

## Project Summary

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### Study

Maintaining effective communications is critical to launching terror attacks. Yet, this chain of information must remain covert, else command and control are exposed, making operational leaders vulnerable to counter-insurgency efforts.

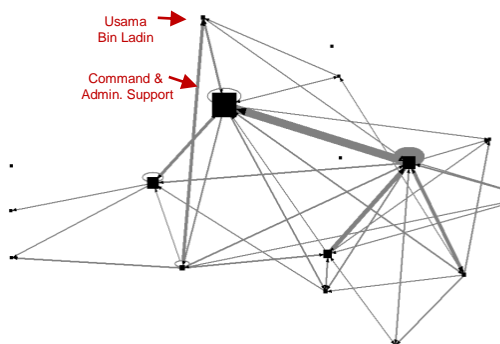
This study contributes to a growing body of network-oriented research aimed at evaluating whether U.S. led military actions disrupted the ability of jihadist leaders to interact with commanders on the ground. Drawing upon recently declassified documents, seized during the raid on Usama Bin Laden's compound, we investigate how a period of concentrated drone strikes affected Al Qa'ida operations as revealed by changes in communication chains.

### Findings

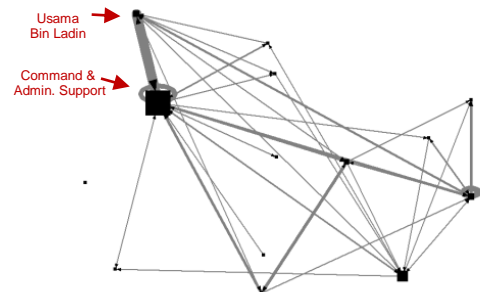
1. During the baseline period, Usama Bin Laden was peripheral to the flow of communications: He was not even in the top most important brokers (measured by betweenness centrality).
2. While Usama Bin Laden and other Al Qa'ida leadership emerged as the most important figures controlling the flow of information when the group was under heavy attack, their positions dropped significantly by the post-strategic period. However, with threats remaining, Bin Laden remained prominent in the flow of information.
3. Throughout the campaign, supporting staff, namely Atiyya Abdul Rahman, and the media (Al Sahab) gained prominence, becoming central leaders of the communications network.

**Figure 1. Shifting Locus of Communications**

*Baseline (pre-drone attack period)*



*Post-Strategic (after drone attacks)*



### Implications

This study investigates the impact of U.S. led drone strikes on Al Qa'ida operations as revealed by the evolution of communication networks. Using social network analysis supports the development of intelligent, targeted efforts to disrupt the capacity of terror groups to communicate, and thus, could restrict their ability to launch attacks. Looking at shifts in communications demonstrates how these analytic techniques can be used to evaluate anti-terror policy.