



al-Qaeda as an Adaptive Organization: A Case Study

July 15, 2010

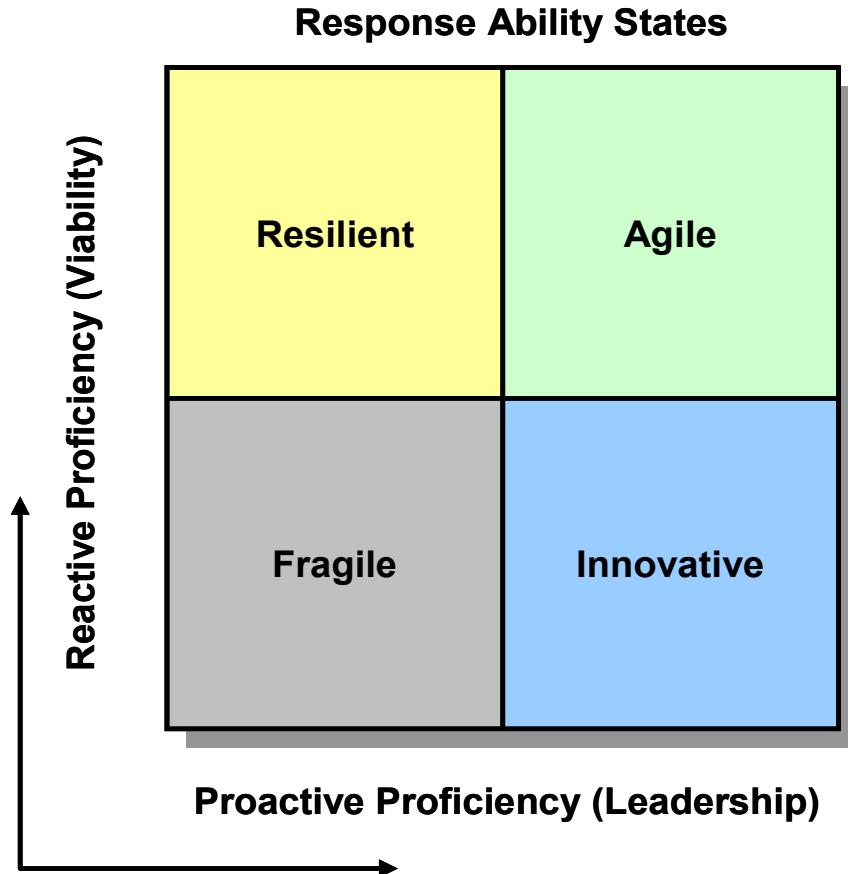
Nicole Hutchison
Trina Powell
Art Pyster

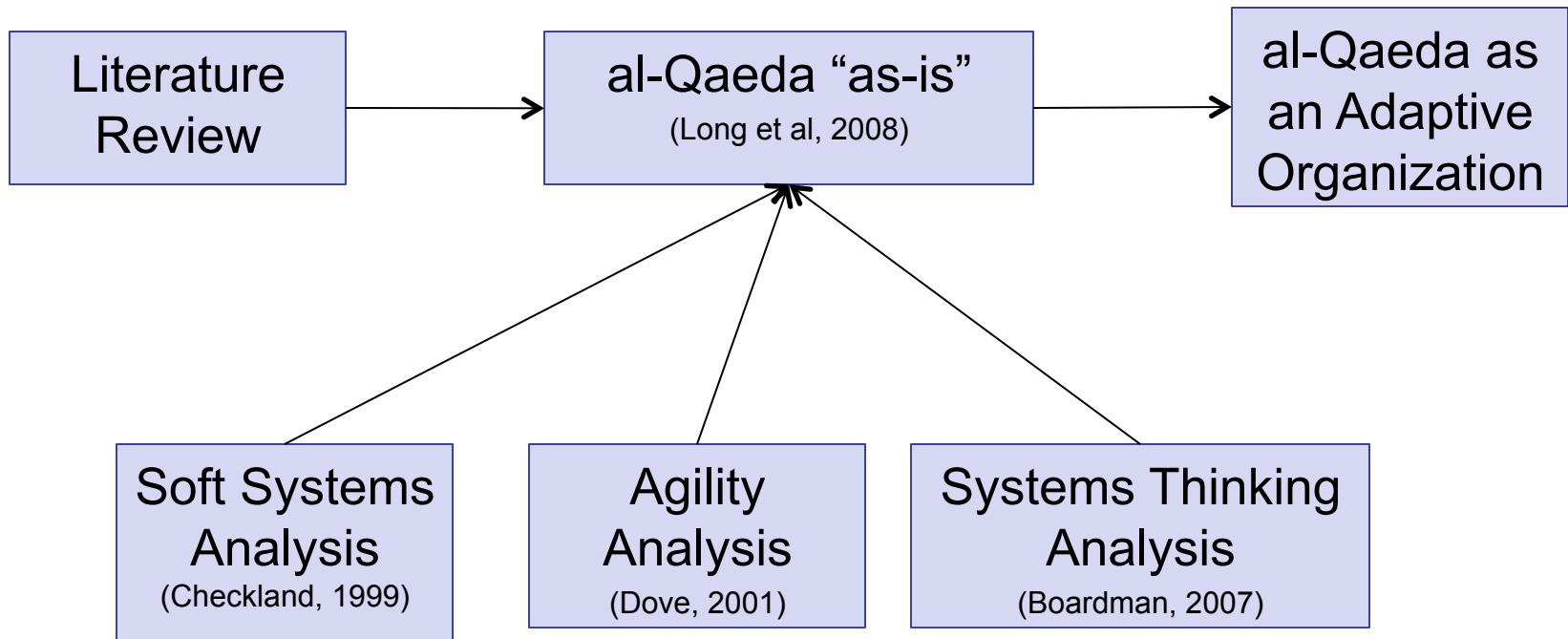
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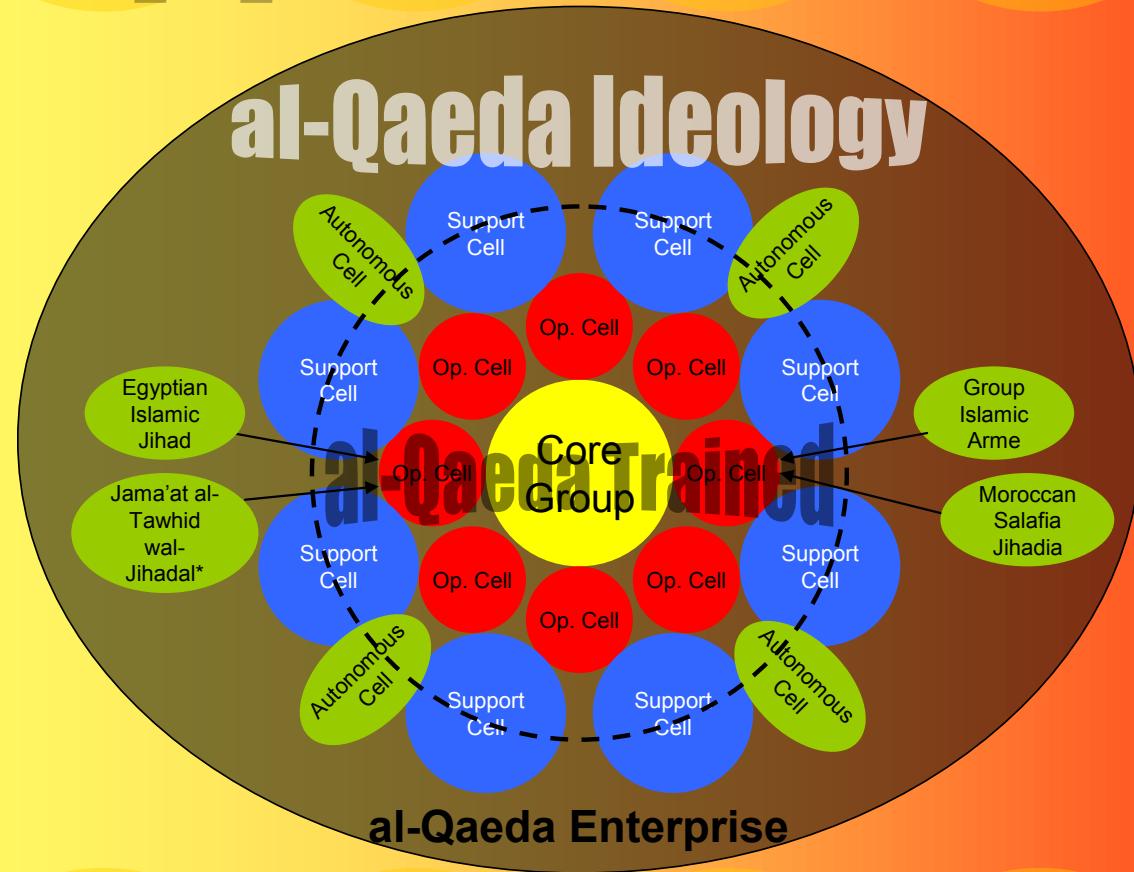
- Background
- Definitions
- Approach / Methodology
- Agility of al-Qaeda Functions
- Conclusions
- Questions

- Adaptive—an adaptive organization is one whose infrastructure should be ready to scale, adapt, change, or grow to deal with challenges already looming on the horizon (Robertson and Sribar, 2009)
- Resilience—the ability to respond appropriately to unforeseen actions (e.g. Dove's Reactive Change Proficiency, 2001)
- Agility—resilience and innovation (reactive and proactive change proficiency (Dove, 2001)

- Change proficiency in both proactive (innovative) and reactive (resilient) dimensions
 - Reactive changes are generally triggered by events which demand a response
 - Proactive changes are internal system changes triggered by the application of new information to generate new value
- Used to study al-Qaeda's ability to survive and thrive in face of GWOT







Other State Sponsors

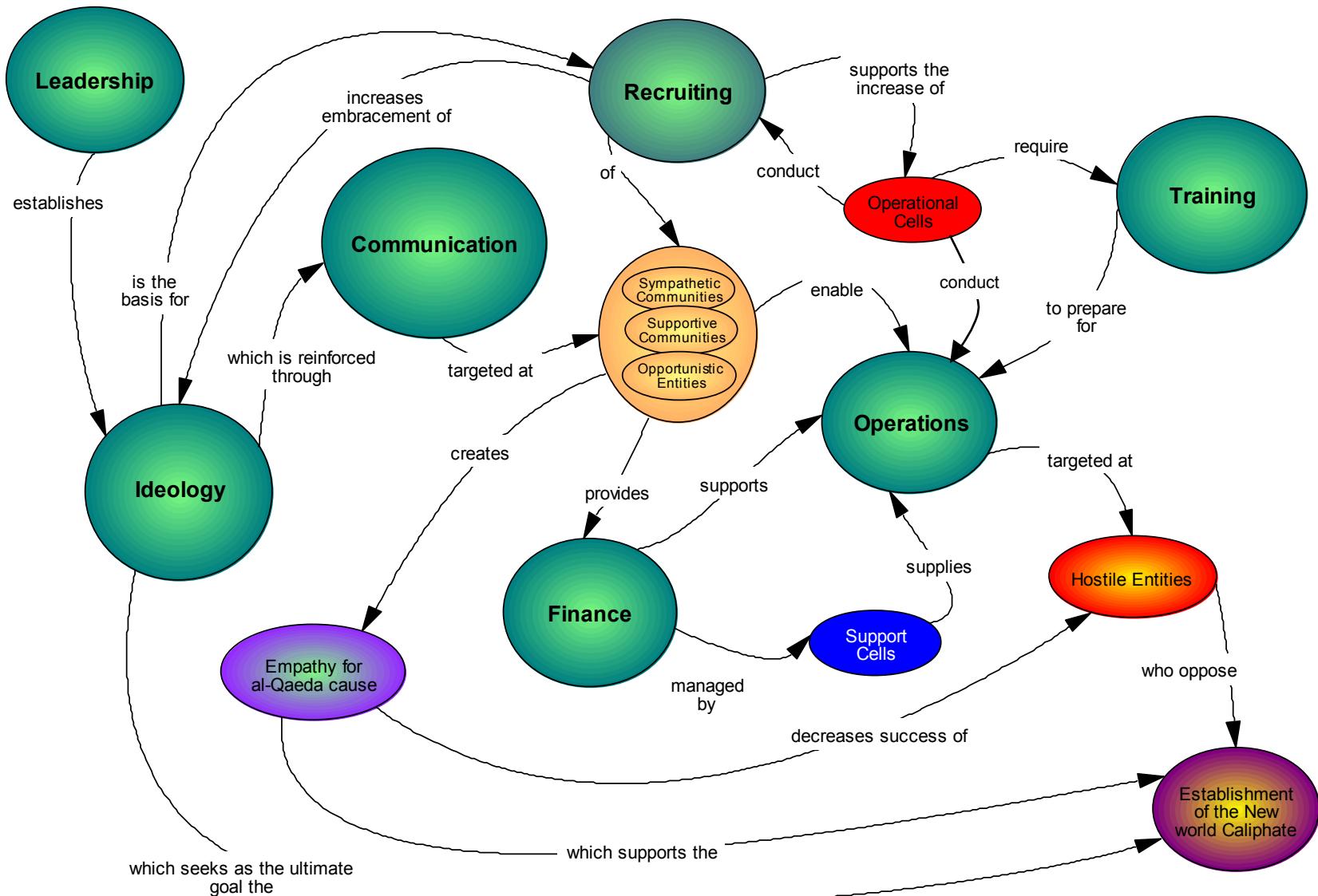
Other Terror Organization

State
Sponsor

Other Terror Organization

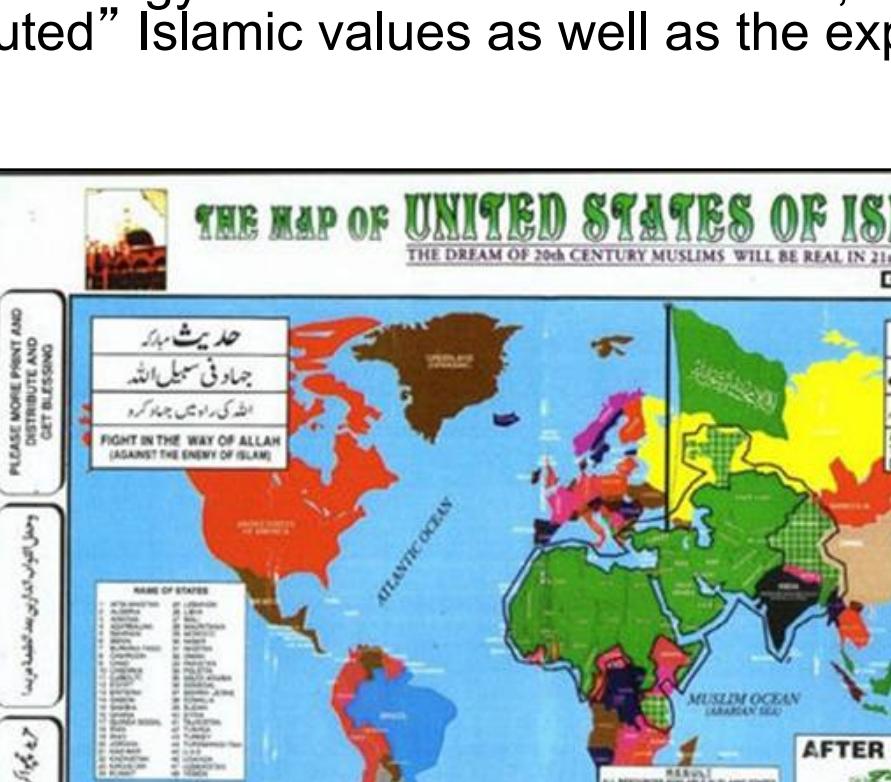
Local Communities

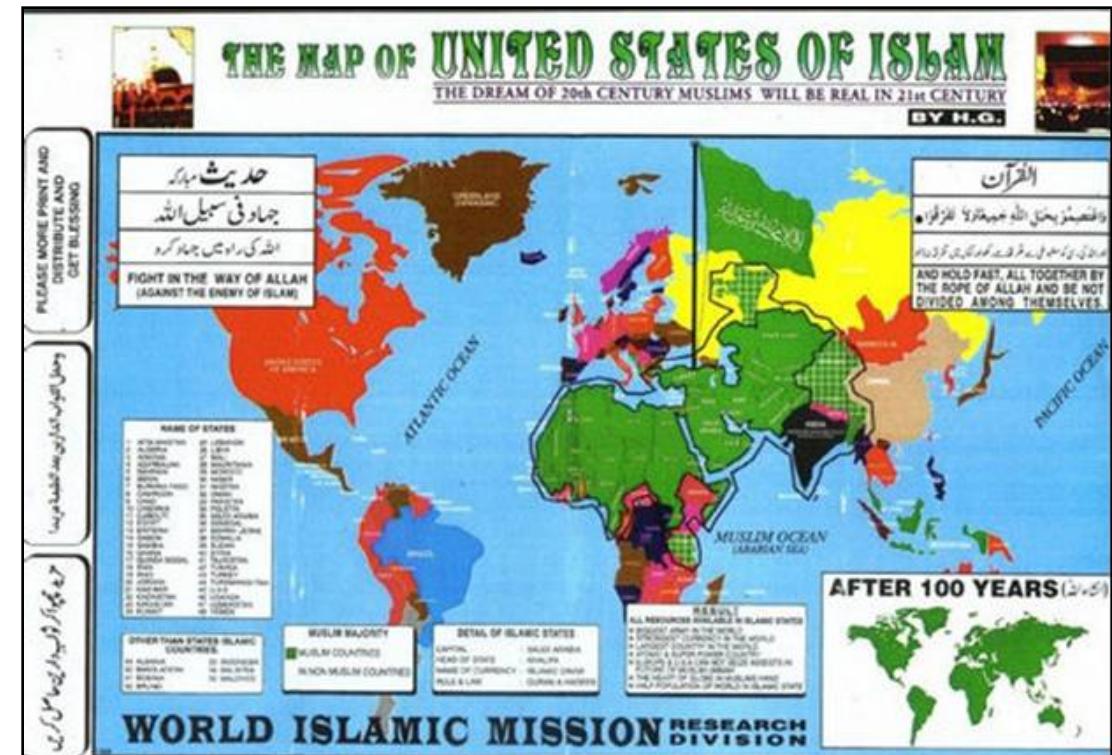
Indonesia



al-Qaeda Ideology

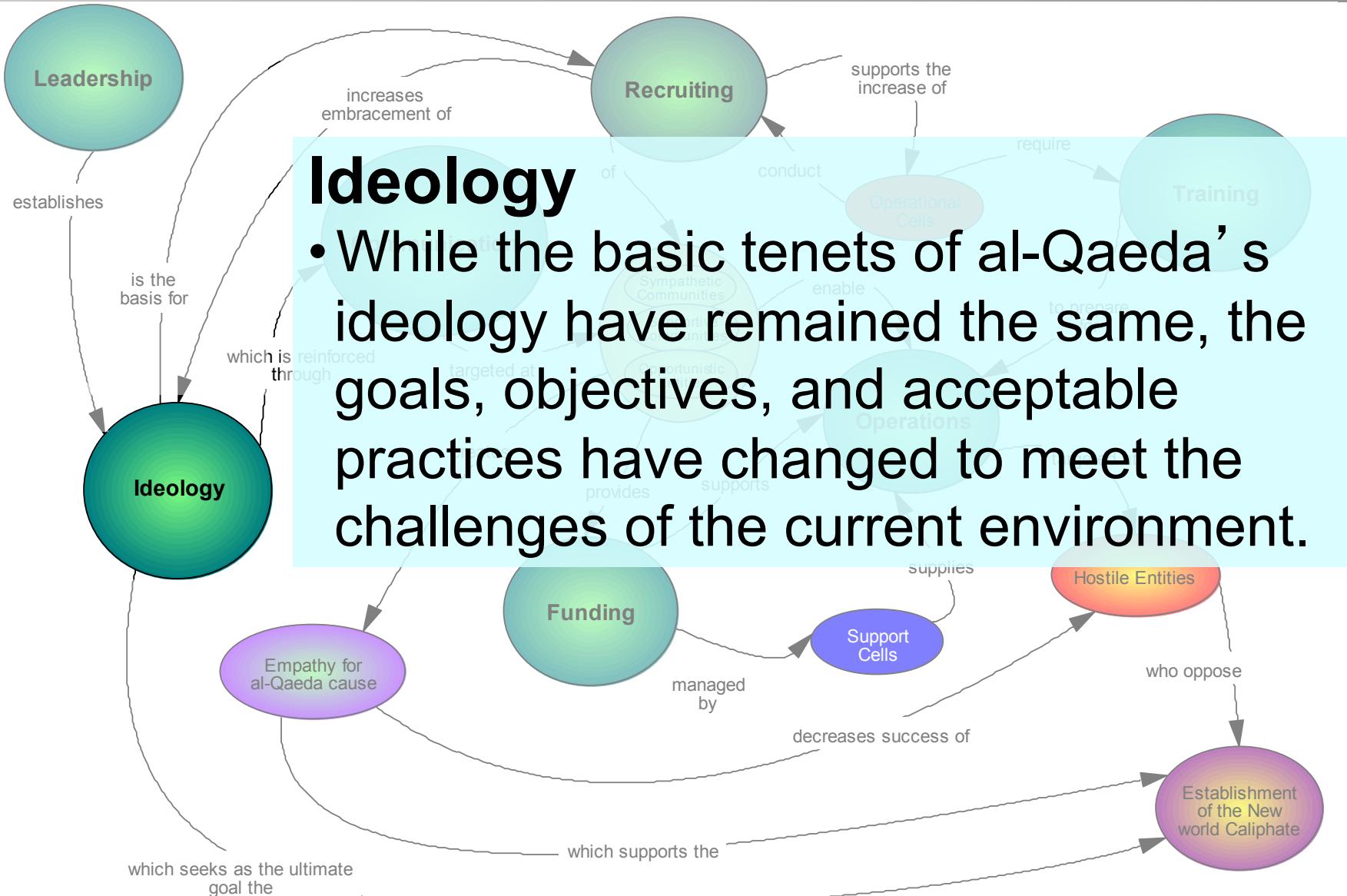
- Major tenets of ideology have remained consistent
 - Salafi Jihad—al-Qaeda ideology is a mixture of these ideas, striving for a return to “non-polluted” Islamic values as well as the expansion of the Islamic state.
 - Support of the *umma*
 - Strengthening of the Islamic State
- Interpretation has changed over time
 - Goals and objectives expanded as global influence increases
 - Acceptable practices change as the environment changes





Vision of Salafi Jihad

- Provides common framework for the organization
- Enables al-Qaeda identity, around which people rally
- Ideological interpretation changes over time
 - Better ability to react to environment
 - Allows al-Qaeda to change acceptable practices (within parameters) to take advantage of opportunities

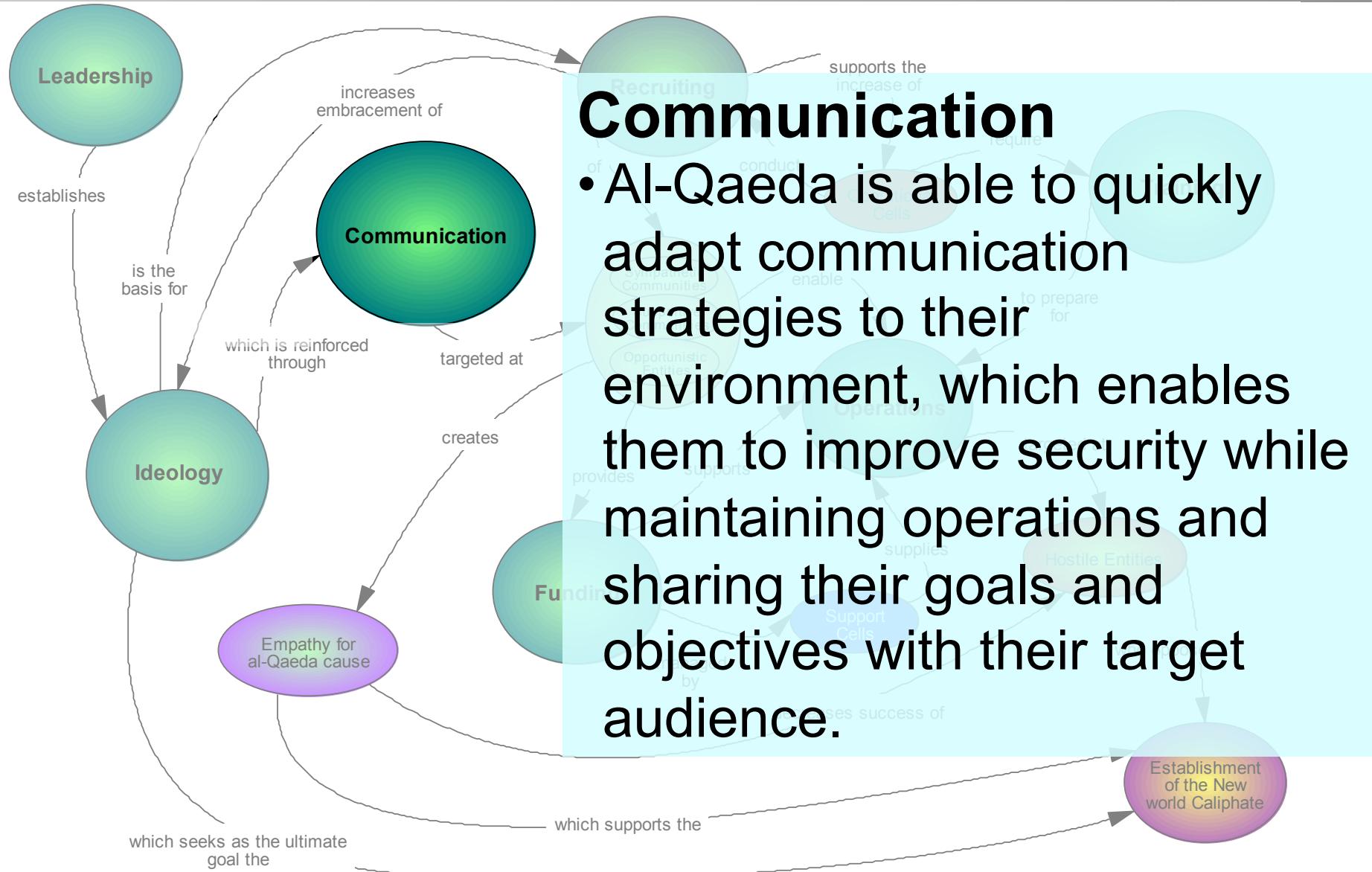


Ideology

- While the basic tenets of al-Qaeda's ideology have remained the same, the goals, objectives, and acceptable practices have changed to meet the challenges of the current environment.

- **Distributed Communication**
 - Information pushed to the lowest levels
 - Quickly incorporate new technologies/communication strategies
 - Quickly limit technologies which are less secure
- **Empowerment of individuals**
 - Ideas generated at the lowest levels can quickly spread throughout the organization

Conclusions: al-Qaeda Specific Research Questions 1 & 2



Communication

- Al-Qaeda is able to quickly adapt communication strategies to their environment, which enables them to improve security while maintaining operations and sharing their goals and objectives with their target audience.

Initial contact between potential recruit and recruiter

resulting in

Subsequent and more intense contacts

leading to

identity transformation by the recruit

Exploiting or creating physical and mental trauma to produce a dissociative state in the target individual – a condition in which identity, memory, consciousness, awareness, and rational thought are in flux

Creating a new identity and new thought processes

A transformation along the lines sought by the recruiter

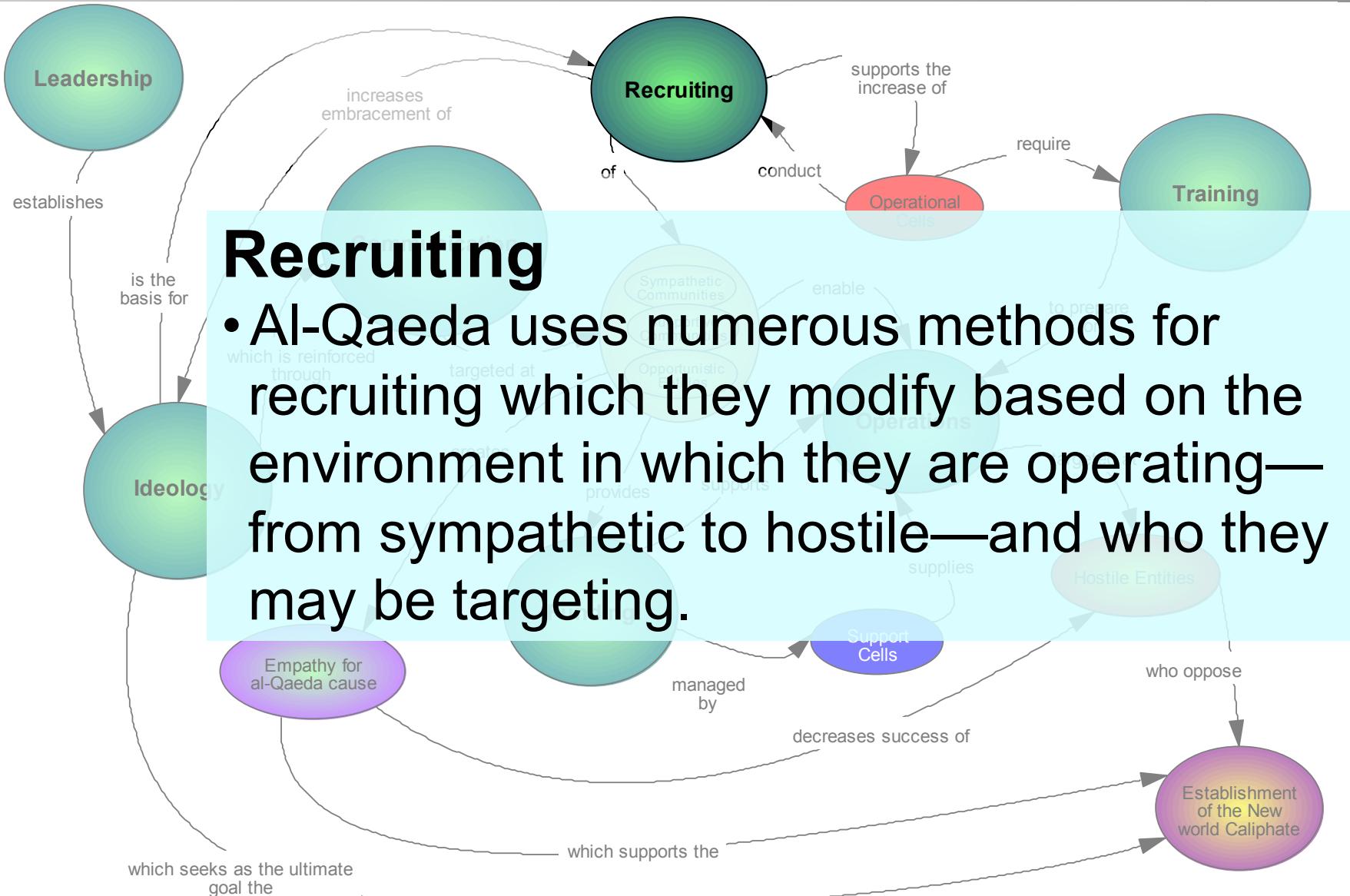
Source: by Daly and Gerwehr, RAND reprint of Chapter 5 of the *McGraw-Hill Homeland Security Handbook*, Oct 2005

- Findings:

- Agile in ability to modify recruiting methods based on environment in which they are operating and the target recruit(s)
- Fundamental belief in ideology and the connection individuals have with one another has the greatest impact in successful recruiting

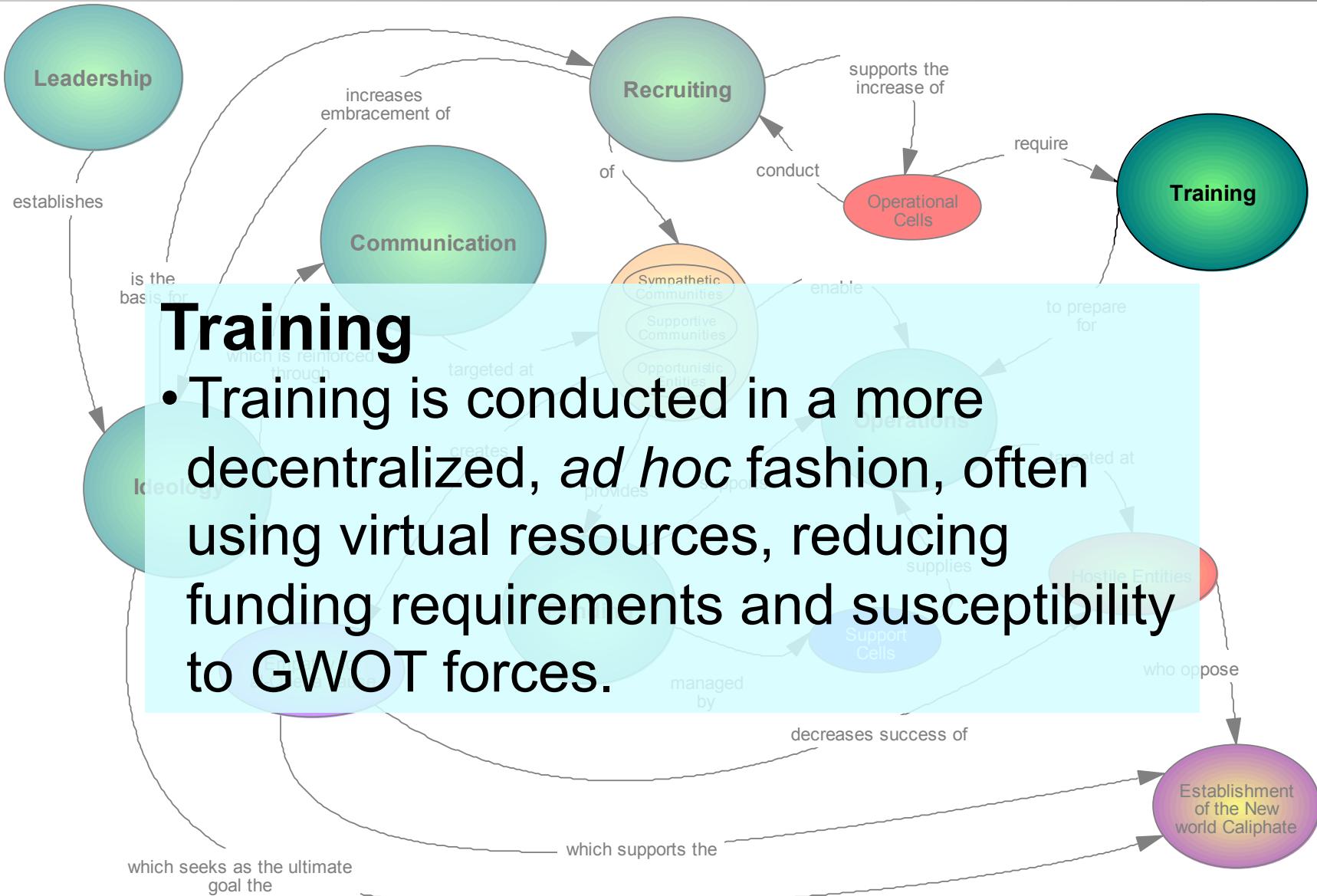
“Implicit throughout this remarkable report [House of Commons Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005] was a sense of frustration at the failure to arrive at a clear profile of those who have been recruited into al-Qaeda’s global campaign of terrorism and subversion. The same frustration is, in fact apparent in many policy and law enforcement circles, and despite the failure by researchers to arrive at any valid and reliable terrorist profile, the search for one continues.”

-John Horgan, From Profile to Pathways: The Road to Recruitment



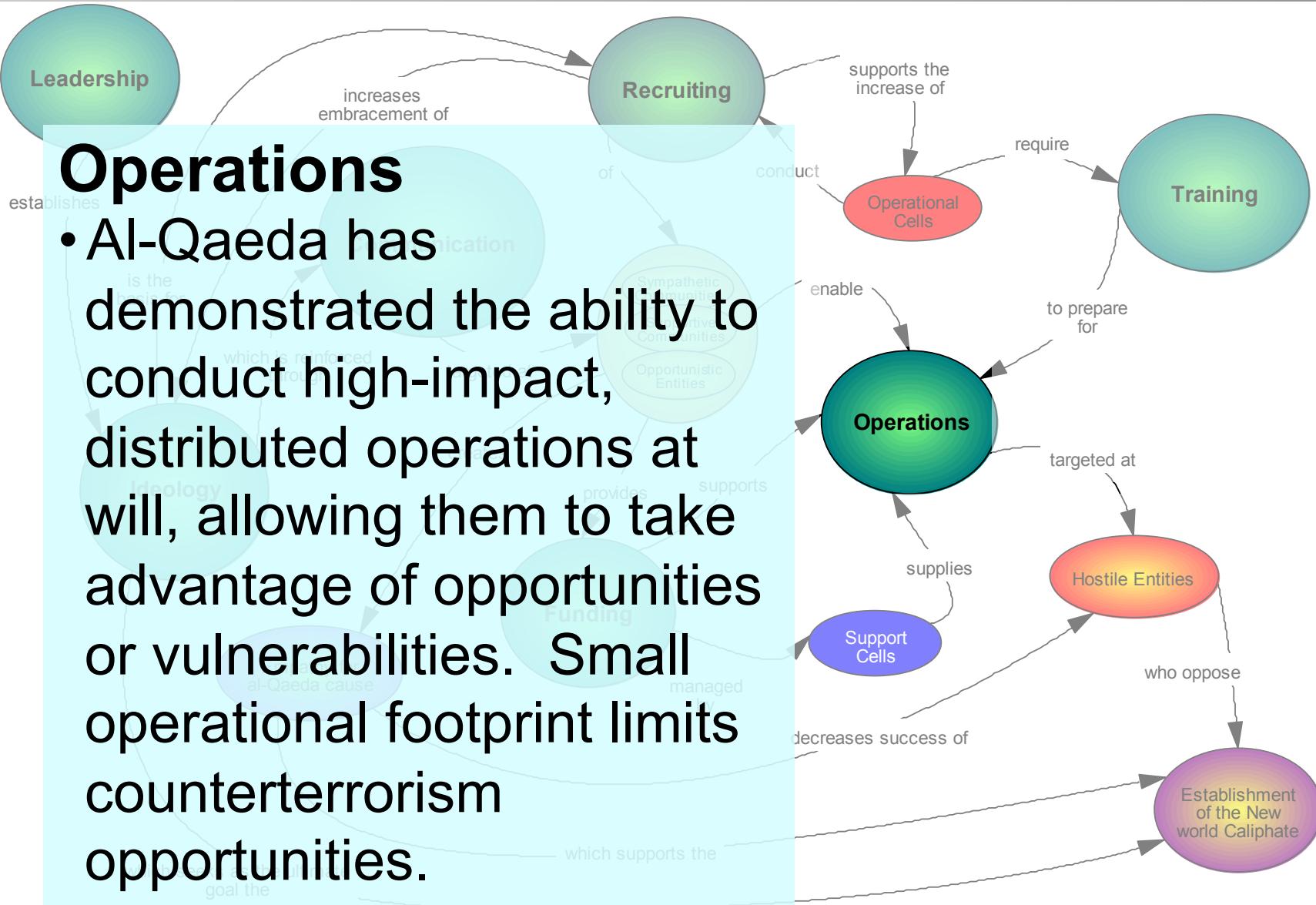
- Training camps key target in GWOT
- Evolution from organized training at training camps to more decentralized, *ad hoc* approach
 - Use of virtual resources to reach wider audience
 - Reduces funding requirements
 - Reduces susceptibility of members as targets in GWOT
 - Less complicated missions require less skill in executing

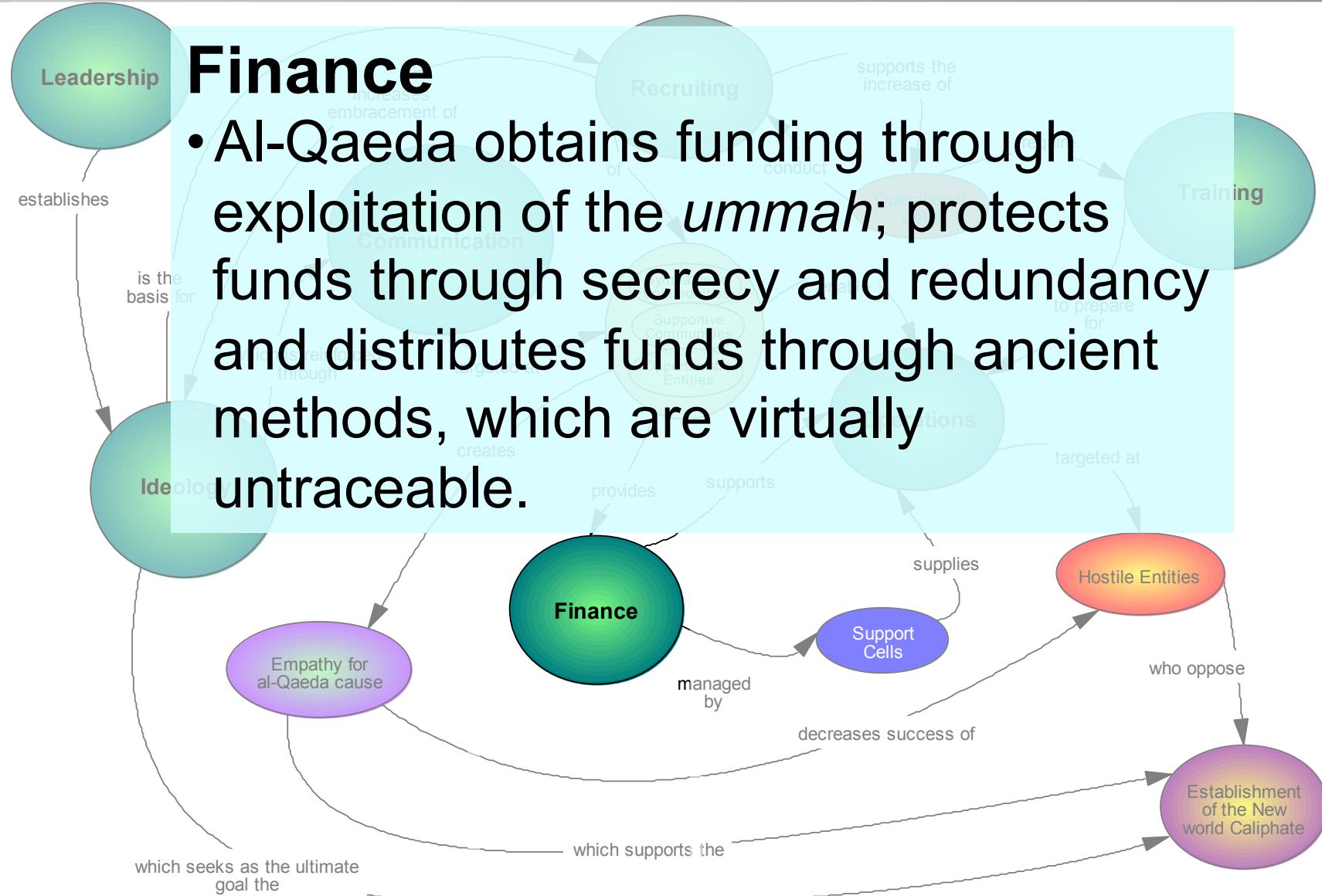
Conclusions: al-Qaeda Specific Research Questions 1 & 2

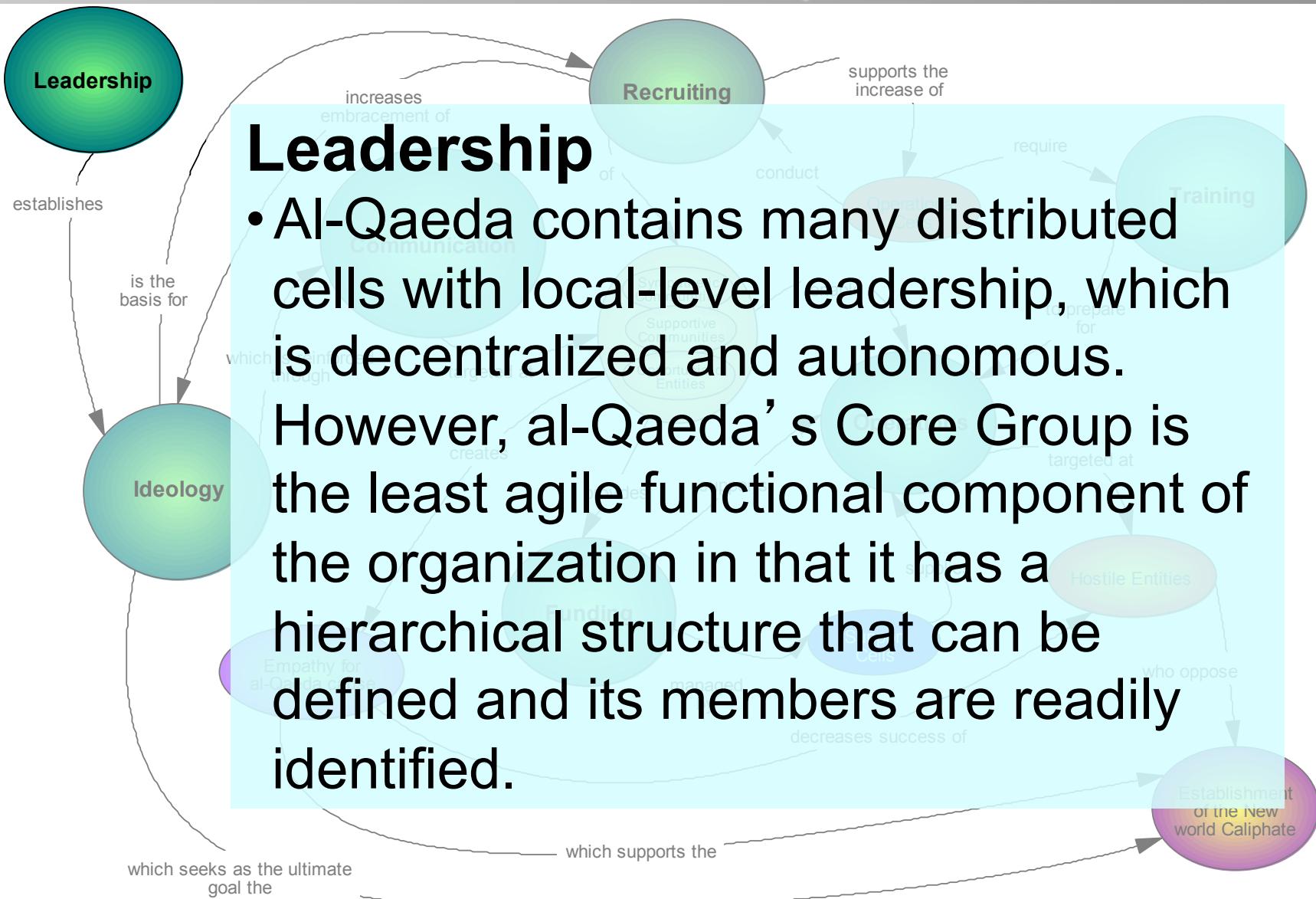


- Terrorist operations are al-Qaeda's primary tool for implementing environmental change
 - Unless people are killed, al-Qaeda doesn't make the news
 - Each significant terrorist operation provides another opportunity for al-Qaeda to make a statement
 - Terrorist operations are the principal business of operational cells

- Technical innovation in operations
 - Use of commercial aircraft as implements of destruction
 - Use of hand-held weapons that were below the screening threshold of airport security operations.
- A theme in modern terrorist operations is turning an infrastructure system into a weapon or an enhancement
 - Relative invulnerability of a commercial airliner in flight
 - Containment as in subway systems (Aum Shinrikyo, 1995)
- The signature simultaneous attack was an innovative display of the widespread inability of law enforcement and security operations to prevent attacks
 - Complex and manpower intensive to execute
 - Demonstrated publicly al-Qaeda's ability to conduct operations "at will."
- Innovation in low-order tactics, such as IEDs, triggering devices, triggering tactics, and shaped charges
 - May not be al-Qaeda led, but al-Qaeda benefits







Functional Concept	Training Reinforces Other Functional Components
Ideology	Reinforcement of empathy and support for ideology
Operations	Training essential to improve tactics and operational capabilities
	Redundancy in trained individuals supports rapid recovery from intellectual or capability losses (increases operational capacity)
Leadership	Specialized training for individuals likely to lead operations, expand into recruiting positions, and trusted with tactical and operational plans
Communications	Training provided to other Islamic terrorist organization members, increases collaboration and sharing of information
Recruiting	Selection for training does not guarantee commitment into operational cells or positions of responsibility
Finance	“Train the trainer” program reduces funding requirements

Functional Concept	Training Reinforced by Other Functional Components
Ideology	Reinforcement of empathy and support for ideology
Operations	Evolution into less complicated missions reduces training requirements
Leadership	Trustworthy and capable individuals will receive more and specialized training
Communications	Communication infrastructure supports virtual training
Recruiting	Acquiring members with special skill-sets reduces training requirements and supports “train the trainer” programs
Finance	Drastic reduction in funding resulted in the development of innovative strategies by operational cells to train members

- Most businesses are not built using this form of organizational model
- However, certain lessons may be more readily adapted to typical corporate or government organizations:
 - Organizational ideology should provide common ground, but be flexible (i.e. should allow organization to readily adapt to changing conditions)
 - Consider the lowest levels to which individuals can be empowered and maintain lowest possible oversight (i.e. only manage as much as necessary)
 - Organizational ‘brand’ should be constructed as the primary attractor for new members

What next for al-Qaeda?

“The threat from al-Qaeda’s core is largely over, and future attacks will come from footsoldiers of a “leaderless jihad” – homegrown radicals with no formal connection to bin Laden.”

Mark Sageman, former CIA case officer

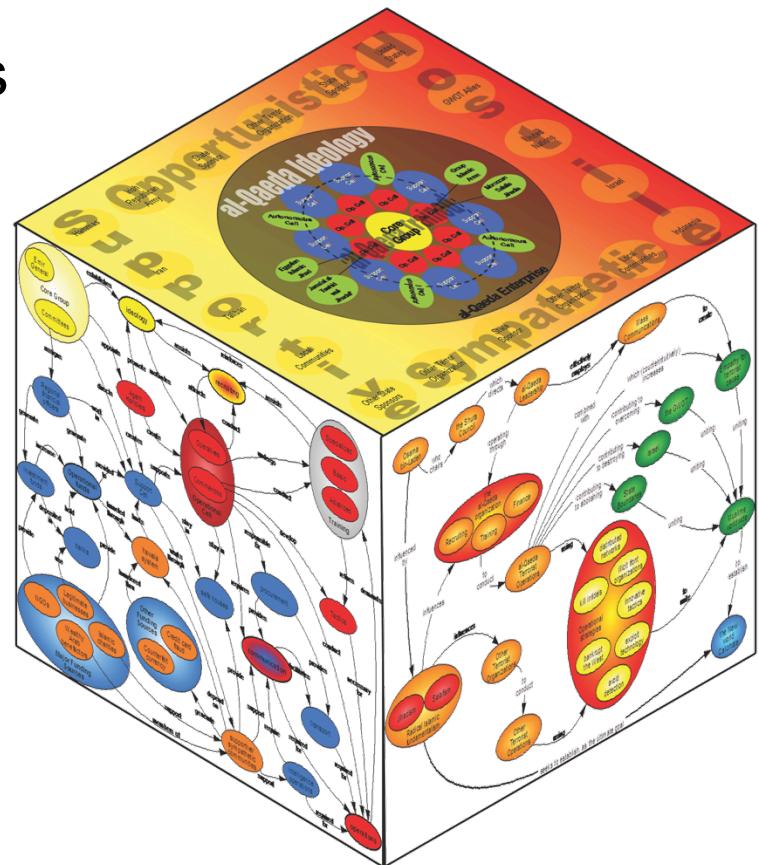
“They’re on the march, not on the run.”

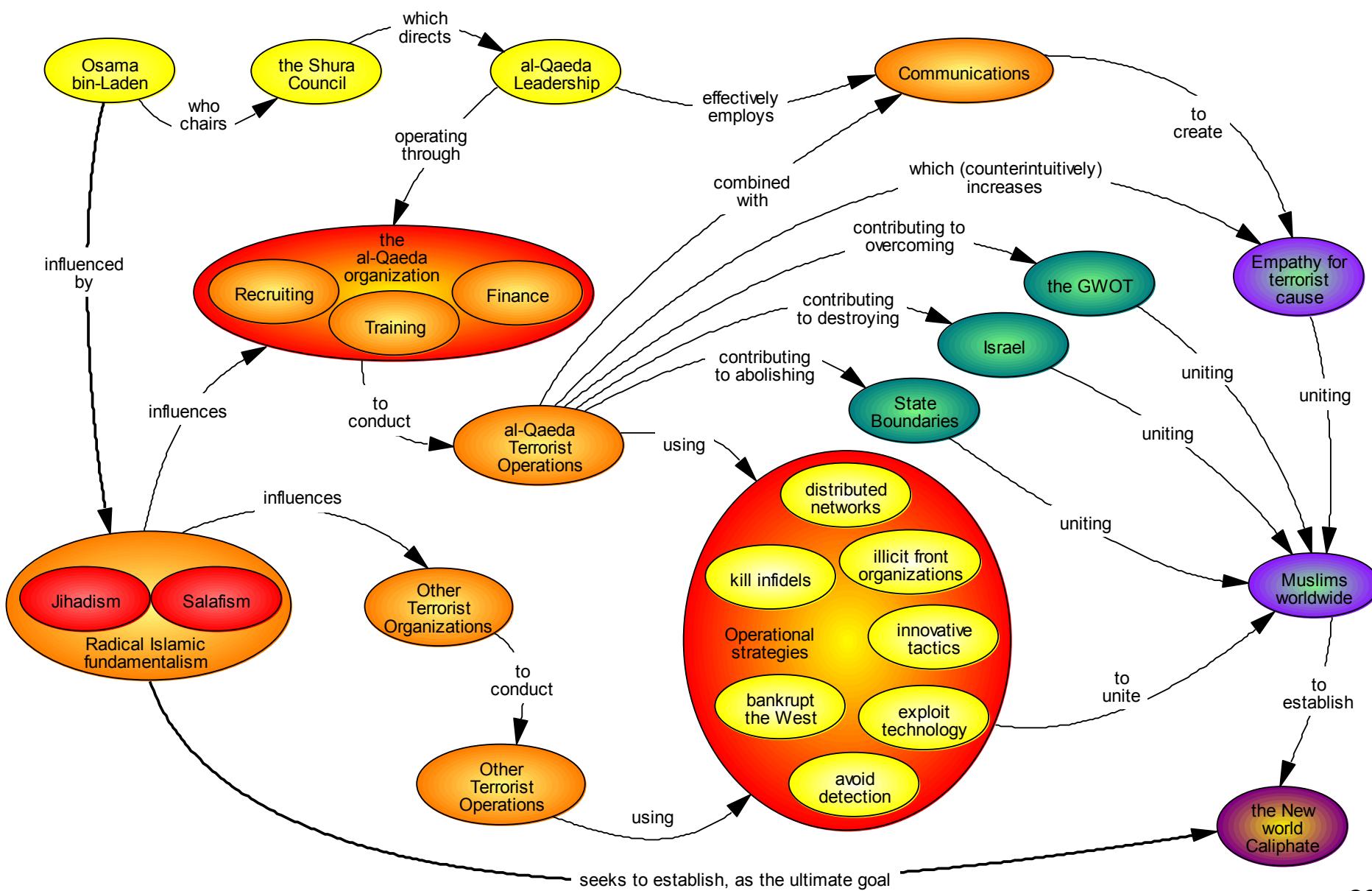
Bruce Hoffman, Georgetown University professor

“Absolutely it’s imploding. It’s imploding because it’s not a message that resonates with a lot of Muslims.”

Dell Dailey, State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism, 9/16/08

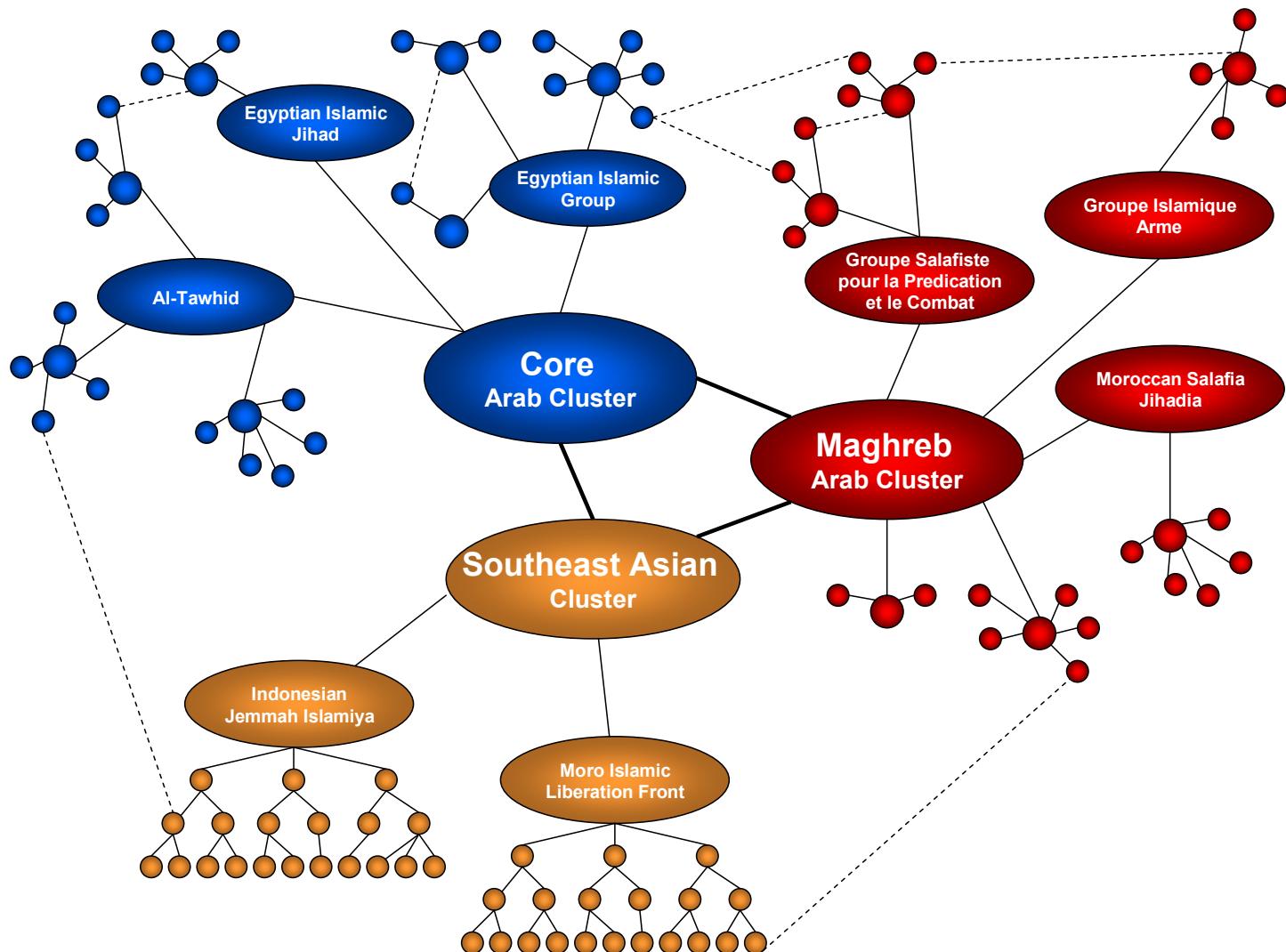
Questions?



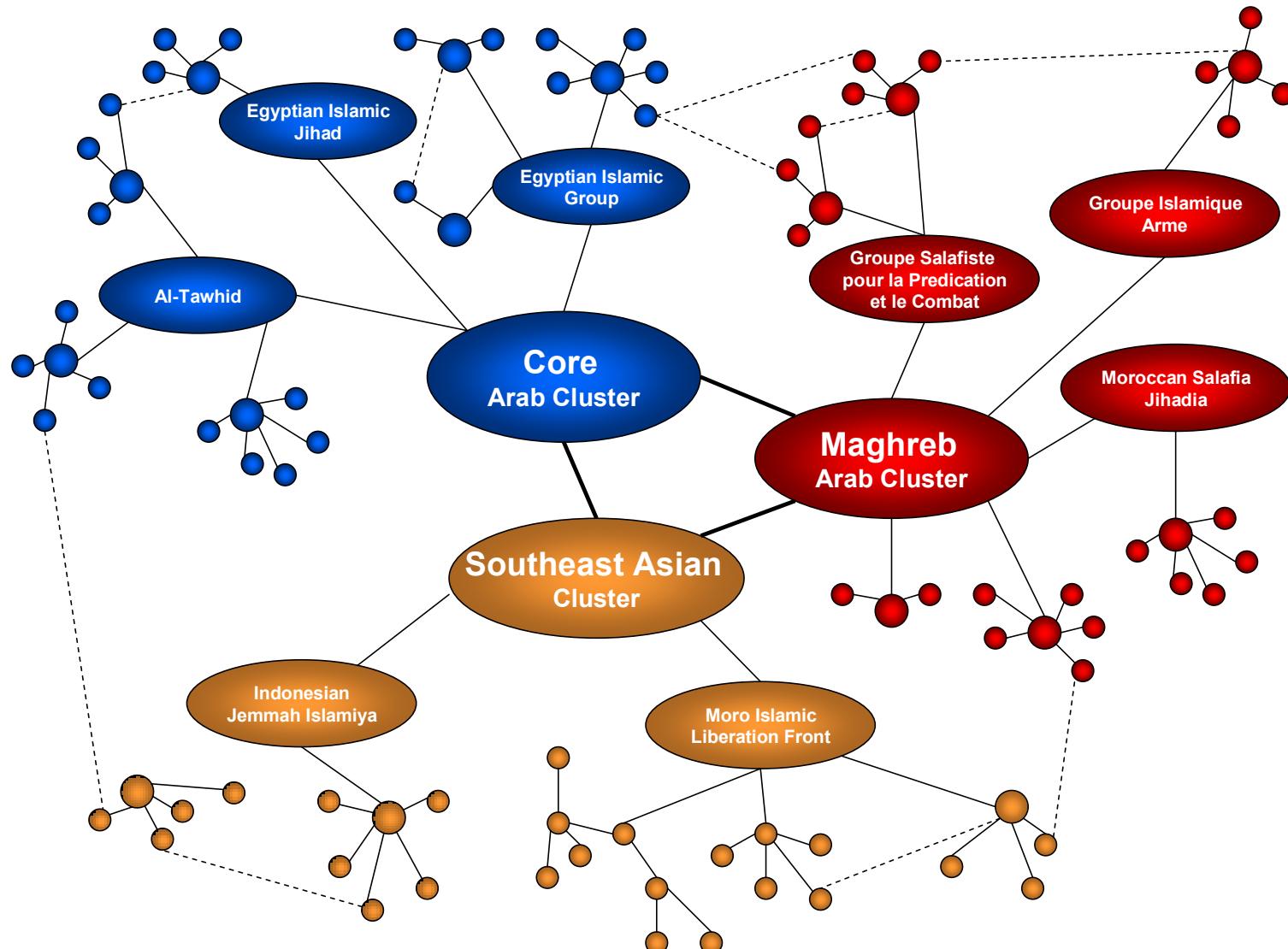


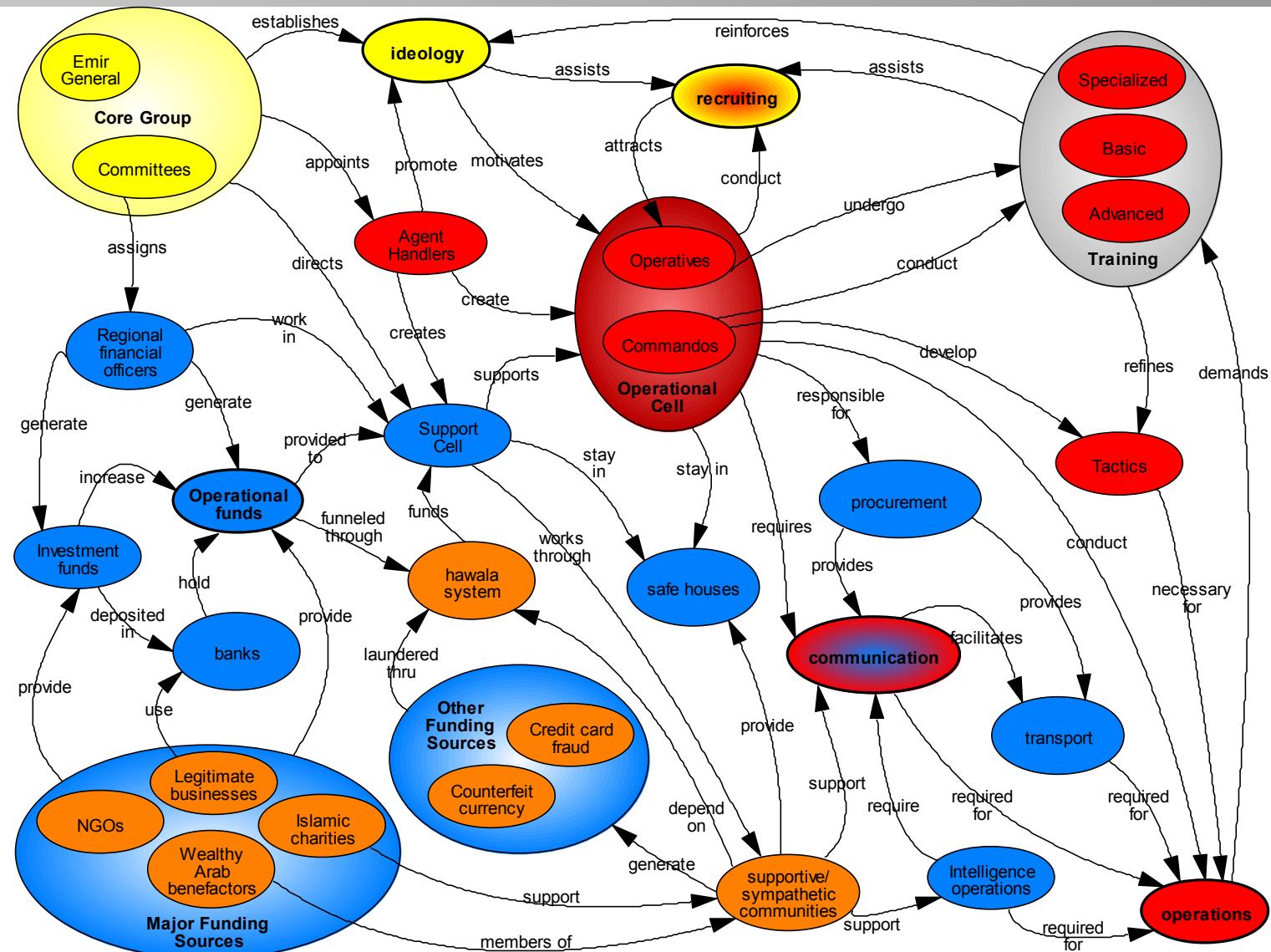
- Main social groups
 - Core Arab Cluster
 - Maghreb Arab Cluster
 - SE Asian Cluster
- Social structure is a “small world” network
 - Small groups of closely connected individuals
 - Weak links between groups

Social Structure (c. 2000)

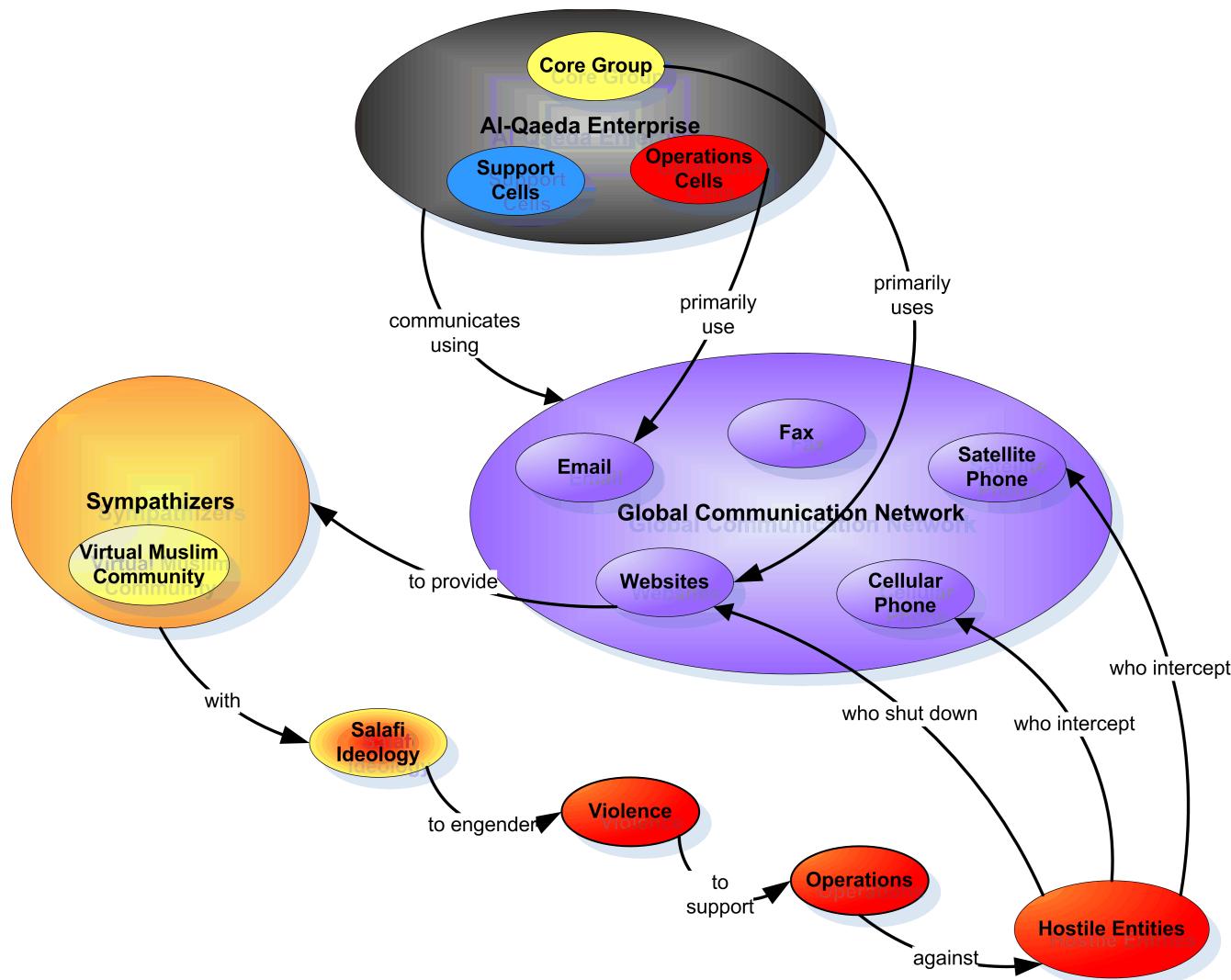


Social Structure (present day)





Communication Methods



Proximate

- Suits face-to-face contact in small groups
- Recruiters commingle with the population and target individuals ripe for recruitment
- Suits Infection-type approach – allows face to face access to audience with few restrictions
- Examples: prisons, refugee camps, wartime

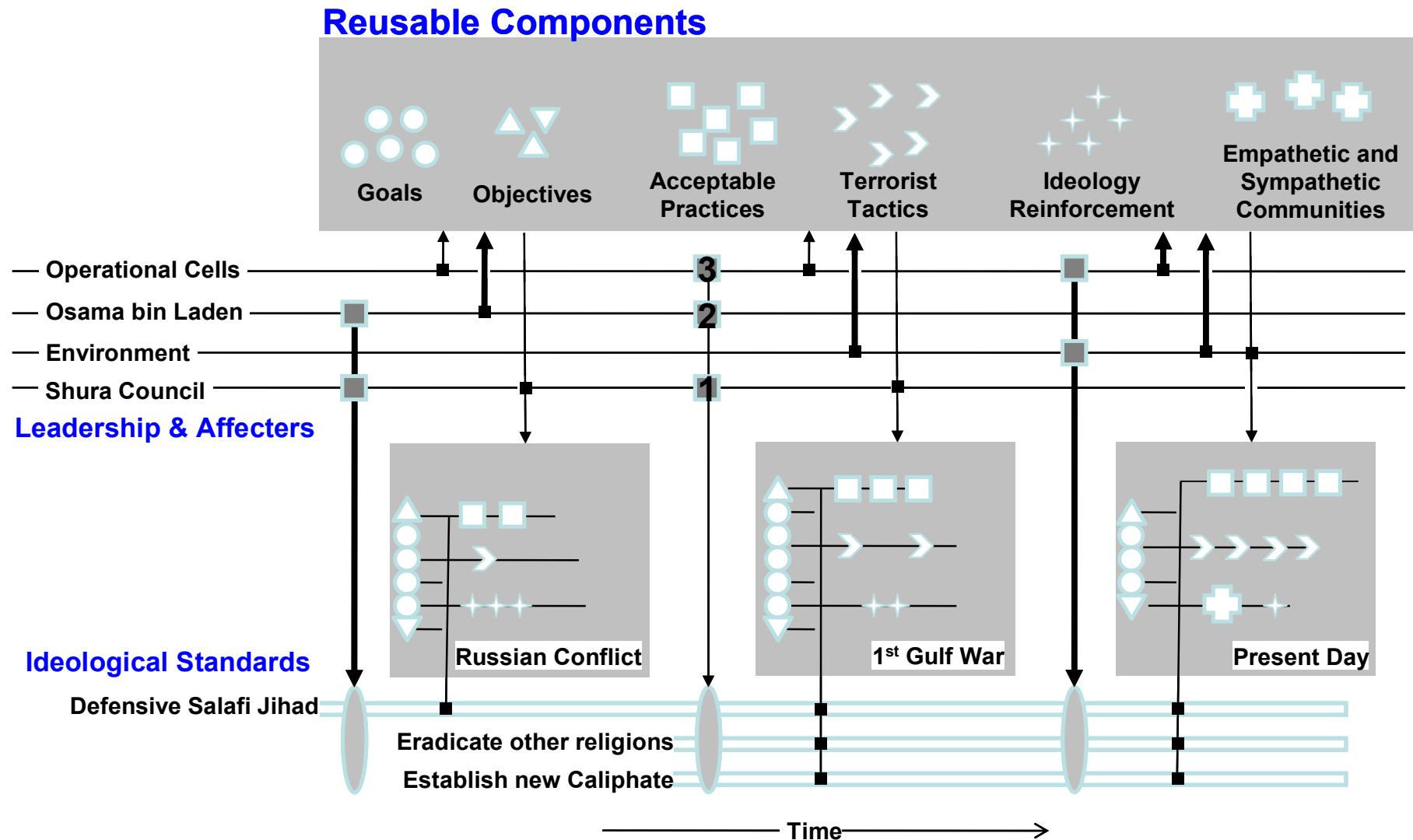
- Suits groups operating out of sight or in opposition to local authorities and effectively leverages influential power of conformity (peer pressure).
- Rely heavily on personal appeals tailored specifically for targeted individual or small group
- Suits infection or funnel approach – the power of one-on-one persuasive communication
- Examples: recovering addicts at private clinics, prayer sessions in neighbor's living room, training camps

Public Channels

- Broad recruiting (propaganda) through mass media
- Target usually some stratum of the regional demographic or psychographic
- Suits a net or seed crystal approach – no access to target audience, but communication is still relatively unrestricted
- Examples: TV, radio broadcast, newspapers, websites

Private Channels

- Combine mass media with intimacy or clandestinely
- Effective when aimed at population that is already primed to accept message
- Suits net approach – large audiences are reached, although out of sight and control of adversarial authorities
- Examples: password protected websites, etc. to maintain current membership



- Legitimate Businesses:
 - Construction
 - Agriculture
 - Manufacturing
 - Currency trading
 - Import-Exporting
- Petty Crime
 - Drug Sales
 - Coupon Scams
 - Calling Card Scams
 - Credit Card Scams

- Funding tours
 - Tours to mosques and *jihad* conferences
- Charity organizations worldwide
 - Collection boxes at mosques
 - Orphanage in Azerbaijan
 - Tuberculosis hospital in Tajikistan

- Cheaper than Commercial Financial Institutions
 - 10% - 20% savings (low overhead)
 - Unregulated exchange rates
- Faster than Commercial Financial Institutions
 - 1-2 days transaction period vs. up to a week or longer
- More reliable than Commercial Financial Institutions
 - There are more problems with foreign banks doing business with one another, and transactions get lost
- No paper trail
 - Not taxed
 - Lack of bureaucracy
 - Anyone can send money to anyone without having to ID themselves or being legal
 - Users remain anonymous

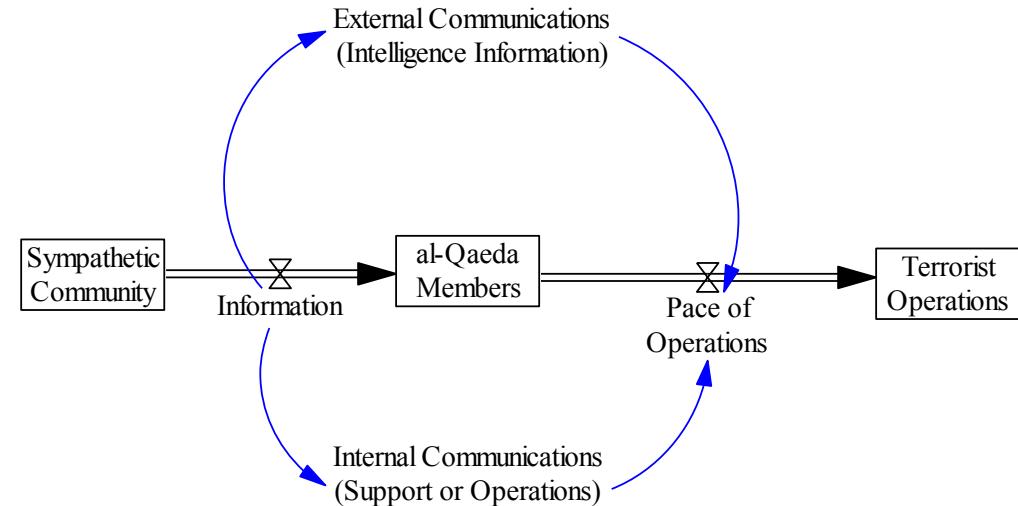
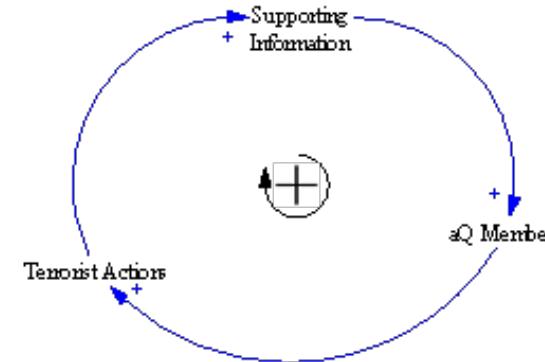
Agile Concepts

- Resilient
- Innovative
- Self-Contained Units
- Plug Compatibility
- Facilitated Reuse
- Flat Interaction
- Deferred Commitment
- Distributed Control and Information
- Self-Organization
- Evolving Standards
- Redundancy and Diversity
- Elastic Capacity

Decentralization Concepts

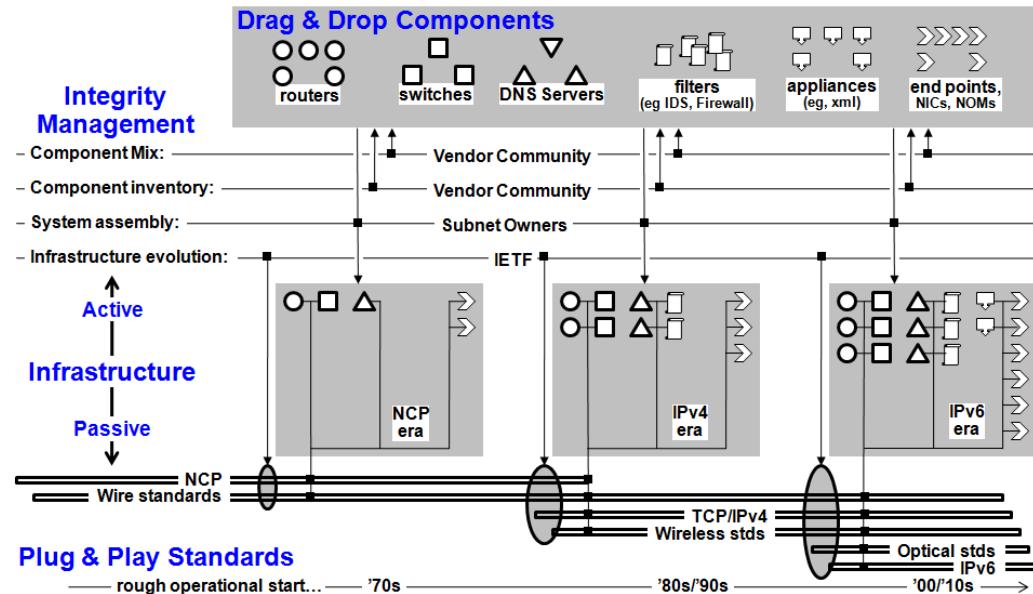
- No one in charge
- No headquarters
- Survives targets attack at obvious “head”
- Amorphous division of roles
- Organization unharmed if individual units removed
- Knowledge and power are distributed
- Organization flexible
- Units are self-funding
- Cannot count members
- Working groups communicate directly

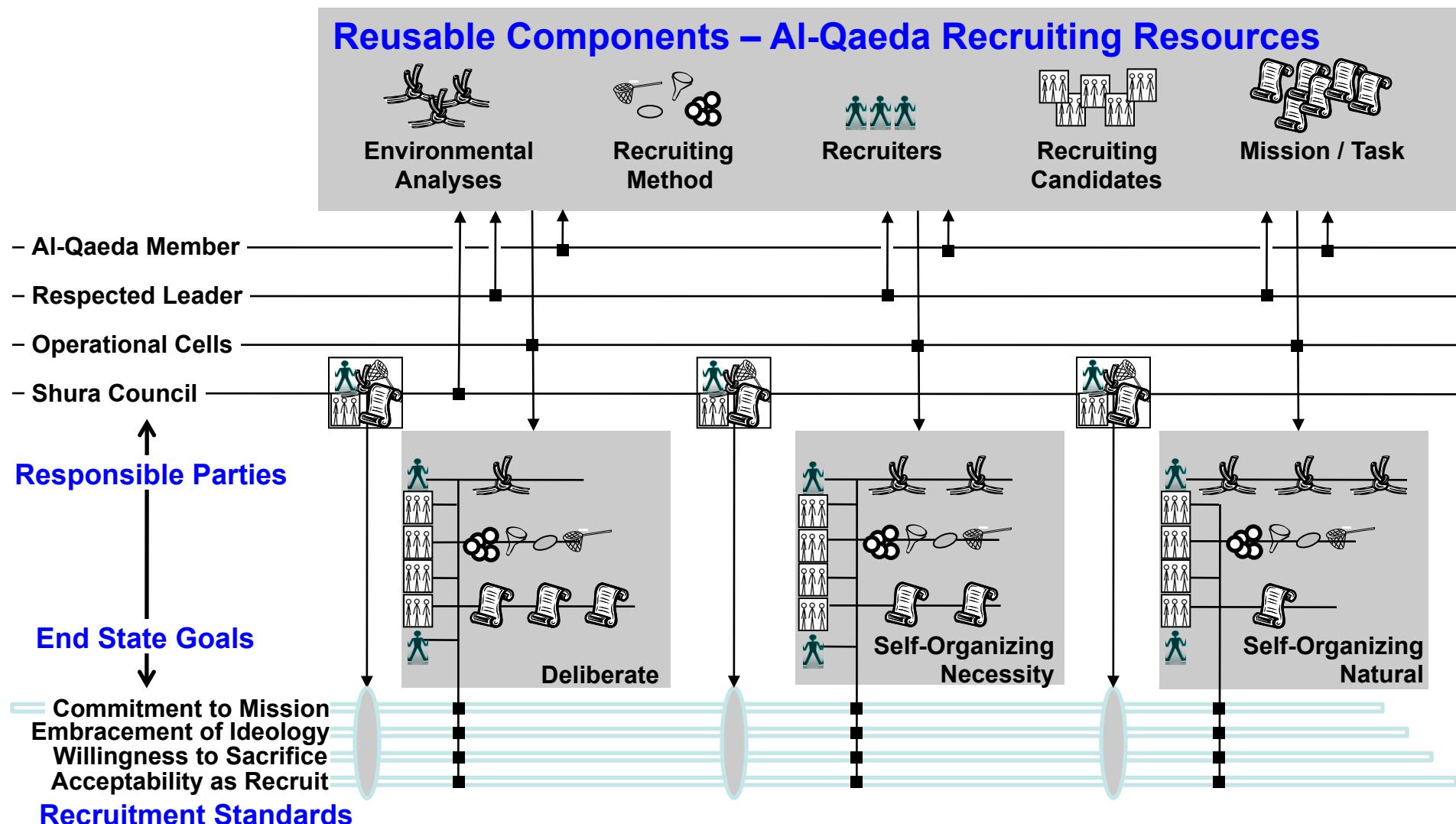
- Organizational Benefits
 - Enables spread of ideology
 - Supports recruiting
 - Mechanism for gathering intelligence and community support
 - Enables operations



- Depicts complex processes in a simple way
- Used to illustrate:
 - Responses the recruitment system deals with
 - How all of the system components are pulled together
 - Standards required for new recruit

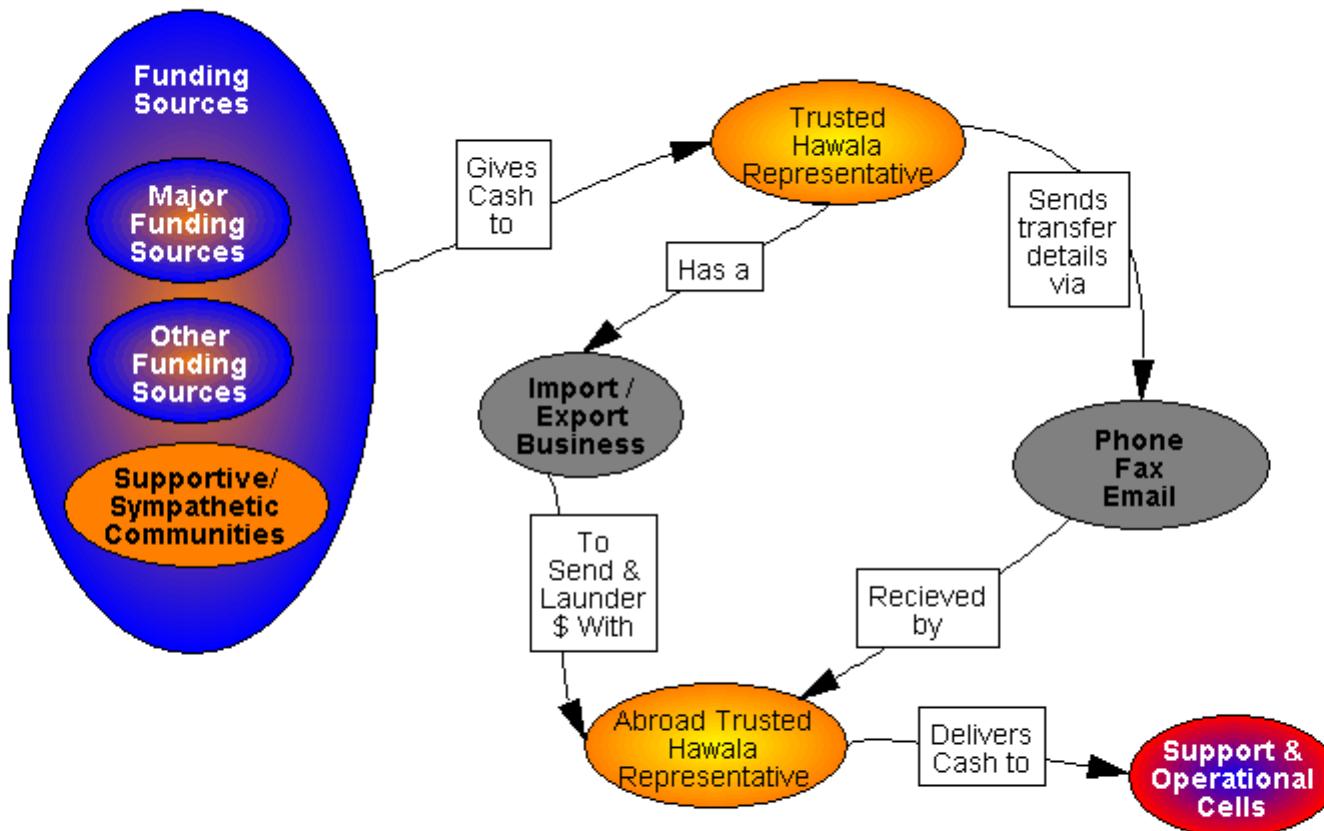
Is Internet Protocol Migration an Exhibit of the Agile Response-Able Architecture Pattern?





- Design
 - Osama bin Laden designed the financial system to be decentralized, compartmentalized, flexible and diverse to make it difficult for the Soviets to disrupt the system
- Environment
 - A Muslim's religious obligations include a mandate (*zakat*) to donate 2.5% of each individual's income to charities for humanitarian causes

- The *hawala* system is a cash remittance system that originated in India during the 18th century
- Heavily used by al-Qaeda to distribute funds globally
- The *hawala* system was used extensively to send funds to support the 1998 US embassy bombings in Africa, and the 9/11 attacks



- Give rise to a decentralized, distributed, self-healing system in human societies
- Characteristics:
 - Emergent Counter-Balance
 - Self-Correcting System
 - Autonomous
 - Self-Governing
 - Acting Independently
 - Autonomous Agent Systems
 - Generative Framework