

THE CENTER FOR NATIONAL POLICY

“A YEAR BEYOND BIN LADEN: THE NEW AL QAEDA”

FEATURED SPEAKER:

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FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE**

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SCOTT BATES: Thank you for coming here today. My name is Scott Bates. I'm president of the Center for National Policy. And we very much appreciate you taking the time to come here today to the Capitol Visitor Center.

One year ago, a team of Americans working here in Washington and over the skies of South Asia, and on the ground in Pakistan, and on the seas of the Indian Ocean avenged the lives of 3,000 of our countrymen taken too soon and delivered a crushing blow against enemies of our nation.

For a decade, the American people had seen the world through the lens of the events of September 11th. Armies were raised, wars were started, alliances were changed and new powers of surveillance were granted. This all because of the actions of Osama bin Laden and his network of transnational terrorists known as al Qaeda. The raid on Abbottabad changed much of that worldview and now a realignment of American foreign and defense policy is underway.

And so, on this first anniversary of victory over bin Laden, it is right and proper to ask: is there now victory over al Qaeda? For getting the answer to that question right has everything to do with our global security interests as well as the safety of the American people.

And we're going to have a discussion about these very issues today. And to help us answer these questions – and the way we like to do things here is have our panelists spark a discussion and take your questions as well.

We have Mary Habeck. She is an associate professor in strategic studies at Johns Hopkins, SAIS, where she teaches courses on military history and strategic thought. Before coming to SAIS, Dr. Habeck taught American and European military history in Yale's history department. She received her Ph.D. in history from Yale, an M.A. in international relations from Yale, and a B.A. in international studies in Russian and Spanish from Ohio State in 1987. Mary was special adviser for strategic planning at the National Security Council. In addition to books and articles on doctrine and World War I and the Spanish Civil War and al Qaeda, her publications include *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror* and two forthcoming sequels – *Attacking America: How Salafi Jihadis Are Fighting for Their 200-Year War with the United States* and *Fighting the Enemy: The U.S. and Its War Against Salafi Jihadis*. And that's coming out in 2013.

To my left is Will McCants. He's a Middle East specialist at CNA, Center for Strategic Studies; an adjunct faculty at Johns Hopkins University. He previously managed the Minerva Initiative for the Defense Department and served as a State Department senior adviser for countering violent extremism. McCants' article, "Al Qaeda's Challenge," headlined *Foreign Affairs* 9/11 10th anniversary edition. And last year, Princeton University Press published his first book, *Founding Gods, Inventing*

Nations: Conquest and Culture Myths from Antiquity to Islam. McCants has translated an al Qaeda strategy book, directed a year-long study of influence between jihadi and Salafi ideologs and authored numerous articles on Islam. McCants is a senior fellow at George Washington University's Homeland Security Policy Institute and a former fellow at West Point's Combating Terrorism Center. Last year, *Foreign Policy* named McCants one of its Twitterati 100. I don't know what that means but it sounds impressive.

WILLIAM MCCANTS: It's good.

MR. BATES: It's good. (Laughter.) And Technorati designated his blog, Jihadica, as one of the top 100 websites on global affairs in 2009. Jihadica has also been featured on the front page of the *New York Times*. McCants has a Ph.D. in Near Eastern studies from Princeton.

And to my right is Stephen Tankel. He's an assistant professor at American University, a non-resident scholar at the Carnegie Endowment in the South Asia program, and an adjunct staff member at the RAND Corporation. His research focuses on insurgency, terrorism, political and security issues in South Asia and U.S. policy responses to these issues. The professor has published widely on these issues and has conducted field research in Algeria, India, Lebanon, Pakistan, and the Balkans. His book, *Storming the World Stage: The Story of Lashkar-e-Taiba*, is published jointly by Hurst & Company and Columbia University Press. He's also Ph.D. in war studies from King's College.

I think we've just given you about five different books to go buy today. So thank you all of you for being here.

I'd like to just before we start mention that this event was put together by our research fellow Ryan Evans and made possible with the support of our chairman, Peter Kovler.

And now, let's get the discussion started. Mary, would you like to kick off?

MARY HABECK: Thank you. I'd like to start with what I think will be some non-controversial statements and then I'd like to – I'm sorry?

I'd like to start with what will probably be some non-controversial statements that I'm sure most everyone on the panel will agree with. And then I'd like to throw out what I believe will be a few rhetorical bombs that I think most everybody on this panel will disagree with, or both the other panelists will disagree with. And then, I would love to have my thinking sharpened by the sorts of debate that we're going to have and the questions that you will ask and we will attempt to answer.

So, first and foremost, I agree with what you had to say that the death of bin Laden and the Arab spring have had a tremendous impact on al Qaeda. And it was a blow that many people thought they would not recover from.

I remember some of the folks that I know who studied this quite intensely believed that there was a fair to even chance that in fact the entire thing would completely collapse, that the movement was held together by the personality, the charismatic personality of this one leader, and that once he was gone, the entire organization might in fact disappear with him.

And the Arab spring seemed to show that their ideas were completely irrelevant. They had been after all working for several decades in order to overthrow – in the case Zawahiri and others, even longer – to overthrow some of these governments and had failed completely using violence. And here people using Twitter and other sorts of social media and basically people power have overthrown Mubarak and others that had once been the target of so much ire from jihadis in general and the jihadi Salafists in particular.

So there was I think this kind of hope last year about this time that we might be seeing the end of this group. But, in fact, the group proved to be more resilient. And I think it was more resilient for reasons that I had been talking about before these events had occurred and not just me, but others had been talking about as well, but which seemed to have no way of actually showing if they were true or false until the events of the Arab spring, and the death of bin Laden showed in fact to be at least plausible if not actually proved.

So that – the assertions that I used to make about al Qaeda before the events of last year and also, by the way, before the discovery of a lot of documents that are now slowly being released to the public, slowly but surely through news articles, seems to show that something that folks like me, Bruce Riedel and Bruce Hoffman had been arguing even before May of last year might be true, and that is that when we talk about al Qaeda core and al Qaeda affiliates as two separate things, this is actually a false dichotomy. And the two have to be seen as part of a single organization, not a movement, not a network but an organization, an organization that had in place bylaws and all sorts of rules for dealing with succession in a way that a network or a movement would not have had. And then it was able to react to the events of last year in a far more vigorous action than many people expected.

The other thing that I think it shows is at least there are some hints that an argument I have been making and a few others – I don't want to say Bruce Riedel, Bruce Hoffman, because I think they might disagree with some of what I'm going to say – might also be true, and that is that when we talk about al Qaeda, we in fact are not talking about a terrorist group at all.

In fact, I don't think it's been a terrorist group since about 2004-2005. In the 1990s it certainly was one. It has aspirations and all kinds of fantasies about becoming something more than a terrorist group, but it was incapable of becoming more than that.

If you go back and take a look at the captured documents that we have from 2001 to 2002 that were found in Afghanistan, what you can see is an organization that was

spending 90 percent of its money and its effort on creating Mujahedeen – or at least that’s what they called them – and regular combat troops, and about 10 percent on what they called special operations. And we all know what special means in special operations. Those special operators were the ones who carried out the attack on the United States, but they were only getting 10 percent of the effort even back in the 1990s.

I believe that the events of 9/11 were misinterpreted by most people in the United States, me included, to mean that we were the center of attention and focus of al Qaeda when in fact it’s not really all about us at all.

So the events after 9/11 in fact show that this interest and attention was turning towards very different things and you begin to have these affiliated groups up here, then one by one swearing bay’ah to bin Laden, and you begin to see the formation of something that I think few people had expected after 9/11, and that is the creation, an idea that sprung from – I hate to put it this way, but from the evil genius of bin Laden of creating some sort of global insurgency. A fantasy back in the 1990s and even in the 2000s slowly but surely began to create the mechanisms and the organization that would make that possible.

Now, 2006 showed that the concepts that he had before then were a failure, however, because Zarqawi and his ability to defy orders, as we know from the Atiyah letters and the Zawahiri letter that Will McCants’ old outfit translated and put on the web for all of us to use, show that the concept of a global jihad had some problems with it and there were all sorts of issues with command and control even in an irregular warfare setting that they still had not worked out. I believe over the next couple of years, they spent a lot of time probably working through those because we haven’t seen those sorts of terrible issues develop once again.

The concept, by the way, of command and control in a global insurgency is something that nobody has thought through so we’re talking about something that’s completely new and different. But if we look at irregular warfare in general, you can make some sorts of guesses about what it might look like.

First and foremost, it wouldn’t look like command and control between, for instance, the Pentagon and the COCOMs. It would in fact be something more like command and control in any irregular war or insurgency where the commanders give some sort of general strategic guidance, provide, supply some logistics and then have some sort of feedback loop to make sure that their orders are at least being generally obeyed.

So, to me, the most interesting aspect of what has happened over the past year is to see this organization flex with these terrible blows be able to show a great deal of resiliency and in the manner of very many insurgencies around the world, react to attrition – which is the main strategy that the United States has been following in order to combat this – react to attrition simply with more recruiting and greater ability in fact to show that they are more flexible, more resilient than the United States gives them credit

for, that they are able to keep doing the things in Yemen, in Somalia that prove that they are capable of taking, of holding territory. All of these things that they showed themselves doing are to prove not only to their supporters and their financiers that they are more resilient than people take them for, but they are in fact to fulfill their original objectives of creating at some point an Islamic state. Thank you.

MR. BATES: So, Mary, I don't want to put words in your mouth but let me try to hone in on one point in on one point you made. You said that perhaps the attack on us in 2001, or even say the late '90s, by al Qaeda, it was not necessarily all about us. So was it really a kind of bid by al Qaeda to help in their recruitment effort of what is essentially as they viewed it a kind of – I wouldn't say a global jihadi network but a kind of bid for regional supremacy in the game of capturing the energy of those interested in violent radical tendencies?

MS. HABECK: Thank you. The original strategic plan by al Qaeda had several stages. First and foremost, they argued with local jihadis that it was impossible to overthrow the tyrants of the Middle East and elsewhere in the Muslim majority world solely through violence, violent overthrow and decapitation of the government. In fact, they had huge arguments with these, what are called local jihadis, about this throughout the 1990s. And they came up with a several-stage plan that was supposed to answer this problem that they had identified that you kill a Sadat and a Mubarak simply replaces him.

Their answer was the reason that we have been incapable so far of creating an Islamic state is because of the United States and the support that the U.S. gives to these countries. If we simply overthrow these countries' leaders, they will be replaced by somebody equivalently bad.

And so their argument was, first attack the United States, convince the U.S. to leave us alone, to withdraw from Saudi Arabia, from Egypt to stop supporting Israel and so on, and then these governments will be susceptible to our violent pressure.

Bin Laden – in fact, there were disputes within the group about this, with many people telling him he was insane to believe that a few attacks in the United States would cause the U.S. to simply fold up all of its forces and leave. And he consistently pointed to Beirut, to Yemen – there's an incident in Aden – and to Somalia, Mogadishu, as instances when the U.S. had been convinced through violence to simply roll up its forces and leave.

And as I said, there were disputes about this but, obviously, he had his way and 9/11 occurred. And it seemed to show that this was in fact false. But the second part of the plan had always been U.S. will leave and then we'll take on the leaders of the Muslim majority world. So he had in place already groups that had sworn bay'ah, some that had simply had an agreement with him, cooperation, collaboration going on throughout the 1990s with these groups and attempted then to activate them in places like Saudi Arabia, Morocco and elsewhere with the very bad results that we have seen.

At the same time, there was a second vision for what should be done that I think began to replace this rather simplistic view of how to take power, one that in fact Will McCants is very involved in – the translation of the original documents is solely due to his efforts.

A book or a document by a man named Abu Bakr Naji who wrote that really what we need to do is support long-term guerilla warfare in these countries taking advantage of ungoverned spaces, creating there the conditions for imposing our version of Islamic law, eventually setting up governance structures or shadow government structures, and then slowly but surely the central government will be forced to come out and contest with us. We will defeat it in a long-term guerilla struggle and then the government will simply fall into our hands.

And if you take a look at places like Yemen or Somalia, even in the Sahel, you can see that this concept became the vision for actually implementing the grand strategic views of al Qaeda. So I would call that their military strategic vision as opposed to the grand strategic vision of who should we attack first, the U.S. or elsewhere.

Now, implicit in your question though is a query about whether they are still interested in attacking the U.S. The answer is yes, but for very different reasons than before 9/11. Now I think it's far more about recruitment, about relevance and about convincing people that they are successful in what they're doing versus before 9/11 when it was about actually convincing the U.S. to roll up its support and leave.

MR. BATES: Very good. Thank you. Will.

MR. MCCANTS: Thank you, Mary. I thought that was a good overview of the issues pertaining to al Qaeda's trajectory over the last 20 years.

First of all, I was not one of those who said that al Qaeda would just disappear after bin Laden's death, but I was one of those saying that the death of bin Laden is going to be a significant blow to the organization. Of course, he was the founder. He was the model in terms of behavior and speech. He was a terrific fundraiser. He had a lot of personal ties to some very powerful people with deep pockets in South Asia and other parts of the Middle East. He was the spiritual guide for the organization for much of his tenure.

And, as Mary has said, we've seen at least in press reporting about these documents that he was quite involved with governing not just al Qaeda central but also the affiliates that are part of al Qaeda. So his death is a big deal still. And I think we're still going to see reverberations of that death as Zawahiri struggles to consolidate his control, pick up the sources of funding that bin Laden had and also the paper trail that bin Laden left behind.

I read yesterday that some of the captured documents will come out, but I am sure it is a tiny, tiny tip of the iceberg of what was captured. So that paper trail is still going to

be followed for years to come because I'm sure we don't even know yet fully what we've recovered.

So the organization is under great threat, not just in Pakistan but also in particular Yemen. The branch in Yemen has been historically quite close to al Qaeda. So the organization is definitely not dead, will not be dead for a long time.

But the question for me is, is it setting the pace of events and does it command the same level of policymakers' attention? Does it command the same level of fear in this country? Is it shaping events in the Middle East as it once did? And I don't believe it is outside of say the southern part of Yemen.

I don't think al Qaeda is setting the tone of things in the region in the way that it did say during the insurgency in the Iraq war or even in the immediate aftermath of 9/11.

The Arab spring has had huge consequences for the resonance of al Qaeda's ideology in the region. I never thought and still don't think that the Arab spring was consequential because of the way it came about, particularly in Egypt and Tunisia with peaceful protests. I don't think that's important to al Qaeda at all. It may have been bin Laden a little bit, who's never been a fan of peaceful demonstrations and protests, but Zawahiri before the Arab spring was quite comfortable with such demonstration. So it's not as if it's a major chink in their armor.

Where I do think it's been consequential is that some very conservative Muslims have gone against their own ideology and decided to participate in parliamentary politics and get involved in the party system.

For Salafi Muslims, who share much of their ideology with al Qaeda in terms of their theology and often their political worldviews, for years they have opted out of party politics and parliamentary systems and seen them as corrupt, as usurping God's role as lawmaker. For the jihadis and jihadi Salafis and also for the more quiet Salafis, the people that begged off of politics, they're comfortable with some elements of democracy.

They wouldn't mind – the Sunni males, for example, are allowed to elect their own leader. They're also comfortable with the notion – many of them – of having representatives elected who will hold that leader to account in his implementation of the law.

But the law itself, the creation of that law, that's not for humans to do. God they believe has already provided it and it's for humans to implement it. Therefore, the parliamentary system is a polytheistic system because man is joining partners with God by becoming lawmakers themselves. And they also critique it for empowering minority voices that shouldn't have any say over the affairs of Muslims. For example, having a Christian minority in Egypt, having a vote in parliament is anathema to many.

Nevertheless, we have seen over the past few decades a process which the Arab spring has accelerated of Salafis getting involved in parliamentary politics. We saw it in Kuwait in the 1980s and we see it even more apparent today in Egypt where the Salafis form political parties in the immediate aftermath of Mubarak's fall after equivocating on whether he should go or not, and they ended up taking about one-quarter of the seats in the newly formed parliament, this despite the fact that in their ideology, they very strongly disagree with the idea that people should be involved in parliaments at all for the reasons I stated.

This has caused a lot of turmoil in the broader jihadi movement that supports groups like al Qaeda. If you want to see evidence of it, one of the chief websites that a lot of jihadis will visit to get legal opinions is run by a Jordanian cleric named Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. There you can read fact files about the Arab spring, whether we should be involved or not, and it's significant that a lot of the questions are coming from Egyptian Salafis who support al Qaeda's cause, but they're extremely confused about the way forward now because you have – in Egypt the ruler that they had been fighting against is now gone. You have the secularists and the more from their standpoint moderate Islamists getting involved in the political process. And the worry is that they are going to take all the spoils. And to make it worse for the Salafis, they have their own local sheiks or religious scholars telling them that it's now okay to get involved, the argument being that it's the lesser of two evils, that, yes, parliaments are evil but it's a greater evil if we're not able to protect our interests.

And so these parties are being formed and it's caused a lot of confusion in the jihadi community, and you can find among these so-called jihadi clerics – you can find statements where they say, look, it's still an evil, we still shouldn't be doing it, but it's definitely better than what came before. That kind of equivocating is going to continue to cause turmoil in the jihadi movement when they consider the best ways to go about obtaining and exercising power.

So I think that's the real significance of the Arab spring. It strikes right at the ideological fellow travelers of al Qaeda. The key ordinance that they focus on, the one that they pitch most of their arguments to, the one that they marshal sources, textual resources for convincing them that their cause is right, this audience is starting to have doubts, real doubts about staying completely out of politics or using violence to overthrow the government. I think that's the major thing that the Arab spring has done.

Is it going to end terrorism? Is that going to go away because now there's democracies? No. We know that new democracies are particularly susceptible to terrorist violence. So I don't think that's going to be the case, but if these newly elected parliamentarians are allowed to fully and completely exercise their new rights as representatives of one-fourth of Egypt's public, that is going to have long-lasting consequences in the region. And I don't believe it can be just dismissed out of hand as inconsequential to al Qaeda.

And you will notice if you review every single al Qaeda statement over the last year, almost without fail, all of them talk about the consequences of the Arab spring, and what they key in on is the nature of those governments that Muslims are forming and they warn again and again you cannot allow the fruits of our jihad to be stolen by giving it away and forming parliamentary systems of government.

So al Qaeda itself sees this as a major downside to the Arab spring and the frustration will grow as more and more of these countries, these Arab spring countries turn to more representative forms of government.

On the issue of command and control that Mary raises, I think Mary is thinking about it in the context of this old debate about whether you have a leader-led Jihad, as Bruce Hoffman would put it, or a leader-less jihad, as Marc Sageman would put it.

I think that debate has come out fairly on Bruce Hoffman's side and in terms of their being an al Qaeda core that provides leadership to the affiliates, Mary suggesting that the affiliates will walk in lockstep with al Qaeda core, that when it receives a directive from them, that it will definitely carry it out.

That's not my sense of things from reading the documents that we have publicly available from al Qaeda in Iran from 2005 and 2006. It's not my interpretation of the information that has come out through the news media of the documents that were recovered in Abbottabad during the bin Laden raid.

My sense from those documents is that when al Qaeda central wants something done, it is couched in terms of advice, advice to their affiliates. And you'll notice the way in which Zawahiri, for example, approaches Zarqawi who had been misbehaving, and he says, brother, we notice from afar X, Y and Z is happening. Based on our experience in Egypt and around the world, we are uncomfortable with what has been going on, but you, of course, are on the ground. We don't want to push, but can we suggest these things? And they leave it to Zarqawi's discretion whether to implement them or not.

Now, of course, the affiliates are going to try very hard to implement the suggestions. They would not have sworn an oath of allegiance to the leadership of al Qaeda. Bin Laden and now Zawahiri, if they had not been willing to carry out its directives, but on the other hand, this is not a military organization. And even pointing to paramilitary organizations or irregular units, it doesn't quite capture it either. I think you have to have a little bit of a sense for the cultural background of these guys where it's just a big impolite to issue a straight directive and that you want to frame it in terms of advice and not as an order.

Again, I agree with Mary that these organization that have sworn an oath of allegiance and have had it reciprocated by al Qaeda's leadership, they are indeed part of al Qaeda. But as to whether they completely carry out the orders on the ground, I think time will tell, but the available evidence says it's a lot more complicated than that.

Going to another topic that Mary raised that is a fascinating new development, it is the fact that al Qaeda now controls territory. It tried this back in 2005-2006 in Iraq. It failed miserably, one reason being Zarqawi didn't follow a lot of the advice that Zawahiri had given him about creating a popular front, about playing nice with the other insurgents, about not going after the Shia.

Al Qaeda is trying its hand at this again. One way they're trying it is, of course, they bought some new capabilities with their merger with the Shabaab. Shabaab controls a lot of territory in Somalia, which is a large state. And so now al Qaeda can be said to control that territory.

In the Shabaab's case, it's unclear though, one, how long they will hold this territory because the organization is conceding some ground to its neighbors that are attacking and, number two, it is also unclear to the extent – to what extent the Shabaab organization – the entire organization signed up for the merger with al Qaeda. It may be the case that in the coming months we will see different factions of the Shabaab split off and that the one that allied itself with al Qaeda did so for reasons of its own, not necessarily aligned with those with the more national focus in Somalia. So, yes, al Qaeda controls territory in Somalia, but it may not for long and it's not clear that the Shabaab, as an organization, is going to hang together for much longer.

Moving over to Yemen, to me, that's the most fascinating development in the past year. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula under the front group Ansar al-Sharia has been able to take some villages in the south and it's able to move relatively freely across a wide swath of territory in Yemen.

Interestingly, in contrast to what al Qaeda in Iraq had done, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula operating in Yemen has been very careful to demonstrate to the wider world that it has a light touch and that it is meeting the needs of the people that it has, quote, unquote, "liberated."

It, for example, is producing propaganda videos done very beautifully that interviews locals and villages that they captured and they have – and they get these locals saying we're so grateful that you've turned on the electricity for us again. We're grateful that you've turned on water. We're grateful that you have established some sort of police presence in this town.

Naturally, you have to take all of this also with a grain of salt. This is, after all, propaganda. And just because it's mentioned in propaganda does not make it so. But we know from independent press reporting that in fact al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has gone of its way to try and provide basic services in the villages and towns that they capture.

As Mary said, this resonates quite well with the strategy put forward by this fellow, Abu Bakr Naji, and the book he wrote in 2004 when the insurgency in Iraq was

just getting sprung up. And Naji's idea was that basically I would call his strategy insight and conquer, that you do two things at the same time.

One is that you want to goad your enemy, whether it be the local ruler or the United States into overreacting, and this overreaction, if you can get them to commit military forces, it will draw recruits to you. It will bring money with it. If they decide to pull back, even better, because now you've got more latitude to operate and they're looking to open up these zones of instability where they can move in, provide basic services to people and win their allegiance in that matter.

And we know that members of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula have read the book. We know – I know from a journalist friend of mine that the Shabaab has read the book, that it's recommended reading to many of its followers. It's not a complicated strategy so I'm not suggesting that this is some sort of new strategic manual that is guiding efforts, but it's a useful way to understand what's happening on the ground.

So the so-called Emirates in southern Yemen are a major development for al Qaeda. But, again, we'll see how long they're able to hold them. Holding a few towns at gunpoint when a government is collapsing is one thing. Are you going to be able to hold them over the long term while at the same time insisting that your enemies attack you by repeatedly poking them in the eye and threatening to kill them, that is, issuing proclamations against the United States, trying to blow up airplanes over Detroit. That's going to bring down a lot of heat on you and on the local population that's hosting you. So whether they are going to be able to hold it for a long time, I'm skeptical of it.

I'll wrap it up there.

MR. BATES: That sounds great. Thank you, Will. I have a complicated question if you can give a quick answer to it. And that's this: what was more disruptive to al Qaeda's immediate goals: the death of bin Laden or the Arab spring?

MR. MCCANTS: I think the Arab spring certainly. And it will have the longer lasting consequences. I do think bin Laden's death was significant for the reasons I mentioned, but the Arab spring and the behavior of Salafis in the wake of the Arab spring strikes right at the heart of al Qaeda's ideology.

MR. BATES: Thanks very much. Stephen.

STEPHEN TANKEL: Thank you very much. It's always – to go last, you can sort of pick and choose the brilliant things that the other panelists said and then just try to find a new way to repeat those back.

But just to let everybody where I'm coming from, I think we've talked a lot about sort of the al Qaeda organization. I certainly want to keep the focus on that but just so that you know where my biases are, although I work on South Asia a lot now, a lot of my research in the past was on the evolution of Jihadist groups that were (an extent ?) but

independent organizationally from al Qaeda at the time of 9/11 and how they have evolved. So while I'm interested in AQ as the organization, I'm also interested in sort of some of those other groups within the wider jihadist movement.

And just to put my cards on the table, I too tend to see the organization as comprising those actors in Pakistan and there might be a few running around in Afghanistan, the affiliates and others who have sworn bay'ah not to see that distinction organizationally between the core and the affiliates, but that said, like Will, I do see the relationship not being perhaps nearly as tight between the leaders who are based in Pakistan and those affiliates.

And I think it's helpful to just – I don't want to get too much into history, but to briefly look back and to remember that prior to 9/11 – and I agree with Mary that attacking the United States, the purpose of that has evolved over time.

One purpose of that prior to 9/11 was to try to get the U.S. to move out of the Muslim world. Another was a potential means to unite the jihadist movement. I think it's important to remember that prior to 9/11 al Qaeda did not have a lot of ideological suasion. You know, it was a minor player in the jihadist movement in that degree. Global jihadism was not the mainstream at that time. Most groups were either fighting to liberate occupied Muslim land, waging a classical jihad or they were fighting to topple what they perceived to be apostate regimes, a revolutionary jihad.

Bin Laden's very unique trick as it were, his contribution, one of several, was to suggest that the U.S. was occupying Saudi Arabia and so therefore it was the occupier that needed to be fought first and that it would be impossible to topple, as Mary outlined, any of these other apostate regimes until the U.S. were evicted from the Muslim world. And so to suggest that the U.S. needed to be the first target, the primary target – and again, I will come back to it, part of that was designed to try to unify the jihadist movement.

I think it's important to remember that within the wider jihadist movement, a lot of people were opposed to bin Laden's aims to attack the U.S. Abu Musab al-Suri, another jihadist – (inaudible) – talked about the potential to lose the Afghan safe haven. There was to be, even among those small number within al Qaeda leadership who knew about 9/11, whether or not this was a good idea.

Nevertheless, after 9/11, there's no doubt that al Qaeda's ideological suasion certainly increased and global jihadism became part of the mainstream, if not necessarily the mainstream ideology. And I would posit that rather than it being the predominant driver – I tend to look at waging jihad against the U.S. and its allies for most of these groups as what I would term a peripheral jihad, which is to say they have their primary objectives they're trying in primary area of focus, and this goes for affiliates as well as for associated movements which could be Lashkar-e-Taiba, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, or until Shabaab joined, that could have been seen as perhaps an associated movement that wasn't part of the organization. But these became peripheral jihads for the group.

I think that's important because these groups remain predominantly focused on their local issues. They remained parts of their local environments and they remained influenced by local factors. In some cases that was their relationships with the local ruling powers and others it was competition with other non-state actors.

I think it's also important to remember in terms of those groups that have sort of, quote, "gone al Qaeda," you know leaving the AQAP and Yemen aside because that was – these were individuals in AQAP 1.0 who had been connected to the al Qaeda organization.

Al Qaeda in Iraq, you know, there are a number of reasons why Zarqawi perhaps goes and joins, but one is that he had perhaps taken his organization as far as it could go. But in terms of the Salafi group for preaching combat in Algeria, the impetus for reaching out to join al Qaeda – and they reached out first in 2003 and took several years before they were finally accepted – came from a position of weakness, not of strength.

I spent a fair amount of time in Algeria looking at this group and these were actors who saw the revolutionary jihad was going nowhere and so joining al Qaeda was a way to try to regenerate. But that doesn't necessarily mean that that became their primary focus or that they necessarily had the capabilities to inflict losses on the West, even their ability to try to attack Western targets in Algeria has been – they've been relatively successful now.

Al Shabaab, you know, not a – Somalia is not a country where (ordinarily ?) is strong in but I would argue that Shabaab begins trending more towards al Qaeda after it has perhaps peaked and that this has, as Will alluded to – there are questions about the degree to which this is an area in which everybody within the organization is unified.

And this is the other thing that I think it's important is that the decision about whether or not become involved with al Qaeda, either to affiliate formally or to provide assistance at the operational level, in terms of the logistical support or training or what have you among the associated groups, this is something that has actually caused a fair amount of disunity at least in a number of the groups that I have looked at, which is to say there are a lot of debate about whether adding the United States as an enemy is a good idea for some of the reasons that Will outlined.

And here's where I think – and I too am one who saw bin Laden's death as a significant event but not the death now for al Qaeda, the organization, and certainly not for the wider Jihadist movement, but here's why I think his death is in some ways important and where I think degrading the actors who are based in Pakistan is also important.

One could argue that in terms of those who have been promoting the idea of America as the primary enemy to be fought, that these are for the most part the people in South Asia, in Pakistan. I don't have an answer to the question, but I think it's an

important question to be asked is when those people are entirely removed from the playing field, what comes after?

If I were asked to bet, I would bet that you were looking at a re-localization, which I think is already underway. I would also point in terms of bin Laden's death to the fact that we know this from – even from some of the information that is beginning to come out now that I believe it hasn't been necessarily declassified yet but I know Peter Bergen in his book writes about this and has previewed some of the information that there were debates within al Qaeda about whether or not to – even the TTP should be waging as much of a jihad as it was against the Pakistani state.

Bin Laden was pushing for that focus on the U.S. and there were – there was discord within – even AQ about whether to be more focused on those apostate regimes or focused on the U.S., all of which is to say I would posit that we are going to be looking at an increasingly, as I said, re-localization which means not just in terms of objective focus, but in terms of the drivers for how these groups evolve and for how the threat evolves, which is to say – and to echo that point I think, Will, that you were alluding to is the fact that AQ is not the driving force that it was several years ago for a lot of different actors within the Jihadist movement.

And I think it's helpful to just sort of take a brief tour around in terms of those questions of upholding territory and recruitment and command and control, not to pile on here, but because I think the record is somewhat mixed.

Will, you spoke about Yemen and Somalia to a degree, and Algeria. I think we need to sort of qualify what it means to say that AQIM holds territory in Sahel. First of all, they expanded there initially because they were looking for new supply lines. And they grew their presence there because Algeria had become very inhospitable terrain.

And since moving to Sahel, expanding there, AQIM has been forced to move around quite a bit. And even AQIM in the Sahel is not a unified entity. There are different brigades that not only clobbered with one another but even within the same organization compete with one another.

They were based in Northern Mali for a time. They've been forced periods of time to move back in southern Algeria. One of those brigades now appears to potentially be moving into Libya. Certainly there is a flow of arms from Libya that is going to be helpful to AQIM and that is an area of concern, the ability to move into Libya as space is an area of concern, but I think the wider picture is one ungoverned space, yes, continues to be problematic. I don't think any of us would debate that.

But I think there's a difference between holding territory and at least to the evidence that we've seen in this area from higher tracks and camp tracks and everything else. They're quite mobile in the Sahel, but to say that they are holding territory or rather that there's a lot of ungoverned territory that they can move around in – those are two distinctly different ways of looking at the issue.

And I think that's an important distinction. And I think one can extrapolate this to other entities within the Jihadist movement, because one of the reasons why AQIM has trouble holding territory is it's forced to compete not necessarily with other governments – I mean, you know, they had actually a bit of a sort of non-aggression path with the government in Mali for a while which just shows that jihadists are certainly capable of strategic thought and of doing deals when they want to – but also that they're forced to compete now with other non-state actors.

The Tuareg are far more popular in these areas than are necessarily AQIM. And that's going to be the case I would argue in other areas as well that they are forced to compete not just with governments and not just to deal with, you know, what I expect to be continued U.S. counterterrorism pressure but also with other non-state actors as well that are providing a slightly more appealing cause. And to the degree that it's not the only game in town, I think overtime that weakens the movement.

I think all of that's important because I agree that AQ's overarching goal was never just to attack the U.S. That was always a means to an end. So the question then becomes, how much success are they going to have in terms of growing their footprint?

And my sense is that while they will continue to be able to take advantage of ungoverned spaces, of areas in which grievances exist, you know, of areas in which states are weak or abusive to their populations, you know, and they may be able to continue to recruit man to man or even beyond that, that their ability to grow into the type of movement that they ever envisioned will remain hamstrung.

And I would also argue that I think we'll increasingly see, as I said, you know, greater variegation as these actors are forced to deal with a lot of these different local issues. And let me just sort of wrap up in terms of my sense of what that means for the U.S. you know as we gauge this moving forward.

One of the things I think that's very important is gauging both intent and capability, right? We can ask what's in a name. Okay. So you're al Qaeda and the Islamic Maghreb. And it is problematic that you are expanding in the Sahel region, or you're al-Shabaab and it is troublesome that you hold some territory in Somalia. What are your capabilities to actually threaten U.S. interests abroad or at home? I can name several organizations that I'm pretty sure the U.S. is more worried about that are not part of the al Qaeda organization. You know, I'm prejudiced but Lashkar-e-Taiba is one of them.

So I think that's very important when we look at these is that rhetorical unity is important and certainly with joining al Qaeda, that intent comes along. And I think it's going to be some time before that global jihadist genie gets put back in the bottle. But it is important to keep in perspective the capabilities of these organizations, as well as the fact that they're intent to attack the U.S., I would argue is going to remain a peripheral intent to their local objectives and is going to be influenced by strategic calculation that

takes into account the dangers or at least the costs of trying to target the U.S. versus being more locally focused.

Now, what does that mean for America? Does that mean that we can say, okay, problem solved, drop up and go home? No. It absolutely does not. But it does mean that, to my mind at least, as policymakers look at the myriad threats from this organization going forward and from the wider jihadist movement, that we will or we should look at it within the more perhaps of a regional lens, which isn't to say that there's not connectivity at the global level, but it is to say that as we look at things through a regional prism, it is to say, okay, how much of a real concern is AQIM for us in terms of transactional terrorists to catch? Okay, it's not a major concern. It is a destabilizing force. It's one of several destabilizing forces potentially in the region and must be looked at through that prism.

So I guess I come at this from the perspective of saying, while we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that these actors do share that there is ideological overlap, that there is connectivity, that there is I would describe to you a much looser advise and consent type of command and control, but at the same time, to the degree to which we can disaggregate these actors and deal with them on a region-to-region basis, working with regional partners where possible, while continue to engage in direct action to capture or kill where necessarily to me that seems to be a sensible path forward. And hopefully that will stir some discussion.

MR. BATES: Thank you. So threat equals capability plus intent. Capabilities of al Qaeda and affiliates are reduced and intent may be reduced from, say, 2001 to harm the United States.

MR. TANKEL: And I think the intent of the al Qaeda organization, certainly the actors in Pakistan remains – you know, they are still quite intent on harming the U.S. I think the capability to do so is reduced. One of the reasons why there's concerns about the Yemeni affiliate obviously is the fact that it has attempted transactional terrorist attacks.

One of the reasons why there's concerns about Shabaab is the fact that there's a South Somali Diaspora community. Even there, of course, there was a period of time when Shabaab appeared quite reluctant to send Somali Diaspora back to the U.S. because they didn't want to step on their fundraising networks, right? So it's to say that the capabilities will be more dispersed. It's also to say that the intent will remain but I would argue will continue to be influenced by a variety of other factors beyond wanting to carry forward al Qaeda's local jihad.

MR. BATES: Very good. We have time for a few questions. Yes, sir, in the back. There's nobody behind you so it's you.

Q: Yes. My name is – (inaudible) – and my question could be answered by – (inaudible) – and Mary. Steve – (inaudible) – break this time. I needed to bring up –

(inaudible) – to ask about this Salafi mindset – (inaudible) – but once it’s come to – (inaudible) – election – (inaudible).

And my question to Mary is that you said that 200-years war – are those Salafi – fighting – (inaudible) – have been supporting the Salafi regime from the beginning, not only – (inaudible) – look at Obama even – (inaudible) – the expectation that he will increase the supply – (inaudible) – election.

So how can we – (inaudible) – our own confusion that – (inaudible) – embarrassed that then – (inaudible) – Mr. Zardari with – (inaudible) – Pakistan and he was brought – (inaudible) – with the help of U.S. and British ambassador to Islamabad. So unless we attack the structural problem that – (inaudible) – double standard by not – (inaudible) – corrupt, because how can we eliminate these kind of negative feelings towards America – (inaudible)?

MR. BATES: Thank you. Mary.

MS. HABECK: You’re sure you don’t want –

MR. BATES: No. Go ahead. You’ve been ready to go.

MS. HABECK: So I’ll just talk a little bit about the 200-year war thing because I should point out that that’s actually an older title. I’m sorry about that. I’m not certain when the updated was sent. My actual new title is *How Al Qaeda Is Fighting Its 200-Year War* because when I first came up with the title for the book, I was thinking of something broader and I’ve since narrowed it.

So for al Qaeda, the 200-year war is not just about attacking the United States or destroying the West in some way, but about creating the conditions to fulfill their four key policy objectives, which are first and foremost overthrow what were called the apostate rulers of the Muslim majority countries; then, secondly, to impose their version, a very extremist version of Sharia on everyone in those countries and generally on Muslims around the world; then, thirdly, to set up what they call (foreign phrase) or emirates in these various places, and then finally to somehow get all these emirates to run together into something they call a caliphate.

So, to me, their 200-year war was supposed to be kicked off with an attack on the United States and then everything would shift focus towards these other bigger issues. That explains for me what you see as re-localization because that’s really going back to their original focus.

And their arguments that they have with other jihadis about how to actually go about creating the world’s perfect Islamic state, which is behind all of this, was about methods and strategies and not about what we all want in the end.

And their argument that they had in the 1990s about attacking the United States showed itself to not be the winner that they'd expected to be after 9/11, but they still believe, as I said, that this can be part of their sort of recruitment and so on. And instead they've refocused on these other countries – there would be very many countries around the world that they want to see the so-called apostate rulers overthrown and then their version of Sharia imposed on it.

And in the process of doing so, though, I don't see this as an agreement with the local jihadis of the 1990s but rather there was a second part of their disagreement. And I think this is key. They said not only do we need to be attacking the U.S. first, but, they said, we have to unify the jihad. We can no longer be thinking about this as local separate jihads fought for local separate reasons or for reasons of what they call (foreign phrase). We have to think about this in terms of fighting as one community for one goal and we are going to set about to unify the jihad so the entire community rises up together in order to do this as a whole and not just some sort of tiny vanguard in one country.

So that they have continued throughout the 2000s – they have attempted up until 2004-2005 with indifferent success to win people over to their vision of how to fight the jihad and how to work together with us, first through some sort of collaboration, cooperation and then through a tighter-knit, what I think of as irregular warfare command and control. And then, to pursue the sorts of ends that we think you should be pursuing in those countries rather than your own local concerns.

And that to me is what's happening today. It's not really a re-localization. It's more like, yes, finally we're able to do what we had hoped to do all along because we have worked for a decade on unifying the jihad and we believe we've gotten there.

And what you pointed out, Steve, I think was very true that mostly the people who joined up with them were people who'd failed in their local jihads or people who were desperate to continue fighting but couldn't figure out how to do it.

In fact, if you take a look at 2000, where al Qaeda was in the global sort of world of jihadism, they were a minor actor with very little influence. But after 2001, when the U.S. pursued a policy of pressuring governments to go after hard anybody with a jihadist sort of tinge, as well as some other groups outside the Muslim majority world, these groups under pressure from very capable governments in places like Indonesia or Turkey or Egypt or elsewhere found themselves greatly reduced in power and in numbers, and were then open, more open to the appeals being made by al Qaeda as basically the last kind of successful group standing and the ones that had managed to escape the pressure of the United States and were still fighting and had a vision for a way forward.

So to me, what happened was through a variety of kinds of means, al Qaeda has set about as a purposeful strategy to unify the jihad and has managed to accomplish that at least to some extent in very many places.

So their 200-year war is continuing and it will continue, but it is focused where it has been from the very start, not on attacking the U.S., which I agree was a means to an end, but on the ends of overthrowing these states and setting up their own in their place.

MR. BATES: Thank you. I think we have time for one more question. Yes, sir.

Q: Thanks very much – (inaudible). I'm Mike Kraft (sp). I grew up in – (off mike). I want to touch on – (inaudible) – you haven't really gotten into is the long war factor and the impact – (inaudible) – on whether bin Laden's death has reduced the inspiration factor, the propaganda authors. And particularly for, Will, because you worked on the counterterrorism – (inaudible) – program, do you have any assessment of where that's going – (inaudible) – program because it might have a real impact?

MR. MCCANTS: Thank you. I see lone wolf strategies as a strategy of a weak organization. It's what you turn to when you can't get your own operatives into a country, and that's not to say al Qaeda won't reconstitute that sort of strength, but the fact that it calls for lone wolf operatives have grown louder over the past few years I think shows that they're having a difficult time getting people into this country.

Certainly you will always have some people who are willing to respond to those kind of appeals. The goal is to lessen the attractiveness of the message, but you're still going to have a steady stream of willing idiots.

I read an interesting comment about an al Qaeda recruiter online who talked about his methods of recruitment and had an interesting number that he put out there. He basically said, you know, we need to paper the mainstream forums, YouTube, everywhere, get our message in every possible place. And if we can do this, we will be able to attract 0.00001 percent of Muslims to our cause and get them to pick up a gun. That's about 15,000 people. That's not a lot, but he's probably reading it right. You're always going to get a certain number of people to join up.

So I think you can initiate large-scale programs like they have in the U.K. or more recently in this country to try and identify and keep vulnerable populations from embracing al Qaeda's message. I personally think that's the wrong way to go about it because it still concedes too much to an organization like al Qaeda that you have to consider your own citizens as potential threats and how you identify a vulnerable person no one is ever going to be able to tell you. And the fact that you're always going to have some idiots who are willing to sign up goes to show you that it's a numbers game.

So what you do, you find the places particularly online now where people are celebrating al Qaeda propaganda, who are sharing it with their friends. And you keep an eye on them and you look to see if they're getting up to any criminal activity.

And my hope is that U.S. counterterrorism will evolve to the place where it can pull some of these guys back from the edge. Right now, law enforcement is more worried about building cases against them. That's their mandate. It's understandable,

but I think we need another tool in our toolkit, and that is being able to pull some of the guys back from committing something – doing something stupid.

MR. BATES: Thank you very much. Thank you everyone for coming out today for what was a very interesting panel and a very important topic. And please join me in thanking our panelists today. (Applause.) Join us on May 9th when we have more programming at CNP. Thank you.

(END)