

# TERRORIST RECRUITMENT AND RADICALIZATION IN SAUDI ARABIA

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In studies of the contemporary Middle East, Saudi Arabia is often seen as a source of Muslim extremism. Much has been written — rightly and wrongly — about Saudi Arabia's alleged role as an exporter of recruits, ideology and money to violent Islamist groups such as al-Qaeda. Yet there is a remarkable paucity of detailed studies of the Islamist community within Saudi Arabia itself, and the prevailing view of Saudi Islamism is rather monolithic. There have notably been few attempts at understanding the dynamics and patterns of radicalization inside Saudi Arabia.<sup>1</sup> In the literature on militant Islamism, there is even a tendency to fall back on tautological arguments, whereby the extremism of Saudi militants is explained by the fact that they are Saudi. Such analyses rely on the assumption that there is something about the religiosity in Saudi society or the Wahhabi religious tradition which predisposes Saudis for extremism. However, this does not explain why some Saudis become militants while others do not. Key questions have thus

remained unanswered: Exactly who in Saudi Arabia become militants and why?

The current article addresses this question through an analysis of biographies of Saudi militants. The study focuses on the individuals who took part in the terrorism campaign that started in Saudi Arabia in May 2003.<sup>2</sup> I will seek to answer two questions: First, who joined the organization known as al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula [QAP] and why? Second, to what extent does Saudi Arabia present specificities in terms of radicalization and recruitment to Islamist militancy?

One of the main objectives of this article is to fill an empirical gap in the growing corpus of profile-based studies of Islamist militancy.<sup>3</sup> The individual-oriented approach to terrorism studies, which fell out of fashion in the mid-1980s, has regained popularity since 9/11 and has yielded significant new insights into the causes of Islamist violence. However, most of the empirical data for the existing studies are drawn from countries or regions other than Saudi Arabia.<sup>4</sup> This

article analyses profiles of militants drawn exclusively from the Saudi context, which will hopefully enable us to validate existing hypotheses and make comparisons with data from other regions.

The source data for this analysis is a collection of 240 biographies of Saudi militants, which I compiled over a two-year period from a broad range of primary and secondary sources, mostly in Arabic. In addition to international and local press reports, I have made extensive use of the militants' own publications, which contain a wealth of biographical information.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, during a series of research trips to Saudi Arabia in 2004 and 2005, I conducted numerous interviews with former radicals as well as families and acquaintances of militants. My sample includes only people who have been directly or indirectly involved in militancy inside Saudi Arabia since 2002. I have included the names of all individuals who are mentioned in the jihadist publications, as well as all those mentioned in press reports in connection with attacks, shootouts or arrests. As with most databases of this kind, the profiles do not always contain the same type or amount of information. I shall therefore distinguish between, on the one hand, a core group of 70 individuals whose biographies are relatively extensive, and, on the other hand, the entire sample of 240.<sup>6</sup>

There are undoubtedly certain problems with this material. For a start, the information may not always be one hundred percent accurate. Regrettably, I have not had the chance to interview the militants themselves, because most are dead or in high-security prisons. Most biographical details come from jihadist publications and Interior Ministry statements that were produced in a context of intense mutual

conflict and information warfare. Another problem is that the militants portrayed here may not be entirely representative of all the followers of the QAP. While the exact total number of QAP-related individuals is unclear, we know that Saudi authorities have arrested between 500 and 1000 suspected militants, while around 150 have been killed in attacks and shootouts.<sup>7</sup> Having said this, our core sample of 70 is likely to include most of the prominent and active members of the QAP. These are, after all, the most relevant for understanding the organization.

The analysis will proceed in five steps. First, we shall provide a brief outline of the historical origins and context of the terrorism campaign launched in Saudi Arabia in 2003. Second, we shall present basic statistics about the militants and show their distribution according to criteria such as socioeconomic background and geographical and tribal origin. In the third part, we shall look at why and how so many of the QAP militants had gone to Afghanistan between 1999 and 2001. In the fourth section, we shall examine why and how the militants joined the QAP between 2002 and 2005. Fifth and finally, we shall look at our findings in a comparative perspective and identify differences and similarities with radicalization patterns in other countries and regions.

## **AL-QAEDA ON THE ARABIAN PENINSULA**

The roots of the organization known as al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula go back to the late 1990s. After the standoff between the Saudi government and the moderate Islamist opposition in the early 1990s and the bombings in Riyadh (1995) and Khobar (1996), which led to heavy

government crackdowns, the Saudi Islamist scene had entered a quiet phase.<sup>8</sup> However, in about 1999, the jihadist community in Saudi Arabia underwent a renaissance. A new generation of Saudis went to Afghanistan, this time not to fight the Russians, but to join Osama bin Ladin's training camps.<sup>9</sup> Between 1999 and 2001, Bin Ladin also established an elaborate recruitment infrastructure in Saudi Arabia through the intermediary of local representatives such as Yusuf al-Ayiri.<sup>10</sup> In early 2002, after the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan and the fall of the Taliban, several hundred Saudis returned from Afghanistan to Saudi Arabia, some of them carrying specific orders from Bin Ladin to start preparing for a terrorist campaign in the kingdom.<sup>11</sup> In 2002, Yusuf al-Ayiri built an organization and made extensive military preparations for a future campaign.<sup>12</sup> Al-Ayiri and his lieutenants amassed weapons light and heavy and rented safe houses across the country. They also set up training camps in the desert and indoor training facilities in the cities.<sup>13</sup> At some point in the spring of 2003, the top leadership of al-Qaeda ordered that the first strike be launched, in spite of protests from Yusuf al-Ayiri, who allegedly argued that his organization was not yet ready.<sup>14</sup> History would prove al-Ayiri right. After the first major bombings on May 12, 2003, the Saudi police initiated a crackdown that led to the elimination of al-Ayiri himself and many of his top associates. By September 2003, the network was seriously disrupted. In the late autumn, the group reorganized and launched an extremely professional and successful internet-based PR campaign that for a long time would make the organization look more powerful and

sophisticated than it really was. The terrorist campaign culminated in the spring of 2004, when the militants conducted a series of simple yet spectacular terrorist operations against Western targets across the country. However, in the summer of 2004, Saudi police dismantled the QAP by arresting the main operational leader, Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin, in June, by raiding the organization's headquarters in Riyadh in July, and by capturing Faris al-Zahrani, one of their top ideologues, in August. The QAP would never quite recover from these setbacks. It has remained very weak ever since, although sporadic attacks have occurred. Proof of this weakness is that, between December 2004 and October 2006, the QAP did not successfully execute any major attacks.<sup>15</sup> However, the scale of some foiled operations, such as the attempted attack on the Abqaiq oil refinery in February 2006, have raised concerns of a revival of the QAP.<sup>16</sup>

It is important to note that the declared purpose of the QAP campaign from the beginning was not primarily to topple the regime but to end what the militants perceived as the American military occupation of the Arabian Peninsula. Of course, some members were driven by hatred for the regime, and as the campaign evolved, the group would get drawn into a vicious cycle of tit-for-tat violence with Saudi security forces.<sup>17</sup> However, the QAP never attacked the government as such, and no minister was ever the target of an assassination attempt.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the ideological literature of the QAP consistently describes the United States and its Western allies, not the local regime, as its main enemy.<sup>19</sup>

## THE MILITANTS

Like most militant Islamist organizations, the QAP was an almost exclusively male organization. While most QAP militants had left their families behind, some wives accompanied their husbands in their underground existence. A handful of these wives performed minor logistical and media-related tasks for the organization, but none were involved in operations.<sup>20</sup>

The majority of QAP militants were in their late twenties at the beginning of the campaign in 2003. The average age was 27 with a range between 19 and 42. Even if we account for source-related problems, this is relatively high.<sup>21</sup> For a start, it debunks the myth of Saudi militants as young and gullible teenagers. Moreover, it means the QAP militants were older than the members of many other militant Islamist groups.<sup>22</sup> There are indeed indications that some QAP followers were teenagers, but they do not seem to have played important roles in the organization. The relatively high-age average probably reflects the fact that many of the militants were veterans from Afghanistan, as we shall see below.

The vast majority of QAP members were Saudi nationals. Between 5 and 10 percent were foreigners from countries such as Yemen, Morocco, Syria, Chad and Mauritania. Some foreign nationals, such as the Yemeni Khalid al-Hajj and the Moroccan Karim Majati, are believed to have held positions of leadership. It is worth noting that practically no South Asian expatriate workers seem to have joined the QAP.

The Saudi militants came from many different parts of the country.<sup>23</sup> Most major cities and governorates are represented in our sample (see figure 1).



*Figure 1 Geographical origin of QAP militants*

In comparing the geographical distribution of the QAP militants to the distribution of the population as a whole, three important observations may be made.<sup>24</sup> First, the regions commonly viewed as socially and religiously conservative (often described in Western media as "hotbeds of extremism"), such as the central region of Qasim or the southern regions of Asir, Jizan and Baha, are not overrepresented in our sample (see figure 2). After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, there was a widespread view that the southern regions of Saudi Arabia had produced a disproportionately large number of al-Qaeda recruits, because 11 of the 15 Saudi hijackers were from Baha or Asir.<sup>25</sup> Our data contradict this view. There are two possible explanations for this discrepancy. Either southerners were overrepresented in the Afghan training camps but did not join the QAP in 2002, or southerners were never overrepresented in the training camps, but were specifically selected to partake in the 9/11 operation.<sup>26</sup> It is worth noting that

southerners are in fact underrepresented among Saudi fighters in Iraq.<sup>27</sup> The data from the QAP and Iraq combined strongly suggest that there is no specifically southern radicalism in Saudi Arabia.

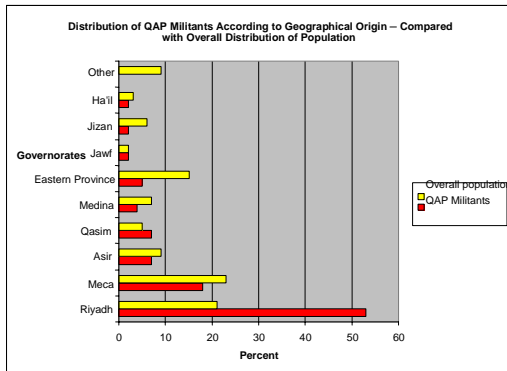


Figure 2

Second, the sample does not contain a particularly large number of militants from regions that are considered poor or rural, such as the far south or the far north (see figure 2). Saudi militancy has sometimes been explained as a reaction of “neglected peripheries” to the economical or political domination of the Najd. Our data do not support this hypothesis.

This leads to the third point, that it is in fact Riyadh which is by far the most heavily overrepresented governorate.<sup>28</sup> Riyadh was the residence of more than half the militants before they joined the QAP, as opposed to only 21 percent of the population. There are many possible explanations for this. One is organizational: The fact that key recruiters such as Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin were from Riyadh may have made the capital the main locus of organized recruitment efforts in 2002. Another possibility is that the presence,

from the late 1990s onward, of high-profile radical ideologues such as Nasir al-Fahd made the extremist community in Riyadh disproportionately large.<sup>29</sup> Yet another explanation may be socioeconomic: As a rapidly expanding city, Riyadh has a large population of newly urbanized youth as well as disadvantaged neighborhoods such as al-Suwaidi.<sup>30</sup> Whatever the reason, this overrepresentation indicates that the QAP was, above all, an urban phenomenon.

Unfortunately, our data do not allow us to draw conclusions regarding the proportion of recently urbanized or displaced individuals. Out of the 23 confirmed Riyadh city residents in our core sample, eight were born in Riyadh, and three were born elsewhere, while the birthplaces of 12 are unknown. On the whole, however, the individuals in our sample seem to have been more sedentary than one might have expected. There are 31 people in the core sample for whom we know both the birthplace and the recent residence. Twenty-one of these were living in the place they were born until the beginning of their militant activities. Only three had changed governorates, while seven had moved within their governorate (mostly to a larger town or city).

There is another aspect of Saudi society that is potentially important for understanding recruitment dynamics: the tribal dimension. The key role played by certain desert tribes in the Ikhwan revolts in the 1920s, in Juhayman al-Utaybi’s 1979 takeover of the Mecca mosque, as well as in the 9/11 attacks, has led many to assume the existence of a “tribal factor” in Saudi Islamism.<sup>31</sup> It has been speculated that certain tribes suffer political marginalization, carry historical grievances against the Al Saud or possess a particularly rebellious

culture that makes them prone to Islamist radicalism. However, in the contemporary context, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to identify a tribal factor and assess its importance in the radicalization of Saudi militants. There are two reasons for this; first, Saudi society has witnessed rapid urbanization and significant social change in the past three decades, and much of our scientific knowledge on the sociology of tribes is simply outdated. Second, there are no reliable figures on the total size of the Saudi tribes, hence it is difficult to determine whether certain tribes are over- or under-represented in a given group. There may indeed be many Ghamidis, Harbis and Utaybis among the jihadists, but these are also commonly viewed as the largest Saudi tribes with members in the millions.

The tribal distribution of militants in our sample provides few clues to the existence of a “tribal factor” determining QAP recruitment. If anything, our sample contains a remarkable diversity of tribal backgrounds (see figures 3 and 4).<sup>32</sup> It must be kept in mind that identifying the tribal origin of Saudis based on their family names is a complicated exercise, and I readily admit there may be errors in the dataset.

In terms of socioeconomic background, the vast majority of QAP militants belong to the middle class or lower middle class. Given that information on their family background is often sparse, the two main socioeconomic indicators are the education level and profession of the militants themselves. Most QAP members are only educated to high school level or less. Many started university studies but dropped out. It is difficult to say whether they are educated above or below the Saudi average. If we compare their education level to

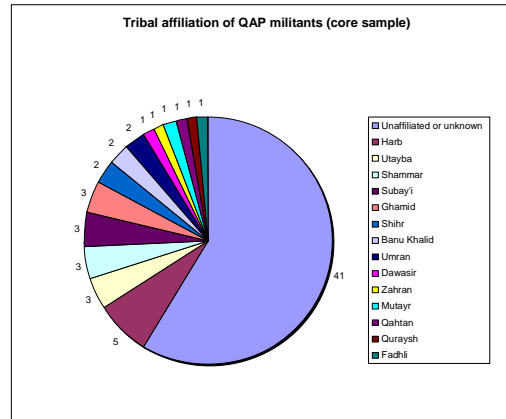


Figure 3

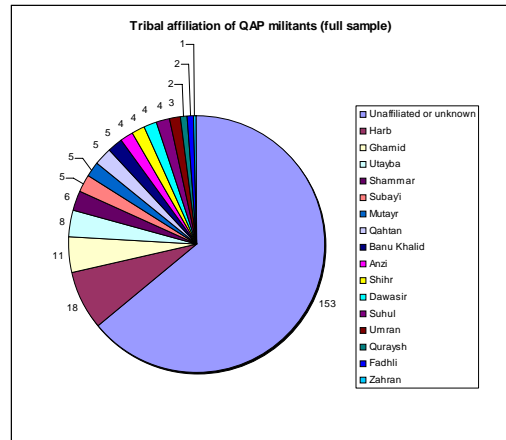


Figure 4

that of the male working population as a whole (see figure 5), the QAP militants come out favorably.<sup>33</sup> However, the overall figures include older people who grew up when the Saudi education infrastructure was still rudimentary. If the QAP militants were compared to their own age group (the figures of which are unavailable), the picture might be different.

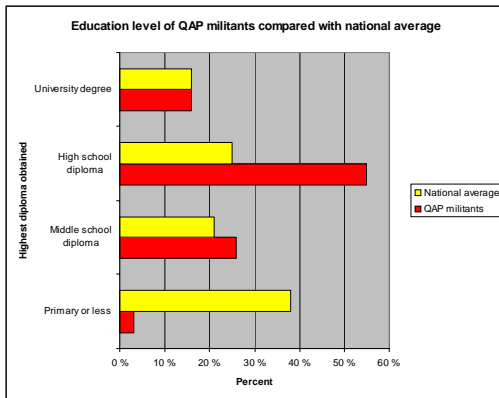


Figure 5

As for the militants' job situation, there are three points to note. First, many of them seem to have been unemployed or in unstable professions. We know the main professional activity of 29 of the 70 individuals in the core sample. Three of them were unemployed, while seven or eight had been moving frequently between jobs. However, unemployment is likely to have been underreported in our data, because biographies tend to mention actual jobs. Hence it is very likely that the remaining 41 (whose work is unknown) include many who were students or unemployed.<sup>34</sup> The second point to note is that a relatively high number of people (12 of 29) were employed in religious professions before they traveled to Afghanistan or joined the QAP.<sup>35</sup> In comparison, six had worked in the police or military, three in small trade, while six were university students. The third point is that we find hardly any engineers, doctors or economists in our sample.<sup>36</sup> This is in contrast to many other radical Islamist groups, notably in Egypt, which included a disproportionately high number of people educated in prestigious

natural-science disciplines.<sup>37</sup> The absence of these professions in the QAP may at least partly be explained by social mobility. While talented Egyptian engineering students from rural backgrounds often faced unemployment in the 1970s, most of today's engineering graduates in Saudi Arabia are destined for prestigious and well-paid positions in companies such as Aramco.

On the whole, the QAP members were unremarkable in the sense that they were neither society's losers nor winners. Although many were unemployed, very few had a criminal record before they became radicalized.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, very few were significantly overqualified for their jobs; hence we have fewer reasons to believe that unfulfilled ambitions or a sense of relative deprivation fueled their social alienation. Conversely, only a handful of the QAP militants are known to have come from very rich or influential families.<sup>39</sup> We can conclude from this review of the militants' demographic and socioeconomic profiles that it is very difficult to pinpoint specific factors explaining their subsequent radicalism.

There is one clear common denominator in the life stories of the QAP members, however, and that is previous jihad experience, primarily from Afghanistan. At least 39 of the 70 people in our core sample are known to have participated in combat or training camps abroad before joining the QAP. In our sample there are clearly two separate generations of Saudi jihad veterans: those who went before 1996, and those who went after 1999 (see figure 6). The first generation is a heterogeneous group in terms of their jihad experience. Some went out to fight in the first Afghan war, while others went to Bosnia,

Chechnya or elsewhere. These older veterans pursued one of two different paths after their first jihad ended. Some, like Saud al-Utaybi and Hamad al-Humaydi, returned to Saudi Arabia, led quiet lives and remained “passive Islamists” until 2003. Others, like Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin and Yusuf al-Ayiri, became “lifestyle jihadists” and developed close links with the al-Qaeda leadership. The second generation of jihad veterans all followed a relatively similar path. They went to Afghanistan between 1999 and 2001 and trained at the Faruq camp in Qandahar. Many of them fought alongside the Taliban on the Kabul front in late 2001 and left Afghanistan by way of Iran.<sup>40</sup> This means that they had been through many of the same experiences and that many certainly knew each other in Afghanistan.

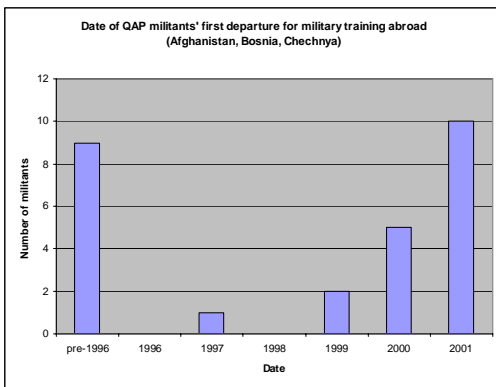


Figure 6

The crucial role of training camps and combat experience in radicalization processes is well known. In the early 1990s, Arab veterans from the first Afghan war distinguished themselves by their brutality and were accused of escalating conflicts in Algeria, Egypt, Bosnia and elsewhere. It is commonly accepted that the training camps

in Afghanistan played an extraordinarily important role in the operationalization of al-Qaeda’s recruits in the 1996-2001 period. Recruits who attended these camps underwent four important and interlinked processes: violence acculturation, indoctrination, training and relations-building. These processes are the key to understanding the extremism, ideology, abilities and intra-group loyalty of the militants who returned from Afghanistan to Saudi Arabia in late 2001.

Another frequent and no doubt radicalizing consequence of taking part in jihad abroad was imprisonment and torture. A striking number of QAP militants — at least 14 in our core sample of 70 — had spent time in prison before 2003.<sup>41</sup> Some, like Ali al-Harbi and Yusuf al-Ayiri, had been caught in the wave of arrests of jihad veterans after the 1995 and 1996 bombings in Riyadh and Khobar. Others, like Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin or Khalid al-Baghdadi, had been imprisoned abroad for their jihad activities in countries as diverse as Ethiopia or Pakistan. Yet others, like Amir al-Shihri and Isa al-Awshan, spent time in Iranian or Syrian prisons on the way back from Afghanistan in late 2001. Many of those who returned from Afghanistan in late 2001 or early 2002 were arrested upon arrival in Saudi Arabia and held for periods of one to six months. Most of the militants who spent time in prison said they were subjected to physical and/or psychological torture.<sup>42</sup>

Another, more qualitative approach to the analysis of militants’ backgrounds consists of identifying the different functional categories within a given group and looking for correlations between a member’s background and his role in the organization. In the QAP, one can distin-



guish relatively easily among three categories of members: the “top commanders,” the “ideologues” and the “fighters.”<sup>43</sup> The top commanders were “lifestyle jihadists” from the first generation of veterans.<sup>44</sup> They had left for Afghanistan at a very young age (16-17 years) between 1989 and 1991, i.e., just too late for the jihad against the Russians. They had distinguished themselves by their physical abilities and leadership skills and worked as instructors in training camps. They had remained active militants throughout the 1990s, spent years in prison and suffered severe torture.

The ideologues, on the other hand, had little or no practical jihad experience.<sup>45</sup>

They had all studied religion, either officially at university or privately with shaikhs.<sup>46</sup> Most of them had mediocre resumes or failed careers in the religious sector, and none

of them were particularly well-known as religious scholars before the outbreak of the campaign.

The fighters were a more heterogeneous group that can be broken down into three subcategories. The first and operationally most important category consisted of the young jihad veterans who had gone to Afghanistan after 1999 and returned in late 2001.<sup>47</sup> They had trained in Bin Ladin’s camps during al-Qaeda’s “peak” and had left Afghanistan against their own will, so they returned highly trained and

motivated. Most of the mid-level leaders of the QAP, such as Turki al-Dandani, Mitib al-Muhayyani and Faisal al-Dukhayyil, were drawn from this category. The second subcategory consisted of older jihad veterans who had “retired” in the mid- or late 1990s and were mobilized by the QAP campaign in 2003.<sup>48</sup> They were experienced and respected fighters but lacked the leadership skills to become top commanders. The third category consisted of the new recruits, i.e., people who had been too young to go to Afghanistan but were recruited into the QAP from 2002 on-

wards. Many of them, such as Bandar al-Dukhayyil and Mansur Faqih, were friends and relatives of jihad veterans or QAP members. In addition to the commanders, ideologues and fighters, the QAP also relied on a certain number of “helpers” who

sympathized with the core members and offered various kinds of assistance but did not take an active part in the fighting. The background of these individuals is not well known, but many seem to have been young sympathizers without previous jihad experience.

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militants. However, this raises two intriguing questions: First, why and how did they go to Afghanistan in the first place? Second, why and how did they go from being war veterans to becoming terrorists inside Saudi Arabia?

## **RECRUITMENT TO AFGHANISTAN**

In the following section we shall look at the motivations and recruitment patterns of those QAP militants who went to Afghanistan between 1999 and 2001. We shall leave aside the first generation of jihad veterans in the QAP; they were numerically fewer in the organization, and their motivations for going abroad are not well known.<sup>49</sup> Although we are speaking primarily about those militants who subsequently joined the QAP, we will also draw upon publicly available information about other Saudis who went to Afghanistan in this period, such as the 9/11 hijackers and certain Guantanamo prisoners.<sup>50</sup>

In order to understand Saudi recruitment to Afghan training camps in the late 1990s, it is useful to recall the ideological environment from which the recruits emerged. First of all, it is important to keep in mind that going to Afghanistan was not seen by the recruits themselves as an act of joining al-Qaeda. For a start, there was no real awareness in Saudi Arabia of al-Qaeda as an organization before 9/11, for the simple reason that Bin Ladin and his close associates did not use that name in their propaganda and did not actively promote an organizational identity around it.<sup>51</sup> Outside of Afghanistan, there only seems to have been a vague conception of “Bin Ladin’s group” or “Bin Ladin and his men.” A second point to keep in mind is that since the 1980s war in Afghanistan, a

culture of private military participation in foreign conflicts had developed in certain parts of the Saudi Islamist community. Although this “culture of jihad” had a significant militaristic component, going abroad for jihad was always framed positively as an act of altruism toward oppressed Muslims. There was a thin line between relief work and military resistance, and many of those who went to Afghanistan in the 1980s and to Bosnia in the early 1990s did both. This means that for most recruits, the act of going to Afghanistan was not as big a step, in moral and psychological terms, as that of joining a terrorist organization.

Equally significant for understanding the dramatic increase in Saudi recruitment to Afghanistan from 1999 onwards is the domestic and international political context. Domestically, the late 1990s saw a recomposition of the Islamist field that included the rise to prominence of a group of hardline religious scholars centered around the aging Hamud al-Uqla al-Shuaybi in Burayda.<sup>52</sup> The increasingly militant discourse of shaikhs such as Nasir al-Fahd and Ali al-Khudayr influenced a large number of young Saudis, not least because of the scholars’ skillful use of the Internet, which was introduced in Saudi Arabia in early 1999. These domestic changes coincided with three very important international political developments: the outbreak of the second Chechen war in 1999, the beginning of the al-Aqsa intifada in Palestine in 2000, and the growing tensions between the Taliban regime and the international community in 2000 and 2001.

In this same period, important developments occurred on the organizational level within al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and in Bin

Ladin's recruitment network in Saudi Arabia. In Afghanistan, the al-Qaeda training infrastructure became markedly more extensive and streamlined in 1999, largely due to the establishment of the Faruq training camp near Bin Ladin's own headquarters in Qandahar.<sup>53</sup> In Saudi Arabia, al-Qaeda's foothold increased considerably in 1999 and 2000, when Yusuf al-Ayiri started working directly for Bin Ladin.<sup>54</sup> In recruitment and fundraising terms, al-Ayiri was a considerable asset for al-Qaeda, because his family was from Qasim, which gave him better access to the influential scholars and rich businessmen in the central region of Saudi Arabia.<sup>55</sup> Before al-Ayiri, Bin Ladin's network was much stronger in the Hijaz than in Najd, and most of his representatives on the Arabian Peninsula (such as Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri or Tawfiq bin Attash) were Hijazis of Yemeni origin.<sup>56</sup>

Regarding the recruits' own motivations for going to Afghanistan, the biographies point to a wide range of different factors that can be broadly classified as being of a political, religious or personal nature. By far the most common political motivation was outrage at the Chechen war. A large number of those who went to Afghanistan between 1999 and 2001 wanted in fact to fight in Chechnya, but were either unable to get there or unfit for fighting, so they ended up in Afghanistan instead.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, some Saudis went to Kashmir in 1999 or 2000 only to be redirected to Afghanistan.<sup>58</sup> Another oft-cited political reason for going to Afghanistan was the desire to ensure the survival of the

Taliban, first against the threat from the Northern Alliance, and, after 9/11, against the threat from the United States.<sup>59</sup> One of the most striking findings in our sample is that there are virtually no accounts of recruits who went to Afghanistan before 9/11 and say their primary motivation was hatred for America or a desire to take part in an international terrorist operation. While some may have harbored such motivations from the outset, most recruits seem to have developed such ambitions only after they came to the training camps.

Perhaps just as important as the political factors was genuine religious conviction. Many seem to have gone out of a desire to meet the individual obligation of

jihad and to achieve martyrdom, without paying much attention to the political content of their jihad activities.<sup>60</sup> Others went

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to Afghanistan on the urging of religious scholars who told them that Taliban was the only true Islamic state in the world, and that they should go and "see for themselves" what such a state looked like.<sup>61</sup>

Personal motivations were undoubtedly also very important. There are several accounts of people who went or tried to go to Afghanistan to follow in the footsteps of a brother or a friend who had gone before them.<sup>62</sup> Others went because their brother had fallen in combat in Afghanistan and they wanted to die a martyr so that they could be with their dead brother in heaven.<sup>63</sup>

The question of *how* people were recruited to Afghanistan is relatively complex. In the study of terrorist recruit-

ment, a distinction is often made between so-called “top-down” and “bottom-up” recruitment. The first refers to the enlisting of initially sceptical recruits by an appointed recruiter; the latter refers to the process by which self-radicalized recruits seek out, by their own initiative, a passive recruiter or “gatekeeper.”

Mobilization to Afghanistan was mostly bottom-up. The available sources point to the extraordinary importance of social networks in mobilizing people to go to Afghanistan. Many had a relative or a friend who had gone previously. Most people made the travel preparations as well as the journey itself with friends or relatives.<sup>64</sup> Group dynamics such as peer pressure and intra-group affection seem to have been crucial in the process. Our data are very much in line with the arguments proposed in Marc Sageman’s influential study of terrorist networks.<sup>65</sup> There also are indications that some individuals radicalized partly on their own through the Internet. They are described as having been nonobservant and at the same time obsessed with following news about “jihad and the mujahidin.”<sup>66</sup> A second type of self-radicalization might be sparked by specific political events. The medium of television played an important role in this regard. The jihadist literature contains accounts of people watching TV images from Chechnya in 1999 and deciding almost on the spot to travel abroad for jihad.<sup>67</sup> Others recount how they were spellbound by the images of the 9/11 attacks and started taking an interest in Afghanistan.<sup>68</sup> There are also indications that religious experiences might have triggered processes of radicalization. Some militants are described as having had a religious vision or dream that made them

change their lifestyle and seek out Islamist communities.<sup>69</sup> However, it must be emphasized that the notion of self-radicalization is relative. Practically all recruits went through some kind of socialization period before going to Afghanistan.

This is not to say that there was no top-down recruitment to Afghanistan in Saudi Arabia in this period. There were indeed people who sought to influence others to go to Afghanistan. Some, but far from all, were connected to the local al-Qaeda network supervised by al-Ayiri. A common recruitment ground was an informal religious study group or gathering.<sup>70</sup> Recruiters were also active in schools.<sup>71</sup> They would invite pupils to evening lectures and social occasions and give them pamphlets to read. Then they would show jihad videos from Bosnia, Chechnya and elsewhere, and thus motivate people to travel to Afghanistan.<sup>72</sup> There were also recruiters in Mecca who were particularly active during the pilgrimage or the last ten days of Ramadan, when many young Saudis go to the Holy City.<sup>73</sup> Radical imams and scholars also played a very important role. Many of them encouraged their students to go to Afghanistan.<sup>74</sup> It must be noted, however, that clerics who recommended students to go to Afghanistan seem to have been more interested in assisting the Taliban regime than Bin Ladin’s organization.<sup>75</sup>

Many of the Saudis who went to Afghanistan between 1999 and 2001 would never return. An unknown number, possibly close to a thousand, were killed in combat before or after the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>76</sup> Others were captured and sent to Guantanamo. Those who made it back to Saudi Arabia were the prime recruitment target for al-Qaeda’s new project: Jihad on the Arabian Peninsula.

## RECRUITMENT TO “QAP”

While those who went to Afghanistan may have had varying intentions and levels of awareness of what their journey would entail, those who joined the nascent QAP in 2002 and 2003 knew the stakes: they would be killing people inside Saudi Arabia. To the vast majority of the Islamist community in the kingdom, the concept of a jihad at home was alien; those who did not consider it illegitimate saw it as counterproductive. The returnees from Afghanistan, on the other hand, viewed things differently for a number of reasons. First, and most important, they had been battle-hardened and indoctrinated in training camps and combat. They had a more global, anti-American and intransigent ideological vision than most radicals who had never left the kingdom. Second, many of the returnees had problems reintegrating into society, not only because they were radicalized, but also because their absence had marginalized them economically. Moreover, arrest and interrogation upon their return from Afghanistan left many feeling betrayed by state and society.<sup>77</sup> Faced with these and other adaptation problems, many of them ended up socializing mostly with other Afghan veterans. Hence, the internal social networks in the jihadist community strengthened at the expense of their links with the rest of the Islamist community.

This does not mean that the returnees were a completely isolated group. As we have seen above, the QAP did include a number of people who had no previous jihad experience. Some, though not all, of these new recruits were linked to the Afghan veterans by pre-existing social networks such as friends, relatives or neighbours. The expansion of the QAP as

an organization seems to have followed a pattern of concentric circles. In the beginning, most of the QAP recruits were Afghan Arabs or their acquaintances; as the campaign evolved and the organization became known, others joined in.

The recruitment of militants in 2002 and 2003 took place within an increasingly tense domestic and international political context. On the domestic level, the year 2002 witnessed an intense power struggle and increasingly polarized debate within the Saudi Islamist community between the radical shaikhs, on the one hand, and the more liberal-minded Islamists, on the other.<sup>78</sup> The discourse of the radical shaikhs, led by the prolific Nasir al-Fahd, grew markedly more violent and anti-American from late 2002 onwards.<sup>79</sup> In the autumn of 2002, the authorities also began cracking down more systematically on the jihadist community, presumably because they had sensed that something was stirring.<sup>80</sup> On the international level, the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan and the growing tensions over Iraq from mid-2002 onwards provided a favorable context for militant Islamists who argued that the United States had imperial ambitions in the Muslim world.<sup>81</sup> Meanwhile, the situations in Chechnya and Palestine continued to deteriorate. In early April 2002, Russian intelligence assassinated Khattab, the legendary Saudi leader of the Arab fighters in Chechnya, and later the same month, Israeli Defense Forces killed over 50 Palestinians, half of them civilians, in the town of Jenin.

In the biographies of those militants studied in this article, we find a number of declared motivations for joining the QAP. As in the case of Afghanistan, the motivations were essentially of three types:

political, religious and personal. The most commonly cited political reason was the same as the declared aim of the QAP: to end the perceived U.S. military occupation of Saudi Arabia. They felt they had an obligation to fight “Crusaders” in Saudi Arabia in order to liberate the Arabian Peninsula and to stop the U.S. military from using airbases in Saudi Arabia for attacks on Muslims in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>82</sup> While most of the anger was directed at the Americans, some emphasized the treacherous role played by the Saudi government. Others emphasized the religious dimension, quoting the injunction by the Prophet that “there shall not be two religions on the Arabian Peninsula,” or the need to “expel the polytheists from the Arabian Peninsula.”<sup>83</sup> Many were undoubtedly driven by a strong belief in the necessity of performing jihad (in the military sense), as well as a genuine belief in, and desire for, martyrdom. But there were also personal motives. Some referred to the fact that they had sworn an oath together with their friends in Afghanistan in late 2001 to liberate the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>84</sup> It also seems that some were mobilized by the arrest or killing of friends or relatives at the hands of the police.<sup>85</sup> It is worth noting that the three lists of wanted militants issued by the Interior Ministry may have had a radicalizing effect, as several people joined the QAP after seeing a friend or relative appear on the wanted list.<sup>86</sup>

Recruitment to the QAP was mostly a top-down process, in the sense that it was organized and coordinated by individuals who had a higher “level of initiation” than the recruits. Yusuf al-Ayiri presided over a hierarchical recruitment network that systematically targeted returnees from

Afghanistan. Their task was facilitated by the existence of social networks linking most Afghanistan veterans. Typically, the recruiter and the recruit would meet at informal gatherings in private homes. Then the recruiter would invite the recruit to smaller gatherings or one-to-one conversations in order to assess his motivation and qualifications. If the recruit was promising, he would be introduced to the recruiter’s superior, who would decide on how to integrate the recruit in the organization.<sup>87</sup> Another important recruitment channel was the religious gathering. Militants would exploit the longstanding mainstream Islamist practice of organizing religious summer camps for young Saudis. The jihadists would hold recruitment meetings — presented as innocent religious lectures or classes — in rest houses (*istirahat*) in the desert outside the major cities.<sup>88</sup> QAP-affiliated preachers, such as Ahmad al-Dukhayyil, also traveled around Riyadh in 2002 delivering fiery sermons in various mosques.<sup>89</sup> It is not clear exactly what role the most prominent radical Saudi shaikhs (such as Nasir al-Fahd and Ali al-Khudayr) played in the recruitment to QAP, but several of their students were later found in the militants’ ranks.<sup>90</sup>

There are also examples of bottom-up mobilization into the QAP. For example, in 2002, a number of groups of friends independently formed “proto-organizations” that were planning to carry out terrorist attacks in 2002. Some of them were well underway when they came into contact with the QAP network, which told them to put their operation on hold and discuss ways of cooperating.<sup>91</sup> Another type of mobilization involved former jihadists offering assistance (money or shelter) to old friends who were being sought by

police for involvement in the QAP. They gradually became drawn into the organization, but more often as a result of mutual affection rather than calculating recruitment efforts.<sup>92</sup> Sometimes, however, militants would ask favors from friends and sympathizers specifically in order to implicate them and complicate their extraction from the group.<sup>93</sup>

There are also a few interesting examples of individuals who radicalized almost on their own in 2002, and only joined the organization after carrying out their own small attacks and becoming fugitives.<sup>94</sup> There are also indications that the QAP's massive Internet-based media campaign from late 2003 onwards inspired some individuals and groups of friends to contact the militants via the Internet and offer to help.<sup>95</sup> However, these volunteers were neither numerous nor well-trained enough to make much difference to the fate of the QAP.

### COMPARATIVE OBSERVATIONS

Not surprisingly, the findings of this article reveal both similarities and differences between Saudi Arabia and other contexts where Islamist militants are recruited. Overall, most of the main factors and dynamics identified in other recruitment contexts were also at work in Saudi Arabia. Like many other Islamist groups, QAP was an urban middle-class youth phenomenon. Although unemployment was probably a factor, the primacy of politics and ideology over socioeconomic factors seems to apply to radicalization processes in Saudi Arabia as it does elsewhere.<sup>96</sup> Our study has also confirmed the extreme importance of social networks and group dynamics in radicalization and recruitment to Islamist militancy.<sup>97</sup>

There are certain specificities in the profiles of the QAP militants that are worth noting. While other militant Islamist groups have tended to include many natural-science students and fewer people with formal religious education, the QAP included virtually no natural-science students but several individuals with university degrees in religious studies.<sup>98</sup> This discrepancy may be related to a structural difference in the labor market: In Saudi Arabia, the unemployment rate is low among engineers and doctors and high among people with religious education.<sup>99</sup> Another interesting point is that the geographical and social backgrounds found in the QAP seem to have been somewhat more varied than for example that of Egyptian groups, whose membership tended to be relatively clearly defined geographically and socially.<sup>100</sup> In this respect, the QAP profiles are more similar to those found in Palestinian Islamist groups. This might indicate that Saudi recruits were driven more by a form of nationalist sentiment than by socio-revolutionary ideologies.<sup>101</sup> This would tally with our earlier observation that the QAP's discourse was focused more on the struggle against America than against the local regime. It is also worth noting that the profiles of the QAP members are less heterogeneous than those of Saudis who went to fight in Iraq in the 2003-2005 period.<sup>102</sup> This supports the hypothesis that the more legitimate the cause, the broader the recruitment pool (and vice versa).

Perhaps the most striking specificity of Saudi Arabia as a recruitment context, particularly in the 1999-2002 period, was the freedom with which organized recruiters and so-called "gatekeepers" were allowed to operate without interference

from the authorities. In this sense, Marc Sageman's observation that there was very little top-down recruitment to the jihadist movement does not apply to the Saudi case.<sup>103</sup> Even if we consider Sageman's valid point that there is a tendency to overreport top-down recruitment, there is overwhelming evidence from primary sources that significant organized recruitment was taking place in Saudi Arabia in this period.

The explanation for the relatively high level of organized recruitment is probably not to be found, as many commentators have suggested, in some kind of official Saudi support for al-Qaeda or questionable loyalties within the Saudi security services. Rather, it is to be found in the crucial role of so-called pan-Islamic nationalism in the Saudi political system, as well as in the absence (until recently) of a confrontational and intrusive culture of policing.

From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, the Saudi state actively promoted a form of pan-Islamic nationalism within the kingdom in order to boost its own legitimacy.<sup>104</sup> The pan-Islamic nationalist discourse notably emphasized the moral responsibility of Saudis to support oppressed Muslims abroad. In the early 1990s, when the so-called Sahwa movement led by Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-Awda began adopting a similar discourse — thus contesting the state's hold on pan-Islamic nationalism as a source of legitimacy — there emerged a political culture of one-upmanship in declared solidarity with Muslim causes abroad. This, in turn, produced a relatively high level of social acceptance, in important parts of the Saudi population, of financial and military support toward Muslim resistance movements in places such as Palestine, Bosnia and

Chechnya. After the mid-1990s, the Sahwa declined, and the state tried to contain the private Saudi military support for foreign resistance movements. However, the continued pan-Islamic nationalist atmosphere made it politically difficult for the authorities to clamp down hard on the communities involved in sending people to Afghanistan.

However, the QAP recruitment in 2002 and 2003 cannot be explained solely by the role of pan-Islamic nationalism in Saudi Arabia, because the QAP's project — jihad on the Arabian Peninsula — was not at all socially accepted and would not have been politically difficult to prevent with police methods. The failure of the Saudi authorities to detect and prevent the rise of the QAP in 2002 had much to do with the fact that Saudi Arabia lacked the culture of confrontational policing required to confront and preempt terrorist threats. It also seems clear that prior to 2003, the entire Saudi security sector suffered from a lack of experience and competence in anti-terrorism work. One might argue that in its modern form, the Saudi state has relied more on religious conservatism than physical power for social and political control. This is unlike the Arab republics, whose vast and intrusive security services produced police states in the traditional sense. The more consensual Saudi security model has strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, it produced a somewhat "softer" state less prone to accusations of abuse of power; on the other hand, it hampered police and intelligence capabilities. Since May 2003, however, the Saudi security establishment has adopted a much more confrontational approach toward its jihadist community. One of the main challenges for the Saudi state now is to



avoid a counterproductive overreaction to the terrorist challenge, notably that posed by the future returnees from Iraq. Another challenge is to remember, in the midst of the battle, that the most important component in

any balanced and long-term counterterrorism strategy is the continued search for the universal and local root causes of political violence.

<sup>1</sup> The most detailed studies of militancy in Saudi Arabia have been carried out by Saudi academics. A Western diplomatic source in Riyadh told me in November 2005 that, since 2003, the Saudi Interior Ministry has commissioned several studies of the profiles and backgrounds of Saudi militants. However, none of these studies have been made public so far. A good, but rather brief review of QAP profiles is found in Roel Meijer, "The 'Cycle of Contention' and the Limits of Terrorism in Saudi Arabia," in *Saudi Arabia in the Balance*, ed. Paul Aarts and Gerd Nonneman (London: Hurst, 2005). Other relevant studies include Nawaf Obaid and Anthony Cordesman, "Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia: Asymmetric Threats and Islamic Extremists" (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005); Nawaf Obaid and Anthony Cordesman, "Saudi Militants in Iraq: Assessment and Kingdom's Response" (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005); and *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (W. W. Norton & Co., 2004), p. 231-235.

<sup>2</sup> The scope of this article does not include the broader community of Saudi veterans from foreign conflicts such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya or Iraq. For an analysis of 205 biographies of Saudi fighters in Iraq, see Thomas Hegghammer, "Combattants saoudiens en Irak: Modes de radicalisation et de recrutement," *Cultures et Conflits*, No. 64, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Anatomy of Egypt's Militant Islamic Groups: Methodological Notes and Preliminary Findings," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (1981); Ayla Hammond Schbley, "Torn between God, Family and Money: The Changing Profile of Lebanon's Religious Terrorists," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 23 (2000); Ami Pedahzur, Leonard Weinberg, and Arie Perliger, "Altruism and Fatalism: The Characteristics of Palestinian Suicide Terrorists," *Deviant Behaviour*, Vol. 24 (2003); Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Malecková, "Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (2003); Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terrorist Networks* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Petter Nesser, "Jihad In Europe: A Survey of the Motivations for Sunni Islamist Terrorism in Post-Millennium Europe," in *FFI/Report* (Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 2004); Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in The West* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005); and Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, 1st ed. (Random House, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> One exception is Marc Sageman, who includes some 30 Saudis in his sample of 172 militants in *Understanding Terrorist Networks*.

<sup>5</sup> The QAP produced its own magazines *Sawt al-Jihad* [Voice of Jihad], *Muaskar al-Battar* [Camp of the Sabre] and *al-Khansa* [named after a seventh-century female poet], as well as a large number of statements. They also produced several films containing portraits and interviews of militants, such as *Wasaya al-Abtal* [Wills of the Heroes], *Shuhada al-Muwajahat* [Martyrs of the Confrontations] and *Badr al-Riyadh* [Badr of Riyadh] (February 2004). Biographical information about Saudi militants has also been available on radical Internet message boards. A total of 33 individuals are portrayed at length or interviewed in *Sawt al-Jihad*.

<sup>6</sup> The core sample of 70 includes only individuals who were portrayed in *Sawt al-Jihad* and/or figured in one of the three "wanted lists" published by the Saudi Interior Ministry in May 2003, December 2003 and June 2005.

<sup>7</sup> The total number of militants arrested and killed is unclear. Prince Turki al-Faisal said in 2005 that the government had arrested over 600 people and questioned 2000 in connection with terrorism charges since September 11, 2001; see Anthony H. Cordesman and Nawaf E. Obaid, *National Security in Saudi Arabia: Threats, Responses, and Challenges* (Praeger Security International, 2005), p. 122. In March 2006, news agencies quoting official sources said a total of 120 or 130 militants had died since May 2003; see for example "Saudi Arabia Arrests 40 Suspected Militants," *Reuters*, March 29, 2006. However, my review of press

clippings between May 2003 and March 2006 indicates that at least 164 militants have died since the outbreak of the campaign.

<sup>8</sup>Stéphane Lacroix and Thomas Hegghammer, "Saudi Arabia Backgrounder: Who Are the Islamists?" in *Middle East Report* (International Crisis Group, 2004)

<sup>9</sup>A small number of Saudis also went to Afghanistan between 1996 and 1999, but the flow of volunteers only gained momentum in 1999.

<sup>10</sup>For more on al-Ayiri, see Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer, "Jihadi Strategic Studies: The Alleged Policy Study Preceding the Madrid Bombings," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 27, No. 5 (2004).

<sup>11</sup>See, for example, the biography of Fahd al-Saidi (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 16).

<sup>12</sup>In the beginning, al-Ayiri's group referred to themselves as *al-mujahidun fi jazirat al-arab* [Mujahidun on the Arabian Peninsula]. The name *al-qaeda fi jazirat al-arab* [al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula] was in fact not used until November 22, 2003. A number of other names have also been used to describe sub-units or branches of the organization. However, in this article we have chosen to use the name QAP for the organization during in all its phases and manifestations, for simplicity's sake.

<sup>13</sup>There is overwhelming evidence of the existence of training camps inside Saudi Arabia in 2002 and 2003. Militants have described the camps in their publications (e.g., *Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 15) and in televised confessions (e.g., "Saudi Militants Shown Repenting on State TV," *Reuters*, January 12, 2004). QAP videos showing military training inside houses and in desert camps have also surfaced on radical Islamist Internet sites.

<sup>14</sup>Interview with Western diplomat in Riyadh, November 2005.

<sup>15</sup>This is excluding the assassination of the police interrogator Mubarak al-Sawat in June 2005.

<sup>16</sup>Thomas Hegghammer, "Saudi Arabia: Terror Threat Reduced — for Time Being," *Oxford Analytica Daily Brief* (2006).

<sup>17</sup>In December 2003, the QAP created a unit called the "Haramayn Brigades" [kataib al-haramayn] to which the organization "outsourced" the ideologically controversial attacks on police targets.

<sup>18</sup>In December 2003, there were rumors in the press about a foiled assassination attempt on Muhammad bin Nayif, the son of Interior Minister Nayif bin Abd al-Aziz, but these reports were never confirmed.

<sup>19</sup>See, for example, *ghazwat al-hadi ashar min rabi al-awwal: amaliyyat sharq al-riyadh wa-harbuna ma amrika wa umalaiha* [The 12 May Raid: The East Riyadh Operation and Our War with America and its Agents], (Markaz al-Dirasat wal-Buhuth al-Islamiyya, 2003).

<sup>20</sup>Women seem to have been involved as writers on women-related jihad issues. *Sawt al-Jihad* included several articles signed with female pseudonyms, and the magazine *al-Khansa* was allegedly produced by a group of women calling themselves the "Women's Information Office in the Arabian Peninsula." A number of women were arrested in connection with police raids on QAP safe houses and flats, but the authorities have released very little information about them.

<sup>21</sup>Many of the youngest members are likely to have been among the least known and are thus probably underrepresented in our sample.

<sup>22</sup>The average age of the two militant Egyptian groups studied by Saad Eddin Ibrahim in the late 1970s was 22 and 24 years, respectively; see Ibrahim, "Anatomy of Egypt's Militant Islamic Groups," p. 439. The Hizbollah militants studied by Alan Krueger were on average 22 years old when they died; see Krueger and Malecková, "Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?" p. 132.

<sup>23</sup>The geographical origin of the militants is defined as their main residence in the five years preceding their inclusion in the QAP. We have chosen to focus on the recent residence rather than the birthplace for two reasons: first, most biographies indicate the recent residence, not the birthplace; and second, the social environment is presumed to be more important than the birth environment for understanding radicalization processes.

<sup>24</sup>The overall figures are from the Central Department of Statistics, "Demographic Survey Report 1421H-2001" (Saudi Ministry of Planning [<http://www.planning.gov.sa>]).

<sup>25</sup>Charles M. Sennott, "Why Bin Laden Plot Relied on Saudi Hijackers," *Boston Globe*, March 3, 2002.

<sup>26</sup>The high-level al-Qaeda member Tawfiq bin Attash has told interrogators that Bin Ladin wanted the large southern tribes to be represented in the 9/11 operations in order to send a message to the Saudi regime. However, this is contradicted by other key planners such as Khalid Shaykh Muhammad; see *The 9/11 Commission Report*, p. 232 and 524. There may also have been operational reasons for choosing hijackers

from the same tribe, region or social circle. Preexisting friendships and sociocultural affinities would have increased their in-group loyalty, a security advantage during extended operations on foreign territory.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, “Combattants saoudiens en Irak,” *Cultures et Conflits*, No. 64, 2006.

<sup>28</sup> The governorate of Riyadh includes many towns and cities in addition to the city of Riyadh itself. Of the people in our sample counted as Riyadh governorate residents, about one-sixth were from smaller places such as Zulfi and Kharj.

<sup>29</sup> From the late 1990s, the most prominent radical Saudi shaikhs were based in Riyadh (Nasir al-Fahd, Abd al-Aziz al-Jarbu et al.) and Burayda (Ali al-Khudayr, Sulayman al-Ulwan et al.).

<sup>30</sup> A former QAP member interviewed by a Saudi newspaper in 2005 said recruiters targeted people who came from small villages and rural areas; *Okaz*, October 8, 2005.

<sup>31</sup> Sennott, “Why Bin Laden Plot Relied on Saudi Hijackers.”

<sup>32</sup> This confirms some of the preliminary observations made by Saudi sociologists regarding the QAP militants; see Faris Bin Huzzam, “*qiraa lil-tarkiba al-jiusiyasiya li-qaimat al-26* [A Reading of the Geopolitical Structure of the List of 26],” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 9, 2003.

<sup>33</sup> “Demographic Survey Report 1421H-2001.”

<sup>34</sup> A former QAP member told a Saudi newspaper in 2005 that the group’s recruiters had been looking for “unemployed and idle youngsters in need of money”; *Okaz*, October 8, 2005.

<sup>35</sup> In the category “religious professions,” we include a wide range of occupations in ministries (of education, Islamic affairs), courts, schools and universities, the religious police, and missionary or relief organizations.

<sup>36</sup> Notable exceptions were Turki al-Dandani, who studied medicine; Abd al-Rahman al-Jubara, who studied engineering in Canada; and Ali al-Ghamidi, who studied economics. However, none of them practiced his profession.

<sup>37</sup> Ibrahim, “Anatomy of Egypt’s Militant Islamic Groups;” Diego Gambetta and Steffen Hertog, “Engineers of Jihad,” paper presented at a workshop at the Peace Research Institute in Oslo, August 10, 2006.

<sup>38</sup> A few, like Khalid al-Baghdadi, were involved in petty crime and spent time in prison. Others, like Salih al-Awfi and Uthman al-Amri, had been dismissed from their work for embezzlement or other irregularities. A number of people, such as Talal al-Anbari and Faisal al-Dukhayyil, are described in the jihadist literature as having been “in sin” before becoming religious, though it is not clear whether this refers to delinquency or immorality.

<sup>39</sup> Exceptions include Khalid al-Baghdadi, who was from a wealthy Riyadh family; Rakan al-Saykhan, whose father was a high-level civil servant in the trade ministry; and Isa al-Awshan, who was the son-in-law of Abdallah bin Jibrin, one of the country’s top religious scholars.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, the biographies of Abd al-Ilah al-Utaybi (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 4), Mitib al-Muhayyani (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 4), Turki al-Dandani (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 7), Amir al-Shihri (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 12), Fahd al-Sa’idi (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 15), Talal al-Anbari (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 17), Khalid al-Baghdadi (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 18), Turki al-Mutayri (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 20), Ali al-Harbi (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 24), Faisal al-Dukhayyil (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 28) and the interviews with Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin (*Sawt al-Jihad*, Nos. 1 and 2), Salih al-Awfi (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 8) and Abd al-Rahman al-Yaziji (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 28).

<sup>41</sup> The real number is probably higher, as many biographies are not detailed enough to include past prison experience. Among the 33 militants who are portrayed in *Sawt al-Jihad* in biographies or interviews — and whose biographies are hence best known — as many as 12 were imprisoned before 2003.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, the biography of Yusuf al-Ayiri (*Sawt al-Jihad*, p. 1) and Khalid al-Baghdadi (*Sawt al-Jihad*, p. 18) or the interview with Ali al-Harbi in the film *Badr al-Riyadh*. There are many other accounts of suffering in Saudi prisons in the broader jihadist literature.

<sup>43</sup> The “ideologues” were preoccupied with ideological production and rarely took part in fighting. There were two kinds of ideologues: the “shaikhs” — such as Faris al-Zahrani and Abdallah al-Rushud — who provided overall religious guidance, and the media officers — such as Isa al-Awshan and Abd al-Aziz al-Anzi — who were responsible for the QAP’s publications. The term “fighters” refers to those people who were part of operational cells and regularly engaged in combat with security forces; most core QAP members belong to this category.

<sup>44</sup> The two most important QAP leaders were Yusuf al-Ayiri and Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin. Others, such as Sultan al-Qahtani, Khalid al-Hajj and Salih al-Awfi, were also reported to have held leadership positions at various periods, but their real degree of authority is unclear.

<sup>45</sup> The main ideologues in the QAP were Abdallah al-Rushud, Faris al-Zahrani, Ahmad al-Dukhayyil, Isa al-Awshan, Sultan al-Utaybi, Abd al-Aziz al-Anzi, Abd al-Latif al-Khudayri, Abd al-Majid al-Mani and Hamad al-Humaydi. Apart from al-Humaydi, who was in Afghanistan for a short while in the 1980s, and al-Awshan, who made it to the Iranian-Afghan border in late 2001, none of these ideologues had foreign jihad experience.

<sup>46</sup> All of those with formal religious training had attended Imam Muhammad bin Saud University in Riyadh or Burayda.

<sup>47</sup> See note 39 above.

<sup>48</sup> These “revived” veterans included Ibrahim al-Rayis, Khalid al-Sabit, Ali al-Harbi, Saud al-Utaybi, Bandar al-Ghamidi and others.

<sup>49</sup> A notable exception is Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin, who described the process of his 1991 departure to Afghanistan in an interview in the first issue of *Sawt al-Jihad*.

<sup>50</sup> Recently declassified transcripts of testimonies of Guantanamo prisoners shed new light on motivations for going to Afghanistan; see *Testimony of Detainees Before the Combatant Status Review Tribunal* (U.S. Department of Defense, 2006); available from <http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/foi/detainees/csrt/index.html> [accessed April 3, 2006]. See also Sharon Curcio, “Generational Differences in Waging Jihad,” *Military Review*, Vol. 85, No. 4 (2005) and Sharon Curcio, “The Dark Side of Jihad: How Young Men Detained at Guantanamo Assess Their Experiences,” in *A Future for the Young*, ed. Cheryl Benard (RAND, 2006).

<sup>51</sup> The near-absence of the name “al-Qaeda” in the pre-2001 jihadist literature has fuelled doubts over the very existence of al-Qaeda as a formal organization; see, for example, the 2004 BBC documentary *The Power of Nightmares* by Adam Curtis. However, recently published testimonies and declassified documents have removed all doubt that al-Qaeda existed as an organization from the late 1980s onward; see Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower* (Knopf, 2006); Peter Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know* (Free Press, 2006); and Combating Terrorism Center, “Harmony and Disharmony: Exploiting al-Qaeda’s Organizational Vulnerabilities” (United States Military Academy, 2006). These new documents also make it clear that before 2001, the name al-Qaeda was for internal use and not for propaganda (as is the case today).

<sup>52</sup> Lacroix and Hegghammer, “Saudi Arabia Backgrounder: Who Are the Islamists?” Vol. 7.

<sup>53</sup> The Faruq camp in Qandahar (not to be confused with the old Faruq camp in Khost) was established in 1999. It was probably the first camp for new recruits that was controlled entirely by Bin Ladin and his closest associates (as opposed to more loosely affiliated partners such as Abu Zubayda). The fact that practically all Saudis who went to Afghanistan after 1999 began their training in al-Faruq, and not elsewhere, points to the importance of this camp in al-Qaeda’s recruitment policy toward Saudi Arabia.

<sup>54</sup> Al-Ayiri was released from Dammam prison in 1998, but in the months after his release he seems to have been preoccupied with the Chechen cause. He probably only started working directly for Bin Ladin in late 1999 or 2000. See al-Ayiri’s biography in *Sawt al-Jihad*, Nos. 1 and 2.

<sup>55</sup> Al-Ayiri had particularly close links with Sulayman al-Ulwan. Al-Ayiri’s wife was the sister of al-Ulwan’s wife, and the two families were next-door neighbors in Burayda (author’s interview with former Saudi Islamist, Riyadh, 2005).

<sup>56</sup> Biographies of Saudi martyrs in the first Afghan war and in the Bosnian war indicate that a majority came from the Hijaz; for the Afghan war, see for example the 1980s jihadist magazines *al-Jihad* and *al-Bunyan al-Marsus* [The Firm Structure]; for Bosnia, see Hamad al-Qatari and Majid al-Madani, *min qisas al-shuhada al-arab fi al-busna wal-harsak* [From the Stories of the Arab Martyrs in Bosnia and Herzegovina] (2002). The center of gravity of the Saudi jihadist community thus seems to have shifted from Hijaz to Najd in the late 1990s.

<sup>57</sup> See the biography of Faisal al-Dukhayyil (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 28) and Abd al-Rahman al-Jubara (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 14). See also *The 9/11 Commission Report*, p. 233; and Curcio, “Generational Differences in Waging Jihad,” p. 84.

<sup>58</sup> See the biography of Mitib al-Muhayyani (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 4) and the interview with Abd al-Rahman al-Yaziji (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 28).

<sup>59</sup> At least five QAP militants (Abd al-Ilah Sultan al-Utaybi, Nasir al-Khalidi, Talib al-Talib and Isa al-Awshan, Abd al-Muhsin Shabanat) went or tried to go to Afghanistan for the first time after 9/11, ostensibly motivated by a desire to defend Bin Ladin and the Taliban regime. Saudi detainees in Guantanamo have also said they went to Afghanistan to fight for the Taliban against the Northern Alliance; see *Testimony of Detainees*, p. 1126-31.

<sup>60</sup> Many quote a general desire to “get jihad training,” seemingly without reflecting on the practical and political content of the jihad that they were embarking on. Several recruits seem to have had a very vague idea of what they were actually going to do beyond firing a Kalashnikov and jumping hurdles.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, *Testimony of Detainees*, p. 1115-20.

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, the biography of Abd al-Muhsin Shabanat (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 23).

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, *Testimony of Detainees*, p. 1275-82.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, the biographies of Musaid al-Subay'i (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 19) and Amir al-Shihri (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 12).

<sup>65</sup> Sageman, *Understanding Terrorist Networks*.

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, the biographies of Talal al-Anbari (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 17) and Musaid al-Subay'i (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 19).

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, the biography of Faysal al-Dukhayyil (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 28).

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, the biography of Khalid al-Sabit (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 15).

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, the biography of Talal al-Anbari (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 17). In the biographies of Saudi martyrs in Iraq, there are several accounts of people being inspired by visions and dreams; see Muhibb al-Jihad, “*shuhada ard al-rafidayn [Martyrs of the Land of the Two Rivers]*,” (2005) a list of 400 martyrs’ biographies in Iraq, circulated on radical Islamist websites in May 2005.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, the biographies of Mihmas al-Dawsary (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 22) and Talal al-Anbari (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 17).

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, the account of the recruitment of Nayif al-Shammari in *Arab News*, July 11, 2005.

<sup>72</sup> A former militant described this gradual initiation process in an interview with a Saudi newspaper; *Okaz*, October 8, 2005.

<sup>73</sup> Mecca has been a key recruiting ground for jihad activity abroad since the early 1980s. Several Saudis in Guantanamo say they went to Afghanistan after meeting someone in Mecca; see, for example, *Testimony of the Detainees*, p. 1439-46.

<sup>74</sup> Shaykh Sulayman al-Ulwan is believed to have recruited many Saudis to go to Afghanistan; he allegedly recruited one of the 9/11 hijackers; see *The 9/11 Commission Report*, p. 233. Many of the Saudis detained at Guantanamo say they went to Afghanistan on the urging of a local imam or shaikh; see, for example, *Testimony of Detainees*, p. 1132-34.

<sup>75</sup> All the Saudi Guantanamo prisoners who say they heeded calls from religious scholars to go to Afghanistan say they went to fight for the Taliban, not al-Qaeda or Bin Ladin.

<sup>76</sup> According to a list of martyrs’ biographies circulated on Islamist websites in mid-2005, as many as 99 Saudis died in the Mazar-e-Sharif battle (November 9-10, 2001) alone; see *hatta la nansa qissat al-mujahidin al-asra wa'l-shuhada kamalatan fi qalat janji ma suwar wa asma al-shuhada [Lest We Forget the Complete Story of the Mujahidin Taken Prisoner and Fallen Martyrs in the Janji Fortress — with Pictures and Names of the Martyrs]*, accessed on www.hkmah.net on June 6, 2005.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, the biography of Khalid al-Baghdadi (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 18).

<sup>78</sup> Stéphane Lacroix, “Le champ politico-religieux en Arabie Saoudite après le 11 septembre” Master’s thesis, Institut d’Etudes Politiques, 2003.

<sup>79</sup> The rhetorical escalation reached its pinnacle in May 2003 with the publication on the Internet of Nasir al-Fahd’s infamous *risala fi hukm istikhdam aslihat al-damar al-shamil didd al-kuffar* [Letter about the Ruling on the Use of Weapons of Mass Destruction against the Infidels].

<sup>80</sup> The first shootout between security forces and QAP followers took place in Riyadh on November 16, 2002. A number of other arrests and shootouts followed in early 2003.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, “Global Jihadism after the Iraq War,” *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (2006).

<sup>82</sup> This line of argument is cited throughout the publications of the QAP.

<sup>83</sup> For more on these injunctions, see Gilles Kepel, *Jihad : expansion et déclin de l’islamisme* (Gallimard, 2000), p. 416.

<sup>84</sup> See for example the biographies of Mitib al-Muhayyani (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 4) and Talal al-Anbari (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 17).

<sup>85</sup> For example, Mansur al-Faqih joined the QAP when his brother Hassan was arrested in May 2003; see Raid Qusti, “Background of the Most Wanted Terrorists: Part 4,” *Arab News*, December 14, 2003. Fahd al-Juwayr deepened his involvement in the QAP after two of his brothers were killed by Saudi police; see

Abdullah al-Shihri, "Leader of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia Killed," *Associated Press*, February 28, 2006.

<sup>86</sup> For example, Ahmad al-Suwailimi joined the militants after seeing his brother Muhammad's name on the list in June 2005; see "*majmuat maqalat al-shahid muhammad bin abd al-rahman al-suwailimi* [Collection of Articles by the Martyr Muhammad bin Abd al-Rahman al-Suwailimi]," posted at [www.al-hesbah.org](http://www.al-hesbah.org) on April 13, 2006.

<sup>87</sup> See, for example, the biography of Musaid al-Subayi (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 19).

<sup>88</sup> According to a former jihadist interviewed by a Saudi newspaper, QAP member Sultan al-Utaybi was one of the main organizers of this kind of event; *Okaz*, October 8, 2005.

<sup>89</sup> See the biography of Ahmad al-Dukhayyil (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 5). See also the biography of al-Dukhayyil's driver, Nasir al-Sayyari (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 25).

<sup>90</sup> Abd al-Latif al-Khudayri (portrayed in *Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 27) was allegedly one of Ali al-Khudayr's favourite students.

<sup>91</sup> See, for example, the biography of Turki al-Mutayri (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 20). Some returnees from Afghanistan carried out attacks before they could be included in the QAP. One such group notably carried out a series of assassinations of government officials in the province of Jawf between September 2002 and April 2003; see Saad Al-Matrafi, "Three Saudi Extremists Executed in Sakaka for Criminal Acts," *Arab News*, April 2, 2005.

<sup>92</sup> See the interview with Saud al-Utaybi (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 12).

<sup>93</sup> This strategy was described by repentant militants in the Saudi TV documentary *Inside the Cell*; see Rawya Rageh, "Ex-Militants: al-Qaeda Preys on Young Men," *Associated Press*, September 22, 2004.

<sup>94</sup> See the biography of Sami al-Luhaybi (*Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 6).

<sup>95</sup> See the numerous "Letters to the editor" published in *Sawt al-Jihad*, Nos. 8, 20, 21, 26, 27 and 28.

<sup>96</sup> Krueger and Malecková, "Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?"

<sup>97</sup> Sageman, *Understanding Terrorist Networks*.

<sup>98</sup> Ibrahim, "Anatomy of Egypt's Militant Islamic Groups."

<sup>99</sup> Steffen Hertog, "Segmented Clientelism: The Politics of Economic Reform in Saudi Arabia." DPhil thesis, Oxford University.

<sup>100</sup> Gilles Kepel, *The Roots of Radical Islam*, 2nd English ed. (Saqi Books, 2005).

<sup>101</sup> Studies of secular terrorist groups indicate that nationalist-separatist groups tend to have a broader recruitment base than the sociorevolutionary organizations; see for example Peter Waldmann, "Ethnic and Sociorevolutionary Terrorism: A Comparison of Structures," in *Social Movements and Violence: Participation in Underground Organizations*, ed. Donatella Della Porta (JAI, 1992). The distinction between sociorevolutionary and nationalist-separatist ideologies is applicable to Islamist groups. It can be used to distinguish between those groups fighting for state power (such as in Egypt and Algeria) and those fighting for territory (such as in Palestine and Chechnya).

<sup>102</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, "Combattants saoudiens en Irak."

<sup>103</sup> Sageman, *Understanding Terrorist Networks*, p. 121-22.

<sup>104</sup> The roots of pan-Islamic nationalism in Saudi political culture go back to at least the 1960s, when King Faisal promoted "Islamic solidarity" (*al-tadamun al-islami*) as an alternative to Nasser's Arab nationalism. See Abdullah M. Sindi, "King Faisal and Pan-Islamism," in *King Faisal and the Modernisation of Saudi Arabia*, ed. Willard Beling (London: Croom Helm, 1980)."