

I. Articles

Alliance Hubs: Focal Points in the International Terrorist Landscape

by Tricia Bacon

International terrorist alliances pose a threat in that they provide opportunities for groups to bolster their operational effectiveness, range, and efficiency as well as enhance their legitimacy and stature. However, they remain rare because alliances expose partnering organizations to serious vulnerabilities, and terrorist organizations are ill-suited to forge these kinds of commitments. When alliances do occur, they tend to cluster around a small number of groups, termed alliance hubs, which demonstrate an aptitude for forging partnerships. The prevailing notion that terrorist groups with shared threats or ideologies will naturally gravitate toward hubs mischaracterizes the nature of relationships among these illicit, clandestine, and violent organizations and predicts that alliances should occur more frequently than they do, and that alliances should form where none exist. Rather than precipitating alliances, shared ideology and enemies act as identity features that guide partner selection. Hubs function as focal points by fulfilling organizational adaptation and learning needs for groups that lack self-reform capacity. This offers under-utilized opportunities to exploit and disrupt these relationships.

Keywords: *Group decision-making, organizational behavior, collaboration*

Introduction

As for the answer to your question, why did we join Al Qaeda? We say, why shouldn't we join Al Qaeda? God ordered us to be united, to be allied, to cooperate and fight against the idolaters in straight lines.... We are a jihadi ancestral community.

–Abelmalek Droukdal, leader of al-Qaida of the Islamic Maghreb, formerly the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), on his group's 2006 alliance with al-Qaida

By 2005, the predominant Algerian Sunni terrorist group, the GSPC, was a shadow of its former self. After two amnesties and more than a decade of conflict, its decimated ranks were pursuing a cause that no longer resonated with the war-weary Algerian public. Once an existential threat to the state, the jihadist insurgency operated largely as a law and order problem relegated to the outskirts of the country. Newly radicalized Algerian militants gravitated to the insurgency against the United States in Iraq, rather than join the discredited cause at home.[1] Surrendering members reported that the group's fighters struggled to survive on rations and lived in desolate conditions.[2]

Then, on the five-year anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, al-Qaida appointed the GSPC as its affiliate in North Africa. Shortly thereafter, the newly minted al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) unleashed a violent campaign that shattered the Algerian Government's claims that the insurgency was on the verge of defeat. AQIM adopted al-Qaida's modus operandi of suicide operations, which increased the lethality and reach of its attacks. It struck high profile targets, like the United Nations building in the heart of the Algerian capital, a locale considered secure against the group's traditional bombings and ambushes.[3] AQIM expanded its safe haven and smuggling activities in the Sahel region, and members outside its traditional Algerian base joined the group.[4] Significant credit for AQIM's rejuvenation went to its alliance with al-Qaida.[5]

AQIM's post-alliance transformation reflects the fact that allying with another terrorist organization creates opportunities for groups to bolster their operational effectiveness, range, and efficiency as well as enhance their legitimacy and stature; sometimes it even allows them to re-invent their image.[6] Like the increased

destruction produced by AQIM's adoption of the tactic of suicide operations following its alliance with al-Qaida, terrorist groups with allies conduct more deadly attacks, resulting in a higher average number of fatalities and injuries to both victims and attackers alike.[7] In addition, alliances increase terrorist groups' longevity and make them more resilient. For example, terrorist organizations with allies are 50 percent less likely to disband or collapse following leadership decapitation than those without them.[8]

Terrorist alliances clearly pose a threat; however, they remain rare.[9] For example, the apex of cooperation—a joint operation involving allied groups—occurred in less than one percent of terrorist attacks between 1970 and 2007.[10] The paucity of alliances reflect the hurdles that terrorist groups face when attempting to forge credible commitments.[11] All entities allying in an anarchic environment face obstacles, but terrorist groups' secretive and illicit nature exacerbates them and thereby makes alliances more difficult. Terrorist groups also face additional barriers because of their strong in-group identification and insular qualities.[12] As a result, terrorist organizations struggle to form alliances.

These obstacles shed some light on why terrorist alliances occur infrequently, but fail to explain the puzzling distribution of terrorist alliances. Terrorist alliances tend to form in closely-knit clusters or cliques of cooperating organizations with a small number of groups acting as focal points.[13] Such alliance hubs are, in essence, an anomaly among anomalies. Hubs exhibit an unusual propensity to overcome the collaboration hurdles that stymie most groups. In addition, their activity accounts for a disproportionate number of these dangerous relationships. But why are alliance hubs so effective at forming these partnerships? Why do other groups seek hubs as partners?

Counterterrorism officials and terrorist groups themselves, i.e. the GSPC's justification of its relationship with al-Qaida, often attribute alliance behavior to shared ideologies and common enemies.[14] Alliances are indeed strongly correlated with both.[15] However, the rarity of terrorist group alliances is inconsistent with these ideational or instrumental motives. If ideological solidarity or common enemies stimulated alliances, they should occur more frequently, and alliances should form where none exist. In addition, neither explanation can account for the timing or duration of terrorist alliances. For instance, the GSPC shared an ideology as well as enemies with al-Qaida for years before "God ordered" them to unite.

Given the danger posed by alliance hubs, governments need to better understand what causes them. Overall, the dearth of well-developed theories that explain international terrorist alliance behavior, particularly compared to intra-conflict or inter-state alliances, has stunted efforts to disrupt and prevent these dangerous relationships. Not surprisingly, governments have had little success against international terrorist alliances, even though disrupting them has been a priority for over a decade. Government action has not severed any of the alliances involving the premiere contemporary alliance hub, al-Qaida, even though as early as 2003, the U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy asserted: "[t]he interconnected nature of terrorist organizations necessitates that we pursue them across the geographic spectrum to ensure that all linkages between the strong and the weak organizations are broken, leaving each of them isolated, exposed, and vulnerable to defeat." [16] For example, the public break between al-Qaida and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) earlier this year was caused by internal disagreements about the scope of ISIS's mission and its tensions with another al-Qaida ally, al-Nusrah Front. Though the ISIS-al-Qaida alliance was plagued with problems from the outset, governments proved unable to exploit these fissures.[17] If governments understand alliance hubs' appeal and their vulnerability, they can better identify when alliances may occur and more effectively intervene.

This article provides an excerpt of the findings in my dissertation "Strange Bedfellows or Brothers-in-Arms: Why Terrorist Groups Ally," forthcoming with the University of Pennsylvania Press. In it, I propose a theory of international terrorist alliance formation and sustainment based on a combination of organizational

theory and constructivism. Using qualitative methods, including within-case comparisons, cross-case comparisons, and process tracing of nine international terrorist dyads between 1968 to 2011 and two hubs' alliance behavior, I argue that organizational learning and adaptation needs motivate alliance searches, while identity, particularly ideology, constrains partner selection and helps partnering groups to build trust. Furthermore, I find that alliance sustainment hinges on organizational need fit between partners, the nature of the organizational needs driving the alliance, as well as partners' ability to forge a shared identity.

This article focuses more narrowly on my dissertation's findings on alliance hubs, specifically why these organizations attract numerous partners. It begins by discussing the obstacles and benefits to terrorist alliances. It then defines international terrorist alliances and situates them within the alliance literature. Next, it delves into what constitutes an alliance hub—groups that demonstrate anomalous success in attracting partners and forging alliances, thereby increasing the terrorist threat. It proceeds by discussing how existing theories offer little insight into their behavior before proposing an alternative explanation for why terrorist alliances cluster around hubs. In the interest of space, this article selectively draws on the dissertation's alliance hub case studies to illustrate its arguments, rather than providing the full case studies. Instead of being a product of common ideology or shared threats, alliance hubs acquire their positions because of their willingness and ability to fulfill others' organizational adaptation and learning needs as well as by possessing identity traits that make them acceptable partners to numerous other groups. The article concludes by discussing follow-on research on alliance hubs and the implications that flow from these findings.

Defining International Terrorist Alliances

International relations scholar Ole Holsti contended that “[a]lliances are apparently a universal component of relations between political units, irrespective of time and place.”[18] As fundamentally political actors, this applies to terrorist groups. However, beyond agreement on its political dimension, terrorism is a notoriously difficult concept to define, and debates persist about the appropriate use of the term.[19] At a minimum, an act of terrorism generally contains three components: 1) political aims and motives; 2) violence or threats of violence; and 3) intended psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target.[20] Terrorist organizations include entities that consistently employ such violence with some defined membership, chain of command, command and control mechanisms, and in-group identity.

Alliances consist of relationships of security cooperation between terrorist groups that involve mutual expectations of coordination or consultation in the future.[21] Such relationships are distinct from the more prevalent forms of low-level collaboration between individuals who do not represent organizations or ad hoc organizational cooperation without shared expectations for future cooperation. While these other forms of cooperation pose fewer hurdles and thus may be more common, alliances offer opportunities for deeper and more sustained exchanges, and therefore, can pose a greater threat.

International alliances refer to partnerships between terrorist groups that emerge from political markets that cross state and/or conflict boundaries. After the internationalization of terrorism, terrorist groups increasingly forged alliances with one another within the anarchic international system.[22] While international terrorist alliances have received less scholarly attention than intra-conflict or inter-state alliances, they have produced some of the most prolific terrorist attacks and defined the terrorist threat for the past decade. Beyond al-Qaida's abundant alliances, notorious examples include the Japanese Red Army's attack on Lod Airport in Tel Aviv in 1972, as well as the coordinated kidnapping and hijacking in 1977 by the Red Army Faction (RAF) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

Significantly, the PFLP, JRA, and RAF were not rivals within a shared conflict, so they did not compete in

the same primary political and resource market. Well-known examples of intra-conflict relations include the perpetual jockeying between Afghan *mujahidin* factions after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and the constantly shifting alliances among militant Palestinian factions. International terrorist alliances differ from intra-conflict relations among violent non-state actors in important respects that necessitate separate theorizing and empirical work about the causes of their alliance behavior. A shared political market creates a competitive dynamic, particularly as groups proliferate over time due to group fractionalization. Competitor terrorist organizations thus constantly maneuver for primacy, and this affects their behavior, including alliances, in a variety of ways.[23] For example, competition influences the tempo and scale of violence as well as the tactics that competitor groups employ, such as suicide attacks.[24] In competitive situations, groups increase the pace or broaden the scope of their attacks, as Kydd and Walter claim that, “outbidding should occur when multiple groups are competing for the allegiance of a similar demographic base of support.”[25]

Rival groups operating within a shared conflict seek to acquire their share of resources, power, and position at the expense of one another, thus engaging in cooperation selectively, carefully, and briefly. While not all conflicts involving multiple terrorist groups reach the threshold of a civil war, Fontini Christia’s work on alliance behavior within multiple party civil wars parallels what occurs in many conflicts with multiple terrorist groups. Alliances within a conflict fluctuate based on groups’ assessments of relative power position vis-à-vis one another.[26] Unless one group is powerful enough to win outright or has a monopoly in the conflict, the within-conflict alliance terrain constantly shifts in response to changes in power, including defections, betrayals, group fracturing, and losses on the battlefield, detentions or targeted killings. Alliances thus tend to be tactical and temporary, governed by a desire to acquire the maximum resources as part of the smallest-winning coalition, as long as the risk of exploitation by stronger parties in that coalition is manageable.[27] In other words, power considerations trump all others. Power calculi not only subsume identity considerations, group leaders and elites actively manipulate identity narratives to suit their instrumental needs.[28]

In contrast, my research focuses on relations among dyads of terrorist organizations that operate in different primary conflicts and political markets, where relative power considerations do not readily apply.[29] While some scholarship distinguishes between domestic and international terrorist attacks, much of the work on terrorist alliances does not differentiate between these two types of alliances.[30] However, objectives such as creating alliances to establish the smallest-winning coalitions or determining relative power position do not transfer to non-competitive, international relationships.[31] Because they do not compete in the same political market, non-competitors can share assets, even members, funds, and safe haven, without the same concerns that doing so will negatively affect their position relative to one another. They need not worry that resources or skills shared today will be used against them tomorrow. Rather than vying for the same resources in a zero-sum environment, resources among non-rivals can have a positive-sum value. As a result, theories must account for these differences in order to understand international terrorist alliances and alliance hubs in particular.

Impediments and Benefits of Alliances

Even though terrorist groups can accrue benefits through alliances, they struggle to forge credible commitments, an essential ingredient for alliances. By design, most terrorist organizations are insular, secretive, and lack the requisite transparency to assure their partners that they intend to honor future promises and obligations.[32] With uncertain and often short lifespans, few have the requisite shadow of the future to make attempting cooperation worth the risk.[33] To compound these problems, terrorist

groups often lack reputations as trustworthy partners.[34] Terrorist groups cannot overcome mutual distrust by creating institutions to bind themselves to agreements, as states do. Nor can they enter into contracts enforceable by an outside institution, like a firm. Thus, both sides have incentives to use cooperation opportunistically to improve their own security and then defect before reciprocating. Meanwhile, adversaries seek to exploit these fears to undermine cooperative relationships and weaken partnering organizations.[35]

At least four other major hurdles compound these problems. First, terrorist groups can be particularly leery of the security-autonomy tradeoff, in which an organization exchanges some independence for the improved security offered by the alliance partner. For groups with strong in-group identities, relinquishing autonomy can provoke internal dissension and thereby create instability within the partnering groups.[36] Second, partnering with another terrorist organization sometimes generates additional counterterrorism pressure as adversary governments respond to the threat posed by the alliance.[37] Third, groups risk discrediting themselves in the eyes of their real or perceived constituents, which can range from the international community to local support bases, with their ally choices or if their allies engage in behavior unacceptable to key audiences.[38] Lastly, and of the greatest concern to terrorist organizations, alliances increase the possibility of betrayals or leaks as they expand the circle of people with knowledge of groups' activities and members.

The obstacles to alliances discussed raise the question: what could groups acquire through an alliance that would warrant undertaking such risks? In a RAND study on terrorist interactions, Kim Cragin et al. explained that "interactions allow terrorist groups to elevate the threat that they pose to state governments by sharing 'best practices' and therefore multiplying their own efforts with the knowledge and know-how from other militant groups." [39] Alliances offer avenues for groups to acquire new capability, expand their capacity or conduct activities more efficiently.[40] Groups can train one another in new skills and teach one another improved techniques. An ally may improve its partner's ability to acquire resources and materiel, like weapons or documents. For instance, the West German Red Army Faction approached Fatah in 1970 primarily to access weapons that were not readily available in West Germany.[41] Allies can offer facilitation or logistical assistance to allow their partners access to previously denied areas or more secure routes where they currently transit.

Allied groups can also help one another to withstand counterterrorism pressure and regroup after losses. Groups that control territory or have unfettered access to a sanctuary can extend safe haven to their partners—a particularly coveted resource during rebuilding phases. Without its allies in Pakistan, it is unlikely that al-Qaida could have survived the United States' invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent fall of the Taliban. Under some circumstances, alliances offer intangible benefits, such as improved credibility, legitimacy, and prestige, which can translate into assets like recruits or funds. Groups can project themselves as part of a broader movement by allying with another terrorist organization, a particularly valuable asset when the resonance of the original cause begins to wane.

In sum, by allying with another organization, groups can access assets that may otherwise be unavailable. Under some conditions, the potential benefits warrant the risks. For some groups, the resources and skills acquired through an alliance can be the difference between survival and extinction or between victory and defeat.

Alliance Hubs

Rather than being evenly distributed among dyads, terrorist alliances often form closely-knit clusters with a group or groups operating at the center of each cluster.[42] In that respect, terrorist groups' alliances bear

similarities to businesses and military innovation patterns. Strategic blocks refer to firms that “are tied to each other more densely” than most businesses and rooted at the center of networks.[43] Similarly, critical nodes operate at the center of military innovation networks.[44] Likewise, alliance hubs act as focal points for terrorist partnerships around which other groups and relationships orbit.

This phenomenon—alliance hubs—has previously been observed among terrorist organizations, though it has not been explicitly identified and studied as such. Following the internationalization of terrorism in 1968 and accompanying proliferation of terrorist ties across national boundaries, some speculated that this collaboration was a state-driven phenomenon, a conspiracy hatched by the Soviet Union and the allied Communist bloc to coordinate terrorist groups’ efforts against the West.[45] While the Soviet Union sponsored some terrorist groups—including one of the most influential alliance hubs in the 1970s, the PFLP’s Special Operations Group, discussed below—it did not manage relationships among them.[46]

Instead, alliance hubs, particularly the PFLP and Fatah, operated at the epic center of the enhanced cooperation. In his quantitative examination of terrorist relationships in 1979, scholar Kent Layne Oots concluded that some groups acted as “major powers” providing aid and resources to others, primarily those of “similar ideological orientation.”[47] Similarly, in his trenchant examination of al-Qaida, journalist Jason Burke likened the group’s alliance behavior to a great power. He argued that al-Qaida acted similarly to the United States or Soviet Union during the Cold War in terms of its alliance behavior within the Sunni Islamic militant milieu.[48] Alliance hubs act as focal point organizations around which numerous alliances orbit and to which other terrorist groups are drawn. They demonstrate an exceptional ability to work closely with numerous partners and to maintain those relationships.

Alliance hubs can operate on a regional level or an international level. Regional-level hubs ally with fellow terrorist groups that are concentrated in a geographically contiguous area or in a grouping of countries with some overarching shared historical, cultural or linguistic qualities. For example, Hezbollah has acted as a regional alliance hub in the Middle East, more specifically in the Levant. A regional-level alliance hub often has the advantage of proximity, a common language or overarching shared ethnic identity. A regional hub may have relationships outside of the region, but it serves as a focal point of a regionally-based cluster. An international-level hub’s relationships are not limited to any particular region; instead, they are transnational, drawing in groups from various states and regions. Fewer bases for a common identity exist, as do linguistic and cultural barriers as well as informational and access hurdles. International hubs are, not surprisingly, quite rare and extremely influential, when they do occur.

Alliance hubs’ existence poses a puzzle in light of the obstacles to cooperative relationships. Alliances are the exceptions. Generally, terrorist groups struggle to form international alliances due to structural, organizational, and ideological hurdles, not to mention the geographic distance. Yet some organizations forge a disproportionate number of alliances. Hubs are, in essence, an anomaly of an anomaly; their alliance success defies expectations about the rarity of such partnerships and obstacles to them. Alliance hubs are by definition deviant cases in that they show a surprising propensity to form alliances.[49] Their existence raises a host of questions, central among them: why do they attract other terrorist organizations as partners?

One component of my dissertation involved delving into this question by conducting comparative case studies involving two alliance hubs: al-Qaida and the PFLP. Much of the scholarship on al-Qaida’s experience as an alliance hub focuses on its unique characteristics in ways that do not shed light on the broader phenomenon.[50] Moreover, this overlooks the fact that al-Qaida is not the first alliance hub, nor will it be the last. Given the rarity of alliance hubs, the threat they pose, and the need to move beyond correlations to determine the causal pathways, my dissertation employed a qualitative methodological approach to this

puzzle. Quantitative research demonstrates, for example, a strong correlation between alliances and both common ideologies and shared enemies, but does not illuminate the causal process by which these variables produce alliances or alliance hubs.[51]

Hubs with international reach, as opposed to regional hubs, are simultaneously the rarest and the most difficult to explain theoretically, given the obstacles to cooperation and the propensity for relationships to form between proximate groups.[52] Therefore, I employed a cross case comparison coupled with within case process tracing in order to engage in both theory building and testing.[53] As mentioned earlier, in order to forge a broader theory of international terrorist alliance formation and alliance sustainment, my dissertation also examined nine terrorist dyads involving alliance hubs, selected based on their variation on the independent variables discussed below. This article focuses on a sub-component of the dissertation: determining the how and why of alliance hubs.

I conducted comparative case studies of two international alliance hubs—the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and al-Qaida—selected based on their variation on three independent variables discussed below: threat, ideology, and organizational structure. The two groups' alliance hub tenures did not overlap and they operated under different international systems, as the PFLP was a hub from 1969 to 1979 during the Cold War bi-polar system, while al-Qaida's time as an alliance hub began in the early-1990s and occurred under the unipolar, United States-dominated system. While both defined their enemies expansively, they faced different threats, as al-Qaida insisted that the United States was its primary threat, while Israel posed the greatest threat to the PFLP. In addition, they hailed from different ideologies. The PFLP was a Marxist, leftist organization with a clear ethno-nationalist streak, while al-Qaida adhered to a Sunni jihadist ideology and sought to transcend nationalism.

Lastly, in contrast to the conventional explanations that point to ideology and enemies, this article proposes an organizational theory-based explanation for alliance hubs. Therefore, I selected hubs with organizational variation, including size and structure, as a proxy for the organizational needs theory discussed below. Al-Qaida[54] operated solely as a terrorist group with a few hundred members, while the PFLP's complex organizational structure included a political party and non-terrorist functions as well as thousands of followers.[55] Thus, the two selected hubs exhibited variation on each of the independent variables discussed in the next section, which offered an opportunity to test which theories elucidate how they developed into alliance hubs.

Theoretical Frameworks and Findings

To date, much of the work on international terrorist alliances assumes the groups' motives for allying. The existing literature and prevailing wisdom frequently assert that common enemies or shared ideologies motivate relationships, yet remain silent on the many instances when these factors exist, but do not produce an alliance. For example, in a monograph examining technology transfers between terrorist organizations, "Sharing the Dragon's Teeth," Cragin et al. justified their selection of three dyads of international terrorist cooperation: 1) Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and other Sunni Islamist groups in Southeast Asia; 2) Hezbollah and Palestinian militant organizations; and 3) the Provisional Irish Republican Army and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC) as follows:

JI shares an ideological worldview and overarching objective with other Islamist militant groups in Southeast Asia. We therefore expected that JI's rationale for engaging in technology exchanges would be ideologically driven. Hizballah and most Palestinian militants, however, derive from different, albeit Islamic, ideologies. With regard to Hizballah's rationale, we therefore estimated that it would

be driven more by its enmity toward Israel than by religious ideology. Finally, we expected that PIRA and FARC would represent the most disparate ideological worldviews, exchanging technologies exclusively for profit.[56]

Their goal was to select relationships that stemmed from different motives to test their theory on technology transfers. In so doing, they assumed the relationship motives post hoc based on shared characteristics. This example is not intended as a criticism of these authors or their work, which was not focused on explaining alliances, but to illustrate the tendency even for scholars to assign the reasons for these relationships, rather than to explore them.

Moreover, the processes by which these frequently cited variables produce and sustain alliances are rarely articulated. What constitutes shared ideologies or enemies is frequently applied in an elastic way, fitted to explain the presence or absence of a partnership on a case-by-case basis with little consistency or predictive accuracy. It remains unclear how common enemies and threats should be weighed or what level of ideological compatibility is necessary for organizations to ally. It is even less clear how these variables would produce an alliance hub. Therefore, after exploring the inadequacy of these theories, this article offers an alternative framework for understanding alliance hubs, rooted in organizational theory and coupled with constructivism.

Responding to Threat

Like intra-conflict alliances, the robust inter-state alliance literature offers little insight into understanding international terrorist alliance behavior. Much of the dominant realist paradigm's emphasis on relative power does not apply to international terrorist alliance dynamics, for the reasons discussed above. However, the main existing work that proposes a theory of international terrorist alliances draws on a variation of neo-realism: balance of threat theory. Stephen Walt's balance of threat theory proposes that states ally to balance in response to threat, defined as offensive power, aggregate power, geographic proximity, and perceived aggressive intentions.[57] Ely Karmon built on Walt's theory and proposed that terrorist groups in the international arena unite when they feel threatened and share a perception of the nature of a threat from the international system.[58]

Terrorist groups, including alliance hubs, sometimes invoke this rationale to explain their alliance behavior, and quantitative research demonstrates that groups with a shared target have a higher probability of working together.[59] The idea that the "Crusader-Zionist" threat required unity underlain bin Laden's numerous exhortations to Sunni terrorist groups to ally with al-Qaida.[60] The GSPC's declaration of its alliance with al-Qaida also alluded to the need to ally with a hub to balance against a shared threat.

The destruction of war, the difficulty of the present situation, and the unified coalition of our enemies against us make it necessary for us to confront this coalition with our own coalition, their alliance with our alliance, face their unified forces against our unified forces... The United States of America will only be defeated by a United States of Islam... [I]t became clear to us that our brothers in Al-Qaida organization under the lead of Mujahid Shaykh Usama Bin Laden—may Allah protect him—are the best ones in this era to unify the scattered Muslims against their enemies and to lead them in their present war.[61]

By extension, this theoretical framework would posit that alliance hubs emerge to form a counter-balancing coalition in response to threat. From a balancing perspective, this makes intuitive sense. Terrorist groups operate at a power disadvantage vis-à-vis their enemies and thus seek partners to help balance against the threat. Groups feeling similarly threatened by the distribution of power in the international system should

then flock to hubs.

In the case of al-Qaida, this theory predicts that the threat from the United States' hegemony encouraged its emergence as an alliance hub and attracted terrorist groups that shared its perception of the threat from the United States.[62] However, an examination of al-Qaida's alliance hub experience as well as that of the PFLP quickly reveals deficiencies in this theory. Following the United States' deployment of forces to Saudi Arabia in 1991, the nascent al-Qaida shifted its attention from Communist forces and identified the United States as its greatest threat. This corresponded with the Soviet Union's downfall and the emergence of a unipolar international system with the United States as the sole super power. As al-Qaida burgeoned as an organization and an alliance hub simultaneously, it propagated the view that the United States was the primary threat to prospective allies.

However, few fellow Sunni terrorist organizations shared this perception when al-Qaida developed into an alliance hub, as most focused on nationalist causes and the threat posed by their respective governments. [63] Like al-Qaida, they opposed the United States and the world order under its hegemony, but the United States was not the primary threat, or in some cases, a direct threat at all. For example, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and Egyptian Islamic Group saw Cairo as their greatest threat.[64] Likewise, the Algeria Armed Islamic Group faced a clear threat from Algiers, a conflict in which the United States played a minimal role and thus posed no threat.[65] Yet all three groups allied with al-Qaida in the early 1990s, helping to elevate it into an alliance hub.[66] Therefore, al-Qaida developed into an alliance hub during a period in which most of its allies did not share its threat perception.[67]

Moreover, it cooperated only temporarily with groups that shared its perception of the threat from the United States during the early 1990s, to include Somali warlord Mohamed Farah Aideed and Hezbollah, but did not forge full alliances with these actors.[68] Threat cannot explain this failure to ally or the short duration of their cooperation. More importantly, if threat motivated al-Qaida to become an alliance hub and attracted partners, its coalition would have included these groups, which shared its threat perception. Instead, its alliance network predominantly included fellow Sunni jihadist groups with differing threat perceptions.

In addition, 9/11 and the United States' response to it precipitated a convergence of threat against terrorist organizations to a degree previously unseen. Al-Qaida essentially created a situation whereby the United States posed the threat to terrorist groups, particularly to Sunni terrorist organizations, that al-Qaida long claimed that it did. Yet al-Qaida's alliance position did not commensurately change following this significant threat escalation. For example, immediately following the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan—a clear shared threat for all resident groups—both the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) and Jund al-Sham declined to ally with al-Qaida. A few years later, Jund al-Sham agreed to ally with al-Qaida and became al-Qaida in Iraq, now known as ISIS and a faction of LIFG merged with al-Qaida.[69] But in the face of a clear shared threat to both groups in Afghanistan, they opted to flee rather than ally with al-Qaida, contrary to what threat-based theories would predict. Post-9/11, al-Qaida added a different type of alliance—the affiliates—but this did not flow from a change in threat. As will be explained below, this reflected the shift in the assets al-Qaida could provide its partners.

Threat's limited explanatory power becomes even more apparent when examining the PFLP case. Israel posed the greatest threat to the PFLP throughout its time as an alliance hub, yet none of the PFLP's international allies faced any direct threat from Israel. Many opposed Israel on ideological grounds, but did not actually experience a threat from it, let alone view it as their greatest threat. Only the PFLP's competitors shared this threat and, as discussed earlier, different dynamics governed their alliance behavior. While the PFLP and its international allies shared a perception that the "imperialist" international system was an underlying cause

of their respective threats, numerous organizations that did not ally with the PFLP also held this view. Thus, threat provides minimal insight into the PFLP's ability to develop into or operate as an international alliance hub.

One problem with the threat-based theory is terrorist groups constantly view themselves as threatened by implacable foes. Yet alliance hubs remain rare, as do alliances. In other words, theories of shared threat over predicts the frequency of alliance hubs and international terrorist alliances in general. Similarly, as discussed, both alliance hubs opposed the international system and viewed it as threatening. But this did not differentiate them from most groups operating during their respective eras. Many terrorist groups focus on parochial threats, but they also often see the international system as partially culpable for their grievances. Moreover, the international system configuration does not frequently change and thus the threats posed by it to terrorist groups fail to explain the timing or duration of alliance hubs, including the termination of the PFLP's alliance hub position in 1979, or their relationships.

Ideology: Causing Alliances or Shaping Alliance Behavior?

In addition to threat, shared ideology is also frequently invoked in explanations of terrorist group alliance behavior, with good reason. Quantitative research established that organizations with a shared ideology tend to ally, regardless of ideological orientation.[70] In addition, terrorist groups frequently attribute their alliance behavior to their ideological convictions. To return to the GSPC example, when asked why the GSPC decided to ally with al-Qaida, the GSPC's leader responded that: "[w]e rely on legitimacy (from religion) before anything else as a base of our decisions.[71]

Ideology serves as a lens through which groups view and interpret their environment and is what separates terrorist groups from profit-motivated criminals and other illicit non-state actors.[72] Terrorism expert Daniel Byman described the role of ideology as explaining "the world's conditions and offering a blueprint for action. Ideology helps individuals formulate, consider and respond to political problems." [73] In her analysis of left-wing terrorism in Italy, Donatella della Porta similarly found that "[i]deologies operate as facilitating factors, resources or constraints in the formation of actors and in their definition of strategies." [74] However, the way in which ideology would theoretically function to produce alliances, let alone alliance hubs, remains unclear. No comprehensive theory exists that clearly specifies how ideological solidarity or compatibility causes terrorist alliances, despite the widespread perception that ideology influences terrorist group alliance behavior.

Like the contention that shared threats produce alliance hubs, the inchoate idea that common ideologies produces alliances or hubs faces a number of shortcomings. First, it suggests that alliance hubs should occur far more frequently than they do, as groups often share ideologies, while alliance hubs and alliance writ large remain rare. Like threat, ideological solidarity predicts that alliance hubs should form where they do not exist. Neither can account for the variation in cooperation among different dyads that share comparable levels of common threats or ideological solidarity. Threats and ideology do not often shift significantly during most groups' lifespan, so they cannot readily explain alliances or hubs' timing or duration. Overall, existing theories and conventional wisdom struggle to explain alliances and alliance hubs.

Ideology functions as an integral feature of terrorist groups' identities and thereby shapes alliance behavior. As constructivist scholar Michael Barnett argued, "a 'natural' security partner cannot be derived from material forces alone, for the degree of naturalness is highly dependent on familiarity and identity." [75] Instead of functioning in the primary causal role that terrorist groups like the GSPC attribute to it, ideology operates as part of identity criteria that guide partner selection and contribute to alliance hubs' appeal as

partners. For terrorist organizations in particular, identity ensures organizational loyalty and cohesion. Identity refers to “the understanding of oneself in relationship to others.”[76] Collective identity consists of both an internal and an external component; it binds terrorist groups together and situates them with respect to others. Collective identity provides a “set of norms and narratives that sustain “we-ness” through time.”[77] It functions as the glue binding terrorist groups together.[78]

Identity affinity guides partner preferences and delineates the boundaries of acceptable alliance partners. [79] Affinity refers to a sense of mutual identification among groups based on shared identity traits. Groups use identity affinity to evaluate the worthiness and desirability of prospective partners. Identity conditions thinking such that a group seeking an alliance will limit its search to other organizations with which it shares identity traits, primarily ideology, but potentially other identity characteristics, such as enemy narrative or ethnic affinity as well. Groups weigh affinity, either consciously or unconsciously, when they are deciding whether to enter into an alliance. In essence, in order to enter into a partnership, prospective allies must satisfy an identity threshold.

This identity threshold facilitated both alliance hubs’ positions because they possessed salient identity features in their respective eras, and thus numerous other groups viewed them as acceptable partners. In particular, they adhered to ideologies that defined the terrorist landscape during their time. During the PFLP’s tenure as an alliance hub, fellow militant leftist organizations were active in every hemisphere, identified as the third wave of modern terrorism by David Rapoport.[80] For its part, al-Qaida emerged from the broader Islamist revival and the militant Sunni offshoots of that movement, particularly following the anti-Soviet jihad in the 1980s. Thus, they had numerous ideological brethren, accepted many as partners, and conversely, these groups tended to view them as suitable allies.

While terrorist groups’ identities consist of more than just their ideologies, al-Qaida and the PFLP both used ideology as their primary criteria to determine identity affinity. This is consistent with terrorist groups’ use of their ideology to reduce the information required to act and to simplify the environment.[81] Ideology serves as an integral component of terrorist groups’ identity features in that it provides both the historical narrative and vision that binds terrorist organizations together.[82] An ideological platform helps to readily divide the world into dichotomous categories of “us” versus “them.” These binary categories reinforce in-group solidarity and identities.[83] They also inform friend-enemy distinctions, including determinations of who is a potential ally and who is an unacceptable partner.[84] However, ideology alone was not sufficient to produce an alliance, as both hubs also failed to ally with groups with which they shared ideologies, including some of their closest ideological brethren.

Each terrorist group defines its identity parameters for alliances, including the degree of ideological compatibility necessary to meet the identity threshold. Ideologies do not come neatly pre-packaged to fit all circumstances. Instead, groups act as the interpreter and filter of their ideologies and adapt them to their conditions.[85] The resulting identity affinity parameters depend on groups’ ideological disposition, their ideological flexibility or rigidity, and the overall ideological landscape.

Both alliance hubs defined their identity parameters broadly enough to include numerous potential partners—a perk of their adherence to an ideology with resonance in their environment—but narrowly enough to maintain a cohesive in-group identity among its allies. Al-Qaida defined ideological affinity as fellow Sunni jihadist groups.[86] Thus, its affinity criteria expanded beyond its narrower Salafist sect to include Deobandi groups, but excluded non-Sunni Muslim groups, such as Shia, Sufis or Barelvi organizations or Sunni entities that eschewed violence in favor of political participation. For example, al-Qaida’s cooperation with Hezbollah early in its organizational life proved short-lived in part because it

strained its identity affinity parameters.[87] Some contend that Marxist actors struggle to form alliances.[88] Yet the PFLP—a group admittedly more “tinged with red” than doctrinaire in its adherence to Marxism—defined its identity parameters expansively to include most fellow leftist groups and successfully forged numerous allies.[89] It also had an ethno-nationalist streak that provided a basis for affinity with other groups seeking “self-determination,” though its leftist affinity proved far stronger.[90]

Al-Qaida and the PFLP also propagated expansive enemy narratives. All terrorist groups construct narratives that identify their enemies and the victims. Groups’ enemy and victim narratives explain why the enemy is the enemy and the plight of the victims they purport to represent. A terrorist group can describe its enemy in different terms at various times in order for its narrative to remain relevant with the perceived disposition of its constituencies.[91] Significant overlap in groups’ narratives creates a sense of identity affinity between groups. When a common enemy/victim construction exists, a corresponding sense of “them” as opposed to “us” can also be present. This can complement ideological affinity or operate alone. In the hub case studies, narrative affinity buttressed ideological affinity. Al-Qaida’s opposition to the United States, Israel, their allies, as well as so-called “apostate” regimes provided numerous avenues for narrative affinity with fellow Sunni jihadist groups. Likewise, the PFLP held the “imperial system” responsible for Israel’s perpetuation and the Palestinians’ plight, thus its narrative included opposition to any states considered part of the United States-led imperialist bloc.[92] The international orientation of their narratives added to a sense of identity affinity with many of their ideological brethren. Thus, the materiel interests derived from having a common enemy do not stimulate hubs; instead, hubs have expansive enemy or victimization narratives that overlap with others’ narrative and thereby make them acceptable partners to them.

Lastly, identity affinity serves as a cue that it is safe to attempt to build trust. In intra-conflict relations, identity affinity narratives have limited staying power and groups often have histories of interactions that make trust untenable. However, in the international environments where information is more limited, identity affinity signals trustworthiness. Alliances do not work without trust, and yet it is exceptionally difficult for terrorist groups to develop it. Identity affinity acts as an early indicator to prospective partners operating in the international realm that it is safe to try to build trust, especially when personal ties have not yet formed or reputations are not well established. Trust is essential for alliances to form and sustain; alliance hubs must be seen as trustworthy by their partners and vice versa. Their identity characteristics help to cultivate trust. Identity affinity cannot substitute for trust, yet without it, prospective allies are less apt to seize opportunities to build trust.

Organizational Needs

Identity affinity helps to explain alliance hubs’ appeal; it does not explain why hubs become alliance magnets. While pursuing political aims, terrorist groups, like other organizations, seek their own survival and organizational well-being, which they see as integral to achieving their goals. To survive and thrive, they must possess the organizational knowledge, skills, and assets appropriate in their operating environment. When organizational learning needs and adaptation requirements arise that cannot be addressed through self reform, groups’ alliance searches will lead them to alliance hubs, in particular hubs that meet their identity affinity parameters. In short, alliance hubs emerge as desirable partners because they are both well positioned and willing to fill other groups’ organizational learning and adaptation needs.

Terrorist groups negotiate a constant organizational tension: a bias towards action and a need to secure their survival.[93] When violence becomes necessary for internal satisfaction, a group’s activities can become less connected to their political aims and more about affirming the organization’s viability to satisfy existing

members and draw in new ones.[94] Essentially, the means by which the group seeks to achieve political change, i.e. terrorism, and the perpetuation of the group become ends onto themselves, irrespective of their actual efficacy in achieving broader strategic aims.[95] As a result, over time, the need to preserve the group gradually determines many decisions.[96] This helps to explain why some groups persist even after many of their goals have ostensibly been accomplished or when their demands are no longer relevant to the environment.[97]

The perpetuation of the group depends in part on the adequacy of its knowledge base. Terrorist groups' knowledge base is the product of their organizational learning and adaptation processes. Organizational learning refers to groups' acquisition of new knowledge and skills to apply to future actions and decisions. [98] Relatedly, organizational adaptation involves groups adjusting their existing knowledge, understandings, and processes to changed circumstances.[99] This knowledge base includes everything from their philosophical understanding of the problems that gave rise to their existence to the tactical requirements for day-to-day operations.[100]

Terrorist groups must continually question, verify, and re-define how their knowledge base interacts with their environments. Organizations misaligned with their environments experience instability, decline, and even death.[101] Conversely, groups appropriately aligned with their environment function more competitively, effectively, and innovatively.[102] Therefore, terrorist organizations must constantly learn, anticipate, and adapt in order to endure and prosper. Discrepancies between a group's knowledge, skills or resource base and its environment generate organizational learning and adaptation needs.

When organizational learning or adaptation needs become acute or significant, groups have a choice whether to: 1) continue without addressing the shortfall; 2) undertake self-reform; or 3) seek an alliance. The first option will lead to decline, potentially even an organization's demise, if the deficiencies become substantial enough. Most groups should prefer self-reform, given the risks involved in an alliance, but this may not be possible or successful, depending on the need, their existing knowledge base, and the environment. If a group both recognizes and chooses to address the need, but remains unable or unwilling to undertake self-reform, it may look for an ally. Therefore, groups seek alliances with hubs when hubs can provide access to the knowledge, resources or assets others need to remain competitive in the prevailing and the anticipated conditions.[103] In other words, hubs acquire their position by addressing other groups' organizational learning needs and adaptation requirements.

Indeed, al-Qaida and the PFLP both possessed extensive resources and knowledge bases that they used to address other groups' organizational learning and adaptation needs. In the PFLP case, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that the PFLP's alliance hub activities were concentrated in its international terrorist wing, the PFLP-SOG. For much of al-Qaida's tenure and all of the PFLP-SOG's time as a hub, they offered valuable assets to other terrorist groups, including training, safe haven, logistical assistance, and operational guidance, not to mention money and materiel. How did they acquire this ability? Part of it stemmed from the freedom afforded by their permissive state sponsors. These sponsors did not act as third-party arbiters or enforcers, but they offered both hubs sanctuary as well as extensive latitude within that haven, which was critical because al-Qaida and the PFLP-SOG both operated in exile. The PFLP-SOG ran training facilities from its haven in South Yemen and to a lesser extent in Lebanon, as did al-Qaida in its sanctuaries in Sudan and Afghanistan. Thus, in the wake of losses, such as when the Red Army in Japan sought training and revolutionary experience and the RAF needed training in hostage-taking operations, they sought an alliance with the PFLP-SOG.[104] Both hubs also extended their safe haven to allied groups when their partners needed breathing room. In addition, both groups enjoyed substantial treasuries, al-Qaida's derived in large part from Usama bin Laden's wealth and the PFLP-SOG's from its

blackmail, hijacking and hostage-taking operations.[105] They each had transnational reach with supporters in numerous countries, which they used to help partners with facilitation or logistics needs. Both hubs possessed operational sophistication and thus could provide guidance to partners on how to conduct attacks. Overall, both hubs could fulfill an array of tangible organizational learning and adaptation needs for other groups.

In addition, allying with the PFLP-SOG and al-Qaida also conferred cachet upon their partners, an intangible asset coveted by groups struggling to maintain relevance or support. As part of the Palestinian cause—revered in the late 1960s and 1970s as a premier revolutionary liberation struggle—working with the PFLP-SOG bestowed prestige on partners.[106] Al-Qaida's transnational agenda offered fellow Sunni terrorist groups with declining resonance another cause to pursue in order to survive, a particularly valuable asset in the late 1990s following the defeat of many nationalist jihadist groups.[107] This intangible benefit expanded the pool of groups that could fulfill their organizational needs through allying with these hubs.

The two hubs' operational capability also improved their alliance appeal. The PFLP-SOG's high profile and innovative hijacking attacks, which ushered in the international era of terrorism, advertised a sophisticated operational capability that attracted allies.[108] Shortly after al-Qaida's name became synonymous with the largest terrorist attack in history, it lost many of the assets that made it an alliance hub, such as training facilities and haven. Thus, it no longer attracted partners that sought to fulfill those needs. Instead, groups seeking to associate with al-Qaida's image, cause, and capability, such as the GSPC, gravitated to al-Qaida and adopted its moniker.

But why would groups use their assets to fulfill other groups' needs? Hubs expend resources that they could use internally. Even sharing intangible assets imposes costs on hubs and can damage their reputations. [109] The two hubs shared an international orientation to their ideologies, narratives, and opposition to the international order, albeit based in different ideologies. More importantly, their alliance posture largely derived from perpetual organizational needs that stemmed from that disposition. Al-Qaida's motives evolved over time. Al-Qaida's well-known organizational desire to be the vanguard of an international Sunni jihadist movement in part motivated its early alliance receptivity, as it used alliances to bring groups under its rubric and guide their activities. The gap between its resources, its political and organizational goals, and its environment created a perpetual organizational deficiency that motivated its hub activities.[110] In the changed environment post-9/11, al-Qaida used alliances as a way to signal its continued viability in the face of constant losses and, in a reversal of fortunes, also needed allies to find haven and protection.

For the PFLP-SOG, allies played an integral role in the small, covert unit's ability to execute transnational attacks, its sole mission. Unable to strike in Israel, the group viewed international attacks as the only way to punish those it viewed as responsible for the Palestinians' plight. As it grew more difficult for its Arab operatives to conduct operations, allied operatives helped the hub evade enhanced security measures.[111] In addition, its allies' visible role in its attacks signaled that the Palestinian cause had international support that extended beyond the Arab world and garnered extensive media attention.[112] In the wake of the French withdrawal from Algeria, Palestinian militant groups became convinced that such international attention was essential to victory.[113] Moreover, the PFLP-SOG's motive was not selfless; it charged trainees to come to its camps and when it assisted with operational plans involving hostages and demands, it required a cut of the ransom money.[114] In other words, allies fulfilled the perpetual organizational needs of a small unit executing a transnational campaign from exile.

In sum, hubs acquire their positions by possessing knowledge, skills, and assets in demand to address others' organizational needs in the prevailing conditions and a willingness to share these with those groups that

met its ideological affinity criteria because of their own perpetual organizational needs. When groups seek an ally to fulfill their organizational needs, this search tends to lead to hubs with shared identity traits. Over time, hubs become magnets for partners with shared identity qualities when organizational needs arise. Hubs choose to adopt this position because they possess ongoing organizational needs that require alliances as well and adhere to ideologies or narrative that prescribe or at least support working with their identity brethren.

Follow On Research and Implications

On July 10 2014, a Pakistani terrorist group calling itself Tehreek-e-Khilafat declared fidelity to ISIS's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.[115] The gesture by the shadowy and relatively unknown Pakistani group raises the question: will ISIS emerge as an alliance hub in its own right, particularly as al-Qaida's alliance hub position weakens? Al-Qaida's remaining asset, its name, has continued to lose its cachet, and even al-Qaida leaders have contemplated a name change.[116] In the absence of an international alliance hub, alliances within the Sunni jihadist movement may devolve into alliances linked through regional alliance hubs. Groups like the GSPC/AQIM have the ability and willingness to provide mobile training and haven at that level, as it has reportedly done for Boko Haram and other local jihadist elements.[117] Or another international alliance hub may emerge, such as ISIS, if it is willing and acquires sufficient operating space or status to address other groups' organizational needs.

Subsequent research supports these findings on alliance hubs. Two brief examples help to illustrate. First, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LT)—a group with sufficient organizational capability to become an alliance hub—has opted not to adopt this role because it lacks the requisite organizational needs that motivated the PFLP-SOG and al-Qaida's willingness. The Pakistani Sunni terrorist group operates numerous training facilities from its extensive haven in Pakistan, where it enjoys the long-standing tutelage of the Pakistani Army. While it has trained foreigners in its camps and has a smattering of allies, it has not adopted an alliance hub position because its organizational knowledge base remains well aligned with its environment; thus, it lacks ongoing organizational needs for allies to address. It primarily conducts operations in India and Afghanistan, though it has sought plausible deniability to these attacks in recent years.[118] For example, one of its allies, Indian Mujahidin, fills an important organizational adaptation need: access to India for operations and a veneer or deniability.[119] So it does not eschew alliances altogether, but its organizational needs remain insufficient for it to invest its resources in becoming a hub. In other words, LT has the capability, but not the desire to become a hub. Should this change, LT may have the potential to function as a regional or potentially even international alliance hub.

Second, the West German leftist group, the RAF endeavored to become an alliance hub in the 1980s. It appealed to numerous fellow European leftist groups, including the French Direct Action (AD), the Belgium Communist Combatant Cells (CCC), and the Italian Red Brigades, in an effort to become a regional hub. The RAF's efforts produced brief alliances with these groups, first AD and CCC and later, the Red Brigades. But all proved unstable and short-lived.[120] Soon thereafter, its "Euro-terrorist" coalition collapsed. The RAF's alliance hub efforts relied on ideological affinity to court partners, but its prospective allies faced periods of weakness and declining relevancy. They needed an alliance hub that could help them adapt because in the changing environment, leftist groups were quickly becoming "hopeless anachronisms." [121] But the RAF did not possess the requisite assets that could realign these groups with the changing environment. In other words, the RAF had the desire; however, it lacked the resources to fulfill the pressing organizational needs of its partners. As a result, its alliance hub effort soon faded out.

Although international terrorist alliances pose a clear threat, to date no country has developed or executed

a clear and effective policy to disrupt them. While no silver bullet will eradicate alliance hubs, this research highlights the reality that terrorist groups seek them as partners because of organizational weakness, often when they cannot undertake self-reform. Hubs increase the threat because they help fellow terrorist groups to fill organizational needs that, left unaddressed, would cause their decline and possibly even demise.

Therefore, counterterrorism policies should focus on degrading the assets that attract groups and disrupting their service provision capacity. Al-Qaida and the PFLP-SOG depended on unfettered safe havens to offer their partners resources like training, consultation, and sanctuary as well as to provide a venue to build trust. Targeting safe havens in particular will help prevent the emergence of alliance hubs and reduce the efficacy of existing ones. The hubs' quasi-state characteristics, including their havens, depended on supportive governments, and this offers yet another reason to sanction and punish state sponsors, particularly those that support alliance hubs. Even after al-Qaida lost its state sponsors and sanctuaries, the foundation Sudan and Afghanistan provided helped al-Qaida to sustain its position for years. In addition, both al-Qaida and the PFLP-SOG benefitted from reputations as operationally sophisticated organizations, which increased their appeal as partners. To counter this, governments should emphasize hubs' operational failures and mistakes, especially when they contribute to their partners' shortcomings and missteps. Their hub positions also depended on their robust treasuries, so measures to degrade their finances will help erode their ability to assist other groups. More specifically, disrupting financial transactions when hubs have committed to fulfilling partners organizational needs at critical junctures will harm relationships and damage hubs' reputations overall.

Counterterrorism efforts should also target figures within alliance hubs who manage, facilitate, and encourage alliances. In particular, leadership decapitation may damage alliance hubs' position and functioning. While they had vastly different leadership styles and skills, from an early point, Haddad and bin Laden saw alliances as a way to address their organizations' needs, were inclined to use their resources to assist other groups, and were involved in all aspects of their groups' alliances. They embedded alliances into their organizations' problem-solving processes and cultures from the outset. In the PFLP-SOG case, the loss of Haddad spelled the end of the group's time as an alliance hub. While bin Laden's death did not have as decisive of an impact on al-Qaida's ability to act as an alliance hub, it further degraded al-Qaida's weakened alliance position. Moreover, replacement leaders may not be as effective or as receptive to alliances as their predecessors—this has been the case with Ayman al-Zawahiri. In addition to the central role that leaders played in hubs' development and sustainment, both groups depended on key figures to act as liaisons for partner groups. Targeting those individuals disrupts alliance interactions and can erode trust and affinity between hubs and their partners.

Admittedly, many of these recommendations are already part of U.S. counterterrorism strategy. Therefore, more effective alliance disruption efforts do not necessarily require new initiatives. Rather they require more focused and enhanced measures against hubs as well as well-timed interventions. Keeping in mind the dynamic nature of an alliance, governments can corrode alliances by putting pressure on the partnering groups' identity affinity and hubs' appeal. Coordinated and consistent messaging on real or potential points of identity fissures may pressure alliance cohesion and force hubs to limit their parameters in order to maintain a cohesive in-group identity within the alliance cluster. Pointing to relationships, cooperation or actions inconsistent with hubs' professed identity will help erode their appeal. When governments label groups as compatible or emphasize traits that other groups share with hubs, they inadvertently help foster a sense of affinity and reinforce hubs' positions. Instead, governments should emphasize ideological differences, conflicts in groups' narratives, and cultural differences that differentiate a hub from its partners. In particular, highlighting actions that constitute violations of their shared identities can help weaken alliances.

In addition, government interventions that foster the impression that cooperation failed due to the hub's inability or unwillingness to fulfill other groups' needs will damage the hub's desirability and stunt individual relationships. Alliance hubs' relationships tend to be particularly vulnerable during the early, trust-building phase. Therefore, early interventions that cause cooperation failures will signal to the prospective allies that the hub cannot fulfill needs. Propaganda efforts that cast doubt on a hub's ability to address organizational needs—such as training that did not prepare a partner for an operation or contributed to an operational failure—will also diminish their appeal.

In general, counterterrorism efforts to prevent and disrupt alliances should capitalize on the obstacles groups already face when they attempt to ally. Governments can focus on undertaking measures that both increase the costs of alliances and stoke the concerns that hinder them. Rather than emphasizing groups' commonalities, messaging in forums where the groups acquire information should highlight allying groups' differences and the risks that alliances pose. For example, given terrorist organizations' difficulties forging credible commitments, governments should highlight instances when hubs fail to honor promises or attempt to use cooperation opportunistically. In addition, because alliances sometimes sow internal divisions, governments can take advantage of this by emphasizing the ways alliances cause partnering groups to deviate from their primary goals and lose their autonomy. Opportunities also exist to damage ties by pointing out when groups' actions alienate their partners' constituents. Counterterrorism policies that treat alliances as static or prematurely label a relationship as an alliance inadvertently reduce the costs incurred by the partnering groups, as concerns about an increase in counterterrorism pressure can help deter alliances. Conversely, once an alliance occurs, affected governments should work together to increase the pressure on both groups, including through measures such as sanctions. More than any other obstacle, stoking fears about infiltration and betrayal has the potential to damage alliance hubs' appeal and disrupt specific alliances. In other words, each of the obstacles that alliances face offer exploitation opportunities for governments.

These findings are significant because the conventional (albeit underdeveloped) wisdom that ideology and enemies precipitate terrorist alliances suggests that government intervention will be ineffective. Governments cannot often change terrorist groups' ideology or enemies. Moreover, the notion that shared threats cause alliance hubs infers that governments' cooperation against terrorist groups will cause them to unite in response, creating a disincentive to build counterterrorism coalitions. However, understanding that an organization's willingness and ability to fulfill others' needs makes them an attractive partner offers unexplored avenues to prevent and disrupt these dangerous relationships. It also can help governments to identify when alliances are more apt to occur, specifically when groups experience and identify acute or significant organizational needs that they cannot address on their own. Therefore, the United States can devise a better strategy to prevent hubs' emergence and diminish their effectiveness when they do occur. This strategy should focus on the role of organizational needs and identity in alliance behavior as well as exploiting the obstacles that hinder all alliance efforts.

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- [30] See for example: Bond, Kanisha. "Power, Identity, Credibility & Cooperation: Examining the Development of Cooperative Arrangement among Violent Non-State Actors." Diss. University of Maryland, 2010; Bapat and Bond. "Alliances Between Militant Groups," 793-824; Asal and Rethmeyer. "The Nature of the Beast," 437-449.
- [31] Russett, Bruce. "Components of an Operational Theory of International Alliance Formation," 286.
- [32] Bapat and Bond. "Alliances Between Militant Groups," 811.
- [33] Dugan, Laura. 2012. "The Making of the Global Terrorism Database and Its Applicability to Studying the Life Cycles of Terrorist Organisations," in D. Gadd, S. Karstedt, and S. Farrall (Eds.) *Sage Handbook of Criminological Research Methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- [34] Bapat and Bond. "Alliances Between Militant Groups," 821.
- [35] Bapat and Bond. "Alliances Between Militant Groups," 800.
- [36] Examples of this include the internal dissension within Egyptian Islamic Jihad and Egyptian Islamic Group over whether to ally with al-Qaida. Al-Qaida's Southeast Asian ally, Jemaah Islamiyah, was also intent on protecting its autonomy. Two JI members analogized JI's dynamic with al-Qaida, highlighting JI's independence. One likened it to: "that of an NGO with a funding agency. The NGO exists as a completely independent organisation, but submits proposals to the donor and gets a grant when the proposal is accepted. The donor only funds projects that are in line with its own programs. In this case, al-Qaeda may help fund specific JI programs but it neither directs nor controls it." (International Crisis Group. *Indonesia Backgrounder: How the Jemaah Islamiyah Terrorist Network Operates*, Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2002, 30.
- Another JI member involved in liaising between the two groups invoked a similar comparison, describing JI as "a business affiliate, we can ask them (i.e., al-Qaida) for an opinion but they have no authority over us. We are free. We have our own funds, our own men. We are independent, like Australia and the U.S. But when it comes to an operation we can join together" (Ressler, Don, and Vahid Brown. *The Haqqani Nexus and the Evolution of al-Qa'ida*. West Point: Combating Terrorism Center, 2011.13 Jan. 2013).
- [37] "Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000005." (West Point: Combating Terrorism Center, 6 Aug. 2010), 1-2.

- [38] A good example of this was the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Irish Republican Army's denunciation of the Italian Red Brigades' assassination of Aldo Moro at a time when they sought greater international legitimacy. (Alexander and Pluchinsky. *European Terrorism Today and Tomorrow*. 165-166).
- [39] Cragin et al. *Sharing the Dragon's Teeth*, 3.
- [40] Cragin et al. *Sharing the Dragon's Teeth*, 6.
- [41] Aust, Stephen. Personal Interview. Sep. 2007.
- [42] Asal et al. "Terrorist Networks Over Time," 114.
- [43] Parkhe, Arvind. "Executive Briefing: Current Issues in International Alliances." *Business Horizons* 43.5 (1998), 3.
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- [45] Hoffman. *Inside Terrorism*, 63-80; and Sterling, Claire. *The Terror Network* (Berkeley: Berkeley Press, 1985), 13.
- [46] Andrew, Christopher and Vasili Mitrokhin. *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 247-9.
- [47] Oots. *A Political Organization Approach*. 41; Bapat and Bond. "Alliances Between Militant Groups," 114.
- [48] Burke, Jason. *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 16.
- [49] Gerring, John. *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2007), 105.
- [50] See: Moghadam, Assaf and Brian Fishman, (Eds.) *Self Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions Within al-Qa'ida's and its Periphery*. (West Point: Combating Terrorism Center, 2010); Gerges, Fawaz. *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (New York: Cambridge UP), 2005; Brown, Vahid. *Cracks in the Foundation Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*. (Combating Terrorism Center at West Point); Schanzer, Jonathan. *Al-Qaeda's Armies: Middle East Affiliate Groups & The Next Generation of Terror*. (New York: Specialist Press International, 2004).
- [51] George, Alexander, and Andrew Bennett. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 31.
- [52] Asal et al. "Terrorist Networks Over Time." 31; Oots. *A Political Organization Approach*, 34.
- [53] George and Bennett. *Case Studies*, 12.
- [54] Some argue that al-Qaida is more than an organization; rather, it is a movement, a source of inspiration or a term that refers to terrorists who adhere to a transnational Sunni jihadist ideology. While these arguments have merit, for many years, al-Qaida has also been an organization with a defined chain of command, identified leaders, and members who swore fealty (Bergen, Peter. *The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of al-Qaeda's Leader*. New York: Free Press, 2006, 100-101). This entity, often called al-Qaida Central, engaged in partnerships with other militant groups and became an alliance hub. This article thus looks selectively at al-Qaida Central. This refers to the organizational structure subordinated to Usama bin Laden and after his death, to Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, primarily based in Afghanistan and Pakistan since 1996, and includes members who adhered to their instructions and usually swore an oath of loyalty. Bin Laden himself even acknowledged the validity of the idea of an "al-Qaida Central" in a 2010 letter to one of his subordinates. He wrote that "[t]his term was coined in the media to distinguish between al-Qa'ida in Afghanistan and Pakistan and al-Qa'ida in the other territories. In my opinion, there is no problem with using this term in principle in order to clarify the intended meaning" ("Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-00000019;" West Point: Combating Terrorism Center). Al-Qaida Central made the decisions and implemented al-Qaida's alliances, and thus is the organizational unit relevant to this article.
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- [56] Cragin et al. *Sharing the Dragon's Teeth*, 7.
- [57] Walt. *The Origins of Alliances*, 24.
- [58] Karmon, Ely. *Coalitions Between Terrorist Organizations: Revolutionaries, Nationalists, and Islamists* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 2005), 279-285.
- [59] Asal et al. "Terrorist Networks Over Time." 31; Oots. *A Political Organization Approach*, 33.
- [60] For example: Open Source Center. "Fatwa Urging Jihad Against Americans." Translation of a Usama bin Laden Speech, Declassified Information Report, *Digital National Security Archive*, Feb. 1998.
- [61] Quoted in: Kohlmann. "Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria.

- [62] Karmon. *Coalitions Between Terrorist Organizations*, 385.
- [63] Moghadam and Fishman. *Self-Inflicted Wounds*; Gerges. *The Far Enemy*, 150; Brown. *Cracks in the Foundation*.
- [64] Gerges. *The Far Enemy*, 33.
- [65] Kohlmann. "Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria; Migdalovitz. *Algeria in Crisis: Situation Update*. 5; United States. Cong. Senate. *The Battle Looms: Islam and Politics in the Middle East*. Report (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1993), 1-2; "Shades of Extremism." *The Economist* 13 Aug. 1994: 16. The Economist Historical Archive. Web.
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- [70] Asal et al. "Terrorist Networks Over Time," 31; Oots. *A Political Organization Approach*, 32.
- [71] Quoted in: "An Interview with Abdelmalek Droukdal."
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