

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

AFFILIATE INNOVATIONS: A POLITICAL PROCESS
THEORY APPROACH TO AL QAEDA IN THE ARABIAN
PENINSULA

by
RYAN LEE FISK

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
to the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration
of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences
at the American University of Beirut

Beirut, Lebanon
May 2015

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Dr. Ahmad Moussalli for his help in putting this thesis together and for his advice throughout the process. I'd also like to recognize Dr. Thomas Haase who provided crucial feedback and guidance when I needed it most. Many thanks as well to Dr. Coralie Hindawi who supplied valuable comments and assistance throughout this endeavor.

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Ryan Fisk for Master of Arts
Major: Political Studies

Title: Affiliate Innovations: A Political Process Theory Approach to Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

This thesis uses theoretical tools from social movement studies literature to analyze the group Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The application of Social Movement Theory allows dynamics to be identified that help explain the emergence and decision making of AQAP. This framework enables a more thorough understanding of the group, answering questions of “how” and “why” the group engages in its chosen form of collective action.

This thesis begins with an analysis of the SMT dynamics present in the original Al Qaeda movement in order to observe their transformation and evolution in AQAP. Political Opportunities are identified, along with Mobilizing Structures, Framing Processes, Repertoires of Contention, and Protest Cycles. The concept of protest cycles, also known as cycles of contention is used to collate the dynamics identified and analyzes the waxing and waning of Al Qaeda’s influence and level of contention.

Analysis shows that Al Qaeda proves to be a resilient social movement due to its ability to restabilize after a period of exhaustion caused by interactions with authorities. The movement’s ability to innovate in framing processes, mobilizing structures, and repertoires of contention, allow Al Qaeda to quickly adapt to changing political opportunities and remain active in collective action.

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DEDICATION

For my mother and father. Thank you for your love and support in all my endeavors.
I promise the thesis is done now.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Al Qaeda organization has been relentlessly pursued by the world's most powerful military and intelligence agencies for over sixteen years. Hundreds of billions of dollars have been spent in the effort to degrade and destroy the movement. Despite the massive amount of resources allocated to combating the group it not only still exists, but is also growing, particularly in Yemen. How did this movement form and why is it so resilient? How has the organization, minuscule when compared to its adversaries, managed to survive all these years? The answers to these questions can be found in an unfamiliar place: the study of social movements.

Al Qaeda is viewed in the mainstream as a uniquely brutal, shadowy terrorist group, made up of religious zealots that act irrationally. However the group shares the same characteristics of social movements throughout modern history. Labour movements, environmental movements, civil rights movements, any modern movement that engages in protest to resolve grievances shares common attributes with Al Qaeda. By identifying those attributes individually, analyzing them, and observing how they work together, Al Qaeda can be better understood and questions can be answered.

Studying Al Qaeda from a Social Movement perspective proves that the organization is not unique. The approach shows that the group is actually a complex social movement that functions similarly to other modern movements. It is guided by political concerns just like other movements and acts strategically to resolve its grievances. This

thesis will utilize concepts from social movement theories, specifically political process theory to analyze the origins of the Al Qaeda organization and the evolution of its powerful affiliate in Yemen, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

Conducting firsthand original research on militant movements is fraught with difficulty and was not possible for this study. Therefore the contribution of this thesis is limited due to the lack of original data collected through surveys or interviews. Instead this thesis relies on primary source documents, correspondence between Al Qaeda leaders, online media, and published accounts of individuals who have either been involved or interacted with the organization. Through analysis of these documents and the application of social movement theory concepts to identified dynamics, the movement can be better-understood and longstanding questions answered.

A. Research Question

This thesis seeks to answer the following questions: what factors, exogenous and endogenous led to the establishment and continued existence of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula? How and why does the movement choose to use violent contention? Al Qaeda is often seen as a monolithic terrorist organization unique in its brutality and willingness to kill civilians. However through the course of this study, a toolkit of Social Movement Theories, well suited for the study of violent clandestine movements will be utilized for in depth analysis. This approach will show that the organization AQAP is not unique and in fact shares the same dynamics of other modern social movements around the world.

B. Literature Survey

There is a plethora of existing information on the original al-Qaeda organization. Hundreds of books and countless articles recount the history of the organization and its leader Osama bin Laden. Scholars have used a variety of approaches to study the group. Among the most influential for the purposes of this study are: Peter Bergen's *The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of Al-Qaeda's Leader*¹ which includes statements from Bin Laden along with statements from individuals that met and interacted with him. The book provides insight into Bin Laden's experiences and opinions, helping explain how his worldview was formed and how Al Qaeda developed and operated. *The Looming Tower*² by Lawrence Wright is the definitive guide in tracing the formation of Al Qaeda and the road to 9/11. Specific to Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Gregory Johnsen's *The Last Refuge*³ covers the history of AQAP in Yemen along with US counterterrorism efforts in the country. Johnsen is considered the foremost scholar on AQAP and his numerous articles are an important resource for insight into the group.

Thomas Hegghammer's thesis *Violent Islamism in Saudi Arabia, 1979-2006*⁴ is an invaluable asset in understanding Al Qaeda, Islamist violence, and how it emerged in Saudi Arabia. Hegghammer also uses a social movement theory approach to his research and makes important contributions to the field in understanding ideology, opportunities, mobilization, and repertoires. Victoria Clark's book *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of*

¹ Peter Bergen, *The Osama Bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of Al-Qaeda's Leader* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

² Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (Vintage, 2007).

³ Gregory Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, Al-Qaeda, and America's War in Arabia* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2013).

⁴ Thomas Hegghammer, "Violent Islamism in Saudi Arabia, 1979-2006 the Power and Perils of Pan-Islamic Nationalism," (Doctoral diss., Sciences-Po, 2007).

*Snakes*⁵ details the contentious history of Yemen with its many conflicts and divisions. Her work offers insight into tribal dynamics and the struggle to govern, along with details of Yemen's history with jihadists.

There is a great deal of Social Movement Theory (SMT) literature available that has traditionally studied movements in western democratic states. Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani's work *Social Movements: An Introduction*⁶ is a useful resource for the core concepts of SMT and its applications. Their work studies mostly non-violent movements in democracies, however recently SMT has increasingly been used in the study of non-western movements and movements that operate in more authoritarian states. Quentin Wiktorowicz's edited volume *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*⁷ shows how the SMT framework can be useful in analyzing Islamic movements and understanding that they are not unique and share much in common with western movements. This approach helps "de-orientalize" movements so each can be observed as a complex organization instead of being viewed as monolithic and primarily defined by faith. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*⁸ by Sidney Tarrow is an important text within SMT, it focuses on social movements throughout history and their rise and fall. Tarrow develops theory to explain such fluctuations and those theories are frequently used in this thesis. *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political*

⁵ Victoria Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes* (Yale University Press, 2010).

⁶ Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements an Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

⁷ Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach (Indiana Series in Middle East Studies)* (Indiana University Press, 2003).

⁸ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics (Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics)* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

*Movements*⁹ is an important reference when studying social and political movements. Its vast collection of theories, concepts, and definitions are extraordinarily helpful in developing an understanding of the complex body of theory and terms in SMT. *Clandestine Political Violence*¹⁰ by Donatella Della Porta examines the use of violence by social movements and builds theory suggesting that the phenomenon of violence is developed within interactions between the state, social movements, and counter movements.

Framing Processes are an important component of SMT which identify the grievances of a movement along with prescriptions and motivations for resolving those grievances. Michael Page, Lara Challita, and Alistair Harris's article *Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: Framing Narratives and Prescriptions*¹¹ identifies the Framing Processes of the group as this thesis will also accomplish. However their study is limited to framing and does not identify other aspects of SMT in AQAP. David Snow and Scott Byrd also use framing processes in their article *Ideology, Framing Processes, and Islamic Terrorist Movements*.¹² This article is valuable due to the fact that Snow and Byrd were pioneers in Framing Process theory and they demonstrate how ideology can be broken down into framing processes and better understood. Colin J. Beck and his paper *The Contribution of Social Movement Theory to Understanding Terrorism*¹³ argues that SMT provides a framework well suited for the analysis of terrorism. It identifies relevant

⁹ David A. Snow et al., *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements (3 Vols.)* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

¹⁰ Donatella della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence (Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics)* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹¹ Michael Page, Lara Challita, and Alistair Harris, "Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: Framing Narratives and Prescriptions," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 2 (2011).

¹² David A Snow and Scott C Byrd, "Ideology, Framing Processes, and Islamic Terrorist Movements," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (2007).

¹³ C Beck, "The Contribution of Social Movement Theory to Understanding Terrorism," *SOCIOLOGY COMPASS -ELECTRONIC EDITION-* 2, no. 5 (2008).

mechanisms in SMT literature that could be applied in future research. Reza Aslan's dissertation *Global Jihadism as a Transnational Social Movement: A Theoretical Framework*¹⁴ also utilizes SMT for analysis of political Islam. Aslan uses New Social Movement Theories which focus more on historical and social conditions involved in group formation. His work is focused mainly on ideology emergence and not particular group emergence.

The existing literature on Islamic Extremism that utilizes SMT tends to focus in depth on single concept such as mobilization or framing. What the field is lacking is a broader approach that examines every important concept and the interactions between those concepts. Focusing on a single issue can result in analysis rich in detail specific to a chosen concept. However such an approach ignores dynamics that must be considered to get a fuller picture of a movement. This thesis attempts to fill a void in the literature by examining all the concepts of Political Process Theory in Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

C. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

The organization Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is an affiliate of the Al Qaeda organization founded by Osama bin Laden. Al Qaeda existed in Yemen prior to the founding of AQAP and it will be covered later in the study, however AQAP in its current iteration will be the main subject of this work. AQAP was founded in January of 2009 following a February 2006 prison break of Al Qaeda members and veterans of the

¹⁴ Reza Aslan, *Global Jihadism as a Transnational Social Movement: A Theoretical Framework* (University of California, Santa Barbara, 2009).

Afghanistan jihad fought against the Soviet Union. AQAP came to be considered by the US as the most dangerous Al Qaeda affiliate due to its attempted attacks on mainland US targets. It rose to prominence with its failed attempt to down a US airline on Christmas Day 2009. Along with its failed attempt to detonate explosives disguised as ink toner cartridges also carried on aircraft.

AQAP has also often fought forces of the Yemeni government, functioning as both a violent clandestine movement engaging in strategic suicide bombings and an insurgent movement fighting Yemeni forces in sustained pitched battles. This was a change in normal operations for Al Qaeda and the transformation will be studied within this thesis. By dissecting the AQAP movement with Social Movement theories into political opportunity structures, mobilizing structures, framing processes, repertoires of contention, and protest cycles, the organization can be better understood as each SMT dynamic provides unique insights.

D. Methodology

Due to the difficulties involved in collecting data on violent clandestine movements, this study draws on primary and secondary sources for information. Content analysis of statements from Osama bin Laden is conducted as well as analysis of documents that were collected when US Forces raided Bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad Pakistan. Documents newly released from that trove as of March 2015 are also used. Correspondence between Bin Laden and the leader of AQAP Nasir al-Wuhayshi is analyzed along with correspondence between Wuhayshi and the leader of AQIM recovered by the Associated Press in Timbuktu. These sources provide valuable insight into Al Qaeda

due to assumed privacy of communication and frank exchange of views not visible in official media releases.

The online media output of AQAP is also analyzed, specifically the magazine Sada Al-Malahim and Inspire. These primary sources are used to identify framing processes and repertoires of contention. Anwar al-Awlaki frequently issued his own personal releases of videos, lectures, and statements separate from AQAP. Analysis of those releases is also conducted providing insight into his increasingly radical views and decision to join AQAP. Secondary sources are also used for historical information on the groups concerned and SMT is applied to events and actions. Historical accounts of Al-Qaeda, AQAP, and Yemen are relied upon as well as journalistic accounts of events.

E. Terrorism Related Research

Terrorism related research has had its fair share of detractors who argue that the field is preoccupied with seeking prescriptions for counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency. So much so in fact that it has given rise to journals and sub-fields devoted solely to the topic such as *Critical Studies on Terrorism*.¹⁵ A central point of contention among these critics is the word “terrorism” itself. Debate over the definition of the word is endless and such scholars argue that the term has become so politicized that it has lost meaning and detracts from critical analysis. The word “terrorism” or “terrorist” is often used to stigmatize a group or individual actor and to legitimize expanding powers of state security and build public support against that actor. Brian Jenkins argues in *The New Age of*

¹⁵ Marie Breen Smyth et al., “Critical Terrorism Studies: An Introduction,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1, no. 1 (2008).

Terrorism “not to think of terrorism or terrorists as monolithic. Terrorism is a generalized construct derived from our concepts of morality, law, and the rules of war, whereas actual terrorists are shaped by culture, ideology and politics - specific, inchoate factors and notions that motivate diverse actions.”¹⁶ It is therefore unhelpful analytically to use a term that in the current public conscience is overly emotive, divisive, and non-descriptive. “Terrorists” use complex repertoires of action that are oversimplified by using the catch-all word “terrorism,” therefore an alternative term is necessary for accurate description.

Donatella Della Porta suggests an alternative term that is also the title of her book, “*Clandestine Political Violence*”. Della Porta defines political violence as “those repertoires of collective action that involve great physical force and cause damage to an adversary to achieve political aims.”¹⁷ That is combined with her definition of “clandestine violence” - “the extreme violence of groups that organize underground for the explicit purpose of engaging in the most radical forms of collective action.”¹⁸ Put together this definition offers a more accurate description of the violence used by Al Qaeda while distinguishing it from other groups that use more conventional violence. As Della Porta argues “I consider the concept of clandestine political violence as particularly useful because the choice of clandestinity brings about quite specific sets of constraints. The very choice to go underground of a relatively small group of activists is heuristically relevant, as it triggers a spiral of radicalization, transforming political organizations into military sects.”¹⁹ Armed with this highly specific definition, and by avoiding the endless debate over

¹⁶ Brian Michael Jenkins, “The New Age of Terrorism,” *Terrorism and Political Islam* (2006), 117.

¹⁷ Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence* (*Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics*), 6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

terrorism definitions, this study will examine the violence of Al-Qaeda critically from a sociological point of view.

Another topic of frequent research within the terrorism and security studies field is radicalization. Radicalization is defined as: “the process through which individuals and organizations adopt violent strategies - or threaten to do so - in order to achieve political goals.”²⁰ SMT theorists have largely focused on two processes when it comes to radicalization in social movements: the effect of state repression and movement cycles.²¹ Mobilization can be constrained if governments become more repressive and security services use violence and intimidation. However that repression may lead to increasing militancy. Colin Beck argues that: “state repression actually suppresses moderate alternatives, radicalizes remaining supporters, and creates the martyrs and myths that militants use to justify their actions. Social movements also appear to have an organizational life cycle that makes radicalization most likely in the latter states of a movement cycle.”²² SMT scholars claim that when movements are unsuccessful in achieving their aims they can become increasingly radical over time. Doug McAdam reasons that as governments react and adapt to the tactics used by social movements, those movements must innovate new methods of contention.²³ Radicalization can then emerge as a consequence of that reaction.

²⁰ T Olesen, “Social Movement Theory and Radical Islamic Activism,” *Working paper for The Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation* (2009), 8.

²¹ Beck, “The Contribution of Social Movement Theory to Understanding Terrorism,” 1572.

²² Ibid.

²³ Doug McAdam, “Tactical Innovation and the Pace of Insurgency,” *American Sociological Review* (1983), 735.

In the field of political science and terrorism studies, many attempts have been made to find causal factors that result in the radicalization of Islamic groups. Suggested factors have been wide ranging including: economic insecurity, psychology, poor assimilation into society, religious ideology, and grievances with governments, yet there is no single model that can explain every path to radicalization. SMT has been used to research radicalization in Islamic movements and has proved useful at the group level. However at the individual level, the application of SMT often results in conceptual stretching. A wide net is cast that includes too many factors, often raising more questions than answers. Accounts of radicalized individuals explaining their radicalization often cannot be validated, as they are susceptible to unconsciously explaining motivations as ideological after sustained interaction with ideological activists within a movement. As Stathis N. Kalyvas explains “motives are typically subject to (strategic or unselfconscious) reinterpretation and ex post rationalization by the subjects. Even when fully revealed, intentions often turn out to be mixed or even contradictory.”²⁴ This study is not an attempt to explain the religious ideology of al-Qaeda in a comprehensive way. Or is it an attempt to identify a model of individual religious radicalization along with causal mechanisms. Instead it will focus on the organization’s political grievances, how it attempts to resolve them, and the political climate from which the movement emerged.

F. Outline of the Thesis

²⁴ Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War (Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics)* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 24.

This thesis aims to explain how Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula formed and became the most successful Al Qaeda affiliate. Primary source documents are used to identify Social Movement Theory concepts present in the movement. An analysis of identified SMT dynamics is conducted which seeks to determine how and why AQAP effectively engages in contentious collective action.

Chapter two explains Social Movement Theory and Social Movement Theory concepts. This thesis specifically uses the framework of Political Process Theory (PPT) for analysis; PPT is a body of theory contained within the field of Social Movement Theory and Social Movement studies. Political Process Theory is made up of five concepts: Political Opportunity Structures, Mobilizing Structures, Framing Processes, Repertoires of Contention, and Protest Cycles. Definitions of each of these concepts are provided, along with figures that visualize how the concepts function and interact.

Chapter three provides a historical background that is necessary to understand how the AQAP affiliate formed. The origins of the original Al Qaeda movement are explained and social movement dynamics are identified in order to show how such dynamics changed in later affiliates. Al Qaeda's move into Saudi Arabia is then discussed, along with the migration of the remnants of that organization into Yemen. The last section of the historical background chapter examines Yemen's history with jihadis. This section explains why Yemen was such fertile ground for the development of an Al Qaeda affiliate and helps identify pre-existing political opportunities present in the country.

Chapter four breaks down the AQAP movement into the PPT concepts of Political Opportunity Structures, Framing Processes, Mobilizing Structures, and Repertoires of

Contention. Primary source documents are used to identify such concepts present in the movement and analysis is conducted throughout the chapter of said concepts.

Chapter five uses the last PPT concept of Protest Cycles (also known as Cycles of Contention), to analyze the ebb and flow of the Al Qaeda movement. Protest Cycles are best observed over an extended period of time and this chapter uses the concept to show cyclical changes throughout the history of the movement.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY

Social Movement Theory (SMT) is a framework designed to help better understand how and why social movements mobilize and engage in collective action. Until the 1960's, social scientists believed that social movements and protesters acted as irrational mobs in a collective mentality.²⁵ That began to change with Mancur Olson's 1965 study of collective behavior in *The Logic of Collective Action*.²⁶ Olson contended that protestors were not irrational mobs guided by psychological dispositions. Instead he argued that protestors made rational and deliberate choices in joining social movements and engaging in collective action. Thus began modern social movement studies.

Mayer Zald and John McCarthy then made important early contributions to the field in their 1977 work: *The Trend of Social Movements in America: Professionalization and Resource Mobilization*.²⁷ They argued that the availability of resources explained the level of a group's mobilization. Charles Tilly's 1978 book *From Mobilization to Revolution*²⁸ then unified these observations and added his own, arguing that political opportunities also played an important role in mobilization. Doug McAdam drew on all of these scholars in his 1982 study of the US Civil Right Movement and also added additional concepts. McAdam's work *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*²⁹

²⁵ Neal Caren, "Political Process Theory," *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* 18(2012), 1.

²⁶ Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

²⁷ John D McCarthy and Mayer N Zald, "The Trend of Social Movements in America: Professionalization and Resource Mobilization," (1977).

²⁸ Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (McGraw-Hill New York, 1978).

²⁹ Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970, 2nd Edition* (The University Of Chicago Press, 1999).

observed that the rise and decline of the movement resulted from the interaction of political opportunities, indigenous organizational strength, and cognitive liberation.³⁰ These scholars critiqued and built upon one another's theories forming the foundation of Social Movement Studies. New developments in the field are shaped by these essential texts.

The mentioned SMT theorists have dealt primarily with non-violent movements in the west such as the civil rights movement, labor movements, and environmental movements. The framework is however increasingly being used to analyze both non-western and violent groups. SMT is a wide framework, no one theory explains all social movements, and no single definition explains SMT cohesively. Instead SMT seeks to answer questions based on a set of perspectives and approaches; such as why did a group form? Why did it choose a particular form of action?

Modern Social Movement Theory identifies the concepts of: mobilizing structures, political opportunity structures, framing processes, and repertoires, in social movements. How those dynamics interact determines if and how the actors involved in a social movement engage in collective action. The classical social movement agenda is visualized in Figure 2.1.

³⁰ Neal Caren, "Political Process Theory," *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* 18(2012), 2.

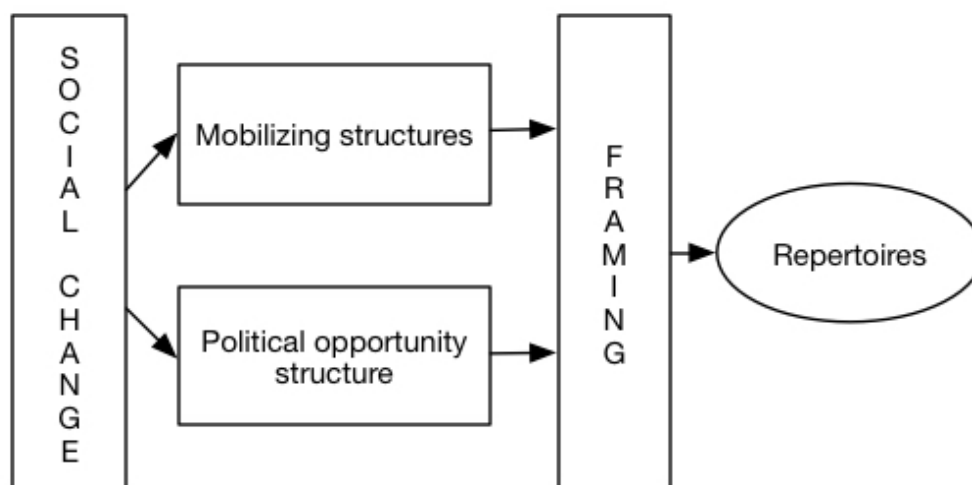


Figure 2.1 The classical social movement agenda. (Donatella Della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence (Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics)*, 15.)

A. Political Process Theory

Political Process Theory (PPT) is a framework within social movement research that has become a fixture in contemporary theory used for explaining social movement mobilization. PPT evolved from past social movement theories that emphasized protesters functioned as an irrational mob with a collective mentality that was more psychological than political. Instead PPT emphasizes that movements are political in nature and formed as a means to resolve legitimate grievances.³¹ “The model claims that social movements result when expanding political opportunities are seized by people who are formally or informally organized, aggrieved, and optimistic that they can successfully redress their concerns”.³² Five dynamics make up this theoretical framework; political opportunities, mobilizing

³¹ Neal Caren, “Political Process Theory,” *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* 18(2012), 2.

³² Myra Marx Ferree et al., *Rethinking Social Movements: Structure, Meaning, and Emotion* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 17.

structures, framing processes, protest cycles, and contentious repertoires.³³ These dynamics are used to explain the rise and fall of social movements as well as the form of protest taken and the results.³⁴ Doug McAdam's Political Process model of movement emergence is visualized in Figure 2.2. The concept of Cognitive Liberation referenced in the figure is known today as framing processes.

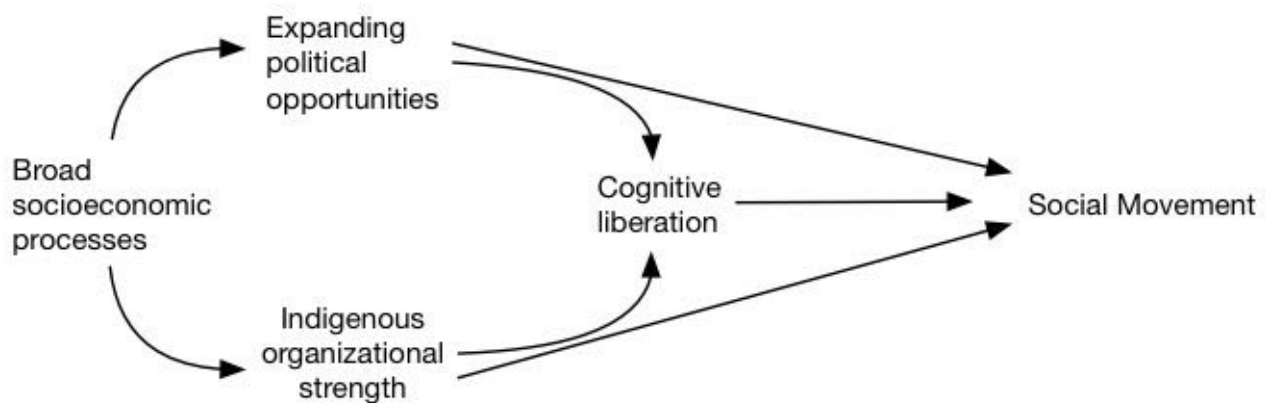


Figure 2.2 McAdam's Political Process model of movement emergence (Karl-Dieter Opp, *Theories of Political Protest and Social Movements: A Multidisciplinary Introduction, Critique, and Synthesis* (Routledge, 2009), 191.)

Past research on Al-Qaeda that utilizes SMT has focused heavily on Framing Processes. It is a useful approach in that it relies on the plentiful media output of the group to identify diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames. This approach is used mainly to identify reasons for radicalization and how ideology is infused into frames that motivate individuals to become members and engage in violence. This approach however is

³³ Neal Caren, "Political Process Theory," *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* 18(2012), 2.

³⁴ Ibid.

hampered in its usefulness by ignoring other aspects of PPT. Conditions must be in place before the construction of framing processes can begin and protest action that results from framing is also of great importance. Therefore a PPT approach will offer a more comprehensive analysis.

This thesis will identify these dynamics within the history of Al-Qaeda in order explain the movements collective action. In doing so, this thesis will attempt to gain insight into the reasoning and strategy behind the decisions and actions the group has taken. The five dynamics will be defined in this introduction to Political Process Theory and further explored within the body of research. Social movement theorists do not all agree on definitions or the scope of these concepts, however an effort is made to present brief descriptions that have generally emerged from debate intact.

1. *Political Opportunity Structures*

Political Opportunity Structures is an idea developed by Charles Tilly in his foundational work *From Mobilization to Revolution* (1978). Tilly asserts that: “the interaction between three components – interests, organization, and opportunity – explains a contender's level of mobilization and collective action. Interests represent the potential gains from participation; organization, the level of unified identity and networks; and opportunity, the amount of political power, the likelihood of repression, and the vulnerability of the target.”³⁵ This is a useful dynamic for the study of Al-Qaeda as the

³⁵ Tilly, Charles. *From Mobilization to Revolution*. McGraw-Hill New York, 1978, quoted in Caren, N. “Political Process Theory.” *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* 18 (2012): 2.

political opportunities or lack thereof available to the movement had a direct effect on choices made by the group.

2. Mobilizing Structures

Mobilizing Structures are defined by McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald as; “those collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action. These “Collective Vehicles” are said to include “meso-level groups, organizations, and informal networks,” “various grassroots settings - work and neighborhood, in particular,” “churches and colleges,” and “informal friendship networks.”³⁶ This dynamic provides useful insights into recruitment and the various methods used to bring members into the movement and to also generate popular public support outside of it.

3. Framing Processes

“Framing, within the context of social movements, refers to the signifying work or meaning construction engaged in by movement adherents (e.g., leaders, activists, and rank-and-file participants) and other actors (e.g., adversaries, institutional elites, media, social control agents, countermovements) relevant to the interests of movements and the challenges they mount in pursuit of those interests.”³⁷ Frames serve three important functions in the study of social movements; they focus attention, deliver articulation

³⁶ Ferree et al., *Rethinking Social Movements: Structure, Meaning, and Emotion*, 3.

³⁷ David A Snow, “Framing and Social Movements,” *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements* (2012a), 1.

mechanisms, and provide a transformative function.³⁸ Benford and Snow identify three core framing tasks: diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, and motivational framing.³⁹ These concepts are critical to understanding the political motivations of Al-Qaeda. The group's ideology is often seen as one solitary concept, but by unpacking it into these three frames it can be better understood and its evolution throughout its existence can be studied.

4. *Repertoires of Contention*

Charles Tilly defined “repertoire of contention” in *Popular Contention in Great Britain* as “the ways that people act together in pursuit of shared interests.”⁴⁰ He observed that “The repertoire involves not only what people do when they are engaged in conflict with others but what they know how to do and what others expect them to do.”⁴¹ He elaborates further: “far from the image we sometimes hold of mindless crowds, people tend to act within known limits, to innovate at the margins of the existing forms, and to miss many opportunities available to them in principle.”⁴² In other words activists choose the method of contention not just because they believe it will succeed but also because it is a method that they are familiar with. Interestingly the literature on Repertoires of Contention also points out that “Traditional forms of action are then handed down to new generations

³⁸ David A Snow, “Framing and Social Movements,” *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements* (2012a), 1.

³⁹ Robert D Benford and David A Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” *Annual Review of Sociology* (2000), 615.

⁴⁰ Tilly, Charles. *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758-1834*. American Mathematical Soc., 1995, quoted in Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics (Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics)*, 39.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements an Introduction*, 182.

of activists, who tend to adapt them to changing conditions.”⁴³ This is of particular interest for the purposes of this study as observing adaptations in the application of contention is a key objective.

5. Protest Cycles

Protest Cycles also known as Cycles of Contention are defined by Sidney Tarrow in his influential book *Power In Movement*. “By a “cycle of contention,” I mean a phase of heightened conflict across the social system, with rapid diffusion of collective action from more mobilized to less mobilized sectors, a rapid pace of innovation in the forms of contention employed, the creation of new or transformed collective action frames, a combination of organized and unorganized participation, and sequences of intensified information flow and interaction between challengers and authorities. Such widespread contention produces externalities, which give challengers at least a temporary advantage and allow them to overcome the weaknesses in their resource base. It demands that states devise broad strategies of response that are repressive or facilitative, or a combination of the two. And it produces general outcomes that are more than the sum of the results of an aggregate of unconnected events.”⁴⁴ The concept of protest cycles is a useful tool for analyzing group transformation over extended periods of time. Protest cycles will be used to monitor the ups and downs of Al Qaeda’s strength, influence, and contention over the

⁴³ Donatella Della Porta, “Repertoires of Contention,” *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements* (2013), 1.

⁴⁴ Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics (Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics)*, 199.

course of its existence. This concept also provides a useful way to observe how SMT dynamics work together and contribute to the flux in cycles.

Figure 2.3 presents a detailed visual model of Political Process Theory and demonstrates how the listed concepts interact.

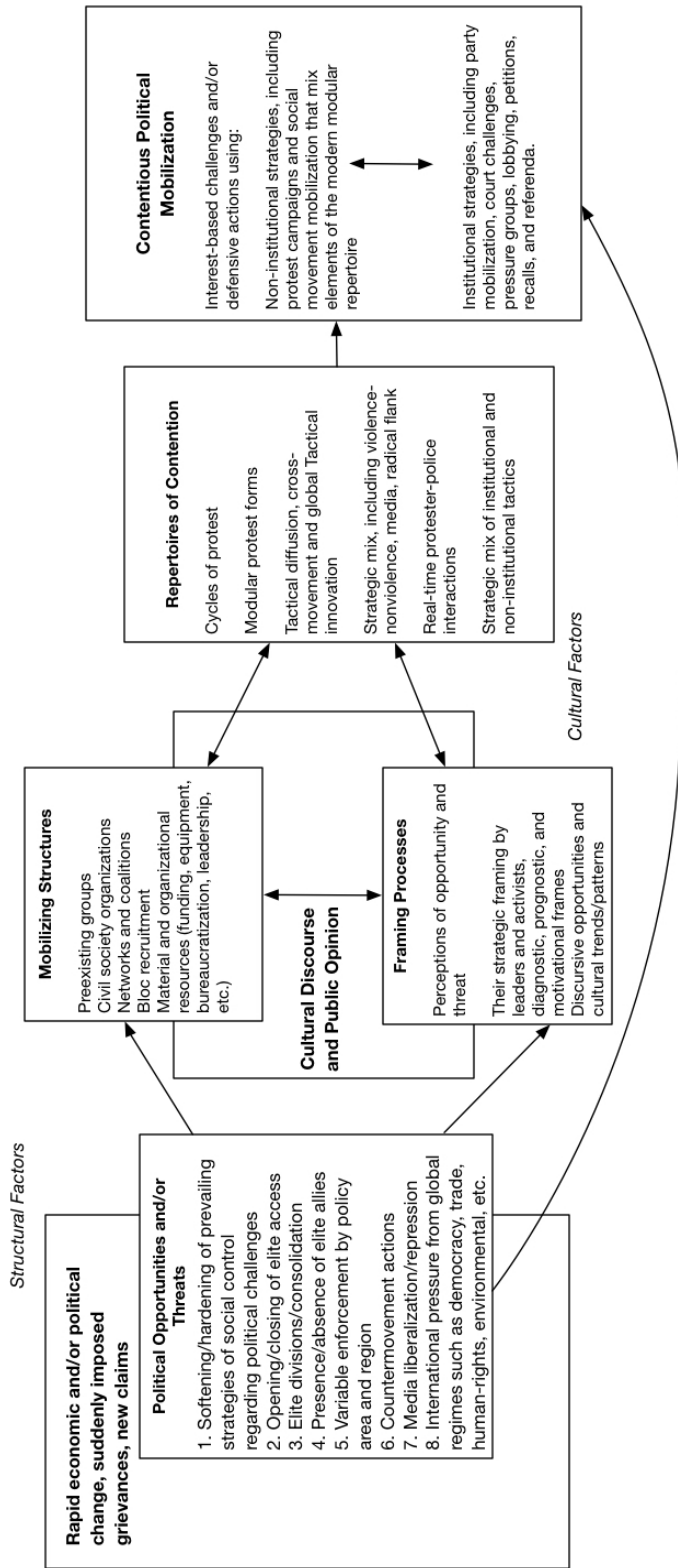


Figure 2.3 Political process model of social movement mobilization (Hank Johnston, *States and Social Movements* (Polity, 2011), 52.)

Through the course of this study the history of Al-Qaeda will be traced from the core organization that formed in Afghanistan and Pakistan, to its affiliate in Yemen. While exploring the history and discourse of leaders and members, the relevant dynamics of PPT will be applied to events and statements.

CHAPTER III

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A. Origins of Al Qaeda

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is an affiliate of the original Al Qaeda movement, established by Osama bin Laden. To understand AQAP, its roots must be traced back to Al Qaeda and the organization's place of founding. By starting at the beginning, it will be possible to trace the evolution of the groups political opportunities, mobilizing structures, framing processes, protest cycles, and contentious repertoires.

Al Qaeda was established in August of 1988 in Peshawar, Pakistan by Osama bin Laden, members of Abdullah Azzam's Services Bureau, and Egyptian Islamists.⁴⁵ The jihad in Afghanistan was ending as the Soviet forces withdrew and al-Qaeda was established to continue the same mission but in a trans-national style. As the Afghan jihad was coming to an end, a political opportunity was seized by Bin Laden and his Egyptian colleagues from the group Islamic Jihad. Hasan Abd-Rhabbuh al Surayhi an early Saudi recruit to the Afghan jihad recounts a meeting he considers the birth of al-Qaeda;

The establishment of al Qaeda was discussed in the home of Osama bin Laden in Peshawar following the departure of the Russians from Afghanistan and the end of the Jihad. I was one of those who witnessed the birth of al Qaeda. The idea of al Qaeda is an Egyptian one by the Islamic Jihad group led by Abu-Ubaidah al Banjshiri and Abu-Hafs. They are the ones, especially al Banjshiri, who proposed the idea to Osama bin Laden after the end of Jihad...Bin Laden's finances were not secret to anyone and I think the Egyptians wanted to exploit this angle...One

⁴⁵ Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979* (Cambridge UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 100.

day, I went to Osama's home and saw al Banjshiri, Abu-Hafs, some others, and a group of journalists. After the journalists left, only al Banjshiri, Abu-Hafs al Masri, and Osama were left in the gathering... Al Banjshiri addressed his words to me. "You are aware of brother Osama bin Laden's generosity. He has spent a lot of money to buy arms for the young mujahideen as well as in training them and paying for their travel tickets. Now that the jihad has ended, we should not waste this. We should invest in these young men and we should mobilize them under his umbrella. We should form an Islamic Army for jihad that will be called al Qaeda. This army will be one of the fruits of what bin Laden has spent on the Afghan jihad. We should train these young men and equip them to be ready to uphold Islam and defend Muslims in any part of the world. The members of this army should be organized and highly trained."⁴⁶

The fighting in Afghanistan was coming to an end; however, that did not mean the jihad had to end for Bin Laden and his associates. Large numbers of veteran militants were already in place and left without a mission. The interests at the time were the same that brought these men to Afghanistan in the first place, defending the lives of Muslims world wide. Bin Laden saw opportunities for jihad in new locations. Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi recounts an interaction with Bin Laden from that time.

Al Qaeda was founded almost the same time when I first heard it from Osama himself. Bin Laden saw that Afghan Jihad would be over soon, the Soviet have withdrawn, and it's just a matter of time. He predicted that the mujahideen would be victorious in weeks or months. So what we will do with those Arab mujahideen? They will go back to their countries, but the flame of jihad should continue elsewhere, so he saw that there would be opportunities in places like Central Asia. It will be called al Qaeda.⁴⁷

For Bin Laden, the Afghan jihad served as an important introduction into organizing and mobilization. He was instrumental in funding Abdullah Azzam's Services Bureau which was of enormous import to Arab involvement in Afghanistan. Thomas

⁴⁶ Bergen, *The Osama Bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of Al-Qaeda's Leader*, 83.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

Hegghammer describes its importance to mobilization; “The foundation of the Services Bureau was a turning point in the Arab involvement in the Afghan jihad because it provided a framework for a much more systematic approach to mobilization. It streamlined the entire mobilization chain from the fundraising and recruitment in Arab countries, via the reception and accommodation of volunteers arriving in Pakistan, to the personnel deployment and weapons distribution inside Afghanistan. In addition, the SB placed great emphasis on media activities, such as the publication of the magazine al-Jihad and the production of propaganda videos, all of which greatly improved the awareness of the Afghan jihad in the Muslim world from 1985 onward.”⁴⁸ This experience in building a bureau designed to import and train fighters, manage resources, and distribute effective propaganda would be an important introduction to organization and mobilization techniques for Bin Laden.

Below is a founding document from between August and September of 1988. It indicates the establishment of the group, selection of an Advisory Council, a pledge to the organization and its leaders, and initial objectives. In this document the earliest stages of political objectives and framing processes can be observed.

8/11/1988

Between Abu Ridha and the Sheikh, a discussion regarding the establishment of the new military work group.

—>General Camp

—> Special Camp

—> Al Qaida (the base)

The mentioned Al-Qaida is basically an organized Islamic faction; its goal will be to lift the word of God, to make His religion victorious.

⁴⁸ Hegghammer, “Violent Islamism in Saudi Arabia, 1979-2006 the Power and Perils of Pan-Islamic Nationalism,” 194.

Requirements to enter Al-Qaeda:

- Members of the open duration.
- Listening and obedient.
- Good manners.
- Referred from a trusted aide.
- Obeying statutes and instructions of Al Qaeda. These are from the rules of the work.

Reads the pledge

The pledge of God and his covenant is upon me, to listen and obey the superiors, who are doing this work, in energy, early-rising, difficulty, and easiness, and for his superiority upon us, so that the word of God will be the highest, and His religion victorious.

Work of Al Qaida commenced on 9/10/1988, with a group of 15 brothers, including nine administrative brothers. Until the date 9/20/1988, Commandant Abu Ubaida arrived to inform me of the existence of thirty brothers in Al Qaida, meeting the requirements, and thank God.

A printed declaration which will explain the following:

- A. The East's and West's agreement to prevent the establishment of an Islamic nation and thorn [sic].
- B. The only solution is the continuation of armed jihad.
- C. Taking interest in the training and seizing the opportunity.
- D. Supporting the Mujahideen believers and (illegible).
- E. Specifying the locations where we want the brethren to be.
- F. Urging the brethren to be patient, pious, obedient, and to practice abstinence (Abu Hajir).⁴⁹

Additional minutes from the founding documents indicate that at its earliest stages Al Qaeda was diligent in building a bureaucracy able to distribute funds, establish training camps, provide provisions, organize transportation, solve passport issues, and solicit donations.⁵⁰ High levels of organization along with high levels of unified identity, interests, and ideas on opportunity made Al Qaeda at its earliest stage a highly mobilized movement involved in collective action.

⁴⁹ J.M. Berger, "Beatings and Bureaucracy: The Founding Memos of Al Qaeda," (2012).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Al-Qaeda at its founding was established as a military organization designed to fight invaders of muslim lands. It wasn't until later that anti-Americanism became a key component of its doctrine. Bin Laden took on a more anti-American view starting in 1992 due to the presence of American military personnel in Saudi Arabia, along with the detention of the Egyptian Sheikh Omar Abd al-Rahman, and the military deployment to Somalia.⁵¹ Bin Laden was convinced that non-violent opposition to the presence of American forces was futile when the Saudi regime cracked down on the Sahwist⁵² opposition movement in September of 1994.⁵³ His views became increasingly radical and in August of 1996 he issued a declaration of war calling for a guerrilla campaign on United States military forces in Saudi Arabia.⁵⁴ This statement gives insight into the initial framing processes that became Al-Qaeda's global jihadist doctrine.

It should not be hidden from you that the people of Islam had suffered from aggression, iniquity and injustice imposed on them by the Zionist-Crusader alliance and their collaborators; to the extent that the Muslim's blood became the cheapest and their wealth as loot in the hands of the enemies. Their blood was spilled in Palestine and Iraq. The horrifying pictures of the massacre of Qana in Lebanon are still fresh in our memory. Massacres in Tajikistan, Burma, Kashmir, Philippines, Somalia, Eritrea, and Chechnya, and in Bosnia-Herzegovina took place, massacres that send shivers in the body and shake the conscience.

The latest and the greatest of these aggressions, incurred by the Muslims since the death of the Prophet, is the occupation of the land of the two Holy Places. By orders from the USA they also arrested a large number of scholars in the land of the two Holy Places — among them the prominent Sheikh Salman al Awdah and Sheikh Safar al Hawali. Myself and my group, have suffered some of this injustice. We have been pursued in Pakistan, Sudan, and Afghanistan, hence this

⁵¹ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979*, 101.

⁵² The Sahwa movement was a Saudi Islamist movement that strongly objected to the presence of United States military forces on Saudi soil.

⁵³ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979*, 101.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

long absence on my part. But by the Grace of Allah, a safe base is now available in the high Hindu Kush mountains in Khurasan.

The presence of the USA Crusader military forces on the land, sea and air in the states of the Islamic Gulf is the greatest danger threatening the largest oil reserve in the world.

My Muslim brothers: The money you pay to buy American goods will be transformed into bullets and used against our brothers in Palestine. By buying these goods we are strengthening their economy while our poverty increases. We expect the women of the land in of the two Holy Places and other countries to carry out their role in boycotting American goods. The security and the intelligence services of the entire world cannot force a single citizen to buy the goods of his/her enemy. The boycotting of American goods is a very effective weapon for weakening the enemy.

I rejected those who enjoy fireplaces in clubs discussing eternally; I respect those who carried on, not asking or bothering about the difficulties; Never letting up from their goals, in spite of all hardships on the road; I feel still the pain of Al Quds in my internal organs. That loss is like a burning fire in my intestines.

More than 600,000 Iraqi children have died due to lack of food and medicine and as a result of the unjustifiable [UN sanctions during the 1990s] imposed on Iraq and its nation. The children of Iraq are our children. You, the USA, are responsible for the shedding of the blood of these innocent children.

The walls of oppression and humiliation cannot be demolished except in a rain of bullets. The freeman does not surrender leadership to infidels and sinners.

My Muslim brothers of the World: Your brothers in Palestine and in the land of the two Holy Places are calling upon your help and asking you to take part in fighting against the enemy — your enemy and their enemy — the Americans and the Israelis.⁵⁵

In this statement, Bin Laden was declaring war on the United States for the first time. To justify the declaration of war Bin Laden needed to first identify the grievances held, along with the cause of those grievances. This is known as diagnostic framing, defined by Benford as; “two aspects: a diagnosis of some event or aspect of social life or

⁵⁵ Bergen, *The Osama Bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of Al-Qaeda's Leader*, 164-66.

system of government as problematic and in need of repair or change; and the attribution of blame or responsibility for the problematized state of affairs. Diagnostic framing provides answers to the questions of “What is or went wrong?” and “Who or what is to blame?”⁵⁶ Bin Laden’s statement clearly shows that the “what went wrong?” is Muslim suffering around the world and the presence of the American military in Saudi Arabia. “Who is to blame?” Is identified as the Zionist-Crusader alliance meaning the United States and Israel along with their collaborators.

The second aspect of framing processes is prognostic framing. Snow defines that as “the articulation of a proposed solution to the problem, including a plan of attack and the frame-consistent tactics for carrying it out, and often a refutation of opponent’s current or proposed solutions. Such framing, simply put, addresses the Leninesque question of “what needs to be done.”⁵⁷ Bin Laden is clear in his declaration that “what needs to be done” is: “demolishing” the “walls of oppression and humiliation” in a “rain of bullets.” Bin Laden’s choice of terms clearly indicates that he is advocating the use of violence as the chosen method of grievance resolution. Interestingly he also advocates a non-violent boycott movement of US goods as “a very effective weapon for weakening the enemy.”

The third framing task is motivational framing described by Snow as “elaboration of a call to arms or rationale for action that goes beyond the diagnosis and prognosis. Motivational framing entails the construction of “vocabularies of motive” that provide prods to action by, among other things, overcoming both the fear of risks often associated with collective action. Motivational framing attends to these impediments to action by

⁵⁶ David A Snow, “Framing and Social Movements,” *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements* (2012b), 2-3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

accenting and highlighting the severity of the problem, the urgency of taking action now rather than later, the probable efficacy of joining others in the cause, the moral priority of doing so, and the enhancement or elevation of one's status."⁵⁸ Bin Laden accomplishes this third framing task by emphasizing the severity of the problem; large numbers of dead and suffering muslims around the world. The urgency and moral priority; if action is not taken, more muslims will die at the hands of this enemy and humiliating presence of the US military in the land of the two mosques will continue. The elevation of ones status; no longer surrendering freedom to infidels and sinners, and attaining the romantic image and status of a fighter who frees muslims from this enemy that causes all these problems. Religious justification would also be a major part of Bin Laden's motivational framing. Bin Laden did not detail religious interpretations justifying his prognosis in this declaration, that would come later with his famous fatwa.

The declaration of war was followed by a 1998 statement of the *World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders* against the United States and the West.⁵⁹ The declaration was a joint statement from Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda and Ayman al Zawahiri's Egyptian Jihad group which aligned with Al-Qaeda in 1998.⁶⁰

The Arabian Peninsula has never — since Allah made it flat, created its desert, and encircled it with seas — been stormed by any forces like the Crusader armies spreading in it like locusts, eating its riches and wiping out its plantations. All this is happening at a time in which nations are attacking Muslims like people fighting

⁵⁸ David A Snow, "Framing and Social Movements," *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements* (2012b), 2-3.

⁵⁹ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979*, 118.

⁶⁰ Bergen, *The Osama Bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of Al-Qaeda's Leader*, 195.

over a plate of food. No one argues today about three facts that are known to everyone; we will list them, in order to remind everyone:

First, for over seven years [since the introduction of 500,000 US troops following Saddam Hussein's occupation of Kuwait] the United States has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, the Arabian Peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors, and turning its bases in the Peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples.

If some people have in the past argued about the fact of the occupation, all the people of the Peninsula have now acknowledged it. The best proof of this is the Americans' continuing aggression against the Iraqi people using the Peninsula as a staging post.

Second, despite the great devastation inflicted on the Iraqi people by the Crusader-Zionist alliance, and despite the huge number of those killed, which has exceeded one million, despite all this, the Americans are once again trying to repeat the horrific massacres, as though they are not content with the protracted [United Nations sanctions] after the ferocious [Gulf] war.

Third, if the Americans' aims behind these wars are religious and economic, the aim is also to serve the Jews' petty state and divert attention from its occupation of Jerusalem and murder of Muslims there. The best proof of this is their eagerness to destroy Iraq, the strongest neighboring Arab state, and their endeavor to fragment all the states of the region such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Sudan into paper statelets and through their disunion and weakness to guarantee Israel's survival and the continuation of the brutal Crusader occupation of the [Arabian] Peninsula.

All these crimes and sins committed by the Americans are a clear declaration of war on Allah, his messenger, and Muslims. And ulema (clerics) have through Islamic history unanimously agreed that the jihad is an individual duty if the enemy destroys Muslim countries.

On that basis, and in compliance with Allah's order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims:

The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies — civilians and military — is an individual duty for every muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque [in Jerusalem] and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip.⁶¹

In this statement Bin Laden reinforces his diagnostic and prognostic frames and adds an important component to the motivational frame with his fatwa. By attempting to legitimize his prognostic solution through a religious ruling, Bin Laden argues that his prognosis is not only the best way to resolve the stated grievances but it is a duty for every muslim. This was the first time a fatwa was used to justify such actions as indicated in a 1998 CIA memorandum.

These fatwas are the first from these groups that explicitly justify attacks on America civilians anywhere in the world. Both groups [bin Laden and a coalition of Islamic groups in London] have hinted in the past that civilians are legitimate targets, but this [is] the first religious ruling sanctifying such attacks.⁶²

Al-Qaeda's doctrine was a departure from past jihadi movements. Instead of focusing on near enemies like the Saudi or Egyptian regimes it focused on what it called the far enemy; the United States and the West. Thomas Hegghammer identifies three main elements that made Al-Qaeda's global doctrine unique; first, America was the primary adversary. Second; global jihadism was articulated in pan-Islamist discourse as a way to defend the umma against western aggression. And third; was a global view of warfare on

⁶¹ Bergen, *The Osama Bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of Al-Qaeda's Leader*, 195-96.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 196.

targets and interests worldwide.⁶³ Instead of focusing on local regimes or occupiers, attacking America was viewed as the top priority and most effective strategy to bring down Al Qaeda's enemies. Bin Laden articulates that doctrine in a statement from 1997: "Regarding the criticisms of the ruling regime in Saudi Arabia and the Arabian Peninsula, the first one is their subordination to the US. So, our main problem is the US government while the Saudi regime is but a branch or an agent of the US ... The people and the young men are concentrating their efforts on the sponsor and not on the sponsored. The concentration at this point of jihad is against the American occupiers."⁶⁴

Bin Laden's chosen repertoire of contention was violence. Based on his experience in the Soviet jihad, Bin Laden believed that the Americans could be defeated using tried and tested methods. The first targets of Al Qaeda were chosen based on a logic that stemmed from Bin Laden's observation of US missions in the Middle East. He concluded that when casualties were inflicted, the US would withdraw. The following quote of Osama bin Laden comes from Lawrence Wright's *The Looming Tower*.

Look at Vietnam, look at Lebanon. Whenever soldiers start coming home in body bags, Americans panic and retreat. Such a country needs only to be confronted with two or three sharp blows, then it will flee in panic, as it always has. For all its wealth and resources, America lacks conviction. It cannot stand against warriors of faith who do not fear death. The warships in the Gulf will retreat to the oceans, the bombers will disappear from the Arabian bases, the troops in the Horn of Africa will race back to their homeland.⁶⁵

⁶³ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979*, 102.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 291-92.

⁶⁵ Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, 187.

Bin Laden believed that he could exploit a low tolerance for casualties and through attacks on American targets in the region, cause the US to promptly withdraw. The tactic used in the example of Lebanon referenced by Bin Laden was a bombing that killed 241 US Peacekeeping Forces. President Ronald Reagan decided to withdraw those forces following the bombing and did not retaliate against the perpetrators. The following quotes of Bin Laden come from a statement made on February 14th 2003 included in Bruce Lawrence's compilation: *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*.

I could also remind you of the defeat of the American forces in the year 1982, when the sons of Israel destroyed Lebanon, and the Lebanese resisted. They sent a truck loaded with explosives into a US marine base in Beirut, sending more than 240 of them to Hell, the worst possible fate.⁶⁶

Bin Laden then builds on this argument offering the example of Somalia, in which US Forces were once again withdrawn from the area when confronted and casualties inflicted.

Then, after the Second Gulf War, America put her armies into Somalia and killed 13,000 Muslims there, and there is no strength or power save in God. But then the lions of Islam, the Afghan Arabs and their brothers leapt on them and rubbed their arrogance in the mud, killing many of them, destroying their tanks and downing their planes. So America and her allies fled in the dark of night, without disturbing anyone, praise and glory be to God.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Osama bin Laden, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden* (Verso, 2005), 192.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Laurence Friedman claims that both “Beirut in 1983-84 and Somalia a decade later had both demonstrated that long-term changes in American policy might be obtained by targeting American personnel in vulnerable, forward positions”.⁶⁸ These events helped shape Bin Laden’s worldview and the success of the repertoires led to his utilization of them with Al Qaeda. Bin Laden claims such early operations succeeded in causing a similar effect.

The youth of jihad prepared explosives against the Americans in Aden, and when they went off all the coward Americans could do was run away in less than 24 hours. Then in the year 1995 there was an explosion in Riyadh that killed four Americans, the clear message of which was that the sons of the region objected to the American policy of supporting the Jews and occupying Saudi Arabia. Then in the following year, another explosion in Khobar killed 19 Americans and wounded more than 400, and the Americans were forced to move their biggest bases from the cities to the desert.⁶⁹

The operation in Aden succeeded in Bin Laden’s eyes due to the Pentagon’s decision to stop using the country as a support base.⁷⁰ Yet Al Qaeda was not succeeding in achieving its ultimate aims. The US was not withdrawing entirely from the Arabian Peninsula as a result of the attacks and its support of Israel was unchanged. Escalation followed in an attempt to hasten a withdrawal.

In 1998, the mujahidin gave America a clear warning to stop supporting the Jews and to leave Saudi Arabia, but the enemy rejected it and the mujahidin were able,

⁶⁸ Joshua A. Geltzer, *Us Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Al-Qaeda: Signaling and the Terrorist World-View (Contemporary Security Studies)* (Routledge, 2009), 89.

⁶⁹ Laden, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*, 193.

⁷⁰ Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, Al-Qaeda, and America’s War in Arabia*, 34.

by the grace of God, to deal them two mighty blows in East Africa. After that, America was warned once again and failed to respond, so God helped the mujahidin to successfully implement a great martyrdom operation, demolishing the American destroyer USS Cole in Aden. This operation was a solid blow in the face of the American military and also exposed the fact that the Yemeni government was a collaborator, like the rest of the region's governments.⁷¹

The desired effect was still not achieved following these attacks, leading to a change in repertoires. Charles Tilly associated “the use of violence to the emergence of new social groups, as violent actions tend to increase when new challengers fight their way into the polity and the old polity members refuse to leave”.⁷² Al Qaeda was increasing the level of violence in an attempt to achieve its aims and become recognized. Repertoires would change as Al Qaeda moved to drastically increase its violence. Tilly also argued that “varieties of action constitute a repertoire in something like the theatrical or musical sense of the word; but the repertoire in question resembles that of *commedia dell'arte* or jazz more than that of a strictly classical ensemble: people know the general rules of performance more or less well and vary the performance to meet the purpose at hand.”⁷³ Attacks on US targets in the Middle East and Africa were not causing a withdrawal from the region, therefore Al Qaeda adjusted its tactics by attacking the US homeland on September 11th 2001.

Since bombing attacks on US interests weren't working, Al Qaeda fell back on what worked in Afghanistan. Instead of initiating a US withdrawal from Saudi Arabia through attacks in the region, Al Qaeda intended to provoke a land invasion similar to that

⁷¹ Laden, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*, 193.

⁷² Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence (Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics)*, 17.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

of the Soviet one. A repertoire that succeeded against the Soviet Union would now be used to draw the US into a land war in Afghanistan and hopefully build public support similar to what was received during the Soviet jihad.

The consequences of 9/11 are very positive. This was so for many reasons, the most important of which was that we found no difficulty in leading Bush and his administration on initially to Afghanistan.⁷⁴

While Bin Laden was successful in provoking a US invasion of Afghanistan, he was not successful in building a level of public support similar to what was received during the Soviet jihad. Violent action carries risks with it in relation to mobilization of potential allies, public support, and new recruits. Della Porta claims “forms of action - such as violent ones - that are more likely to attract media attention are also those that are more likely to be stigmatized by potential allies. In addition, those actions that are more apt to produce internal solidarity might not encounter public approval.”⁷⁵ Bin Laden was not successful in garnering support similar to what he experienced during the Soviet jihad. The level of violence was too extreme for potential allies. Instead of garnering public support and provoking a ground invasion similar to that of the Soviet Union, a massive air campaign ensued. Airstrikes combined with an offensive of American Special Forces and the Afghan Northern Alliance decimated the ranks of Al Qaeda causing members of the organization to flee into Pakistan and Iran. During the bombing campaign in the mountains of Tora Bora, Bin Laden was heard on a short-wave radio asking his followers for

⁷⁴ Geltzer, *Us Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Al-Qaeda: Signalling and the Terrorist World-View (Contemporary Security Studies)*, 93.

⁷⁵ Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence (Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics)*, 16.

forgiveness for leading them into defeat, yet he vowed the battle would continue against the crusaders “on new fronts.”⁷⁶

Figure 3.1 illustrates the identified the political opportunities, mobilization structures, and framing processes that together resulted in the Al Qaeda movement.

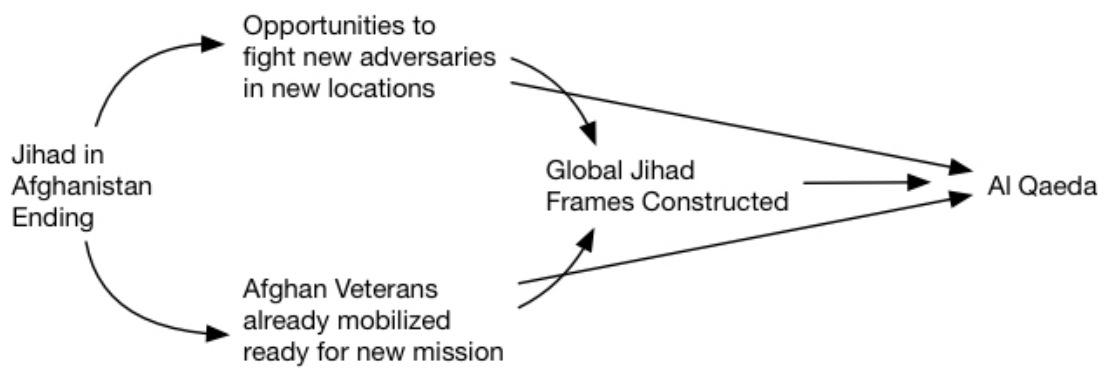


Figure 3.1

⁷⁶ Geltzer, *Us Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Al-Qaeda: Signaling and the Terrorist World-View (Contemporary Security Studies)*, 94.

B. Al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia

The global jihadist doctrine articulated by Osama bin Laden and enacted by Al-Qaeda was exported to Yemen early on, however the affiliate organization AQAP would not be established for many years. The first Al-Qaeda affiliate in the Arabian Peninsula was in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Bin Laden had difficulty initially establishing cells in Saudi Arabia due to the fact that Saudi authorities had made mass arrests of Islamists in 1996 in the wake of major bomb attacks in Riyadh and the Khobar towers. However he did establish a limited network in the Kingdom at that time.⁷⁷

In January of 1998 a group of militants sponsored by Bin Laden were arrested in Saudi Arabia with Sagger antitank missiles.⁷⁸ The target of those missiles is in dispute with Pervez Musharraf writing in his autobiography the target was the US consulate in Jidda, and George Tenet writing the target was vice president Al Gore who was due to visit.⁷⁹ The attack was foiled and the Saudi authorities came to realize that Al-Qaeda was a threat to the Kingdom. A crackdown followed with police arresting 800-900 people.⁸⁰ Operations in Saudi Arabia were postponed indefinitely in 1998, many members were in prison, complicating plans for future attacks. Around that time Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri became known as Bin Laden's deputy and the person responsible for directing the failed missile

⁷⁷ Hegghammer, "Violent Islamism in Saudi Arabia, 1979-2006 the Power and Perils of Pan-Islamic Nationalism," 345.

⁷⁸ The 9/11 Commission Report, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (Authorized Edition)* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 114.

⁷⁹ Hegghammer, "Violent Islamism in Saudi Arabia, 1979-2006 the Power and Perils of Pan-Islamic Nationalism," 347.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

attack.⁸¹ This limited his ability to move and operate in the Kingdom so he crossed the border into Yemen where he would go on to plan the attack on the USS Cole.

On October 12, 2000 in Aden, Yemen, Hassan al-Khamiri and Ibrahim al-Thawar drove a small white boat alongside the USS Cole and detonated its cargo of explosives.⁸² The explosion punched a 40 foot hole in the hull killing 17 and wounding 39.⁸³ The attack was planned by Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri with Bin Laden's blessing.⁸⁴ This attack was the first major Al-Qaeda operation in Yemen and a major success for the network. Information gained from the FBI investigation of the Cole attack would later help identify al-Qaeda as responsible for the September 11th attacks.⁸⁵

The next major Al-Qaeda operation would occur on September 11th 2001. Bin Laden was awaiting the American response in Afghanistan, planning on encountering an invading ground force like that of the Soviets. Instead a relentless bombing campaign inflicted massive casualties on Al-Qaeda and destroyed their training camp infrastructure. Under intense pressure during the bombing of Tora Bora in Afghanistan, bin Laden dispatched Saudi commanders back to Saudi Arabia to establish cells in a group named the 'Mujahideen Military Committee in the Arabian Peninsula' (Mujahideen al-Lajna al-Askiriya fi Jazira al-Arab) with Yusuf Saleh Fahd al-Ayiri as its leader.⁸⁶ Between 2002 and 2003 Yusuf al-Uyayri carefully built a network of operatives in the Kingdom. Emphasizing organization and planning rather than premature attacks, al-Ayiri was cautious, becoming

⁸¹ Hegghammer, "Violent Islamism in Saudi Arabia, 1979-2006 the Power and Perils of Pan-Islamic Nationalism," 349.

⁸² Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, Al-Qaeda, and America's War in Arabia*, 72.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 65.

⁸⁵ Ali Soufan, *The Black Banners: The Inside Story of 9 11 and the War Against Al-Qaeda* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011), 288.

⁸⁶ Abdel Bari Atwan, *After Bin Laden: Al Qaeda, the Next Generation* (The New Press, 2013), 83.

the most important Al-Qaeda figure in Saudi Arabia and building the roots of what would become Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.⁸⁷

From 2003 to 2004, this network would carry out 8 major attacks in Saudi Arabia. In May of 2003, three suicide car bombings on compounds housing western workers in Riyadh killed 35 and wounded 160.⁸⁸ That was followed by the Khobar shooting rampage in May of 2004 which killed 22. Then an attack on the US Embassy in Jeddah in December of 2004 in which 18 were taken hostage and 8 killed, including 4 Saudi guards.⁸⁹ Beginning in 2004 attacks were initiated against security services and in June of 2005 police chief Lieutenant-Colonel Mabarak al Sawat was assassinated.⁹⁰ The escalating violence prompted the Saudi authorities to begin cracking down on suspected militant networks harshly. Safe houses were raided, militants and suspected militants arrested in mass, and shootouts between militants and police were frequent.⁹¹ By 2005 all the leaders of Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia had been arrested, low level attacks initiated by junior members continued until 2009, but by then the organization was crippled and mostly defunct.⁹²

Since 2006, militants from Saudi Arabia under intense scrutiny from the security services crossed the border into Yemen in order to continue their mission with less pressure from the authorities.⁹³ In 2009 the remnants of the network in Saudi Arabia would join with the network in Yemen to form Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

⁸⁷ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979*, 171.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁸⁹ Atwan, *After Bin Laden: Al Qaeda, the Next Generation*, 83.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979*, 199.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 210.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 237.

C. Yemen's History with Jihadis

In the late 1980s the Afghan jihad was in full swing. Arab fighters eager to fight the Soviet Union were traveling to join the fight to defend the umma in Afghanistan against the communist invader. The marxism of the Soviet enemy had a particular significance to Yemenis who detested the communist state in southern Yemen known as the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). Dissidents of southern Yemen and those inspired by Wahhabism exported from Saudi Arabia were recruited for the Afghan jihad and even assisted by powerful figures in government. Brigadier-General Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar is reported to have actively recruited Yemenis and facilitated their travel to Afghanistan.⁹⁴ Osama bin Laden forged close friendships with many Yemeni fighters in Afghanistan and surrounded himself with them, valuing their hardiness and loyalty.

Following the conclusion of the Afghan jihad, Osama bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia and met with Prince Turki al-Saud the head of the Saudi intelligence service. He asked that the kingdom permit him and his army of Afghanistan veterans to destroy the Marxist PDRY.⁹⁵ The prince refused angering Bin Laden, however not long after, the PDRY was dissolved and unified with the north in 1990. Although the PDRY was dissolved, many of the officials from the government remained in powerful positions. Yemenis returning from Afghanistan quickly came into conflict with these remnants of the PDRY.⁹⁶

Tariq al-Fadhli a prominent Yemeni veteran of Afghanistan gathered an army of 29,000 Afghan veterans to fight the remaining marxists in a movement called "Islamic

⁹⁴ Clark, Victoria. *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes*. Yale University Press, 2010, Chapter 5, para. 23.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, Chapter 5, para. 26.

⁹⁶ Atwan, *After Bin Laden: Al Qaeda, the Next Generation*, 87.

Jihad.”⁹⁷ This group was made up mostly of Yemenis but also of veterans of Afghanistan who were not welcomed home by their respective governments.⁹⁸ President Salih, instead of blocking their entry, accommodated these militants and consented to their new jihad as a way to purge what was left of the PDRY and revive the old tribal order, which he was more adept at managing.⁹⁹ Osama bin Laden paid the salaries of these militants in Yemen and promised them guns and cars for their service.¹⁰⁰ Bin Laden also traveled and preached against the Marxist PDRY, and is reported to have even met with Brigadier-General Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar at the Sanaa airport.¹⁰¹

By 1991 Islamic Jihad was openly waging war on the old guard of the PDRY. Escalating violence and assassinations pushed Yemen towards civil war in 1994. President Saleh and the military of northern Yemen prevailed in the bloody civil war with the assistance of Islamic Jihad and Tariq al-Fadhli.¹⁰² President Saleh had effectively used the Afghan veterans to his benefit during this period, enlisting them to fight for him rather than jail or refuse entry which was the practice of the other Arab states.¹⁰³ Following the civil war he believed he could placate these jihadis with land, stipends, and titles. While this worked for some veterans, others were not content and sought to continue the jihad.

In 1998 a group called the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army (AAII) led by Afghan veteran Abu Hassan al-Mihdar kidnapped sixteen westerners, four of whom were killed in a

⁹⁷ Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes*, Chapter 5, para. 27.

⁹⁸ Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, Al-Qaeda, and America's War in Arabia*, 22.

⁹⁹ Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes*, Chapter 5, para. 28.

¹⁰⁰ Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, Al-Qaeda, and America's War in Arabia*, 23.

¹⁰¹ Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes*, Chapter 5, para. 29.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, Chapter 5, para. 29.

¹⁰³ Uzi Rabi, “Yemen: Revolution, Civil War and Unification (Library of Modern Middle East Studies),” 2014, Chapter 5, Section 5, para. 1.

botched rescue raid.¹⁰⁴ President Saleh was getting the first taste of what the jihadis, whom he had used to his benefit, were capable of. Complicating matters further was the fact that Yemeni security service known as the Political Security office (PSO), shared the jihadi ideology in many cases. Ayman al-Zawahiri took refuge in Yemen following a failed assassination attempt on the Egyptian prime minister and was permitted to hold meetings in Sanaa.¹⁰⁵ A PSO officer alerted jihadis about an Egyptian veteran offering intelligence about Al-Qaeda and future operations and a PSO officer was also caught in an Italian wiretap with an Al Qaeda document forger discussing future operations, which alluded to the attack on the USS Cole.¹⁰⁶ Not long after in 2002 the deputy director of the PSO was seen in Sanaa with another Afghan veteran Abdel Rahim al-Nashiri who would go on to attack a french oil tanker.¹⁰⁷

The 9/11 attacks were a wakeup call for President Saleh, he recognized that Yemen could become a target for the United States due to the high number of Afghan veterans present in Yemen and numerous associations with Al Qaeda. Fresh in his mind also were the devastating funding cuts that resulted from his refusal to back the first Iraq Gulf war.¹⁰⁸ This time Saleh put himself on the side of the American government, and reaped the rewards in military assistance funding. Afghan war veterans were deported en mass and Saleh visited Washington to assure President Bush that he was on his side.¹⁰⁹ Saleh moved to arrest Al-Qaeda suspects in the USS Cole bombing with mixed results. The suspects

¹⁰⁴ Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes*, Chapter 5, para. 41.

¹⁰⁵ Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, Al-Qaeda, and America's War in Arabia*, 50.

¹⁰⁶ Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes*, Chapter 5, para. 47.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Chapter 5, para. 54.

¹⁰⁸ Rabi, "Yemen: Revolution, Civil War and Unification (Library of Modern Middle East Studies)," Chapter 5, Section 5, para. 5.

¹⁰⁹ Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes*, Chapter 5, para. 57.

were tracked down to a village in Marib, however they had been given sanctuary by the Balharith tribe and when negotiations to hand over the suspects failed, a shootout ensued leaving eighteen dead.¹¹⁰ Only five of the tribesmen were killed and the suspects escaped. The US government was unsatisfied with the Yemeni counter-terrorism performance and persuaded Saleh to allow the CIA to carry out the first Predator drone strike.¹¹¹ In November of 2002 Qaid Sinan al-Harithi and five others including one Yemeni-American were killed by a hellfire missile.¹¹² Al-Harithi had been the leader of what was known as Al Qaeda in Yemen and with his death the organization we effectively destroyed.

The defeat of Al-Qaeda in Yemen in 2002 did not mean Yemen's jihadis had given up, instead they reached a tacit agreement with the government. If the jihadis focused their efforts on Iraq fighting the Americans and did not attack Yemeni interests, the state would turn a blind eye. In fact Brigadier-General Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar once again facilitated travel to Iraq just as he had done with Afghanistan.¹¹³ Not until 2006 would Al-Qaeda become highly active again within Yemen. A prison break in 2006 would replenish the ranks as 23 seasoned jihadis escaped.¹¹⁴ Battle hardened militants returning from Iraq further bolstered ranks and by 2008 Al Qaeda in Yemen was functioning again.¹¹⁵ It was suggested in a AQY online magazine article in 2009 that because Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia was decimated, those who were left should cross into Yemen and the two organizations should merge.¹¹⁶ Ayman al-Zawahiri approved the merger and in January of 2009 the two

¹¹⁰ Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes*, Chapter 6, para. 20.

¹¹¹ Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, Al-Qaeda, and America's War in Arabia*, 124.

¹¹² Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes*, Chapter 6, para. 48.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, Chapter 7, para. 40.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Chapter 7, para. 43.

¹¹⁵ Atwan, *After Bin Laden: Al Qaeda, the Next Generation*, 88.

¹¹⁶ Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes*, Chapter 7, para. 48.

branches merged into Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Nasir al-Wahayshi a former secretary to Osama bin Laden was named the leader of AQAP with Said Ali al-Shihri, a former Guantanamo detainee, named as the group's deputy.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes*, Chapter 7, para. 48.

CHAPTER IV

AL QAEDA IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

As the organization in Saudi Arabia disintegrated, the AQAP movement began to take shape in Yemen. This chapter will examine the formation of the AQAP affiliate along with significant developments through April of 2015. Throughout the chapter PPT concepts are identified as they appear in documents, correspondence, statements, and secondary sources.

The jihadi phenomenon can be split into three phases in Yemen. Veterans of Afghanistan returning after the defeat of the Soviet Union to fight the PDRY, jihadis who moved their focus to western interests in Yemen and then Iraq, and the third phase that began with the AQAP merger. Significant differences can be observed in the social movement dynamics of AQAP vs the original AQ organization.

A. Political Opportunity Structures

As noted in Chapter 1, key to Political Opportunity Structures are the interaction between interests, organization, and opportunity, these components explain a movements level of collective action and mobilization. Sidney Tarrow suggests that “people engage in contentious politics when patterns of political opportunities and constraints change, and then by strategically employing a repertoire of collective action, creating new opportunities, which are used by others in widening cycles of contention. When their struggles revolve around broad cleavages in society; when they bring people together around inherited

cultural symbols; and when they can build on - or construct - dense social networks and connective structures, these episodes of contention result in sustained interactions with opponents in social movements.¹¹⁸ Political Opportunity Structures also impact the success of tactical innovations. Doug McAdam argues that “tactical innovations only become potent in the context of a political system vulnerable to insurgency. Expanding political opportunities then create a potential for the exercise of political leverage which indigenous organizations seek to exploit. It is the confluence of these two factors that often seems to presage widespread insurgency.”¹¹⁹

In 2006 opportunity struck, Al Qaeda in Yemen had long been under constraints due to lack of leadership and crackdown by the security services, however a prison break would revitalize the group with experienced commanders and fighters. On February 3rd 2006, 23 inmates tunneled from the floor of their cell in a PSO prison into the women’s bathroom of a nearby mosque.¹²⁰ Among those who escaped were Jamal al-Badawi the logistics director for the USS Cole attack and Jabir al-Banna a US citizen charged with providing material support to al-Qaeda due to a trip to Afghanistan in 2001. Both men were on the FBI’s most wanted list. Nasir al-Wuhayshi who would become the leader of AQAP also escaped, along with Fawaz al-Rabi’i who was sent by Bin Laden to Yemen before 9/11, and Qasim al-Raymi who trained fighters in Afghanistan and would become the military commander of AQAP.¹²¹ Fawaz al-Rabi’i, the last of the original Al Qaeda commanders in Yemen was killed in a shootout with Yemeni forces in October of 2006.

¹¹⁸ Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics (Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics)*, 29.

¹¹⁹ McAdam, “Tactical Innovation and the Pace of Insurgency,” 737.

¹²⁰ Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, Al-Qaeda, and America’s War in Arabia*, 130.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

With the last remaining commander gone, Nasir al-Wuhayshi who served as Bin Laden's personal secretary took over leadership of Al Qaeda in Yemen.¹²² He would proceed to rebuild the organization methodically, drawing on the experience of witnessing Bin Laden build the original Al-Qaeda. Al-Wuhayshi and Qasim al-Raymi recruited locals, appointed local commanders, worked to build ties with influential tribes and families, and established a hierarchy.¹²³ The new commander learned lessons from previous failures in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq. The lack of depth and established hierarchy in the 2002 AQY group led to the organization being put out of commission with one drone strike. Opportunity arose with the prison break, the lack of experienced leadership was no longer a constraint for AQY. By strategically recruiting locals, making alliances with tribes, and establishing a cell based hierarchy Al-Wuhayshi was strategically employing a repertoire of collective action.

As Al Qaeda in Yemen was growing, Al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia was nearly defunct. Al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia had made the mistake of killing too many civilians in its operations and public support was in short supply. The Saudi authorities had also been effective in arresting cells and disrupting plots. As a result many leaders and members were in prison. Those that remained crossed into Yemen to escape the pressure from the Kingdom's security services. The growing organization in Yemen provided the fleeing Saudis an opportunity for survival and the Yemeni organization an opportunity for substantial growth and an improved status.

In January of 2009 Said al-Shihri a Saudi former Guantanamo Bay detainee and graduate of a Saudi rehabilitation program that was supposed to de-radicalize and

¹²² Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, Al-Qaeda, and America's War in Arabia*, 208.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 209.

reintegrate militants into society crossed into Yemen.¹²⁴ He brought several other Saudis he had recruited with him to merge with al-Wuhayshi's organization. On January 22, 2009 Nasir al-Whihayshi, Said al-Shihri, Qasim al-Raymi, and Muhammad al-Awfi announced the merging of the two organizations in a video release. The announcement came one day after President Barack Obama signed an executive order promising to close Guantanamo Bay. Said al-Shihri and Muhammad al-Awfi were both former Guantanamo detainees who had also been through the Saudi rehabilitation program. A Saudi review of the program commissioned after the announcement revealed that, of those who passed through the program, 83 men including 11 detained at Guantanamo had crossed the border into Yemen and once again joined Al Qaeda.¹²⁵

B. Framing Processes

Analyzing AQAP's framing process reveals a significant change in objectives. The original Al Qaeda organization formed in Pakistan and Afghanistan listed its grievances as: the presence of the US military in the land of the two holy places, and muslim suffering around the world caused by the US Israel alliance and regimes they were responsible for propping up. AQAP retained those grievances but added local ones, transforming from a movement that focused exclusively on the "far enemy" to one that widened its focus to include the "near enemy" identified as the Saleh regime.

¹²⁴ Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, Al-Qaeda, and America's War in Arabia*, 235.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 239.

Adding this new objective required an addition to the movements diagnostic frames, an explanation of “what is, or went wrong?” And “who or what is to blame?” Passages from AQAP’s online magazine Sada al-Malahim answer these questions.

The people of Yemen are suffering from the decline of living standards, the rise of costs, and the discriminatory practices of the government in employment, the distribution of wealth and the looting of riches, the misappropriation of lands, and absence of someone to defend their rights. (Hamil al Misk, Issue 8, p.27)

Oil in Yemen is extracted from Marib, Hadramawt, and Shabwa, so where are the oil revenues? The majority goes to western oil companies, part of them goes into the pockets of the subcontractors, and another part is spent on paying the salaries and expenses of the army and security forces which are occupying the country and oppressing the people including the people of Marib, Shabwa, and Hadramawt who are themselves paying the price of their own oppression. (Taleb al-Hayqa’a, Issue 10, p. 27)

It is very difficult to imagine the level of degradation reached by the government of Yemen. It has no religion and no magnanimity or sense of honor; [it is] a state which has sold the lives of its sons to be harvested by the enemy’s missiles so that [Saleh] may retain power. It has reached the lowest level of corruption... (Mujahid Adel, Issue 12 p. 36)

How do you consent, O proud and honorable tribes of Yemen that Yemen be the extension of the crusade on the land of Muslims? How do you accept that the governing authority in Yemen be the CIA and Abdullah Salih and his gang its servants and slaves? (Ayman al-Zawahiri, Issue 9, p. 26)¹²⁶

The vast economic problems of Yemen are blamed on Saleh and he is accused of corruption, oppression, lack of religion, and allowing Yemen to be an extension of a crusade on Muslims. AQAP is careful to link these grievances to the west noting that it too

¹²⁶ Page, Challita, and Harris, “Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: Framing Narratives and Prescriptions,” 155.

remains responsible due to its cooperation with Saleh and intervention in Yemeni affairs which Saleh permits.

Life [in Yemen] is jihad for the sake of God. In it lies the response to the appeal of the widows and orphans of the aggression, a response to the appeal of every person suffering injustice and every detainee in the US intelligence and local prisons. (Salih al-Salih, Issue 12 p. 50)

How can we live in peace, how can we enjoy our existence when our vulnerable brothers in Gaza are experiencing excruciating suffering, living between two fires, between the mirages of conferences and the plight of occupation... There is no distinction between a Jewish violator, an assaulting crusader, or a spiteful apostate. They are all equal for the believer. (Abdul Laith al-Hamadani, Issue 2, p. 11)¹²⁷

AQAP diagnoses a third problem in effect adding another internal enemy, the Shi'a. The Shi'a have always been an enemy to Al-Qaeda in general. They are viewed as rejectionists and apostates, yet within Yemen there is special significance to the group of Shia'a AQAP is referring to. The Houthi movement also known as Ansar Allah, is a highly active group that has launched several insurgent campaigns against the Sanaa government. The Houthis are Zaydis, which is the oldest branch of Shia Islam, however its jurisprudence has much in common with Sunni Islam. In fact the Zaydis are referred to in a common saying as "the Sunnis of the Shia, and the Shia of the Sunnis."¹²⁸ Nevertheless AQAP ignores and denies what it has in common with the Houthis and views them as enemies, who are also responsible for suffering of Yemen and its Sunni population.

¹²⁷ Page, Challita, and Harris, "Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: Framing Narratives and Prescriptions," 155.

¹²⁸ Abubakr Al-Shamahi, "Yemen is More Nuanced Than 'Sunni' & 'Shia'." (2014): <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1759/opinion/3540/Yemen-is-more-nuanced-than-%E2%80%98Sunni%E2%80%99-amp;%C2%A0%E2%80%98Shia%E2%80%99.htm>.

They [Shi'a] inspire a feeling of security and serenity in the hearts of Sunnis, and they seek to integrate with them... They strive to show their devoutness [in religion] and conceal their true beliefs that alienate Sunnis from them. In their effort to integrate themselves with Sunnis, they diligently seek to register their newborns in Sunni areas, so that they are temporarily perceived as Sunnis. At this stage, they arm and prepare themselves and seek to gain access to sensitive areas. They infiltrate important positions in the army and positions of influence in other sectors. They seek to monopolize the economy and take control of it from Sunnis so that they have the upper hand over the markets anytime they wish. They buy real estate in Sunni areas, even at a high price. All the while, Sunnis are heedless, and even worse, you find some of them selling their land and properties to the [Shi'a] rejectionists, and even laugh at them, thinking that they got a deal, oblivious of the fact they were tricked in this deal. (Sheikh Ibrahim al-Rubaysh, Issue 11, p. 25)

Once the problems have been diagnosed, the second framing process begins.

Prognostic frames are constructed to identify solutions to the diagnosed problems and how to go about obtaining the proposed solutions. AQAP's solutions are the same as those suggested by the original Al Qaeda movement, however they specifically add the Saleh government to the list of enemies that must be removed and overthrown.

All indications and facts on the ground demonstrate beyond a shadow of a doubt that the path of jihad is the only path to save the Muslim umma from its sufferings. It is the sole and optimal solution, as other solutions are only an excuse to shy away from confrontation. ('Adnan al-Ansari, Issue 8, p.32)

The project of Al Qaeda is not only limited to defeating the United States and expelling it from the land of Muslims; it also extends to the overthrowing the traitor Arab rulers in the Arabian Peninsula, especially the government of Al-Sa'ud ... now that the government of Ali Abdullah Salih is on the brink of collapsing and fleeing from the land of Yemen. (Mish'al al-Sadwakhi, Issue 10 p. 43)

The efficient execution of multiple operations with God's guidance in addition to a centralized and conscious planning must serve the ultimate goal and the establishment of a state of justice which guarantees rights for all and where the

Caliph sleeps on a rug just like the poorest of people. (Hamil al-Misk, Issue 9, p. 31)¹²⁹

Another significant prognosis for AQAP that deviated from the norm of past solutions was the specific emphasis on the advocacy of “homegrown” attacks. AQAP sought to inspire individuals already residing in the west to initiate their own attacks if they could not travel abroad to join the jihad. AQAP was effective with this effort. By publishing an online magazine in english and distributing lectures also online in english, the organization brought its message to a new audience. Anwar al-Awlaki directed the following message to Muslims in the west in the english language online magazine *Inspire*.

Hence my advice to you is this: you have two choices either hijra or jihad. You either leave or you fight. You leave and live among Muslims or you stay behind and fight with your hand, your wealth and your word. I specifically invite the youth to either fight in the West or join their brothers in the fronts of jihad: Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. I invite them to join the new front, Yemen, the base from which the great jihad of the Arabian Peninsula will begin, the base from which the greatest army of Islam will march forth. The Messenger of Allah (uwbp) said: “An army of twelve thousand will come out of Aden-Abyan and they will give victory to Allah and His Messenger and they are the best between me and them.”¹³⁰

After problems and solutions have been identified, motivation to implement the solutions must be articulated. This is the third framing process of Motivational Frames. AQAP details abuses and suffering of muslims using an emotional argument, in effect saying: join us in order to stop this suffering, if you stand by and do nothing you are

¹²⁹ Page, Challita, and Harris, “Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: Framing Narratives and Prescriptions,” 158.

¹³⁰ Daurius Figueira, “*Salafi Jihadi Discourse of Sunni Islam in the 21st Century*”: “*The Discourse of Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi and Anwar Al-Awlaki*” (iUniverse, 2011), 102-03.

permitting this to continue. Portraying jihad as a necessary and central duty in Islam is also heavily emphasized, along with legitimizations of the violent actions that come with the proposed jihad.

The people of Yemen have become the poorest and weakest of all nations. No other Arab people suffer from a similar situation except for our brothers in Somalia who are being crushed by war and the oppression and interference of the crusaders and their agents. (Faruq al-Sana'ani, Issue 3, p. 18)

Evidence we presented previously has demonstrated that *Al-Wala'* in God is loving God and achieving the triumph of His religion, and *Al-Bara'* is aversion towards the enemies of God, fighting jihad against them, and disavowing them, their methods, and actions. (The Shari'a Committee, Issue 6, p. 5)¹³¹

Jihad is the greatest deed in Islam and the salvation of the Ummah is in practicing it. In times like these, when Muslim lands are occupied by the kuffar, when the jails of tyrants are full of Muslim POW's, when the rule of law of Allah is absent from this world and when Islam is being attacked in order to uproot it, Jihad becomes obligatory on every Muslim. (Anwar al-Awlaki)¹³²

Anwar al-Awlaki emphasizes that great progress has been made by past jihadis in a short period of time and that victory is imminent as long as the jihad continues.

First of all Allah (Azza wa Jal) does not grant us victory except after we go through a struggle. Allah (Azza wa Jal) wants us to keep on trying, wants us to keep on exerting effort and also Allah (Azza wa Jal) sometimes withholds victory from us because we have some flaws and mistakes.¹³³

Suban Allah within twenty years look at where we are standing now! The first jihad starts in Filistine; in fact Filistine gave to Shahaada its importance in the

¹³¹ Page, Challita, and Harris, "Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: Framing Narratives and Prescriptions," 160.

¹³² Figueira, "Salafi Jihadi Discourse of Sunni Islam in the 21st Century": "The Discourse of Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi and Anwar Al-Awlaki," 87.

¹³³ Ibid., 86.

modern day. The concept of Shahaada started out in Filistine. In Filistine today, Shahaada is a culture, and people celebrate shahaada like a wedding; when a shaheed would give his life to Allah ‘Azza wa Jall, his family would make a tent and people would come to greet them and give congratulations to the family as if their child got married... So within a short period of time of twenty years, all of this is happening. Does this not tell us that victory is soon? Does it not show us that these areas that Rasoolullah (sallallahu ‘alay wassallam) emphasized and talked about in the ahadith are being prepared by Allah ‘Azza wa Jall for the next stage? Al-Iraq, Khurasaan, Yemen and al-Shaam are being prepared for what is coming next. And what is coming next is al-Malhama because Rasoolullah (sallallahu ‘alay wassallam) talks about these places in reference to al-Mahdi and al-Malhama.”¹³⁴

C. Mobilizing Structures

AQAP uses a variety of mobilizing structures to recruit members into the organization. The original Al Qaeda movement at its inception was able to recruit in an environment with much less pressure from security services. However AQAP has the full attention of the worlds intelligence agencies, making recruitment more difficult. Despite this major challenge AQAP has been able to mobilize in a variety of ways. Gregory Johnsen, one of the most prolific scholars on AQAP suggests that “Al Qaeda is the most representative organization in Yemen. It transcends class, tribe, and regional identity in a way that no other organization or political party does.”¹³⁵ This indicates that AQAP is not limited to a certain area, ethnicity, or background in its mobilization efforts in Yemen. It’s framing processes have resonance in broad sections of society targeted for mobilization. McAdam, McCarthy, and Bald identify “Collective Vehicles” through which people mobilize and engage in collective action. They include; meso-level groups, organizations,

¹³⁴ Figueira, “*Salafi Jihadi Discourse of Sunni Islam in the 21st Century*”: “*The Discourse of Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi and Anwar Al-Awlaki*,” 77-78.

¹³⁵ Gregory Johnsen, “Testimony of Gregory D. Johnsen Ph.d. Candidate Near Eastern Studies Princeton University Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.” (2010): <http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/JohnsenTestimony100120a1.pdf>, 12.

informal networks, grassroots settings like work and neighborhood, as well as churches, colleges, and informal friendship networks.¹³⁶

The “Collective Vehicles” used by AQAP include informal networks of families and friends, interactions in mosques and schools, prisons, and online interactions. Alistair Harris notes that the “process of mobilization, radicalization, and recruitment is frequently taking place in locations where individuals are temporarily distanced from supportive family and social networks, such as institutions of religious instruction. As with radicalization elsewhere, this is an inherently social process.”¹³⁷

It is difficult to obtain details of recruitment efforts done through informal networks due to the fact that they are done on a person to person basis, acutely private, and require secrecy. However a recent memoir from a Danish convert to Islam named Morten Storm who spent time in Yemen and later became an agent for intelligence services details how such meetings and connections were built. Storm traveled to Yemen at the suggestion of a London Imam who told him he would find a pure seminary there called the Dammaj Institute.¹³⁸ In 1998 while attending the institute Storm came into contact with many fervently religious students and was accepted into their social circle. He was introduced by a friend from Dammaj to a group of Salafis in Sanaa, some of which were veterans of Afghanistan and the Balkans who offered to facilitate his travel to Afghanistan.¹³⁹

Contacts made this way show that the right mosque can serve as a vehicle that establishes the credibility of an individual’s views and connects them with likeminded

¹³⁶ Ferree et al., *Rethinking Social Movements: Structure, Meaning, and Emotion*, 20.

¹³⁷ Christopher Boucek and Marina Ottaway, *Yemen on the Brink* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010), 38.

¹³⁸ Morten Storm, Paul Cruickshank, and Tim Lister, *Agent Storm: My Life Inside Al Qaeda and the Cia* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 2014, Chapter 3, para. 74).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 4, para. 51.

people. Those individuals can then connect them with others in their own informal networks who can facilitate mobilization. Storm details another such episode in which word had spread through informal networks of his presence in Sanaa and that he had attended Dammaj. A relatively unknown man in Yemen at the time in 2005 named Anwar al-Awlaki invited Storm to dinner at his apartment. Storm recalls that during that meeting “Awlaki was interested in finding out more about my contacts - in Sana’a and Taiz. He asked me about the other foreigners in my circle and some of the Yemenis that I had got to know. It seemed that he was looking to tap into a wider pool of radicals in the Yemeni capital and beyond.”¹⁴⁰

Anwar al-Awlaki, a Yemeni-American Imam had left the US to come to Yemen because he felt the FBI was harassing him. The FBI suspected that he had connections to two of the 9/11 hijackers, an accusation Awlaki has denied. Awlaki moved to Yemen to get away from FBI scrutiny, however American pressure on the Saleh government led to Awlaki being arrested and access was given to the FBI to question him once again.¹⁴¹ Storm learned from an “Al Qaeda money man” Abdullah Misri that Awlaki was arrested on a charge considered to be fabricated: “plotting to kidnap a Shi’ite and a US official.” Awlaki was never given a trial and remained in solitary confinement for 18 months. Storm recalls a conversation with Awlaki after he was released from prison “I was in solitary confinement for the first nine months. The only contact I had with humanity was my guards, and the cell was three meters long. It was underground. There were times when I thought the isolation and the claustrophobia would drive me insane...I had no paper to write on. I got no

¹⁴⁰ Morten Storm, Paul Cruickshank, and Tim Lister, *Agent Storm: My Life Inside Al Qaeda and the Cia* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 2014, Chapter 9, para. 18.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., Chapter 9, para. 114.

exercise. I survived thanks to the will of Allah and the suffering has deepened my faith. And although it was very difficult to get books, I was able to read Qutb again.”¹⁴² Although Awlaki was considered to hold radical views before he was imprisoned, Storm observed that he emerged from the episode bitter, angry, and much more radical. Awlaki was angry at both the Americans and the Yemeni government for his ordeal, he confided to Storm that he believed 9/11 was justified and that “God had given him a mission to carry the banner of jihad, and to start in southern Yemen.”¹⁴³ Awlaki’s experience is an example of prison serving as another important mobilizing structure for AQAP.

Gregory Johnsen notes in testimony to the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee that following the USS Cole attack in 2000 Saleh began mass arrests of anyone suspected of sympathizing with Al Qaeda. “Men who had spent time in Afghanistan, particularly those that returned to Yemen in the weeks surrounding the attacks were obvious targets, but the dragnet quickly expanded to include young men deemed to be security threats in governorates across the country. Within months Yemen’s jails were full of hundreds of suspects many of whom the government had little if any evidence against. These men were tossed in security prisons with other more experienced fighters who did much to radicalize their young more impressionable fellow inmates in the shared cells.”¹⁴⁴ Housing members of Al Qaeda, Afghan veterans, and innocents caught up in the arrest campaigns together would serve as a powerful mobilizing force. Radicals became further convinced of the righteousness of their mission, believing the detention was a divine test.

¹⁴² Morten Storm, Paul Cruickshank, and Tim Lister, *Agent Storm: My Life Inside Al Qaeda and the Cia* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 2014, Chapter 13, para. 44.

¹⁴³ Ibid., Chapter 13, para. 50.

¹⁴⁴ Johnsen, “Testimony of Gregory D. Johnsen Ph.d. Candidate Near Eastern Studies Princeton University Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee,” 7.

Such radicals exposed innocents to their views who often proved receptive to the argument that the government and United States were responsible for their predicament. Qasim al-Raymi and Hamza al-Quayti both veterans of Afghanistan, along with Fawaz al-Rabi'i were incarcerated together in a PSO prison. They would be joined later by Nasir al-Wuhayshi who was Bin Laden's personal secretary and became the leader of AQAP. Together the men would form study circles and deliver sermons identifying the "Zionist-Crusader" alliance as responsible for their situation.¹⁴⁵ The message resonated with inmates especially those who had been arrested attempting to travel to Iraq to fight the Americans. During his incarceration Wuhayshi and his associates were able to review past mistakes made, plan for the future, and mobilize new members to their cause.¹⁴⁶ In February of 2006, 23 of the Al Qaeda suspects would escape that prison, including Nasir al-Wuhayshi who would put his plans into action and become AQAP's leader.¹⁴⁷

The media output of AQAP has proved to be one of the movements most significant mobilizing structures. Through its online media output AQAP has been able to articulate its message, ideology, and tactics in order to mobilize new recruits and spread its ideas. The online media served as both a mobilization structure as well as a vehicle for communicating its framing processes. The magazine *Sada Al-Malahim* began to be distributed online in 2008. Due to its high production value and articles written by both local and high profile international jihadis like Osama bin Laden, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, and

¹⁴⁵ Johnsen, "Testimony of Gregory D. Johnsen Ph.d. Candidate Near Eastern Studies Princeton University Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee," 7.

¹⁴⁶ Johnsen, *The Last Refuge : Yemen, Al-Qaeda, and America's War in Arabia*, 163.

¹⁴⁷ Johnsen, "Testimony of Gregory D. Johnsen Ph.d. Candidate Near Eastern Studies Princeton University Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee," 11.

Ayman al-Zawahiri, the publication became highly regarded in radical circles online.¹⁴⁸ The publication of the english language magazine *Inspire* in 2010 represented a new initiative in mobilization. AQAP had always had a hybridized mission of jihad, focusing on both the West and the Arabian Peninsula, yet with the release of *Inspire*, AQAP was seeking to mobilize individuals from the west to initiate “homegrown” attacks. The magazine included articles from jihadi leaders along with tactics and ideology similar to Sada Al-Malahim. Yet *Inspire* differed from past publications by crafting a message specifically geared towards an english speaking audience, seeking to mobilize an untapped market already residing in targeted countries. Included in the following passage is an editor’s answer to a question from a reader asking how to overcome the difficulties of reaching Yemen from the West.

Your situation describes the same position that many other brothers in the West are going through. They are ready to march forth but don’t have the concrete steps to meet their mujahidin brothers. What we recommend is that you focus on planning out attacks in the West.

The foreign brothers that join[ed] the mujahidin, many amongst them, conclude that it would have been better for them to return to the West and launch operations. This is because killing 10 soldiers in America for example, is much more effective than killing 100 apostates in the Yemeni military.¹⁴⁹

The answer received indicates that while the reader may desire to join the organization in Yemen, AQAP seeks to mobilize such potential members to action within the west due to the greater strategic impact that would result. Anwar al-Awlaki would go on

¹⁴⁸ Page, Challita, and Harris, “Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: Framing Narratives and Prescriptions,” 152-53.

¹⁴⁹ Benedict Wilkinson and Jack Barclay, *The Language of Jihad: Narratives and Strategies of Al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula and UK Responses* (Royal United Services Institute, 2011), 31.

to join AQAP after his release from prison and edit *Inspire* along with another American Samir Khan, utilizing their American english skills. The magazine would prove successful, attracting a great deal of western media attention and a substantial readership. *Inspire* was frequently discovered to have been downloaded by individuals prosecuted in US terrorism cases. Nidal Hassan the Fort Hood shooter, communicated with Awlaki directly and Awlaki praised the attack in his later statements. The high attention received by *Inspire* coupled with Anwar al-Awlaki's increasingly popular english lectures contributed to the US government's decision to target Awlaki for assassination. The multitude of Mobilization Structures utilized by AQAP allow recruitment to occur in a variety of ways. The combination of informal networks, a sophisticated media output, and connections built in mosques, schools, and prisons serve as effective vehicles for mobilization to collective action.

D. Repertoires of Contention

Donatella Della Porta describes repertoires of contention as “what people know they can do when they want to oppose a public decision they consider unjust or threatening.”¹⁵⁰ Through Framing Processes AQAP articulates the public decisions they consider unjust and threatening along with how to resolve those decisions. Simply put, grievances with the Yemeni and Saudi governments along with the Zionist-Crusader alliance are best resolved with violent jihad. The literature on Repertoires of Contention is helpful in this instance for understanding why AQAP chooses violence as its method of

¹⁵⁰ Della Porta, Donatella. “Repertoires of Contention.” *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements* (2013): 1.

contention over other forms. Charles Tilly states that “the repertoire involves not only what people do when they are engaged in conflict with others but what they know how to do and what others expect them to do.”¹⁵¹ Della Porta expands on that concept; “rooted in the shared subculture of the activists, repertoires contain the options considered practicable, while excluding others. Usually forms of action emerge as a by-product of everyday experiences... Traditional forms of action are then handed down to a new generation of activists, who tend to adapt them to changing conditions.”¹⁵²

Innovations in repertoires and tactics are of utmost importance for a social movement to be successful. Doug McAdam argues that “the key challenge confronting insurgents is to devise some way to overcome the basic powerlessness that has confined them to a position of institutionalized political impotence. The solution to this problem is preeminently tactical. Ordinarily insurgents must bypass routine decision-making channels and seek, through the use of non-institutionalized tactics, to force their opponents to deal with them outside the established arenas with which the latter derive so much of their power.”¹⁵³ Al Qaeda lacks institutional political power, therefore to overcome that powerlessness the movement uses non-institutionalized disruptive violent tactics to achieve its goals. However over time, authorities can counter and adapt to such tactics. As McAdam asserts: “even the most successful tactic is likely to be effectively countered by movement opponents if relied upon too long. Barring the attainment of significant institutionalized power, then, the pace of insurgency comes to be crucially influenced by (a) the creativity of

¹⁵¹ Della Porta, Donatella. “Repertoires of Contention.” *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements* (2013): 1.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ McAdam, Doug. “Tactical Innovation and the Pace of Insurgency.” *American Sociological Review* (1983): 735.

insurgents in devising new tactical forms, (b) the ability of opponents to neutralize these moves through effective tactical counters.”¹⁵⁴ This section will show that AQAP has frequently innovated in its tactics and repertoires. Such innovation has often outpaced authorities attempts at tactical counters. Therefore the movement’s ability to rapidly innovate has both kept the group alive and led to greater diffusion.

Afghans responding to the Soviet invasion chose violence as their method of contention in resisting Soviet forces. The Afghans calculated that non-violent action was unlikely to deter Soviet ambitions, therefore they turned to violence drawing traditions of utilizing weaponry to resolve local disputes and repel invaders. The Arabs arriving to assist in defending Afghanistan adopted this form of contention and it yielded successful results as the Soviets were forced to withdraw. The success of this form of contention inspired Osama bin Laden to re-apply it to new targets in order to achieve his political goals and resolve grievances. From Bin Laden those forms of contention were handed down to affiliate organizations like AQAP which adapted them to new conditions. AQAP retained the contentions forms of mounting attacks on western interests while also adapting to conditions in Yemen and applying contentions forms to the Yemeni and Saudi governments.

Many adaptations and changes in contentious repertoires can be observed in AQAP. The leaders of the movement had observed the problems Al-Qaeda had encountered in Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq. Adjustments needed to be made to established repertoires in order to avoid past mistakes. In Saudi Arabia Al Qaeda lost support from the public with attacks that killed and injured civilians. Attacking security forces prompted a

¹⁵⁴ McAdam, Doug. “Tactical Innovation and the Pace of Insurgency.” *American Sociological Review* (1983): 736.

swift crackdown on cells throughout the kingdom leading to the organization's demise. In Iraq extremely high numbers of civilian casualties and brutal violence caused by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi resulted in Iraq's Sunni tribes turning against Al Qaeda and cooperating with American forces. In a letter from Osama bin Laden to Nasir al-Wuhayshi recovered by US Forces from the raid in Abbotabad Pakistan, Bin Laden covers some of these mistakes urging Wuhayshi to avoid them in Yemen.

You know that many jihadist groups did not succeed in gaining their objective because they concentrated on their internal enemy. Therefore, the Syrian Muslim Brothers got themselves in trouble, especially in Himah, when thirty years ago the event (NFI) shocked the people. Additionally, other events took place as of the Islamic group attempt in Egypt, including the situation with our brothers in Libya, Algeria, and the Arab Peninsula. Even though some of the work was targeting the American centers, not the regime, and was useful in getting America to leave its huge military bases in Saudi Arabia and in educating young men about the jihad. Then the jihad started facing problems for the above mentioned reasons.

Meanwhile, the resistance movements against the foreign occupation enemy were able to accomplish huge successes during the last ten years in the Islamic world, and the latest one was in Afghanistan. The reason for this success is that the Russian occupation of Afghanistan allowed us to gain the people's heart. It was very important to us to gain the Afghanis' support because the people's support to the mujahidin is as important as the water for the fish; therefore; any movement has to have people's support in order to survive, as happened in Gaza when all the people supported the Islamic Resistance Movement; even though, the people are unaware of the wrongdoing by the mujahidin. The enemy entered Iraq without any knowledge of the area or the Iraqi people, who have a strong tribal background; therefore, the Iraqis supported the mujahidin. Many Iraqis joined the mujahidin. Many Iraqis joined the mujahidin against the Americans until some mistakes happened when some of the al-Anbar tribe's children were attacked without a reason of self-defense (they were not a threat to the mujahidin), but they were registering in the security force compound. This attack resulted in the tribe

working against the mujahidin. At this time, the mujahidin learned their lesson, which is not to kill any of the tribe members.¹⁵⁵

Discourse from the document indicates that Wuhayshi had earlier sent Bin Laden a letter asking permission to topple the Sanaa government and establish an Islamic State. Bin Laden argues that the time is not yet right and even advocates attempting to come to a truce with the Saleh government.

In reference to your statement, “If you want Sana’a, today is the day,” we want Sana’a to establish an Islamic State, but first, we want to make sure that we have the capability to gain control of it. Even though we were able to militarily and economically exhaust and weaken our greatest enemy before and after the eleventh, the enemy continues to possess the ability to topple any state we establish.

We do not see escalation as necessary at this point because we are in the preparation stage; therefore, it is not in our interest to rush in bringing down the regime. In spite of this regime’s mismanagement, it is less dangerous to us than the one America wants to exchange it with. Ali Abdullah Salih has been unable to suppress the Islamic activity and has been considered to be a non-muslim man and supporter of the West during the past years. On the contrary, the salafists and the jihadist salafists were able to take advantage of his regime and target America from Yemen, as some of the mujahidin went to Somalia or traveled to us, which allowed us to assign our brothers to conduct international operations.

If the government does not agree on a truce, concentrate on the Yemeni emigrants who come back to visit Yemen and have American visas or citizenship and would be able to conduct operations inside America as long as they have not given their

¹⁵⁵ Osama bin Laden, “Socom-2012-0000016-ht.” <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/SOCOM-2012-0000016-Trans.pdf>.

promises not to harm America. We need to extend and develop our operation in America and not keep it limited to blowing up airplanes.¹⁵⁶

Bin Laden seems highly concerned that Wuhayshi is intent on attacking Yemeni targets. He reminds Wuhayshi of Al Qaeda's "general politics" and the priority of US targets, while also recommending targets to avoid.

Avoid killing anyone from the tribes... Do not target military and police officers in their centers unless you receive an order from us. Our targets are Americans, who kill our families in Gaza and other Islamic countries.

I need to remind you about the general politics of Al-Qaida concerning the military sector and media. Al-Qaida concentrates on its external big enemy before its internal enemy. Even though the internal enemy is considered to be a greater nonbeliever, the external enemy is more clearly defined as a nonbeliever and is more dangerous in this stage of our life.¹⁵⁷

Newly released documents from the same trove recovered at Abbottabad include correspondence from Abu Abd al-Rahman Atiyyat Allah to Osama bin Laden during July of 2010. Atiyya pushes back on Bin Laden's assessment of the situation in Yemen and his reluctance to become involved in fighting Yemeni forces.

Regarding Yemen, my dear Sheikh, what you say is good and you go into depth about it, I ask God to add to your knowledge, wisdom, and soundness. I am bringing you the news that we are glad about it and we believe it reflects God's blessing of wisdom, precision, objectivity, composure, and strength of right action

¹⁵⁶ Eric H. Doss, "The Abbottabad Papers: Documents Seized in the Navy Seal Raid on Osama Bin Ladin's Compound (Annotated)," (2012).

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

target focus to us and to you. However, I hope that you focus on the current situation and its particulars. War is now a reality, and war is nothing other than what you know and have experienced. At first war starts small... and so on. Now, we are faced with the reality of how to act wisely and how to bring in our youth and men. I am not saying that we should weaken in front of our base or indulge them, but we should guide them and bring them to reason by the hand, God permitting. However, this is an extremely difficult undertaking. Let us focus on the means and practical mechanisms for implementing your ideas, may God bless you. Issue; That we should strike the Americans, but not strike the apostates; we have explained our opinion, and you know it. Regarding the matter of completely retreating from the battle: It is dangerous and destructive as well. It seems to me that talking about not escalating reflects a lack of clarity and it will not be practical. The young men want to go to the “front” and they want “operations”. They bring up operations, opportunities, monitoring (surveillance and reconnaissance) to the command every day. We must have clear, decisive orders. Regarding the issue of letting southerners, like the al-Hirak [Popular Movement] group, or others, or others take over the government; considering the results as you described, I have some hesitation. Maybe there is another option: strikes and chaos. That would be better than the rule of apostate infidels.

In sum: Our brothers are now actually at war with the state, and with the Americans, of course. They have even started hitting Security facilities in Abyen, as you must have heard a few days ago. Is it proper to say: stop the escalation, we do not want war in Yemen!? I do not support this choice. None of the brothers here, who have you their opinions, supports it. We definitely see it as a mistake. Should we push towards a truce? How, and what are the conditions? (We have to go into details about how it would look, and then direct it. Here we explain our strategy and give them the open letter you wrote down, and so on). We must answer the question: “Will the American and the Saudis accept a truce at all”? And where will our brothers be during the truce?!¹⁵⁸

Bin Laden seems disconnected from the reality of what was happening on the ground in Yemen. It could be due to his isolation and limited access to up to date

¹⁵⁸ Abu Abd al-Rahman Atiyyat, “422-10-cr-109-s-4-rjd-translation.” <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/422-10-CR-109-S-4-RJD-Translation.pdf>, 3.

information, but AQAP was far past the point of reaching a truce with the government in 2010. Bin Laden may have been attempting to refocus AQAP back to his original goals of striking US targets after such a long time without a successful attack on the US homeland. Regardless, Atiyya pushes back against Bin Laden's assessment and it is clear Wuhayshi did not heed bin Laden's advice as AQAP continued its campaign against government forces. The disagreement evident in the included exchange is an apt example of the next generation of activists adapting repertoires of contention inherited from the previous generation.

Another new repertoire employed by AQAP was its effort at taking territory, holding it, and attempting to administrate and govern. Contrary to Bin Laden's recommendations, AQAP went ahead with its plans and drove government forces out of the towns of Jaar and Zinjibar in Abyan province and declared it an "Islamic Emirate."¹⁵⁹ At this stage AQAP took another new step by attempting to rebrand itself as Ansar al-Sharia. The group took this step in an effort to distance itself from the Al-Qaeda name along with its negative connotations and present an image it hoped locals would find more appealing. Under this new branding the group took control of Zinjibar and Jarr and tried its hand at governing for the first time. A statement from June of 2012 describes their efforts.

The Sharia was implemented, security prevailed, people were safe on their properties, honors and blood, the virtue was established and the vice was removed, crime disappeared, and blackmail ended, also the aid reached to villages of the people and the services reached to many villages and taxes were cancelled and

¹⁵⁹ A Chapman and J Adelman, "Influencing Violent Extremist Organizations Pilot Effort: Focus on Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (Aqap)," *Citeseer* (2011), 51.

even the fees for services like water, electricity, municipality and others were cancelled.¹⁶⁰

While in control of the towns, AQAP was able to successfully bring services that had not been provided by the government. AQAP provided free of charge: food, running water, installed sewage pipes, gas, and most importantly electricity which many of the residents never had before.¹⁶¹ An interviewed resident of Jaar remarked that “Ansar al-Sharia have solved many problems for us that the government hadn’t managed to do for 20 years.”¹⁶² AQAP also sought to provide a system of justice, instituting a sharia court system to quickly resolve disputes and dole out punishments.¹⁶³ Punishments could be harsh, a suspected spy was crucified, those who did not attend mosque at the required times were assaulted, and thieves had their hands amputated.¹⁶⁴ Despite the harsh punishments, some residents seemed to be content with AQAP’s governance. One resident said “people felt secure and safe (under al-Qaeda)... People would leave their shops open when they went to pray and when we came back our goods were untouched.”¹⁶⁵ Another resident claimed “when al-Qaeda was here, it was good. There were no robberies. People treated each other in a decent way. No one would try to make problems.”¹⁶⁶ These individuals may have been under pressure to give an approving appraisal of AQAP’s governance, but with the

¹⁶⁰ Simcox, Robin. “Ansar Al-Sharia and Governance in Southern Yemen.” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 14, 59.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

improvement in services never provided before it is possible they genuinely preferred AQAP rule.

The experiment in governance did not last long however, government forces successfully took back the area and AQAP was forced to withdraw. The battles between AQAP and the Yemeni military were devastating to the area, causing an estimated \$2.5 billion in damages.¹⁶⁷ In the wake of the brutal fighting to take back the city some residents changed their minds about AQAP:

In the beginning when [AAS] came here, they were simple people and weak. We were one of those people who were harmed by the government, because the government stole from us, and we were without work. We aligned with them in the beginning. We found out, thank God, before we did anything with them, we found out that they are liars... they love blood, and they are terrorists.¹⁶⁸

Following AQAP's expulsion from its temporary emirate Nasir al-Wuhayshi wrote a letter to the new Emir of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb Abu Musab Abdul Wadud. The document is one of several found by the Associated Press in a building that was controlled by Al Qaeda fighters in Timbuktu, Mali. In the correspondence Nasir al-Wuhayshi offers advice and describes his groups efforts at governance.

Our dear Sheikh, we don't yet have the full details of your conquest of Timbuktu and Mali, but we are sure that they are your victories, and the fruits of your jihad and steadfastness. We do not know if you and Ansar Dine are two factions, or if you are like us (Al-Qaeda and Ansar al-Sharia) ... Smile!!

¹⁶⁷ Simcox, Robin. "Ansar Al-Sharia and Governance in Southern Yemen." *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 14, 66.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

Allah has sent you to this Umma to move them toward the right path. You have to be kind to them and make room for compassion and for leniency. Try to win them over through the conveniences of life and by taking care of their daily needs like food, electricity and water. Providing these necessities will have a great effect on people, and will make them sympathize with us and feel that their fate is tied to ours. This is what we've observed during our short experience.

You have to take a gradual approach with them when it comes to their religious practices. You can't beat people for drinking alcohol when they don't even know the basics of how to pray. We have to first stop the great sins, and then move gradually to the lesser and lesser ones... Enforcing Islamic punishments in war time is something that was done by our forbearers and it needs to be applied through good judgment and following a verdict. Our opinion in the beginning was to postpone the issue. Only after monotheism took hold of peoples hearts did we begin enforcing these punishments. Try to avoid enforcing Islamic punishments as much as possible, unless you are forced to do so... As for the smaller sins and offenses, they have to be addressed gradually, with patience, leniency and wisdom.

Our soldiers tried their hand at administration and war. We came away with many new experiences. At every stage, we were able to do some things well, and we received uncountable blessings from Allah. One of the most important results was the collapse of the false media empire, since people came to realize the extent of their lies and fabrications. But after that, the West and the East gathered against us, and fought us with one hand. Our men withstood the battle like mountains in a most valiant and indescribable manner that words can hardly express.

After four months of fighting we were forced to withdraw. The offensive was very tough and it could hardly be stopped before achieving all its targets. The whole world was against us, after the victories we had secured. People became familiar with us, and our Islamic model was well received in the areas under our control. Therefore, the campaign was fierce and had we insisted on resisting, the campaign would have been long and would have exhausted us both in terms of casualties and money... The control of these areas during one year cost us 500 martyrs, 700 wounded, 10 cases of hand or leg amputation and nearly \$20 million.

Thanks to Allah, most of the battle costs, if not all, were paid for through the spoils. Almost half the spoils came from hostages. Kidnapping hostages is an easy spoil, which I may describe as a profitable trade and a precious treasure.

As soon as we took control of the areas, we were advised by the General Command here not to declare the establishment of an Islamic principality, or state for a number of reasons: We wouldn't be able to treat people on the basis of a state since we would not be able to provide for all their needs, mainly because our state is vulnerable. Second: Fear of failure, in the event that the world conspires against us. If this were to happen, people may start to despair and believe that jihad is fruitless. For these reasons and others, we deemed that their advice was wise and decided not to declare a state. Moreover, our brothers in Somalia have not declared a state despite the fact that they control most of areas of the country.

Our dear emir, we have been exhausted in the course of many battles and fronts. Despite their undeniable benefit, they are exhaustive in terms of money, men, and weapons. We have seized weapons we thought would be enough for years, but as soon as we withdrew, we found ourselves having to buy arms. Therefore, we advise you not to be dragged into a prolonged war. Hold on to your previous bases in the mountains, forests and deserts and prepare other refuges for the worst-case scenario. This is what we came to realize after our withdrawal.¹⁶⁹

In this correspondence Wuhayshi is quite open about failures his organization experienced and offers suggestions in order to prevent mistakes from being repeated. Advocating a slow and patient application of Sharia law is not something Al Qaeda would be expected to publicly endorse. This suggestion, communicated with some expectation of privacy between leaders, shows how Wuhayshi recommends adapting repertoires in order to gain the support of those it governs. It reveals that AQAP is not guided completely by rigid ideology but has the ability to adapt and can make concessions for political reasons.

¹⁶⁹ Associated Press, "Al Qaida Papers." <http://www.longwarjournal.org/images/al-qaida-papers-how-to-run-a-state.pdf>.

This statement also shows that AQAP makes tactical decisions to withdraw when it is faced with overwhelming pressure and risks exhaustion. Rather than seeking martyrdom or fighting till the death repelling the government advance, (it could be argued that ideology on its own suggests this is a goal) AQAP makes a tactical decision to withdraw, regroup, and fight another day. Wuhayshi also alludes to communication with the Al Qaeda general command advising against the establishment of an Islamic principality. This shows that communication was still happening with the central organization and advice was heeded. It is communicated that the political repercussions of a highly likely failure would outweigh the benefits of trying and failing to establish an Islamic State. Wuhayshi seems to understand this and also acknowledges that its repertoire of attempting territorial control was a failure. AQAP was not equipped to be engaged in prolonged conventional combat that was required with the defense of a town. Instead Wuhayshi advocates returning to more tried and tested methods, bases in forests, mountains, and deserts. Such bases allow AQAP to remain more mobile and less susceptible to authorities. This correspondence provides unique insight into specific transformative events in AQAP's history. Willingness to learn from mistakes and quickly adapt to changing circumstances allow the movement to be highly resilient.

Beginning in the summer of 2014 further innovations in AQAP's repertoires became visible. The Houthi movement began advancing on major cities in Yemen, including the capital Sanaa. As the Houthis became more active, AQAP attacks on Houthi targets increased substantially. Data collected by Aaron Zelin and Patrick Hoover of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy shows that attacks on Houthi targets became more frequent than attacks on government targets. A wide range of attack repertoires were

used including: bombings, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), vehicle born improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs), sniper attacks, assassinations, ambushes, offensive assaults, and infiltrations.

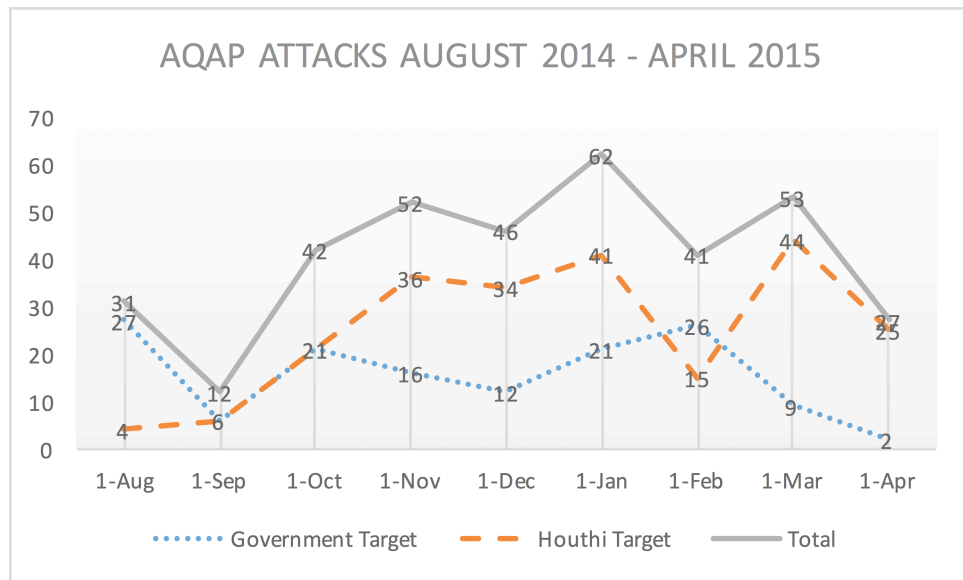


Figure 4.1

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The data shows that AQAP has been able to frequently attack multiple adversaries and sustain high levels of violence. Saudi airstrikes against the Houthi movement began on March 25, 2015. Those strikes along with the breakdown of the central government has led to a military in disarray. A weakened government and military permits AQAP more freedom of movement and the ability to seize new territory and operate in new areas. However as the power of the Houthi movement has risen, it began to operate in new areas and AQAP attacked the group with increasing frequency. These observations show that

¹⁷⁰ Aaron Zelin and Patrick Hoover, “What Aqap’s Operations Reveal About Its Strategy in Yemen,” April 23, 2015, <http://warontherocks.com/2015/04/what-aqaps-operations-reveal-about-its-strategy-in-yemen/?singlepage=1>.

AQAP possesses the ability to quickly adapt repertoires and prioritize their application to emerging and increasingly powerful counter-movements.

CHAPTER V

PROTEST CYCLES

Disaggregating Al Qaeda and AQAP into SMT dynamics has allowed each process to be better understood individually. The last SMT concept of protest cycles or cycles of contention is the best tool to understand how all those dynamics work together and how the movements have evolved over time and why. The beginning of this thesis observed that Osama bin Laden seized the opportunity to create a new movement with a transnational mission by utilizing the remnants of an already mobilized movement. The movement innovated in its repertoire of action by engaging in bombing attacks on US targets. In order to provide reasoning and justification for those actions the existing framing process that was in place for the Afghanistan jihad was transformed to replace the Soviets with the Americans. This process would be the beginnings of the first cycle of contention. A process that would be cyclical throughout Al Qaeda's existence.

Sidney Tarrow defines the concept of cycles of contention: "a phase of heightened conflict across the social system, with rapid diffusion of collective action from more mobilized to less mobilized sectors, a rapid pace of innovation in the forms of contention employed, the creation of new or transformed collective action frames, a combination of organized and unorganized participation, and sequences of intensified information flow and interaction between challengers and authorities. Such widespread contention produces externalities, which give challengers at least a temporary advantage and allow them to overcome the weaknesses in their resource base. It demands that states devise broad

strategies of response that are repressive or facilitative, or a combination of the two. And it produces general outcomes that are more than the sum of the results of an aggregate of unconnected events.”¹⁷¹ This concept is best understood by separating events into four categories of cycles of contention: diffusion, exhaustion, radicalization, and restabilization.

The first stage of protest cycle is diffusion and “happens at the beginning of a cycle, as the first movements to emerge lower the cost of collective action for other actors, by demonstrating the vulnerability of the authorities.”¹⁷² The formation of Al Qaeda following the jihad in Afghanistan lowered the cost of collective action among sympathetic individuals looking for a new mission after the Soviets withdrew. Al Qaeda then demonstrated the vulnerability of US targets with their bombing attacks throughout the late 1990s and culminating with the September 11th attacks. Following the attacks a new dynamic comes to the fore that will determine the ebb and flow of the protest cycle, the interaction with authorities. Tarrow explains “During periods of increased contention, information flows more rapidly, political attention is heightened, and interactions among groups of challengers and between them and authorities increase in frequency and intensity.”¹⁷³ The provoked response by the US to the 9/11 attacks would be an intense bombing campaign on Al Qaeda. This would lead to the second phase of contention cycles: exhaustion. The initial euphoria of the attacks among activists would be destroyed by the US offensive. Morale was low and casualties were high. The attacks also did not result in widespread popular support in the Arab world like that of the Soviet jihad. Something Al

¹⁷¹ Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics (Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics)*, 199.

¹⁷² Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence (Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics)*, 75.

¹⁷³ Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics (Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics)*, 201-02.

Qaeda had been expecting. This led to the third phase of the cycle: radicalization. Della Porta posits that “radicalization is also produced by the uneven pace of demobilization. Whereas those at the periphery, who are also more moderate, tend to drop out earlier, the core activists, who are also more radical, tend to remain mobilized.”¹⁷⁴ After escaping the mountains of Tora Bora the remaining members of Al Qaeda became more convinced of the righteousness of their mission, and became increasingly radical. Thus began the fourth element of the cycle: restabilization. Having escaped the US forces, Bin Laden went into hiding and directed commanders to leave and set up affiliates in other states. The movement had been heavily damaged but stabilized in a reorganized a cell-structure with members in new areas.

Then the cycle of contention began again in Saudi Arabia with diffusion of members returning to the Kingdom from Afghanistan, mobilizing veterans and those sympathetic to the cause, and once again engaging in attacks. Frames were altered to justify attacks in Saudi Arabia provoking a response from the authorities driving the movement once again to exhaustion. Members who were arrested by authorities became radicalized in prison and convinced that they were unfairly victimized by the Saudi authorities. Upon release from rehabilitation programs and joining with remaining activists active in the Kingdom, those members crossed the border into Yemen initiating the next phase of the cycle: restabilization.

In Yemen, commanders had also been appointed following the phase of exhaustion in Afghanistan. In the wake of attacks, authorities in the form of the US government with Yemeni acquiescence executed a drone strike in 2002 that killed the

¹⁷⁴ Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence (Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics)*, 76.

commander of Al Qaeda in Yemen and his associates. That strike combined with mass arrests led once again to exhaustion. Those who were incarcerated were further radicalized, feeling victimized by the Yemeni government and new members were mobilized through interactions in prison. The 2006 prison break led to the next phase of restabilization. Escapees formed a revitalized organization attracting Saudi members who crossed the border culminating in the establishment of a stabilized AQAP.

Once again the contention cycle began as the diffusion of AQAP members demonstrated the vulnerabilities of both the Yemeni, Saudi, and US governments. All three governments could not keep Al Qaeda members from engaging in action. Members had escaped from Yemen's jails, rehabilitated Saudi members had reactivated, and members released from Guantanamo had rejoined the movement. AQAP made it clear that they intended to continue attacks on the US and also readjusted their framing processes to justify attacks on Yemeni targets, due to their unjust incarceration and the Yemeni governments cooperation with the US. New attacks initiated interaction with the authorities, this time both US and Yemeni. In the case of AQAP the movement has not yet reached the next phase of exhaustion. Examining the dynamic between AQAP and authorities reveals reasons for this.

AQAP provoked authorities in a number of ways during its contention in Yemen. Attacks were attempted on the US homeland with the Christmas Day bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab in 2009 and the ink toner cartridge bomb plot on cargo planes in 2010. Also; homegrown attacks were inspired by Anwar al Awlaki in the case of the Fort Hood shooter Nidal Hassan in 2009, along with others indirectly tied to Awlaki's inspiration. Such attacks led to the US focusing a great deal of resources on AQAP and striking targets with a

mix of airstrikes, cruise missile strikes, and drone strikes. The strikes led to the killing of a great deal of AQAP members including Awlaki, however they also led to large numbers of civilian casualties.

In one such example a US cruise missile struck the al Majalah camp in Abyan, Yemen on December 17, 2009. The missile was intended for Qasim al-Raymi however he either escaped or was not present and instead an estimated 52 civilians, 14 of them women and 21 children were killed. This attack, along with other air and drone strikes that killed civilians led to an innovation in framing for AQAP. The US was framed as being at war with Islam and Yemen. The killing of civilians, especially women and children led to new mobilization for AQAP. Those angered by the strikes and those who lost family members became motivated by revenge to mobilize with AQAP.¹⁷⁵ Support for AQAP increased during times of high civilian casualties due to airstrikes.¹⁷⁶ However spontaneous public backlash also emerged against AQAP in instances of attacks on Yemeni targets.¹⁷⁷ In particular, a suicide bombing in May of 2012 that killed more than 90 Yemeni soldiers drilling for an upcoming parade. Another attack, this time on a defense ministry hospital killed 56 and wounded 200 in December of 2013.¹⁷⁸ The killing of patients in a hospital was so barbaric that AQAP ended up apologizing for it, insisting it was meant as an attack

¹⁷⁵ Mothana, Ibrahim. "How Drones Help Al Qaeda." *The New York Times*, June 13, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/14/opinion/how-drones-help-al-qaeda.html?_r=0.

¹⁷⁶ Raghavan, Sudarsan. "In Yemen, U.S. Airstrikes Breed Anger, and Sympathy for Al-Qaeda." *The Washington Post*, May 29, 2012. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/in-yemen-us-airstrikes-breed-anger-and-sympathy-for-al-qaeda/2012/05/29/gJQAUmKI0U_story.html.

¹⁷⁷ Al Muslimi, Farea. "US Drone Attacks in Yemen Protect No One But Al Qaeda." *The National*, January 5, 2014, <http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/comment/us-drone-attacks-in-yemen-protect-no-one-but-al-qaeda>.

¹⁷⁸ Knickmeyer, Ellen, Maria Abi Habib, and Hakim Almasmari. "Video of Hospital Massacre Deepens Yemeni Feelings of Vulnerability." *The Wall Street Journal*, December 13, 2013, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304477704579256143314348648>.

on the defense ministry¹⁷⁹ AQAP even offered blood money to the victims during the apology.

Della Porta explains that “during cycles, the repertoires of collective action tend to change. In the initial stages of protest, the most disruptive forms often come to the fore. New actors invent new tactics, as emerging collective identity require radical action.”¹⁸⁰ One of AQAP’s new tactics was its attempt to take, hold, and govern territory. AQAP attempted this in Jaar and Zinjibar in May of 2011. The organization implemented Sharia law and provided services to the population, however government forces launched an offensive to retake the town resulting in a sustained battle and producing widespread damage and high casualties. AQAP consolidated much of its force and members in these towns and risked exhaustion in the battle. However it opted to withdraw and restabilize in areas beyond government control.

During Yemen’s Arab Spring in 2011 to 2012 President Saleh focused his military resources on controlling protests rather than deploying them against AQAP. AQAP sought to exploit this opportunity and increase diffusion during the time of uncertainty and lower government attention. It also attempted to court more public support among protestors, however President Saleh was replaced by President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi as part of a GCC peace deal. President Hadi proved willing to work with US counter-terror efforts and resumed pressure on AQAP. This pressure remained high as Yemeni and US forces

¹⁷⁹ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki, “Aqap Apologized for Hospital Attack in Ministry of Defense Operation.” (2013): <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1740/news/3270/AQAP-apologizes-for-hospital-attack-in-Ministry-of-Defense-operation.htm>.

¹⁸⁰ Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence (Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics)*, 75.

cooperated targeting AQAP members with strikes and raids when possible. Although pressure remained high it never resulted in the contention cycle phase of exhaustion.

Using data collected by National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START),¹⁸¹ it is possible to visualize a comparison of the number of Al Qaeda attacks vs. AQAP attacks. The data shows the rising and falling of Al Qaeda's protest cycle and the rapid sustained rise of AQAP's cycle through the year 2013. While this data does not account for casualty numbers, it does show that AQAP is more frequently active in violent contention than the central movement.

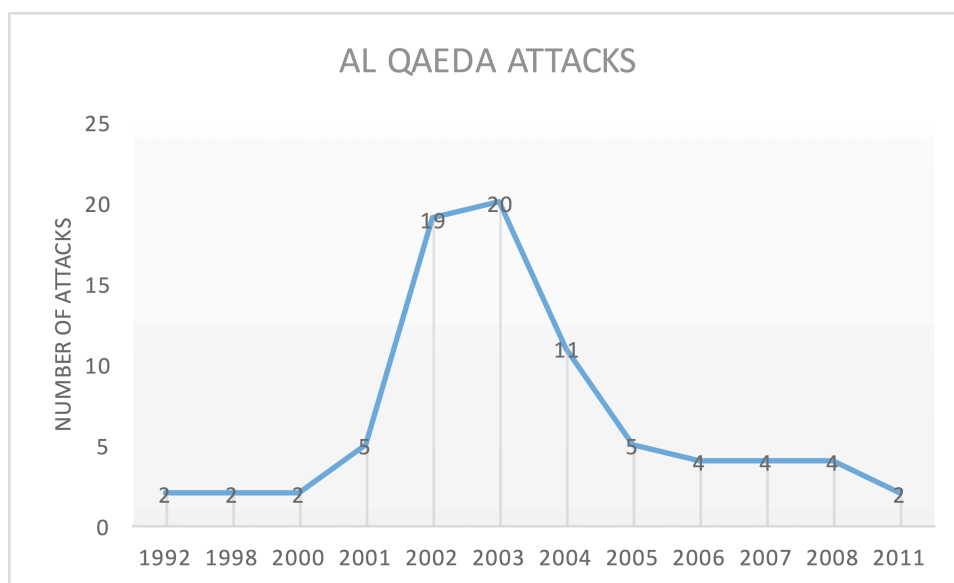


Figure 5.1

¹⁸¹ Global Terrorism Database, “National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (Start).” [Data file] (2013); <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

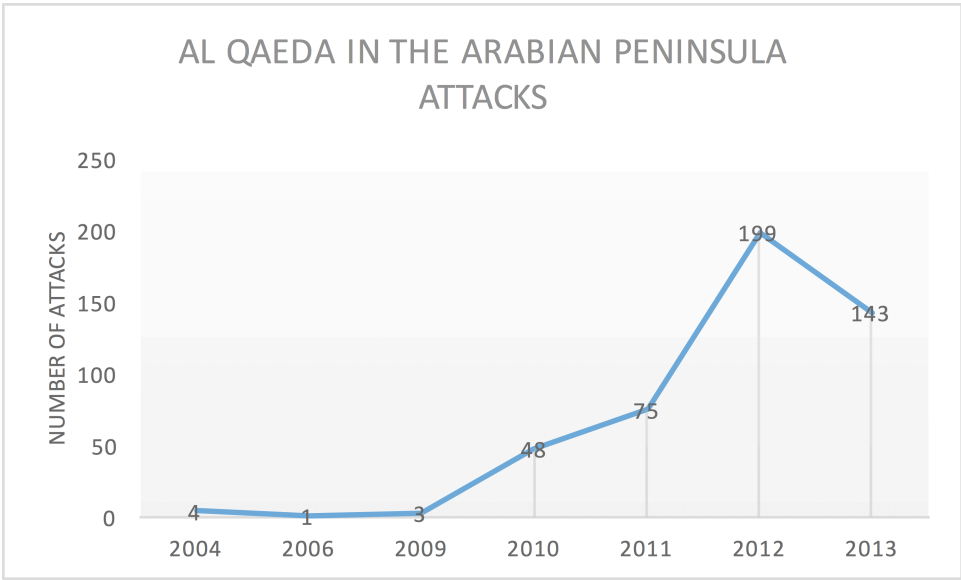


Figure 5.2

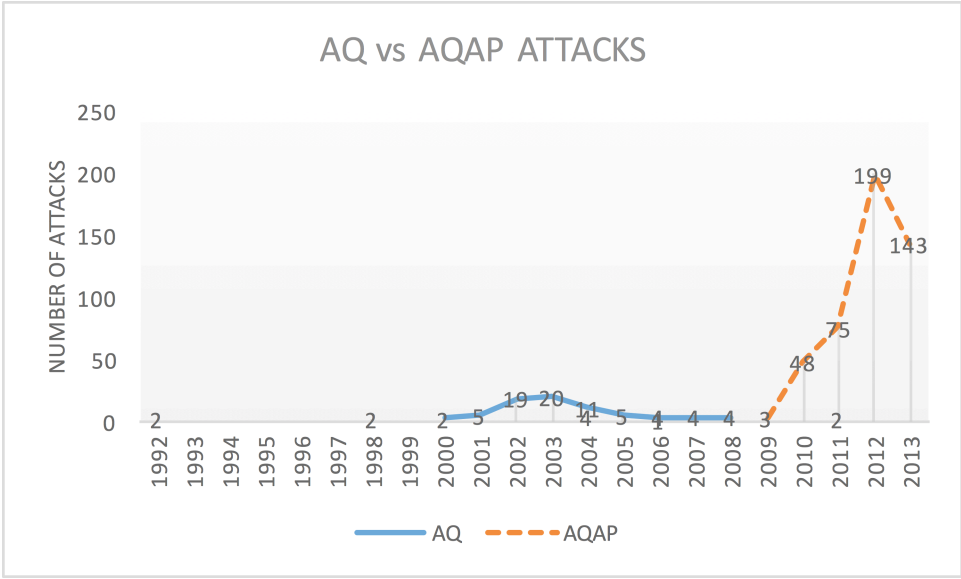


Figure 5.3

Recent developments in Yemen have initiated a renewed phase of diffusion. The Houthi Movement took control of Yemen's capital Sanaa, as well as other major cities. President Hadi was forced to flee to Saudi Arabia as Houthi control expanded. Saudi Arabia initiated a bombing campaign to push back the Houthi movement resulting in a chaotic situation in Yemen. The breakdown in security led to a relief of pressure exerted on AQAP from Yemeni forces. While US pressure continues it has been hampered by the evacuation and closure of its embassy, along with the evacuation of Joint Special Operations Command forces stationed in Yemen. Those closures along with uncertainty in the Yemeni security services led to gaps in intelligence collection. Lacking sufficient intelligence, targeted strikes could prove more difficult weakening the ability of authorities to engage AQAP. Such chaos on the ground in Yemen has led to a resumption of offensives by AQAP. The movement took control of new towns, raided military arms caches, freed around 300 militants in another prison break, and even took control of an airport. As of April 2015 AQAP is not heading toward exhaustion but instead increasing mobilization and greatly benefiting from the uncertainty on the ground in Yemen.

CHAPTER VI

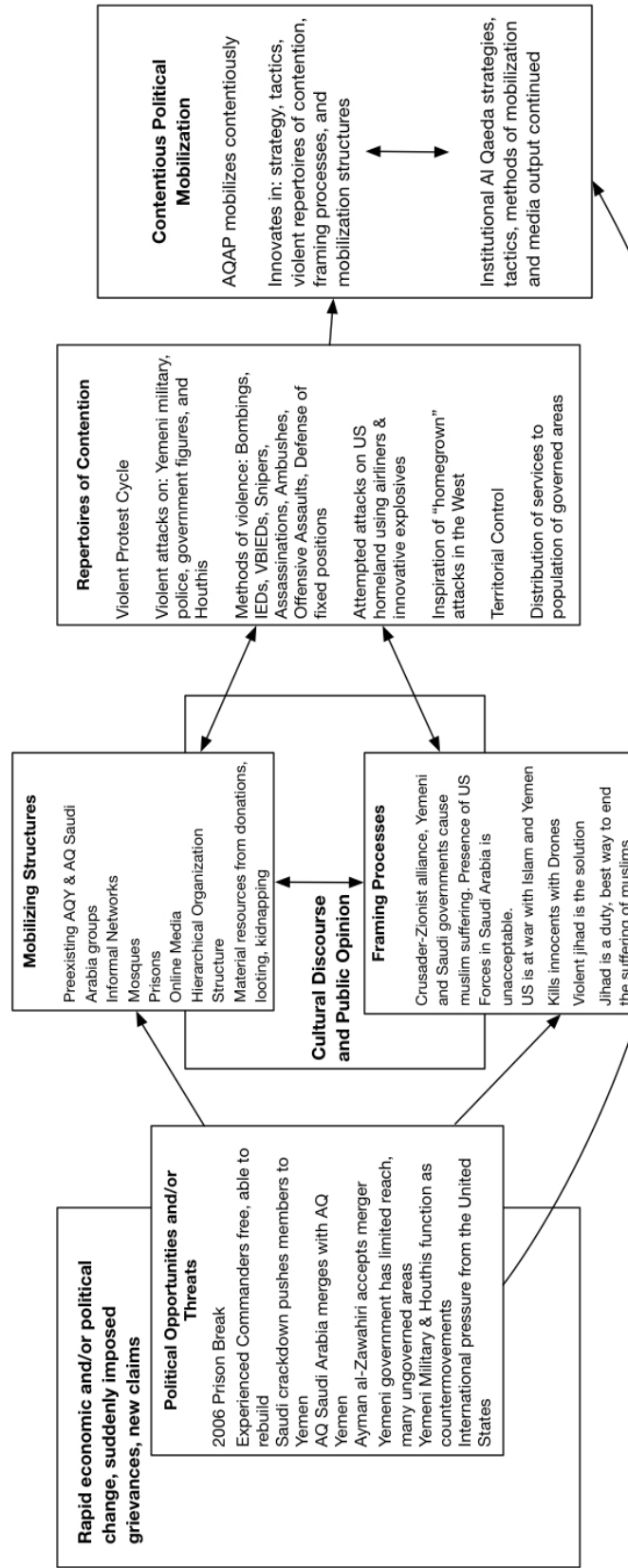
CONCLUSIONS

Through the course of this thesis, the dynamics of AQAP have been broken down and explained with the assistance of Social Movement Theory concepts. The political opportunities, mobilizing structures, framing processes, and repertoires of contention have been identified in both the original Al Qaeda movement and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Each concept identifies important aspects of the organization which when put together; show that it functions as a modern social movement. Examining protest cycles has shown the evolution of Al Qaeda in general and the specific transformations of AQAP in particular.

The adaptations and innovations in framing, mobilizing structures, and repertoires of contention have resulted from changing political opportunities. This can be observed in the ebb and flow of protest cycles, also influenced by interactions with authorities. Those changes have been recognized through close examination of statements, events, and correspondence. Desegregating AQAP in this fashion allows a more thorough understanding of events and ideas, enabling a thorough analysis of each dynamic and how all work together.

Utilizing the visual PPT model referenced in Chapter 1, Figure 6.1 illustrates how the identified concepts interact in the AQAP organization.

Figure 6.1



This study found that Al Qaeda has proved to be a highly resilient social movement. By adapting its frames, mobilization processes, and repertoires it has been able to withstand exhaustion and restabilize in new areas when political opportunities permit. AQAP has become the most powerful of the Al Qaeda affiliates and has achieved that status due to its ability to learn from past mistakes and adapt to changing circumstances. The political and security environment in Yemen as of April 2015 indicates that opportunities are present for increased mobilization. Conditions are ripe for expansion and escalation of repertoires if interactions with authorities are limited. AQAP is far from exhausted, however analysis of Al Qaeda's history and cycles of protest show that the movement is incredibly resilient when faced with exhaustion. If AQAP does eventually reach that phase of the protest cycle, the organization has shown that it possesses the ability to adapt and re-emerge in new locations where political opportunities permit.

This thesis aimed to fill a void in the literature by including all elements of Political Process Theory in the analysis. Rather than focusing on just one or two SMT or PPT concepts, this thesis sought to gain a fuller picture of the movement by observing how all the concepts interact and function as a whole. Future research on Al Qaeda and other social movements could benefit from such an approach, as it can call attention to understudied dynamics and interactions. Authorities may also find the framework useful for developing counter-strategies to deploy against such movements. Because the PPT framework breaks down complex movements into individual concepts, it can help policy makers decide which particular dynamics to counter. For example, in order to slow recruitment, PPT analysis reveals that efforts should be focused on disrupting specific mobilization structures. In the case of AQAP policy makers could recommend housing

radical prisoners separate from non-radicals in prisons, thus denying an important avenue of recruitment. Social Movements themselves could also use this approach to examine their own strength and weaknesses. If a movement is having limited success or authorities have adapted to its mode of contention, a PPT analysis would reveal areas in which changes and innovations should be made.

Future research specifically on Al Qaeda and AQAP could benefit from using this approach as more data and detail is needed to develop a fuller understanding of the movements. The framework could also be applied to other affiliates or offshoots of the Al Qaeda movement such as: Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), Jabhat al-Nusra, and the Islamic State. Each group can trace its roots back to the original Al Qaeda movement and each has innovated on its own to adapt and survive. Further study of such groups is needed as their demonstrated ability to rapidly adapt and innovate indicates they will continue to mobilize and act contentiously for the foreseeable future.

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