



THE BUSH SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT
AND PUBLIC SERVICE


Is the Far Enemy Still First?

An Analysis of al-Qa'ida's Targeting Strategy

Briefing Outline

- Origins of the project
 - Methodology
 - Analysis of al-Qa'ida's targeting strategy
 - Intent
 - Capabilities
 - Implications
- 

Briefing Outline

- Origins of the project
 - Methodology
 - Analysis of al-Qa'ida's targeting strategy
 - Intent
 - Capabilities
 - Implications
- 

Origins of the capstone project

- What is a capstone?
 - Integrative, team-based, applied graduate student research project
 - Supervised by a faculty member on behalf of a client agency
- Why the National Counterterrorism Center?
 - Study issues of critical importance to US national security
 - NCTC can use analysis to challenge existing assumptions about the terrorist threat to the Homeland
- Process and timeframe
 - Client provides key questions and topics of focus last fall
 - Interviews with experts/data collection
 - Deliver briefing and final written product in April/May

Briefing Outline

- Origins of the project
- Methodology
- Analysis of al-Qa'ida's targeting strategy
 - Intent
 - Capabilities
- Intelligence



Key research question

- Has al-Qa'ida's grand targeting strategy shifted from the United States to attacking US allies, especially in Europe?
 - Primary assumption: Al-Qa'ida is still focused on the US as its primary target
- We examined the question from two key perspectives:
 - Al-Qa'ida's intent
 - Al-Qa'ida's capability

Multiple sources were used to verify information and determine credibility

- Our conclusions were reached only after information from numerous sources was collected and thoroughly analyzed
- Sources occasionally provided contradicting information
 - Government documents, expert interviews and various research publications were more heavily weighted than other sources
 - News articles only used for factual data and not analysis
 - Statements from al-Qa'ida leadership helped determine intent

Research constraints limit the depth and scope of the analysis

Al-Qa'ida components and goals

Al-Qa'ida Dimension	Examples	Primary Objectives	Recent Plots & Attacks
Al-Qa'ida Strategic Leadership (AQSL)	Core al-Qa'ida leadership centered in Pakistan	Establish a global Caliphate; harm the US and drive the West out of Middle East	September 11 and foiled 2006 airliner plot
Al-Qa'ida Affiliates	Independent terrorist groups with ties to AQSL, such as AQIM	Undermine regional governments; regional objectives	IED attacks in Algeria against local and Western targets
Al-Qa'ida Cells	Small groups of individuals with ties to AQSL	Local objectives w/ guidance from AQSL for larger attacks	3/11 train bombing in Madrid and 7/7 bombing in London
Homegrown Cells	Cells that develop independent of direct guidance from AQSL	Local objectives inspired by al-Qa'ida's ideology	Foiled plot to attack Fort Dix

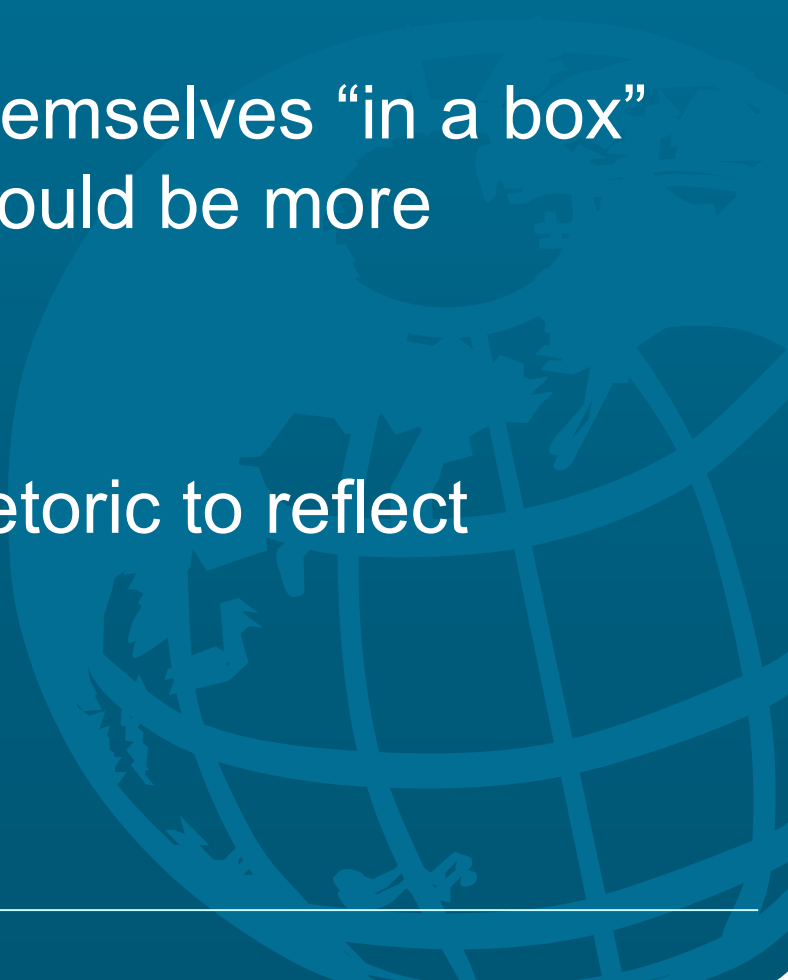
Key Findings

- The United States remains the focus of al-Qa'ida's grand targeting strategy
 - However, al-Qa'ida currently lacks the capability to conduct a spectacular attack against the Homeland
- Al-Qa'ida will continue to target US allies, such as Europe, and other regions to further its regional objectives and increase its capabilities
 - An increase in capabilities will further al-Qa'ida's objectives of striking the US and ultimately establishing a global Caliphate

Briefing Outline

- Origins of the project
 - Methodology
 - Analysis of al-Qa'ida's targeting strategy
 - Intent
 - Capabilities
 - Implementation
- 

Al-Qa'ida wants to carry out an attack in the US more “spectacular” than 9/11

- What would a spectacular attack look like?
 - Did al-Qa'ida leaders put themselves “in a box” by stating the next attack would be more spectacular than 9/11?
 - Has al-Qa'ida altered its rhetoric to reflect lowered expectations?
 - Does timing matter?
- 

What is a “spectacular attack”?


- What are the elements of a spectacular attack?
 - High casualty counts
 - Damage to critical infrastructure
 - Intense media attention
 - Widespread psychological trauma
 - “Ripple effect” on the US economy

Has al-Qa'ida put itself “in a box”?

- “In a box” implies containment, restriction, or limitation
- Two types of “boxes”:
 - Few options/scenarios for an attack
 - Time constraints



Choice of
attacks



Time for
attack to
occur

Al-Qa'ida's attack options are limited, but it is not quite "in a box"

- Choice of attacks:
 - High level attack options limited but al-Qa'ida is still changing
 - Statements still show focus on damaging the US but other opportunities are available
 - Targeting US interests elsewhere (Iraq, Afghanistan) and desire to bleed US of its resources however possible
- Timing:
 - Major disparity in importance (between US and al-Qa'ida) with regard to the next attack
 - Al-Qa'ida emphasizes patience and outcome

Al-Qa'ida seeks to target US allies, particularly Europe, for participating in Afghanistan and Iraq

- Has al-Qa'ida shifted its targeting strategy from the U.S. to Europe to punish allies for participating in Afghanistan and Iraq?
- Has al-Qa'ida targeted Europe because it lacks the capability to successfully attack the United States?
- How might the changing security environment in Afghanistan and Iraq influence al-Qa'ida's targeting strategy?
- Have European responses to previous attacks encouraged al-Qa'ida to target Europe over the United States?

Al-Qa'ida intends to target European allies

- But, the US remains the primary target
- If the US is the primary target, why does al-Qa'ida attack Europe?
 - Lack of capability to strike the US
 - Europe is a target of convenience
 - Punishment for participation in Iraq and Afghanistan
 - Europe is a US ally and symbol of the West
 - Al-Qa'ida's ideology to expel the West from Muslim lands


Europe is more accessible than the US

- Relative to the US, Europe remains an easier target
 - Europe confronts more security challenges than the US
 - Proximity to the Middle East
 - Large Muslim populations
- Europe perceived as an accessible target, not necessarily a weaker target
 - Enhanced counterterrorism measures have deterred some attacks
 - But still an increased risk of radicalization

Europe will remain a target

- Al-Qa'ida likely to continue attacking Europe as a means of harming the West
- In the short run, al-Qa'ida's intent to strike both Europe and US likely to remain unaltered
- In the long run, a gain in capabilities can prompt al-Qa'ida to shift its targeting priorities to other regions

Al-Qa'ida is shifting its strategic focus from the US to other significant regions

- Has al-Qa'ida shifted its focus from the US to other regions?
 - What strategic benefits, either political or ideological, does it gain from operating in these regions?
- 

Al-Qa'ida pursues significant secondary objectives in other regions

- Al-Qa'ida maintains a presence in other key regions to achieve important strategic objectives:
 - Remain visible around the globe
 - Expand its base of support
 - Maintain safe havens

Al-Qa'ida expends significant effort on its secondary objectives

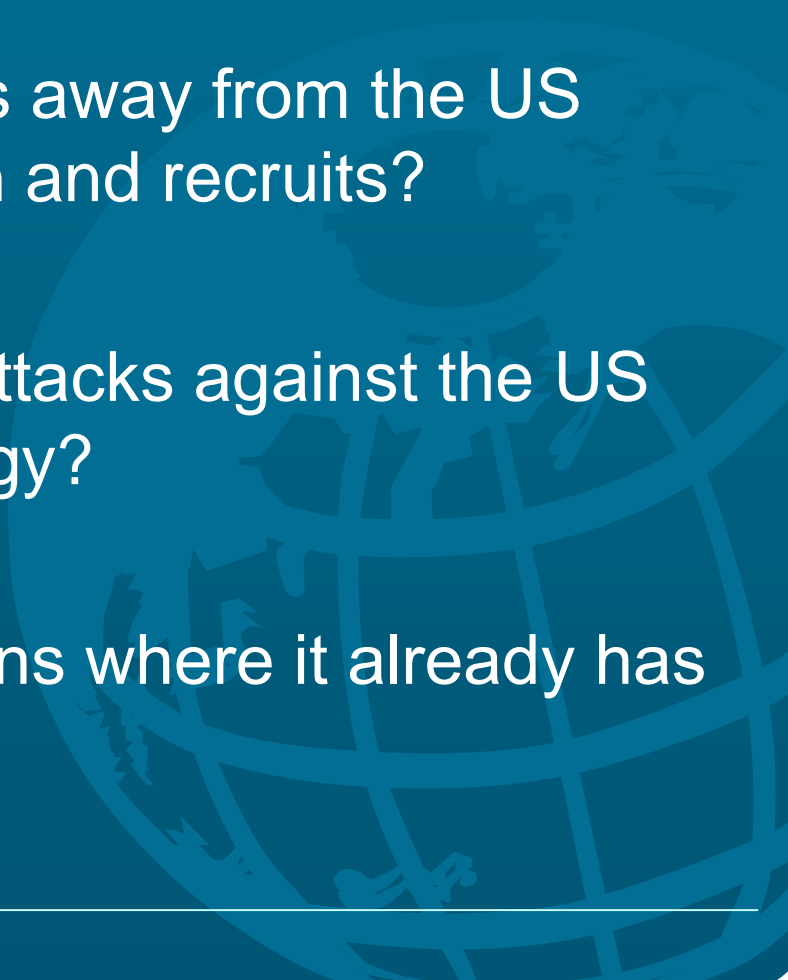
- South Asia
 - Maintain and secure safe haven and base of operations
- Maghreb
 - Spread ideology and increased influence
 - Develop future manpower
- Arabian Peninsula
 - Spread ideology and maintain presence

Briefing Outline

- Origins of the project
- Methodology
- Analysis of al-Qa'ida's targeting strategy
 - Intent
 - Capabilities
- Impact



Al-Qa'ida lacks the capability to conduct attacks inside the United States

- Does al-Qa'ida lack the capability to attack the US?
 - Has al-Qa'ida shifted its focus away from the US because it lacks a safe haven and recruits?
 - How have al-Qa'ida's failed attacks against the US influenced its targeting strategy?
 - Is al-Qa'ida focusing on regions where it already has capabilities?
- 

Several key factors are responsible for al-Qa'ida's lack of capability in the US

- Lacks established networks and a safe haven in the US
- Difficulty inserting operatives in the US from abroad
- Scarce operational resources (weapons, money, recruits, and training facilities)
- Lacks a radicalized Muslim population to exploit

Homegrown terrorists have a distinct advantage

- Al-Qa'ida lacks the capability to direct a successful attack and has difficulty inspiring homegrown terrorism
- It is easier for potential homegrown terrorists to carry out an attack on US soil than foreign al-Qa'ida cells
- Advantages of homegrown terrorism:
 - Citizenship
 - Open society
 - Access to US territory and resources

Al-Qa'ida acquires capabilities from regional networks

- South Asia
 - Safe haven and base of operations in FATA and NWFP
 - Large recruitment pool in Pakistan
- Maghreb
 - Gains resources for operations in North Africa and Europe
- Arabian Peninsula
 - Lawlessness in southern Yemen
 - Charities and financial assistance

But these capabilities are insufficient for an attack on US

- South Asia
 - Still focusing on building base of operations
- Maghreb
 - Lack sophistication for a spectacular attack outside the region
- Arabian Peninsula
 - Multiple crackdowns have reduced recruitment pool

Al-Qa'ida lacks the capability to attack the US specifically because the homeland has been sufficiently hardened since 9/11

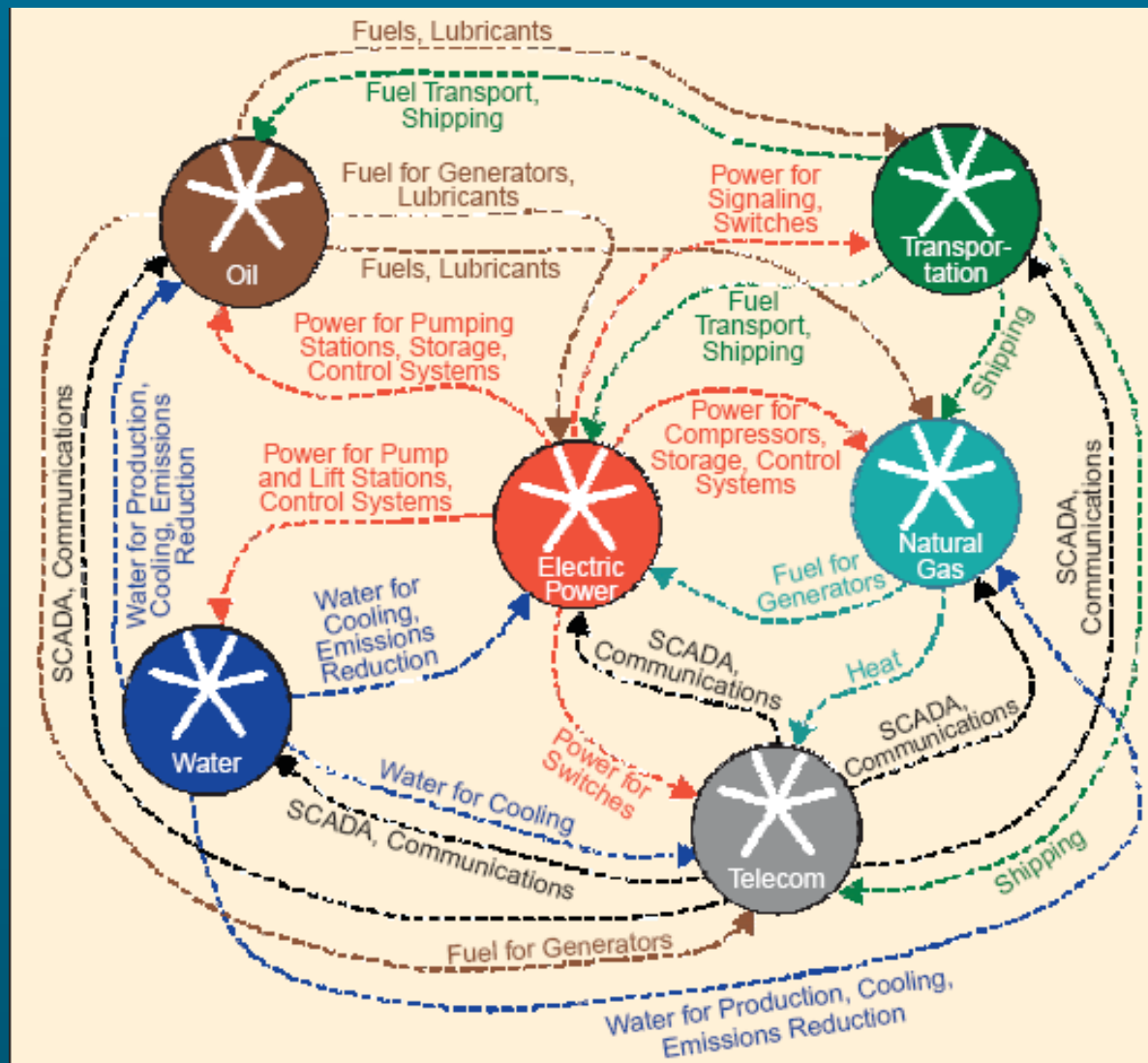
- Did al-Qa'ida deliberately shift its targeting away from the homeland because it lacked the capability to attack inside the US in the face of increased security measures following 9/11?
- Or was this less of a strategic decision, but more of a perceived reality?
 - Was al-Qa'ida dissuaded from attacking in the US because it perceived that the cost was too high?
 - Is the public too aware?
 - Is the government on a high state of alert?

US is working to harden the Homeland

- What is “hardening”?
- US policies have focused on four main areas
 - Finance
 - Access
 - Information
 - Critical Infrastructure



Interdependencies increase vulnerabilities to al-Qa'ida attack



Several elements factor into al-Qa'ida's perception of US policies

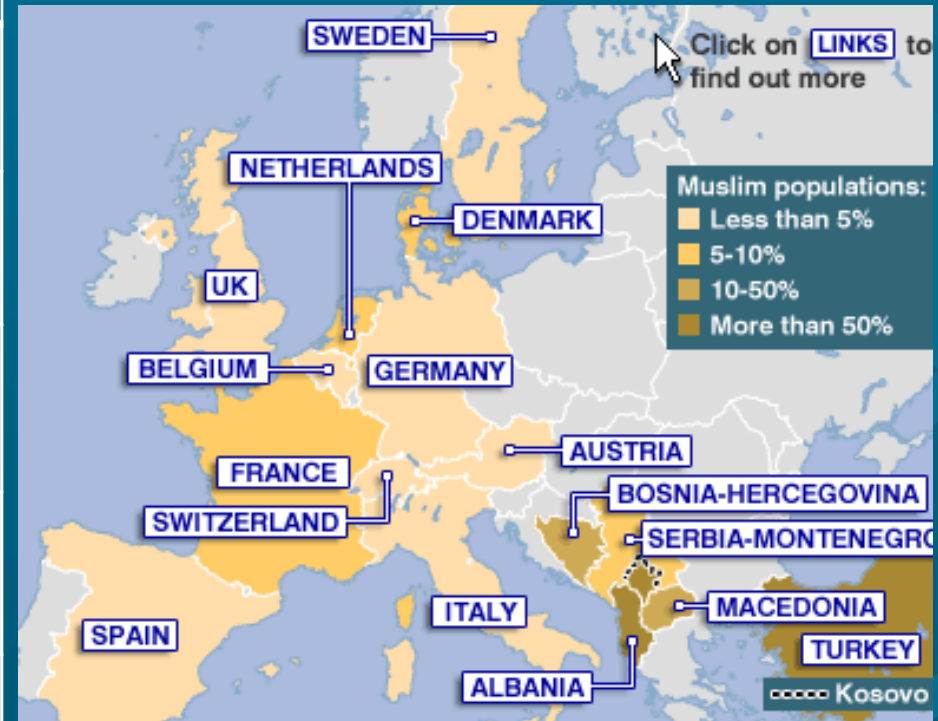
Awareness	"The American and Israeli targets are spread everywhere, and if the conditions are narrow in one place, they are wide in many other places. If the enemy fortifies some [of these places], many are left opened and threatened."
Time	"But the question is: Can America[n] continue to war with us for several coming decades?"
Feeling of entitlement	"You have before you a great opportunity to push injustice and despotism, which is exercised on you from the inside and the outside for several decades, in order for you to take your right by force."

Al-Qa'ida has focused its attacks on Europe because the complex security environment hinders counterterrorism measures

- Has al-Qa'ida focused its attacks on Europe because of the complex security environment?
- How robust are the “disaffected Muslim communities” in Europe?
- Have the Europeans responded with countermeasures rigid enough to dissuade potential terrorist recruits from operating on European soil?

Europe has large Muslim communities and the potential for radicalization

Country	Muslim Population (% of total population)
France	5-6 million (8-9.6%)
Germany	3 million (3.6%)
United Kingdom	1.6 million (2.8%)
Netherlands	945,000 (5.8%)
Denmark	270,000 (5%)
Spain	1 million (2.3%)



Source: BBC News 2005

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4385768.stm>

European counterterrorism efforts face striking challenges

- Some European nations have stringent anti-terrorism policies
- Others rely more heavily on policies designed to counter radicalization within their large Muslim communities
- Individual European nations have had counterterrorism successes, but as a whole, there remain gaps in Europe's defenses
 - Lack of uniform anti- and counterterrorism efforts
 - Freedom of movement across EU countries' borders
 - Extremely large recruiting pools

Briefing Outline

- Origins of the project
 - Methodology
 - Analysis of al-Qa'ida's targeting strategy
 - Intent
 - Capabilities
 - Implications
- 

Al-Qa'ida's capabilities heavily influence its choice of targets

- Intent will remain focused on US allies, including Europe
- Needs more capabilities to directly strike its primary target, the US
- Factors that influence al-Qa'ida's ability to target both the US and its allies:
 - Blowback from Afghanistan and Iraq
 - Training camps in Pakistan
 - Global economic downturn
 - Vulnerability of economic and business targets
 - US administration's approach of combating terrorism
 - Al-Qa'ida's ability to interact with regional affiliates, communicate effectively, and fund terror operations

Al-Qa'ida's targeting strategy



What we learned

- Difficult to determine credibility of open source material
- There are many ways to structure a paper when given a complex question
- Flexibility, patience and adaptability are crucial
- Constructive criticism received at school briefing helped improve our overall product

Questions?



Europe remains fertile recruiting ground

Country	Muslim Population	Suspected No. of Islamist Terrorists	Integration Policies
France	5+ million	100 camp-trained	Assimilation and Secularism
Germany	3.4 million	Up to 3,000 (100 camp-trained)	Between Assimilation and Multiculturalism
United Kingdom	2+ million	Up to 10,000 (3,000 camp-trained)	Multiculturalism and Cultural Autonomy

Counterterrorism successes limited and vulnerabilities remain

- The European Response
 - France
 - Extremely tough anti-terrorism laws
 - French Council of the Muslim Faith
 - Germany
 - Islamkonferenz
 - Anti-Terrorism Act of 2002
 - United Kingdom
 - Finsbury Park Mosque
 - Citizenship tests
- Gaps in Europe's Defenses
 - Freedom of movement across EU countries' borders
 - Extremely large recruiting pools
 - Lack of uniformity in anti-terrorism laws/efforts (France vs. UK)

Capabilities required to carry out a “spectacular attack” in the US

- Simultaneous attacks on multiple locations
 - Exploitation of economic vulnerabilities especially energy sector
 - WMDs
- 