

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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For over a decade, al-Qaeda (AQ) and al-Qaeda inspired terrorism has posed the most significant threat to U.S. national security. This manifested itself most devastatingly on September 11, 2001. Since then, a number of AQ's key leaders have been either killed or captured. However, the group is adaptable, and its threat has diversified. AQ and its various franchises still aspire to attack U.S. interests and, significantly, are still able to recruit U.S. citizens to its cause.

*Al-Qaeda in the United States* shows how the terrorist threat within the U.S. has developed, by profiling all AQ or AQ-inspired terrorists who were convicted in U.S. courts (federal and military) or who participated in suicide attacks against the U.S. homeland between 1997 and 2011.

### STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

*Al-Qaeda in the United States* profiles 171 individuals who were convicted for al-Qaeda related offenses (AQROs) or committed suicide attacks between 1997 and 2011. It provides statistical analysis on their background (such as age, nationality, occupation, education and whether they were a religious convert); data relating to types of offenses, type of charge and their subsequent sentence; outlines individual connections to other known terrorists or designated terrorist organizations; and studies whether these individuals had received terrorist training or had combat experience.

One individual was convicted of offenses on two separate occasions; another individual was convicted on three separate occasions. In each of these cases, the convictions have been counted separately. As a result, there was a combined total of 174 convictions and attacks.

### Year on year threat

*The date of charge (or attack), rather than date of conviction has been used as a standard measure of the year of offense. The year with the highest number of AQROs was 2009.*

- There was a clear rise in AQROs in 2001 – largely caused by the attacks of September 11. This number then declined until a slight rise in 2005. There was a significant drop in AQROs in 2008 (with AQRO levels dropping to the pre-9/11 period), followed by a spike in 2009 – the year when the highest number of AQROs (13% of the total) occurred.

### Age and gender

*AQROs are primarily – though not exclusively – committed by young men.*

- The overwhelming majority (95%) of terrorist offenses were committed by men.
- Eight women have been convicted. Two of these were convicted for their roles in supporting their partners commit AQROs. The remaining six women were convicted of charges that included ; Attempted Identity Theft; Attempted Murder; Armed Assault; Conspiracy to Kill; Discharge of a Firearm; Conspiring to Provide and Providing Material Support to Terrorists or a Terrorist Organization (specifically al-Shabaab); and False Statements.
- Over half (57%) of AQROs were committed by those aged under 30. One third of AQROs were committed by those aged 20 to 24.
- The mean average was 29.6 years, and the modal age was 24.
- The age at time of charge ranged from 19 to 63.

### Nationality, origin and place of residence

*AQRO analysis shows that the majority of the AQ and AQ-inspired threat to the U.S. homeland comes from 'home-grown' terrorism, with U.S. citizens, including U.S. born citizens, featuring prominently among AQRO perpetrators.*

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## *Nationality*

- Over half (54%) of AQROs were committed by U.S. citizens. The second most common nationality of AQRO perpetrators was Saudi Arabian (9%); with Pakistanis the third most common (6%).
- Over a third (36%) of the total number of individuals who committed an AQRO were born in the U.S.
- In total, individuals of twenty eight different nationalities committed AQROs.
- As a proportion of their overall involvement, U.S. citizens committed more AQROs than foreign nationals in eight of the fifteen years studied. These were: 1999, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009 and 2010.

## *Origin*

- Over a third (36%) of individuals who committed AQROs had some kind of American ancestry, either by ethnicity of birth. The most frequent ancestry category was African American (10% of AQROs) followed by American white Caucasians (8%).
- Individuals of Western Asian ancestry comprise a quarter (25%) of those who committed AQROs. Those of Saudi Arabian ancestry account for 11% of this total.

## *Place of residence*

- 82% of AQROs were committed by individuals residing in the U.S. (including three individuals already incarcerated at time of charge) at the time of charge or attack. The individuals resided in 26 different states, spread among all four regions in the U.S.
- Among those residing in the U.S., the state of New York featured most prominently, with 14% of individuals living there. Outside of New York, the two most common states of residence were Florida (11%) and New Jersey (9%).
- The most common region of residence was the South, where over one third (36%) of AQROs perpetrators resided. The Northeast followed with 30%.
- The most common place of residence of AQROs committed by those born in the U.S. was New York (20%), followed by California and Virginia (9%).
- Two of the three most common states – Florida and New Jersey – were the place of residence for a significantly high amount of non-U.S. born individuals (18% and 14% respectively). Conversely, the most common state, New York, had a higher proportion of U.S. born AQRO perpetrators residing there than non-U.S. born individuals.

## **Education and employment**

*Those who committed AQROs were mainly well educated. A small majority were in employment or education at the time of charge or attack.*

- Over half (52%) of the individuals who committed an AQRO had attended some form of college.
- Nearly a quarter (23%) of AQRO perpetrators had been educated to between college graduate and doctorate level.
- 44% of AQRO perpetrators were in employment at the time of charge or attack. A further 13% were full time students. Therefore, 57% of AQRO perpetrators were in employment or education.
- Over a quarter (28%) of AQRO perpetrators were unemployed.
- 60% of U.S. citizens who committed AQROs had received a college education.
- Of U.S. born offenders, 49% were employed and 18% were students. Therefore, 67% of all U.S. born

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individuals were in employment or education.

## Religious converts

*While AQROs are mainly carried out by those raised as Muslim, a significant proportion of the AQ and AQ-inspired threat comes from religious converts.*

- Nearly a quarter (24%) of all AQROs were committed by converts to Islam.
- Where known, all were converts from Christianity.
- The most common (modal) age at time of charge amongst religious converts (32 years) was significantly higher than among non-converts and among all AQROs (both 24 years).
- 41% of U.S. citizens were religious converts.
- Over half (54%) of individuals born in the U.S. were religious converts.
- Converts were most likely to reside in the South (36%), and most commonly resided in Virginia at time of charge (12%).
- 83% of religious converts had some kind of American ancestry. 40% of religious converts had African American ancestry; and a quarter were of American white Caucasian ancestry.
- As a proportion of their overall involvement, religious converts committed more AQROs than non-converts in eight of the fifteen years studied. These were: 1998, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2010 and 2011.
- The years 2003, 2007 and 2010 saw the joint highest levels of AQROs committed by converts (17% in both years).

## Diversity of threat and type of activity

*The AQ and AQ-inspired terrorism threat to the U.S. can be placed into five distinct categories of offenders: Active Participants, Aspirants, Trained Aspirants, Facilitators and Ideologues.*

- The total of 174 AQROs vary in the type of offense, immediacy of the threat and intent of the perpetrator, and are divided into five distinct categories.
  - **Active Participants** – Individuals who committed or were imminently about to commit acts of terrorism – were responsible for 37% of AQROs.
  - **Aspirants** – Individuals who demonstrated an interest in terrorism but whose plans were not advanced enough to pose an imminent threat or whose role was limited – were responsible for 25% of AQROs.
  - **Facilitators** – Individuals involved in the preparation for acts of terrorism, either operationally; by fundraising; or by transferring documentation, material goods or finances – were responsible for 21% of AQROs.
  - **Trained Aspirants** – Individuals who demonstrated an interest in terrorism whose plans were not advanced enough to pose an imminent threat or whose role was limited, but who had received terrorist training at camps abroad – were responsible for 15% of AQROs.
  - **Ideologues** – Individuals involved in the preparation for acts of terrorism by incitement or by encouraging terrorist acts – were responsible for 2% of AQROs.
- Over two thirds of Active Participant AQROs (68%) were committed by those aged under 30. Furthermore, between 62% and 67% of Aspirant, Trained Aspirant and Ideologue AQROs were aged under 30. In contrast, only 25% of Facilitator AQROs were under 30.

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- Almost half (48%) of non-U.S. born individuals were Active Participants – over double the proportion of U.S. born Active Participants (21%).
- U.S. born individuals were much more likely to be Aspirants (43% of all U.S. born) than non-U.S. born (16%).
- When combining both trained and non-trained, 62% of all U.S. born AQROs are committed by some type of Aspirant – compared to only 28% of non-U.S. born citizens.
- A third (33%) of religious converts were Aspirants, and just under a third (31%) were Active Participants (31%).
- The numbers of Active Participants, Facilitators, Trained Aspirants and Aspirants charged rose sharply in 2009, before levelling off to numbers consistent with 2002 – 2007 in 2010.

### **Charges, sentences and undercover investigations**

*19 AQROs were committed by suicide attackers. Analysis of the remaining 155 separate AQRO convictions reveals a spread of severity of charges and length of sentence. Almost all convictions were gained in federal courts, with Material Support charges most commonly used.*

- The vast majority (97%) of the 155 AQROs resulting in successful convictions were prosecuted in federal courts. Just 3% of all convictions took place in a military court.
- 65% of defendants pleaded guilty.
- A total of 415 separate charges were successfully prosecuted between 1997 and 2011.
- In this report, charges have been split into ten separate categories. Offenses are categorised as follows: Material Support; Mass Casualty; Kill, Kidnap, Maim or Injure; Firearms; False Information; General Conspiracy; Aiding the Enemy; Financial; Facilitation; and Rhetoric.
- Material Support was the largest category, comprising nearly a quarter of the overall total (24%). The two most common individual charges from any category are in Material Support: Conspiracy to Provide Material Support to Terrorists (8% of the total charges) and Providing Material Support to Terrorists (6%).
- The second most common category was Mass Casualty, which contained nearly a quarter (22%) of all successful charges. The most common charge in this category was Conspiracy to Damage or Destroy Buildings, Property or Public Transport of the United States (4%).
- The most common sentence received for an AQRO, given 24 times, was between 10 – 14 years (16% of all sentences). The second most common sentence length was life imprisonment (14%). One individual was sentenced to death (a sentence that has, at time of writing, not been carried out). 18% of all AQRO convictions are still awaiting sentence.
- An undercover investigation – the state placing informants or undercover officers into an AQRO case – took place in over a quarter (29%) of AQROs.
- The majority of undercover investigations (64%) were against Aspirants, who make up 25% of all AQROs. Therefore, undercover investigations were disproportionately focused on Aspirants.
- Of the 44 Aspirant AQROs, nearly three quarters (73%), were the subject of an undercover investigation. This is over four times as high as the next most common offender role: Active Participant AQROs, 17% of which were the subject of an undercover investigation.
- Undercover investigations have tended to focus on slightly younger AQRO perpetrators. The mean average age of those subject to undercover investigations is 28.6 (compared to 30 for AQROs not involving an undercover investigation), and the median age is 26 (as opposed to 28).

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## Links to Designated Terrorist Organizations (DTOs)

*Those who committed AQROs were usually linked to a DTO, the most popular of which was AQ. The majority of those who were linked to a DTO were non-U.S. citizens, not religious converts and not the subject of an undercover investigation.*

- The majority of individuals (57%) were directly linked to a DTO.
- The most prevalent group was AQ, with 38% of individuals directly linked to either AQ or al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). 9% were linked to Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT); and 5% to al-Shabaab.
- 43% of those linked to a DTO were U.S. citizens, a lower proportion than U.S. citizens overall (54%).
- 70% of those with no known links to a DTO were U.S. citizens.
- Only 10% of those AQROs subject to undercover investigations were committed by individuals linked to a DTO.
- Two thirds of converts were not linked to a DTO.
- There were nine individual actors whose offenses were not reliant or connected to any kind of network, cell or DTO. Overall, individual actors comprised 4% of all AQRO perpetrators.

## Terrorist training

*Nearly half of AQRO perpetrators had attended training camps for terrorist purposes. Of those who did, Afghanistan was the most popular location.*

- 47% of individuals attended training camps for terrorist purposes.
- Of those who received terrorist training, 68% attended camps in Afghanistan; 29% in Pakistan and 5% in Somalia. Therefore, the overwhelming majority (97%) of trained individuals had trained in either Afghanistan, or Pakistan, or both.
- The most popular camp was al-Qaeda's al-Farouq, responsible for nearly a third of all incidences of training (30%). Al-Matar followed with 19%, and the third most common was Khalden (9%). All three camps were based in Afghanistan.
- A third of U.S. citizens had attended a training camp for terrorist purposes.
- Over a third (39%) of those who had received terrorist training were U.S. citizens.
- Of those AQROs subject to undercover investigations, 10% were committed by individuals who had received terrorist training. In comparison, of those AQROs not subject to an undercover investigation, 63% were committed by individuals who had received training.

## Combat experience

*A high percentage of AQRO perpetrators had no experience of combat in warzones. Of those who did, Afghanistan was the most popular location.*

- The majority (82%) of individuals who committed AQROs had no combat experience.
- Of the 30 individuals who had fought abroad, Afghanistan was the most common location, responsible for 63% of incidences of training. The next two most common countries were Bosnia and Somalia, with 10% each.
- All but one (97%) of those with combat experience had also received terrorist training.
- One third of individuals with combat experience were U.S. citizens.
- 87% of those who had combat experience were linked to a DTO.

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## Mass Casualty Operatives (MCOs)

*Mass casualty operatives refer to those individuals who were also part of a major plot. There have been ten major plots against the U.S. since 2000, involving 36 individuals. The MCOs were primarily terrorist trained, college educated individuals from Western Asia.*

- The majority of MCOs are Western Asian (56%), mainly from Saudi Arabia (44% of all MCOs). 17% of MCOs are American, the second most common nationality.
- 58% of MCOs were educated to college level or above.
- One third of MCOs were in employment or education at the time of charge or attack, a significantly lower proportion than among all AQRO perpetrators (57%).
- While 89% of MCOs had terrorist training (of which 78% occurred in Afghanistan), only 17% had known combat experience.
- Of those with combat experience, 83% of the incidences of combat experience occurred in Afghanistan. The remaining 17% took place in Bosnia.
- The vast majority (94%) of MCOs were linked to DTOs. Only two MCOs had no links to DTOs.
- 11% of MCOs were religious converts.

## Suicide attacks

*19 hijackers launched a series of four co-ordinated suicide attacks upon New York City and Washington, D.C., the only AQ or AQ-inspired suicide attacks that have occurred on the U.S. homeland. These attackers were primarily young, Saudi Arabian nationals with a college education and terrorist training*

- 11% of all AQROs were the suicide attacks of September 11, 2001.
- 95% of suicide attackers were Western Asian, with Saudi Arabians comprising 79% of this number.
- 58% of suicide attackers had been attended to college level or above.
- The mean average age of the suicide attackers (23.9) was significantly younger than that of those convicted in federal or military courts (30.3).
- All of the suicide attackers had received terrorist training, yet only one (5%) had known combat experience.

## SIGNIFICANT PRECEDENTS

*Al-Qaeda in the United States* details several significant precedents:

- In 1997, Jamal Ahmed al-Fadl became the first member of AQ to plead guilty in the U.S. to offenses relating to involvement with the group. Following his confession, al-Fadl subsequently became a witness for the state.
- In October 2000, Ali A. Mohamed became the first member of AQ to be successfully convicted as part of a trial in a U.S. federal court. Mohamed was a former member of the U.S. Army.
- In May 2001, Mohamed Rashed Daoud al-'Owhali, Mohamed Sadeek Odeh, Wadih el-Hage and Khalfan Khamis Mohammed became the first individuals convicted in a U.S. federal court for an act of terrorism perpetrated by AQ – namely the 1998 East African U.S. Embassy bombings. A convert to Islam from Christianity, el-Hage was the first American citizen to be convicted of an AQRO.
- In September 2001, 19 foreign nationals hijacked four planes and attacked targets in New York and Washington, D.C., killing 2,996 and becoming the only individuals to conduct a successful suicide operation

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on the U.S. homeland to date. Attempted follow-up AQ attacks against aviation led to convictions in U.S. courts for Richard Reid (October 2002) and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab (October 2011).

- In July 2002, John Walker Lindh became the first U.S. born citizen to be convicted of an AQRO. He had assisted the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001, and had previously trained at al-Farouq.
- In August 2002, Imran Mandhai became the first individual convicted of an AQRO following a Federal Bureau of Investigation undercover investigation.
- In March 2003, Sergeant Hasan Akbar became the first U.S. citizen convicted of an AQ-inspired murder when he killed two soldiers and injured fourteen others at a U.S. Army camp in Kuwait.
- In April 2003, Earnest James Ujaama became the first individual to be convicted of attempting to establish a terrorist training camp on U.S. soil.
- In September 2003, October Martinique Lewis became the first female to be convicted of an AQRO. Lewis laundered money to her ex-husband Jeffrey Battle, knowing that it would be used in his efforts to join the Taliban.
- In August 2003, Khwaja Mahmood Hasan became the first individual to be convicted for actions in support of the designated terrorist organization LeT.
- In April 2005, Zacarias Moussaoui became the only individual to have been convicted in connection with the September 11, 2001 attacks.
- In August 2007, José Padilla became the first individual previously designated as an enemy combatant by the U.S. Government to be convicted of an AQRO.
- In November 2007, Derrick Shareef became the first individual to be convicted of attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction within the U.S., relating to a plot to set off several grenades in a shopping mall in Rockford, Illinois.
- In February 2009, Wesam al-Delaema became the only individual to date convicted of conspiring to murder U.S. soldiers in Iraq.
- In February 2009, Kamal Said Hassan became the first individual who had fought and trained with the designated terrorist organization al-Shabaab in Somalia to be convicted of an AQRO.
- In November 2010, Ahmed Ghailani became the first former Guantánamo Bay detainee to be convicted in a U.S. civilian court. He was convicted for his role in the 1998 East African U.S. Embassy bombings.
- In February 2010, AQ facilitator Aafia Siddiqui became the only female to be convicted of attempted murder as part of an AQRO, after she attacked U.S. officers and employees in Afghanistan.
- In February 2011, Colleen LaRose became the first white Caucasian female to be convicted of an AQRO.
- In October 2011, Hawo Hassan became the oldest individual convicted of an AQRO, having been found guilty of offenses which included conspiring to provide material support to al-Shabaab. She was 63 at the time of charge, and 64 at the time of conviction.