Background Report: Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Anwar al-Awlaki, and Samir Khan
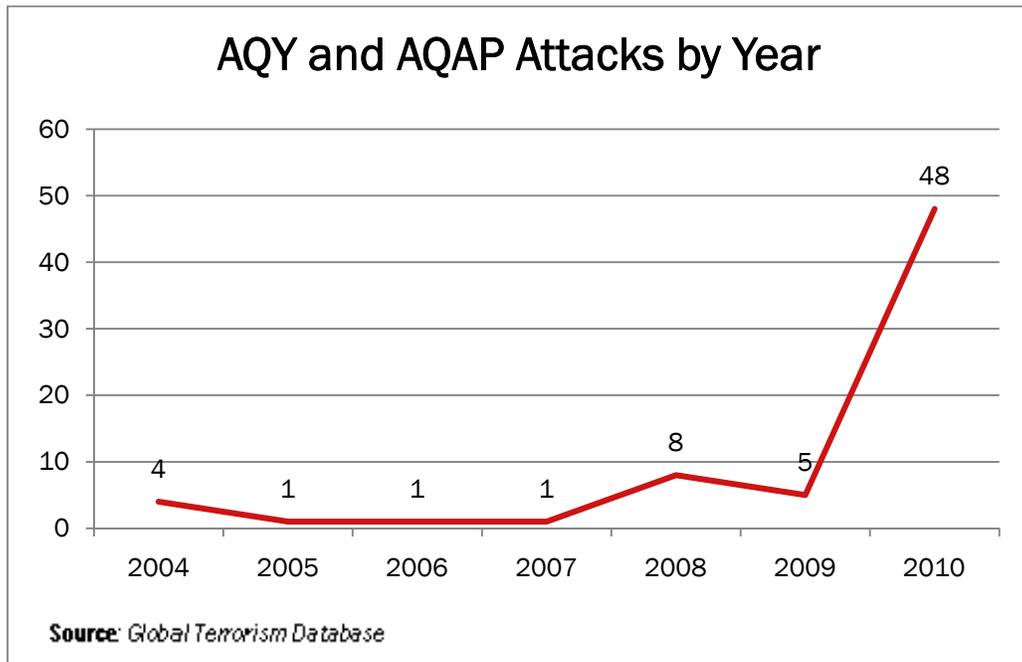
According to news sources from around the world, the well-known American-born radical Islamic cleric Anwar al-Awlaki was killed in Yemen on Friday, September 30, 2011, along with American jihadi propagandist Samir Khan. This report is designed to provide background on al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the organization al-Awlaki headed, and the influence he and Khan had on global terrorism.

AL-QA'IDA IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA (AQAP)

Anwar al-Awlaki was a leader of the al-Qa'ida (AQ)-affiliated group based in Yemen, known as AQAP. Samir Khan was the editor of AQAP's English-language publication, *Inspire.*

ATTACKS

In the mid-2000s groups directly or indirectly associated with al-Qa'ida central began to proliferate, especially in the Middle East and Northern Africa. AQAP emerged in 2009 from the integration of the existing group al-Qa'ida in Yemen (AQY) with al-Qa'ida operatives from Saudi Arabia. Since 2004, AQY and AQAP have been responsible for **68 known terrorist attacks**, with 71% of these attacks (48) occurring in 2010.
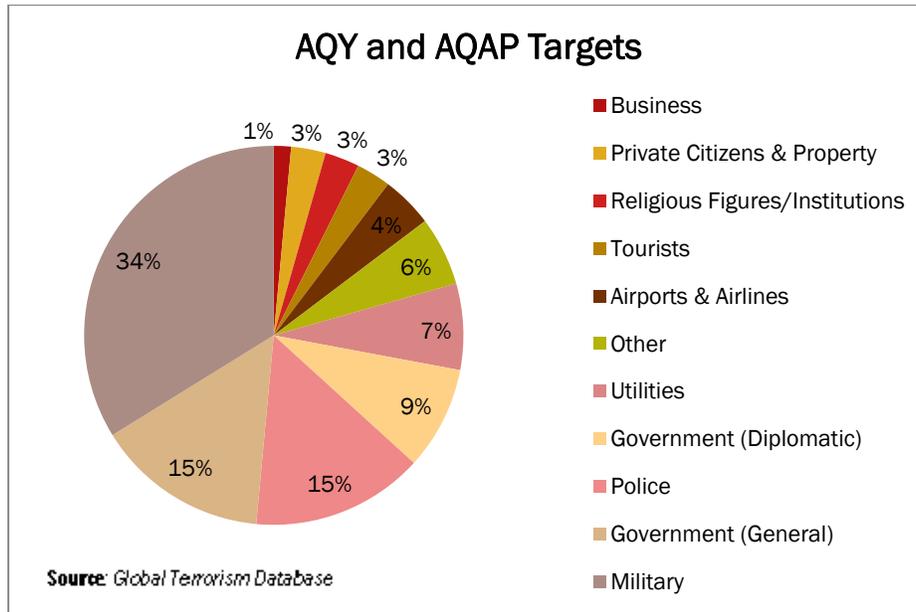

AQAP's terrorist activity has been **concentrated in Yemen (59 attacks)**, but the group's reach has extended to Saudi Arabia (6 attacks), the United Arab Emirates (1 attack), Great Britain (1 attack), and the United States (1 attack). The US attack attributed to AQAP was the 2009 attempt by Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab to blow up a Northwest Airlines flight from Amsterdam to Detroit, Michigan, using an improvised-explosive device contained in his underwear.
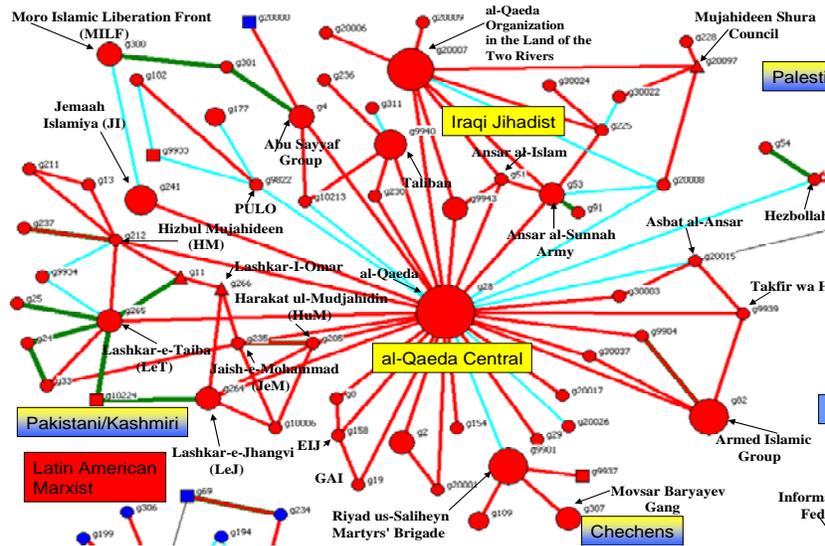
FATALITIES

These 68 attacks resulted in **283 fatalities**—an average of more than 4 deaths per attack. The average number of deaths per attack by any terrorist since 2000 has been 3 deaths per attacks, making AQAP among the more deadly groups of this decade.

The most frequent type of target of AQAP terrorist attacks has been **military targets**, including bases and soldiers. However, AQAP has attacked a wide variety of target types over its life span.

AQY and AQAP Targets

Legend:
- Business
- Private Citizens & Property
- Religious Figures/Institutions
- Tourists
- Airports & Airlines
- Other
- Utilities
- Government (Diplomatic)
- Police
- Government (General)
- Military

Pie values: 1%, 3%, 3%, 3%, 4%, 6%, 7%, 9%, 15%, 15%, 34%

Source: *Global Terrorism Database*

THE AQ NETWORK

AQAP is one of the many terrorist organizations that have emerged in the shadow of Al-Qa'ida. AQ has become a crucial "node" of a network of deadly terrorist organizations—some created in the hopes of replicating AQ, others aligning with AQ for ideological or practical reasons. Research by Victor Asal and R. Karl Rethemeyer at the University of Albany (SUNY) has identified **33 different terrorist organizations with direct links and alliances to al-Qa'ida**.

Several of these AQ-allies have adopted al-Qa'ida's practice of trying to impose mass casualties (al-Qa'ida in Iraq, for example, is responsible for 15 mass-casualty attacks). Together, this network with al-Qa'ida at the core is responsible for deaths of thousands of civilians around the world since 2000.

Al-Qa'ida and Affiliated Groups	Number of Attacks	Number of Fatalities
Taliban	1779	4710
Al-Qa`ida	100	4171
Al-Qa`ida in Iraq	163	1852
Islamic State of Iraq (ISI)	174	1821
Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)	130	1125
Al-Shabaab	156	614
Salafist Group for Preaching and Fighting (GSPC)	214	580
Al-Qa`ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQLIM)	127	510
Jemaah Islamiya (JI)	73	339
Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)	56	234
Ansar al-Sunna	16	164
Ansar al-Islam	25	88
Mujahedeen Shura Council	8	67
Al-Qa'ida in Yemen	12	49
Al-Qa'ida Organization for Jihad in Sweden	1	0
Al-Qa'ida in Lebanon	1	0
Al-Qa'ida Network for Southwestern Khulna Division	2	0

AL-AWLAKI AND THE UNITED STATES

In addition to his position, Anwar al-Awlaki was considered by many to be the leading English-speaking radical Jihadist and a key figure in the broader Jihadist propaganda effort. The US-born cleric, who retained his US citizenship, has been credited with at a minimum inspiring and perhaps providing substantive operational guidance to individuals associated with both successful and failed attempted attacks against the United States, including having direct contact with the terrorists listed below. Al-Awlaki had contact with countless others, including several people in the United Kingdom plotting attacks against UK targets.

Date	Details	PERPETRATOR	OUTCOME
June 1, 2009	Shooting of two soldiers at a military recruiting station in suburban Little Rock, Arkansas	Abdulhakim Muhammad	1 killed, 1 injured
November 6, 2009	Open gunfire on soldiers and civilians at US Army base at Ft. Hood, Texas	Nidal Hasan	13 killed, 31 injured
December 25, 2009	Attempt to blow up a flight headed to Detroit using explosives in perpetrator's underwear	Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab	Attack failed when device didn't fully explode and passengers and the flight's crew subdued the attacker

| May 1, 2010 | Attempt to ignite an explosive device in a vehicle in Times Square, New York City | Faisal Shahzad | Attack was thwarted when a street vendor alerted NYPD to the abandoned vehicle. NYPD Bomb Squad dismantled the device. |
| October 29, 2010 | Attempt to detonate explosives in printer cartridges on board cargo planes destined for the United States. | Not Specified | Authorities intercepted the planes in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and Leicestershire, United Kingdom and defused the devices. |

FURTHER READING

Terrorism analyst Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens explored al-Awlaki's journey to become the "face of Western jihad" in a report for the International Centre for the Study of Radilicalisation and Political Violence and START. The report concludes that al-Awlaki had succeeded in efforts to convince some Western Muslims—typically "religious seekers"—that jihad "is a duty which can be carried out anywhere, and at any time, with little to no religious permission required beyond a few sermons found online." He emphasized the need for the jihadist movement to go beyond what an organization like AQ can do and empowered individuals to take violent action against the Western threat by delivering simplified versions of the jihadist message in a way that could convince loyalists that al-Awlaki's interpretation was of a "true Islam."

Meleagrou-Hitchens' full report, "As American as Apple Pie: How Anwar al-Awlaki Became the Face of Western Jihad," is available online at

http://icsr.info/publications/papers/1315827595ICSRPaperAsAmericanAsApplePieHowAnwaralAwlakiBecametheFaceofWesternJihad.pdf.

GTD
Global Terrorism Database