of attack, a number of suicide bombers, generally two to five, coordinate their attacks to strike a number of targets at roughly the same time. This tactic not only causes significantly more damage and casualties than a single bomb, it also creates a greater sense of panic among victims.
Al Qaeda is also adept at using the media to further its goals. Its attacks are constantly shown on news channels around the world and its taped messages are broadcast to millions of listeners. Though most media outlets seek to delegitimize Al Qaeda, they unwittingly spread its message by heavily covering the group's activities and proclamations.

**Finances**

Bin Laden's personal fortune and a variety of his investments and business partnerships all over the world throughout the years have contributed to the pool of Al Qaeda funds. Additionally, Al Qaeda received funding from charities and many for-profit organizations and individuals have been accused of providing funds to the organization. In the months after the September 11th terrorist attacks, the U.S. government moved to shut down a number of charities, including the Al-Haramain Foundation and the Holy Land Foundation, which allegedly were funding Al Qaeda. Other nations, too, moved to shut down sources of Al Qaeda funding or money laundering, disrupting to an unknown extent the pre-September 11 funding network. However, Al Qaeda does not need massive amounts of money to survive.

**Internet**

After the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and the subsequent destruction of the Al Qaeda infrastructure there, the organization was forced to develop new methods to continue planning, conducting and inspiring terror attacks. The now-dispersed leadership began relying more heavily on the Internet to communicate to its members and the public. Soon, Al Qaeda shifted many of its activities to cyberspace. The Internet compensated for the loss of a secure base and allowed Al Qaeda terrorists to disseminate information and communicate with each other in relative safety. Al Qaeda operates Internet-based publications such as Muaskar Al Battar (Camp of the Sword) and Sawt Al Jihad (The Voice of Jihad), through which it gives general instructions and encourages sympathizers to conduct terrorist activities. A quotation from one Al Battar article illustrates the important role the Internet can play in realizing Al Qaeda's vision of a loosely connected network working towards the same cause: “Oh Mujahid brother, in order to join the great training camps you don't have to travel to other lands. Alone, in your home or with
Since September 2005, a video newscast that claims to be the “voice of Al Qaeda on the Internet” has been posted on the Internet as well. Modeled after standard newscasts, the Arabic-language Sout Al Khilafa (Arabic for “Voice of the Caliphate”), is divided into segments and employs an anchor who discusses world events and presents stories about terrorist activities against U.S. forces in Iraq and in other parts of the world. The program also includes video footage of terrorist attacks.

**Historical Background**

Al Qaeda was founded in 1988 by Osama bin Laden to consolidate the international network he established during the Afghan war. Its goals were the advancement of Islamic revolutions throughout the Muslim world and repelling foreign intervention in the Middle East.

Bin Laden, son of a billionaire Saudi businessman, became involved in the fight against the Soviet Union’s invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, which lasted from 1979 to 1988 and ended with a Soviet defeat at the hands of international militias of Muslim fighters backed by the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Together with Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood leader, Abdullah Azzam, bin Laden ran one of seven main militias involved in the fighting. They established military training bases in Afghanistan and founded Maktab Al Khidamat, or Services Office, a support network that provided recruits and money through worldwide centers, including in the U.S.

Bin Laden and Azzam had different visions for what to do with the network they had established. Bin Laden decided to found Al Qaeda, based on personal affiliations created during the fighting in Afghanistan as well as on his own international network, reputation and access to large sums of money. The following year Azzam was assassinated. After the war ended, the Afghan-Arabs, as the mostly non-Afghan volunteers who fought the Soviets came to be known, either returned to their countries of origin or joined conflicts in Somalia, the
Balkans and Chechnya. This benefited Al Qaeda's global reach and later helped cultivate the second and third generations of Al Qaeda terrorists.

Following the first Gulf War, Al Qaeda shifted its focus to fighting the growing U.S. presence in the Middle East, particularly in Saudi Arabia, home to Islam's most sacred shrines. Al Qaeda vociferously opposed the stationing of U.S. troops on what it considered the holiest of Islamic lands and waged an extended campaign of terrorism against the Saudi rulers, whom bin Laden deemed to be false Muslims. The ultimate goal of this campaign was to depose the Saudi royal family and install an Islamic regime on the Arabian peninsula. The Saudi regime subsequently deported bin Laden and revoked his citizenship in 1994.

In 1991 bin Laden moved to Sudan, where he operated until 1996. During this period, Al Qaeda established connections with other terror organizations with the help of its Sudanese hosts and Iran. While in Sudan, Al Qaeda was involved in several terror attacks and guerilla actions carried out by other organizations. In May 1996, following U.S. pressure on the Sudanese government, bin Laden moved to Afghanistan where he allied himself with the ruling Taliban.

Between 1991 and 1996, Al Qaeda took part in several major terror attacks. Al Qaeda was involved in the bombing of two hotels in Aden, Yemen, which targeted American troops en route to Somalia on a humanitarian and peacekeeping mission. It also gave massive assistance to Somali militias, whose efforts brought the eventual withdrawal of U.S. forces in 1994. Bin Laden was also involved in an assassination attempt against Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in Ethiopia in June 1995. Two major terrorist actions against the U.S. military in Saudi Arabia, a November 1995 attack in Riyadh and the June 1996 Khobar Towers bombing, also fit Al Qaeda's strategy at the time, but their connection to Al Qaeda is not entirely clear. There is little evidence to suggest a significant connection between bin Laden and the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993.
After moving to Afghanistan, bin Laden escalated his anti-American rhetoric. In an interview with the Independent in July 1996, bin Laden praised the Riyadh and Dhahram attacks on U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia, saying it marked “the beginning of war between Muslims and the United States.” He did not take responsibility for the attacks, but said that “not long ago, I gave advice to the Americans to withdraw their troops from Saudi Arabia.” On August 23, 1996, bin Laden issued Al Qaeda’s first “declaration of war” against America, his “Message from Osama bin Laden to his Muslim brothers in the whole world and especially in the Arabian Peninsula: declaration of jihad against the Americans occupying the Land of the Two Holy Mosques (Saudi Arabia); expel the heretics from the Arabian Peninsula.”

In February 1998 bin Laden and several leading Muslim militants declared the formation of a coalition called the International Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and Crusaders to fight the U.S. Member organizations included Al Qaeda, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad led by Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian Islamic Group, and organizations engaged in Kashmir and Bangladesh. Bin Laden was appointed to head the Front’s council (shura). The militants signed a fatwa (religious opinion) outlining the Front’s ideology and goals. The fatwa was published in a London-based Arabic paper, Al Quds Al Arabi; it called on all Muslims to “kill the Americans and their allies - civilians and military,” wherever they may be.

Subsequently, Al Qaeda escalated its war against the U.S. In August 1998, Al Qaeda bombed two U.S. embassies in East Africa (Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania) killing more than 200 people, including 12 Americans. In retaliation, the U.S. attacked targets in Sudan and Afghanistan. In October 2000, Al Qaeda bombed the U.S.S. Cole, an American guided-missile destroyer at Aden, Yemen, killing 17 American servicemen. It committed its most devastating attack on September 11, 2001, when 19 Al Qaeda operatives hijacked four passenger planes and drove two into the Twin Towers in New York City and one into the Pentagon; a fourth plane crashed in rural Pennsylvania. Nearly 3,000 people were killed in the attack.

Al Qaeda’s War Against the Jews
Anti-Semitism, the hatred of Jews, is intrinsic to Al Qaeda's ideology and motivation. Specifically, Al Qaeda's ideology derives from the particular anti-Semitism that was developed by the original ideologues of Islamist terrorism, well before Al Qaeda was formed. According to this theology, the ideal man is the Muslim holy warrior who is prepared to be martyred for the sake of God and the Jews represent his opposite. The Jews are the Muslims' eternal enemy, and, unlike the Christians, cannot be converted or even accommodated as an inferior minority and therefore must be fought until they are annihilated. The battles currently being fought by Islamic terrorist groups may directly target the U.S. or secular Arab regimes, but Al Qaeda considers the Jew to be the true evil; the opposite image of the true believer in God and the force that commands all other forces fighting Islam.

Despite anti-Semitism's central role in Al Qaeda's ideology, the organization has only attacked distinctly Jewish targets since 2002. In the years since, Al Qaeda has also attempted to establish a foothold within Israel and the Palestinian territories; though so far with little success. Aside from the identification of the targets as "Jewish" all the attacks have had additional strategic aims; whether it was against the local regime, the regime's ties to Israel or global stability in general. Still, the "Jewish" identity of the target is not random, carrying an important significance to the terrorists themselves.

Indeed, several of the terrorists involved in the September 11th attacks were to a great extent motivated by their hatred toward Jews. Mohamed Atta and Ramzi Binalshibh, a key member of the Hamburg cell responsible for the attacks, considered New York City as the center for a global Jewish conspiracy, and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who masterminded the attack, had previously developed several plans to attack Israeli and Jewish targets. In their view, New York, as a center of world finance, was the quintessential Jewish target.

Al Qaeda has been involved in a number of attacks on Jewish targets, including:
an attack on a Jewish synagogue in Tunisia on April 2002; the coordinated bombing of an Israeli-owned resort and an attempt to down an Israeli airliner in Mombassa, Kenya on November 2002; an attack on several Jewish-associated targets in Casablanca, Morocco on April 2003; the bombing of two Jewish Synagogues in Istanbul on November 2003; and an attack on several tourist resorts in Sinai, Egypt that are popular with Israelis on October 2004. Several additional plots around the world have failed.

Al Qaeda has always defined its enemies as the “Jews and Crusaders,” referring even to the American forces in the first Gulf War as the “Crusader-Jewish alliance.” Bin Laden, in one of his early public statements, which he issued in 1994, also attacked what he considered the Saudis' official endorsement of the Oslo peace accord. Still, until 2002, Israel and the Jews were only on Al Qaeda’s peripheral view as a strategic target. Al Qaeda was, like many in the Middle East, committed in principal to the liberation of all Muslim lands and holy places, among these the Palestinian areas and the Al Aksa mosque in Jerusalem, but it was busier attacking its primary target- America and did not direct any recourses toward attacking Israel or Jews.

There are several explanations to what brought Al Qaeda and its affiliates to change their strategy to include Israel and the Jewish people among their strategic targets. First, the terror campaign against Jews seems to have been initiated and timed by the leadership, as evident from declarations made by Al Qaeda leaders and spokesmen. At first, post-September 11th declarations in support of the Palestinians may have been motivated by need for popularity. But in 2002 it became apparent that Al Qaeda had made an ideological and strategic shift, making its enmity toward Jews more central. In a video of bin Laden that was shot around the time of Al Qaeda's attack on the synagogue in Tunisia, he declared: "The war is between us and the Jews. Any country that steps into the same trench as the Jews has only herself to blame." Several months later, an Al Qaeda spokesman expressed a similar idea, saying, “we will continue to hit
America until it gets up and leaves these trenches, so that the confrontation can be between us and the Jews who are enemies of Allah.”

Another reason for this trend is associated with Al Qaeda’s relative weakness and its fragmentation. Following the American invasion of Afghanistan, Al Qaeda has relied more on locally-based organizations. And often these tend to choose ‘soft targets,’ lightly-guarded gathering spots such as night clubs or tourists or buildings associated with the local Jewish community. Attacking Jews also has an added propaganda value to Al Qaeda, which relies on the fact that anti-Semitic feelings are widespread in Muslim countries. As an example, the video of the murder of American-Jewish reporter Daniel Pearl, which shows him being beheaded after he “confessed” to being Jewish, was distributed in Saudi Arabia and posted to extremist Web sites as a way to recruit for Al Qaeda.

**Al Qaeda Affiliate Groups**

Since Al Qaeda’s rise to prominence in the 1990’s, Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda successfully convinced other leading terrorists groups to ally with the organization. In effect, this has allowed Al Qaeda to increase its influence by helping to fund, train and direct smaller, more regionally-focused terrorist groups. Following the toppling of the Taliban in 2001 by the U.S., and its subsequent military campaigns in Afghanistan, Al Qaeda’s operational methods and capabilities became more decentralized and its ties to other groups became a correspondingly larger aspect of its operations. Whereas Al Qaeda had previously planned and executed select missions with its own operatives, the destruction of its military headquarters and training camps by the U.S. military forced the organization to turn to other methods. Al Qaeda has thus been able to continue its war against targeted governments by proxy, helping to plan attacks actually carried out by operatives from regional groups.

It is worth noting that there is an ongoing debate as to the amount of influence Al Qaeda has on its regional allies. Recent investigations by various governments into terrorist individuals and attacks, however, have indicated that the organizations listed below are linked to Al Qaeda. It should also be noted that the
groups listed below are the largest and most important Al Qaeda allies, but do not constitute a complete list.

**Jemaah Islamiyah**

Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) is Southeast Asia's largest and deadliest terrorist group. Founded in 1993, the group operates primarily out of Indonesia and seeks to overthrow regional governments and replace them with a totalitarian Islamic state. Its ideology and anti-Western rhetoric closely resembles that of Al Qaeda, making the two organizations natural allies. It is responsible for many of the Indonesia's most lethal terror attacks, including a massive triple suicide bombing outside of a popular nightclub in Bali which killed 202.

Jemaah Islamiyah has maintained high-level ties with Al Qaeda since the 1990's, and in 1998 then-JI leader Abdullah Sungkar reportedly accepted Osama bin Laden's offer to formally ally the two terrorist groups. Shortly thereafter, according to the 9/11 Commission Report, senior JI leader Nurjaman Riduan Ismuddin, aka Hambali, met with Al Qaeda leaders Khalid Sheik Mohammed and Mohammed Atef, the two planners of the September 11th terrorist attacks. Hambali soon began working closely with Mohammed and Atef to increase JI's operational capabilities. The men reached an arrangement to coordinate attacks whereby JI would scout potential targets and provide supplies. In turn, Al Qaeda would provide funding, expertise and a number of willing suicide bombers. Fortunately, many of these attacks never came to fruition and Hambali was arrested in Thailand in 2003.

In addition to its assistance in planning attacks in Southeast Asia, Al Qaeda provided guerrilla training to JI operatives at its camps in Afghanistan. Between 1998 and November 2001, many JI members were trained there, including its senior explosive expert, Dr. Azahari Husin.

Despite the incarceration of several top leaders, JI continues to pose a threat to the stability of security of Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia. Indonesian authorities believe that the organization is behind an October 2005 suicide
bombing in Bali which killed at least 22. Though the extent of coordination between Al Qaeda and JI in this attack is unknown, authorities believe that several of the planners, including Azahari Husin, were trained by Al Qaeda.

**Abu Sayyaf Group**
The Abu Sayyaf Group is a small militant Islamic organization operating out of the southern Philippines, where it seeks to establish an Islamic state. Founded around 1990, it is known for its brazen kidnappings and brutal beheadings. It has also conducted a number of large attacks on Filipino and foreign civilians, including a February 2004 bombing of a ferry in Manila harbor which killed 194 people.

Prior to 1996, intelligence officials directly linked Abu Sayyaf with Al Qaeda, alleging that Osama bin Laden's brother-in-law provided the group with start-up funding and that Abu Sayyaf's first leader, Aburajak Janjalani met with Bin Laden in Pakistan in the early 1990's. Additionally, intelligence officials believe that Abu Sayyaf members have trained in Al Qaeda terrorist camps in Afghanistan. Despite their past cooperation, the current operational links between Al Qaeda and Abu Sayyaf are unclear.

According to police reports stemming from recent arrests in the Philippines, Abu Sayyaf also trains and coordinates attacks with the Al Qaeda-linked Jemaah Islamiyah.

**The Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC)**
The Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC are the initials for the group's French name) was formed in 1998 as an outgrowth of the once-powerful and extremely violent Groupe Islamique Armée (GIA), whose popularity drastically declined following a series of massacres in which it killed thousands of Algerian civilians. Repudiating the GIA's brutal tactics, a former leader, Hassan Hattab, created the GSPC. Hattab declared that the new group would refrain from attacking civilians. Largely due to this policy, the GSPC quickly rose to
prominence in Algeria's rural areas, where most of its support is located. Although the GSPC has not wholly avoided non-combatants, it has eclipsed the GIA as the most deadly terrorist organization in Algeria. It repeatedly attacks the Algerian military and also kidnaps Western tourists in an effort to weaken and ultimately overthrow the Algerian government, replacing it with Islamic rule based on a "pure" interpretation of the Koran.

The group is now closely allied with Al Qaeda, from which it receives material and financial support. According to French intelligence officials, the GSPC also maintains close ties with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and his Al Qaeda in Iraq group. Members of the organization have stated that bin Laden himself ordered the creation of the group and continues to bankroll it. Intelligence officials also believe that the two terrorist groups have worked closely on planning major terrorist attacks, such as the foiled "Millennium Plot" to blow up the Los Angeles airport.

In addition to its terrorist infrastructure in Algeria, the GSPC has an extensive network of operatives in Europe. In the past, the group has targeted France, and in September 2005 it issued a statement threatening the country with more attacks. Around the same time, a GSPC operative in Algerian custody divulged information about a cell in France which was allegedly planning to carry out major terrorist attacks on the Paris subway, Orly airport and the headquarters of the French intelligence service. Members of the organization have been arrested in major raids in Italy, France and Spain.

**Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM)**

Though its significance and ability have gone relatively unnoticed in the international community until recently, the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (more commonly known by its French acronym GICM), has evolved into one of Al Qaeda’s most lethal affiliates. It espouses the same rigid Salafist ideology as Al Qaeda. Intelligence services hold the group accountable for several major terrorist attacks, including the 2004 Madrid train bombings that killed over 190 people and
injured at least 1,400. They also believe GICM was behind a May 2003 suicide bombing in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in which 20 people were killed. In its manifesto, the GICM proclaims its intention to fight Jews and Christians around the world.

The GICM was founded in the late 1990's by a group of Moroccan Islamic militants with the dual goal of overthrowing the Moroccan monarchy and supporting Al Qaeda in its “jihad” against the West. European and U.S. intelligence officials claim that the GICM maintains close links with Al Qaeda; according to his purported confession, senior GICM member Noureddine Nfia met with Ayman al-Zawahiri to secure financing and political support. Nfia, currently incarcerated in Morocco, reportedly described the GICM as a “derivative structure” of Al Qaeda. Nfia played a central role in a May 2003 GICM attack on Jewish and Western targets in Casablanca which killed 45 people.

Intelligence services contend that the GICM maintains operatives throughout Europe, and it is known to be active in Belgium, Italy, France, Spain, Britain and Canada. French intelligence is also concerned about the GICM's links with another Al Qaeda related organization, the Algerian Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC).

Al Qaeda in Iraq

Al Qaeda in Iraq was formed shortly after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who initially named the group Jama'at al-Tawhid Wa al-Jihad (Organization of Monotheism and Jihad). The immediate goal of the group was to end the American occupation of Iraq by killing Americans and their Iraqi supporters. In October 2004, however, Zarqawi publicly allied himself with Osama bin Laden and renamed his organization the Al Qaeda in Iraq. The two organizations are known to jointly plot strategies and tactics.

The group has been responsible for some of the most deadly terrorist attacks in Iraq, often targeting Iraqi police recruits and government officials. It has targeted Shiites in an attempt to destabilize relations between Iraq's Sunni and Shiite
populations, and it has also beheaded foreigners, including American Nick Berg. It is considered the most dangerous terrorist organization in the country.

**Ansar al-Islam**

Ansar al-Islam was formed in 2001 by Kurdish Islamists and militants loyal to Osama bin Laden, who allegedly helps fund the group. At its founding, the group sought to establish an Islamic nation in the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq, but after the U.S. invasion in 2003, Ansar al-Islam shifted its goals to include fighting the U.S. and Iraqi governments. The group has claimed responsibility for a number of high-profile suicide bombings in Iraq.

In 2001, Ansar al-Islam seized control of a small piece of territory in northern Iraq, near the Iranian border. Under the direction of its spiritual leader Mullah Krekar, Ansar al-Islam enforced a strict form of Islamic rule in its newly-acquired territory. Shortly thereafter, Al Qaeda operative Abu Musab al-Zarqawi joined with Ansar al-Islam and set up a number of alleged terrorist training camps in the area.

In one of the first operations of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, U.S. Special Forces, alongside Kurdish partisan fighters, attacked and destroyed the Ansar al-Islam headquarters in the village of Sargat in March 2003. The U.S. has claimed that soldiers found evidence of an incipient chemical weapons program in the village. Krekar was arrested in Norway in 2004 and is awaiting extradition to Iraq.

**Ansar al-Sunna**

Since 2003, Jaish Ansar al-Sunna (Arabic for "Army of the Followers of the Teachings") has carried out some of the most lethal terrorist attacks in Iraq, including many suicide bombings, in an effort to achieve its ultimate goal of establishing a fundamentalist Islamic government in the country. Among the deadliest attacks claimed by Ansar al-Sunna is a bombing in Erbil that killed 109 people in February 2004, and a suicide bombing at a U.S. military base near Mosul that killed 22 people, including 14 U.S. soldiers. The group, described by U.S.
officials as the "principal organized terrorist adversary in Iraq," follows a Salafist ideology and has attracted followers within Iraqi as well as supporters worldwide.

Ansar al-Sunna grew out of Ansar al-Islam, a militant Kurdish Islamic group founded by Kurdish cleric Mullah Krekar in 2001 to establish an Islamic government in Iraq. According to U.S. and Iraqi intelligence officials, a schism between members of Ansar al-Islam, coupled with the deaths of many of its leaders following the U.S. invasion of Iraq, led to the formation of the Ansar al-Sunna in September 2003.

Ansar al-Sunna also maintains strong links with Al Qaeda and its leader in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who joined Ansar al-Sunna after fleeing Afghanistan in 2001. The full extent of their links is unclear; however, captured members of Ansar al-Sunna have reportedly described Zarqawi as having a leadership role in the group (some Ansar al-Sunna followers have also reportedly described a rift between their leaders and Zarqawi). It is clear, however, that Ansar al-Sunna and Al Qaeda maintain some sort of operational links.

Lashkar-e-Taiba (LET)

Lashkar-e-Taiba (Army of the Pure) is a Pakistani-based Islamic terrorist organization which seeks to drive out Indian forces from the Jammu and Kashmir region of South Asia and establish an Islamic caliphate. The organization was founded in the 1980’s under the direction of both Osama bin Laden and the Pakistani government (which also opposes the Indian presence in Kashmir) as the armed wing of the Markaz Dawa al-Irshad, an Islamic social welfare group. Intelligence services consider LET to be the most hardcore of the Kashmir-based Islamic militant groups, and it is known for its many deadly attacks, including a daring raid on the Indian parliament in 2002 which killed 14.

Intelligence services have discovered a number of direct operational links between LET and Al Qaeda, which are allies in bin Laden’s International Islamic Front (IIF). Before its camps in Afghanistan were destroyed by the United States in
2001, Al Qaeda frequently hosted and trained LET operatives who went on to fight in Kashmir. Conversely, since the destruction of those camps, LET has hosted Al Qaeda trainees, including Shahzad Tanweer, one of the suicide bombers in the July 7, 2005 London Underground attack. Additionally, senior Al Qaeda leaders, such as Abu Zubeida have been arrested at LET compounds and LET operatives have reportedly been recruited for planned Al Qaeda attacks on American interests.

LET is known for its expertise in suicide bombing and conventional assault tactics. It is alleged by numerous intelligence officials that LET has members around the world, including in the U.S., Europe and Australia. Also, some American citizens who have been arrested on terrorism-related charges have undergone training at LET camps in Kashmir and Pakistan.

**Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)**

Established in 1996, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan is a conglomeration of Islamic militants from throughout Central Asia. The IMU's stated goal is to overthrow the current Uzbek regime and establish an Islamic state throughout Central Asia. The group aims to achieve this objective by conducting terrorist activities, including suicide bombings, kidnappings and shootings in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Its rhetoric is anti-American and anti-Semitic, and it has targeted Westerners in past terrorist operations.

The IMU is closely linked with Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden allegedly helps fund the group. Members of the IMU have also reportedly been placed in leadership roles within Al Qaeda and many have served as a type of defense force for senior Al Qaeda leaders.

Though U.S. operations in Afghanistan reportedly decimated the IMU, it still possesses an estimated 2000 members and carried out numerous terrorist attacks in 2004. In addition to its terrorist activities, the IMU is believed to control as much as 70% of the drug trafficking industry in Central Asia.