Notes:
1. Below are informal notes taken by a JHU/APL staff member at the Seminar.

Introduction
Dr. Habeck noted that she has changed the title of her upcoming book from *Attacking America: How Jihadis Are Fighting Their 200-Year War With the U.S.* to *Attacking America: How al-Qa’ida Is Fighting Its War*. This was done because she had started rethinking what al-Qa’ida is doing and what its objectives are. There is a significant need to rethink these issues because it appears that attacking the US is no longer the core of al-Qa’ida plans.

Must start rethinking of al-Qa’ida with
- Identifying the differences between counterinsurgency (CI) and counterterrorism (CT)
- Identifying working definitions of insurgency and terrorism

Terrorism definition is generally agreed upon
- Smaller groups
- More security, greatly compartmentalized
- Don’t recruit much
- Result: limited capabilities so can only manage a few bombing or robbery operations

Counterterrorism (CT) involves:
- Preventing attacks or stopping them as they are happening
- Beating the groups by attrition as terrorists are killed off or scared away
  - Example: ETA got down to 3 people who then just gave up
- Focusing on enemy centric actions which would result in the likelihood of very few attacks

Insurgency groups are generally the opposite of terrorists:
- Large and want to get larger – 1,000s or more
- Recruitment is central – always working for “hearts and minds”
- Goal is to be large with the central idea of representing the people
- Want to hold territory and even produce a shadow government

Counterinsurgency (CI) must involve different behavior and goals than does counterterrorism
- COIN is population centric rather than enemy centric since that is the insurgents’ focus
- Will still need to kill off a few leaders to suppress an insurgency
Basic problems:
- Is al-Qa’ida a terrorist group or an insurgency?
- How does that affect policies to confront al-Qa’ida?
- How can you measure progress against al-Qa’ida?

Need to discuss four questions about al-Qa’ida:
- What is al-Qa’ida?
- What are its objectives?
- How well has it done in achieving its objectives?
- Are we pursuing the right policies to stop al-Qa’ida?

Two other important points to consider:
- Can we afford the right policy?
- How answering these questions about al-Qa’ida can help the US handle other problem groups

For a historical way to look at al-Qa’ida see the official US government positions
- In the 1990s and early 2000s al-Qa’ida considered a terrorist group with training camps
  - Training camps did not fit the standard model for terrorists
  - Focused on attacking the US
- After 9/11 saw al-Qa’ida as 3 parts
  - Core al-Qa’ida – basic short-hand idea of al-Qa’ida which was a terrorist group
  - Affiliates – groups that al-Qa’ida talked or persuaded into doing operations
  - Inspired individuals – people who had been radicalized by what al-Qa’ida taught
- Affiliates and individuals may have greater or lesser ties to the core
  - Al-Qa’ida could then be seen to be almost like a movement – closer to an insurgency

New way to look at the problem: How does al-Qa’ida define itself?
- 1990s – the Vanguard of Global Jihad
- Sept 2000 – bin Laden gave talks that were recorded, transcribed and distributed
  - Said: We should regard ourselves as a government in exile for Muslims
- Today can still find other statements about their position and objectives
  - High command still has some people sworn to it
  - Groups and individuals joined because of Afghanistan
  - Opened “branches” in Islamic countries – like a tree or military branches
  - Whole concept is very different from how the US government sees al-Qa’ida
- Looks more like an organization than a movement (see organization chart below)
  - Information comes from documents captured in the 1990s and early on in Afghanistan
  - Other sections not listed on the chart focus on WMD (or nuclear) or technology
  - Special attention given to 3 sections which are well described
    - Training is always listed first – doesn’t fit in definition of a terrorist group
    - Combat section actually has the objective of training troops in brigades
      - Only one known numbered brigade – 55th
    - Special Operations section is designed to carry out major operations
      - 90% of investments go to Training and Combat; only about 10% for Special Operations
      - In the 1990s and today saw selves as a terrorist group with only 10% of its efforts aimed attacking the US and allies
What are al-Qa’ida’s objectives?

- Official US position states that their main goal is attacking the US and its allies
  - Recognizes that there are others
  - White House Counterterrorism Advisor John Brennan has identified:
    - Delusional fantasy of creating a global caliphate
    - Three others – none had to do with attacking the US
  - Caliphate concept doesn’t fit with idea of terrorists who want to attack the US
- Al-Qa’ida outlined its objectives in various messages from its leaders – very consistent
  - Remove non-Muslim occupiers and apostate regimes from “our” countries
  - Imposing their own version of shari’a law on those countries
  - Establishing a caliphate
  - Making God’s word the highest

Aspirations

- **Creating a caliphate** is an aspirational goal
  - Setting up an Islamic state does not require having a caliphate
  - Islamic states may be sub-objectives to the eventual establishing of a caliphate
- **Making God’s word the highest** is even more aspirational
  - Have said that it could take 200 years
  - Idea is that everyone in the world would follow Islamic laws

- Attacking the US is not mentioned
  - US thinking is confusing ends and means
Notes on Ends and Means

1. Global jihad very important but attacking the US is just one means to the desired End
2. Implementing shari’a means everything from guys with sticks enforcing laws to coercive courts
3. A lot of thinking on how to establish caliphates comes from Mao and guerilla warfare concepts
4. Fuzziest of the Ends – because it is so far out (200 years), so no need to identify details

Very important to recognize the differences between Ends and Means
- If don’t understand, then won’t be able to measure how well al-Qa’ida is doing
- Could also cause the policies used against al-Qa’ida to be flawed if don’t recognize their center of gravity
  - Some policies may be better against insurgencies than terrorist groups

Measuring al-Qa’ida’s Success on Its Identified Ends

On End #1: Perhaps could see al-Qa’ida as a failed insurgency that now only acts as a terrorist group
- Attacking America – appears not to be able to do so (weak, incompetent)
  - If only a means, looks like the US has stopped them only from killing Americans
  - If consider the End as expelling occupiers and apostates, different calculation
    - US is out of Saudi Arabia and pulling out of Iran and Afghanistan
    - Al-Qa’ida could crow about their successes
- Al-Qa’ida sees US leaving Iran and Afghanistan as a success while the US believes the opposite
- Arab Spring got rid of many of the apostates that al-Qa’ida wanted to see go
  - Al-Qa’ida didn’t start the Arab Spring but has certainly been applauding it and considers this a political success
    - Really cheating to say so since those who overthrew the governments did not do so to support al-Qa’ida’s objectives
• Al-Qa’ida cheats on other claimed “successes” such as saying that they expelled the Ethiopians – even use it in their propaganda

On End #2: US could probably agree with al-Qa’ida about their ends versus means about shari’a
• Al-Qa’ida has tried to impose shari’a law several places but has failed
  o Anbar Province: established shari’a law but eventually lost people’s support
    ▪ Harshness made people willing to support US efforts in the region
  o Somalia: forbidding watching soccer and chewing khat forced the people to reject it
• Basically, can impose hard rules for a period of time but people eventually fight back
• Persist despite failures because not about winning hearts and minds; can’t compromise on it

On End #3: al-Qa’ida has not done that well on its caliphate objective
• Map below comes from years of observing what al-Qa’ida has said about caliphates
• In some cases caliphates were actually named and proclaimed
• Other cases show approximations of where al-Qa’ida has indicated they were planning to establish them

• Proclaimed a caliphate in Iraq – Caliphate of the Two Rivers, Islamic State of Iraq
  o Even tried to establish a government there
  o Copied Iraqi style bureaucracy and army
  o Were about fully set up and declared a state when they were knocked down
    ▪ Tried something similar in northern Pakistan
• Some proclaimed or indicated caliphates hardly exist at all
• Al-Qa’ida persists in going after this objective even though they have not done well yet

On End #4: Can’t really measure success with the objective to “make God’s word the highest”
• Strictly aspirational and long term
Overall Appraisal: al-Qa’ida is not doing all that well in achieving its objectives
- But continues to persist in carrying out actions to support its means
- Looking more like an insurgency in some ways than a terrorist group

US Response to al-Qa’ida
Have identified reasons why al-Qa’ida should be considered more of an insurgent group with its leadership core in Afghanistan and Pakistan
- Does not mean that the US should only be handling it as an insurgency
- US may be using CT methods because it is so bad at using CI methods
- CT is definitely less expensive that carrying out CI
- CT does save American lives but it ignores what is going on elsewhere in the world
- If concentrate on CI, won’t prioritize protecting the homeland by fighting “out there”

May need to use both CI and CT with al-Qa’ida – but can we afford it?
- However, can we afford to ignore what is going on in the rest of the world?
- Important to note that al-Qa’ida has failed only in places where outside interference has stopped them
  - Afghans hated the Taliban but could not overthrow them until the US arrived
  - Something similar happened in Somalia, too
  - Might see al-Qa’ida as weak and unable to achieve its objective
  - Really al-Qa’ida lost only because the US and allies intervened

It may be that Americans are the wrong people to be intervening with al-Qa’ida
- US needs good allies and partners to handle such situations
- Ed Lansdale stopped a Communist insurgency in the Philippines with few people and a lot of money, but he had a good local partner
  - Took a very corrupt military, retrained it, and turned it into an effective CI force
  - Then sent to Vietnam to do the same thing in the late 1950s
    - Had only a corrupt partner there but lots of troops and money
    - All fell apart because the local partner was not up to the job
- May have to decide whether the US will intervene by determining whether there is a good enough local partner to deal with
  - But what if there are no good partners in the region – such as with Yemen?
    - Very hard to figure out what can be done to help
    - Likely to lose out to al-Qa’ida there

How studying the al-Qa’ida case helps the US handle other similar groups
- Important to distinguish between insurgencies and terrorist groups
  - If they can recruit faster than we can kill them, then they are an insurgency
  - If have charismatic leaders with distinct world views, then there is an insurgency
- Must not confuse means with ends
- Must look at the cost and risks of getting involved versus not getting involved
  - There is a well-founded belief that not acting is better than acting
  - Can always blame some other factor if things go wrong but you did nothing
    - Provides an incentive for not acting – concept permeates government thinking
QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION

Insurgent versus Terrorist Objectives

- Insurgents want to hold territory rather than just attacking enemies
- Important to try to define al-Qa’ida as they do themselves
- Al-Qa’ida branches have never been expelled without outside intervention
  - Appears that the 1990s partnerships were not that strong, successful
- An al-Qa’ida leader clearly identified the 3 levels (core, branches, affiliates) when discussing size
- Size question came up when asked if the requirement to kill Americans had been dropped
  - Response: al-Qa’ida was focusing on killing Americans wherever the US sent their troops

Shari’a Law

- al-Qa’ida not the only group interested
  - Not all agree on what is involved but there are commonalities
- Concept is vital to al-Qa’ida – no matter what the wishes of the local population may be
  - Also did not matter whether or not the occupiers were kicked out
- So central to thinking that al-Qa’ida won’t compromise on this point
- The way al-Qa’ida is trying to go about this objective is being copied by others
- It is possible to use very specific aspects of the different laws as markers to indicate that al-Qa’ida is involved in a given country’s shari’a law effort

Identifying the Center of Gravity for al-Qa’ida

- Still want to see Americans die
- Zawahiri blames the US for the deaths of his wife and children so has personal reasons, too
  - Also wants to destroy the Egyptian army for personal reasons
  - Has been working to support the Arab Spring results
- Since Arab Spring: a shift in focus toward overthrowing the apostate regimes
  - Zawahiri believes he can take advantage of situation for al-Qa’ida’s purposes

Al-Qa’ida Recruiting: from those who felt they did not get their share

- Recruiters’ methods vary by region
- Al-Qa’ida understands the center of the Muslim world – especially Egypt and Libya
  - Zawahiri and his group can exploit the feelings of the populace there
  - Bin Laden did not understand the region well enough to do so
- Main concept: people moved away from God so shari’a law will solve all problems
  - Even problems with the economic situation or bad governance can be solved that way

Handling Insurgencies and Determining Which Fights to Take Up

- Strategies should be specific to the country
- Must look at what has worked before
- Different calculation if don’t have a good local partner
- May need to put boots on the ground and treat the situation partially as CT
- May sometimes just ignore a situation or walk away from it especially if it means that Americans stop dying
- Iraq has often been said to resemble Vietnam – just pull out to stop the dying
  - US was wrong about much in Vietnam
There was no domino effect
  o If local concerns dominate, then don’t worry about attacks on the homeland
  o Big difference: the Vietnamese did not kill 3,000 people in New York City
• Also see that al-Qa’ida has remained interested in trying to kill Americans in the US
  o Statements from leaders told branches to attack the US
    ▪ Six months later a branch sent the “underwear bomber”
    ▪ US should have been able to predict this group was going to become dangerous
• When a group says that it wants to carry out attacks on the US, we should listen
• However, without good partners in a specific region, options for the US would be limited
  o Limitations will be even worse than those imposed by limited budgets

CI versus CT Policies
• A mix of policies may be better than one or the other
• Most Administrations have believed they were fighting insurgencies
  o Obama Administration wants to fight for hearts and minds with local partners
    ▪ So that it is not just the US doing it all
• All too often CI is thought of as just the campaign for hearts and minds
  o What if the insurgents live in your village and say they will kill you if you support the government?

How will we know when we are applying enough effort?
• Basically won’t know until something goes wrong indicating that not enough was done
• Using a Calvin and Hobbs metaphor:
  o Question: How do you know that a 2-ton bridge can carry 2 tons?
  o Answer: Send over 1 ton then 1.5 ton then a 2 ton truck until the bridge breaks, then you build a new one with the same strength
• Same concept applies when trying to determine how much needs to be done in CI
• Also depends on the objective
  o If it is saving American lives, then CT with a little preventative work in some places would be enough
  o Otherwise more of a law enforcement effort for other countries to deal with
  o Until group “unexpectedly” blows up something or sends bombs toward the US
• Probably already doing too little in some places especially in about a half dozen places that appear to have branches in waiting
  o They will eventually be asked to attack America
• If goal is to protect American lives in the homeland, a CT+ strategy might not be enough
• If the US wants to make sure that al-Qa’ida does not get embedded in someplace, will have to do a great deal more

Providing Outside Help to Fight Insurgencies
• Communist insurgencies were generally working from the same background concept with a good deal of nationalist influence thrown in
  o Al-Qa’ida is different
• Communist/nationalist insurgents worked to figure out what was needed to bring in the population
  o Al-Qa’ida instead depends on the objective of establishing shari’a law – no matter what the people may want
• Ethiopian occupiers incited a nationalistic response so the people turned against them
  o Kenyans were welcomed because al Shabaab had ticked off so many people
    ▪ However if they stay too long, they too might lose local support
• Bottomline: al-Qa’ida in pursuit of its primary objectives is very alienating

Map of Proposed Caliphates
• Al-Qa’ida doesn’t talk about Iran now except in terms of the Shia enemy and how to deal with it
  o Plans to kill off all the clergy and set up reeducation camps
• Bottom of western Africa was not included since there is debate about what would be included
  o There may be two emirates in the region – a Sahel and a Sahara (or desert)
  o Unclear where the borders would be
• Can be fairly confident about some of the border lines on the map, but not others
• Must keep listening to what al-Qa’ida is saying to see where the borders will be going

Yemen
• Involves a whole set of imponderables
• Lots of constraints on possible US actions in Yemen
  o Declining budget
  o No support among Americans for another war especially in Yemen
    ▪ Hard to imagine how it would be a threat to the US
    ▪ However, has shown aspirations to attack the US
• Problems may come from the concept that they are calling themselves the al-Qa’ida of the peninsula which includes Dubai, Qatar, and even Saudi Arabia
• Perhaps the Saudis could handle Yemen if they recognized the problem and the US trained them