

# Killing in the Name of God: Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda

Jerrold M. Post



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by

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## **Killing In The Name Of God: Osama Bin Laden And Al Qaeda**

Jerrold M. Post, M.D.<sup>1</sup>

What manner of men are these, living in American society, for years in some cases, aiming to kill thousands while dying in the process? Surely, one would think, they must be crazed psychotics. No normal person could do such a thing. But, in fact, the al Qaeda terrorists were psychologically “normal.” By no means were they psychologically disturbed. Indeed, terrorist groups expel emotionally disturbed individuals—they are a security risk.

In many ways, these new terrorists shatter the profile of suicidal terrorists developed in Israel. Seventeen to twenty-two in age, uneducated, unemployed, unmarried, the Israeli suicide bombers were dispirited unformed youth, looking forward to a bleak future, when they were recruited, sometimes only hours before the bombing. The group members psychologically manipulated the new recruits, persuading them, psychologically manipulating them, “brainwashing” them to believe that by carrying out a suicide bombing, they would find an honored place in the corridor of martyrs, and their lives would be meaningful; moreover, their parents would win status and would be financially rewarded. From the time they were recruited, the group members never left their sides, leaving them no opportunity of backing down from their fatal choice.

The values communicated to the recruits by the commanders are revealed in their answers to questions posed in a series of interviews of 35 incarcerated Middle Eastern terrorists, who agreed to be interviewed in Israeli and Palestinian prisons. Twenty of the terrorists belonged to radical Islamic terrorist groups— Hamas, Hezbollah, and Islamic Jihad. The psychologically oriented interviews attempted to understand their life history socialization, and recruitment. They were asked to explain their attitudes towards suicide, which the Koran proscribes, and whether they had any moral red lines in terms of numbers of casualties and extent of destruction they were willing to inflict. Their answers are revealing.

One interviewed terrorist took umbrage at the term “suicide.” “This is not suicide. Suicide is selfish, reflects mental weakness. This is “*istishad*” or martyrdom or self-sacrifice in the service of Allah.

One of the commanders interviewed was Hassan Salame, commander of the suicide bombers who carried out the wave of bombing in 1996 that precipitated the defeat of Prime Minister Shimon Peres and the election of Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu. Forty-six Israelis died in the bombings. Salame is sentenced to 46 consecutive life sentences. Concerning suicidal terrorism, he said: "A suicide bombing is the highest level of jihad, and highlights the depth of our faith. The bombers are holy fighters who carry out one of the more important articles of faith." Another commander asserted: "It is suicide attacks which earn the most respect and elevate the bombers to the highest possible level of martyrdom."

Asked how they could justify murdering innocent victims, another interview subject bridled: "I am not a murderer. A murderer is someone with a psychological problem; armed actions have a goal. Even if civilians are killed, it is not because we like it or are bloodthirsty. It is a fact of life in a people's struggle. The group doesn't do it because it wants to kill civilians, but because the jihad must go on."

Asked whether there were any moral red lines, another leader responded: "The more an attack hurts the enemy, the more important it is. That is the measure. The mass killings, especially the suicide bombings, were the biggest threat to the Israeli public and so most effort was devoted to these. The extent of the damage and the number of casualties are of primary importance. In a jihad, there are no red lines."

The attitudes reflected in these statements characterize the ethos of radical Islamic terrorism. But there is a striking contrast between the Palestinian suicide bombers in Israel and the nineteen terrorists who carried out the attacks of September 11th, an unprecedented act of mass casualty terrorism. They had lived in western society, in some cases for many years, exposed to its freedoms and opportunities. The leaders were older, in their mid-thirties and late twenties, and a number had received higher education. Mohammed Atta, the apparent ringleader, was thirty-three. Atta and two other hijackers had received graduate training at the technological university in Hamburg, Germany. Most came from financially comfortable middle class families in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. They blended in with society, eschewing the dress, customs and personal grooming of traditional Muslims. And yet, on the appointed day, like the Manchurian Candidate, they carried out their mission to hijack four airliners, and gave their lives while killing just over 3,000 people.

As I have come to understand them, the al Qaeda terrorists differ strikingly from the suicide bombers in Israel. Fully formed adults, they had internalized their values. They were “true believers” who subordinated their individuality to the group. They uncritically accepted the direction of the destructive charismatic leader of the organization, Osama bin Laden, and to them what he declares is moral is moral, indeed is a sacred obligation.

### **Osama bin Laden: A Political Personality Profile**

What matter of man can inspire such acts? How could the son of a multi-billionaire construction magnate in Saudi Arabia become the leader of this powerful radical Islamic terrorist organization?

Osama bin Laden was born in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in 1957, the 17th of 20-25 sons of Mohamed bin Laden, who had 52-54 children in total.<sup>2</sup> Originally an immigrant from Yemen, Muhamed bin Laden, by befriending the royal family, had established a major construction company and had amassed a fortune of some 2-3 billion dollars by the time of his death in a 1967 plane crash. Although estimates range from 18 million to as high as 200 million, it is most commonly agreed that bin Laden inherited approximately 57 million dollars at age 16 from his father’s estate.<sup>3</sup>

Osama was the only child of Mohammed and the least favorite of Mohammed’s ten wives, Hamida, a Syrian woman of Palestinian descent.<sup>4</sup> Hamida was reportedly a beautiful woman with a free and independent spirit who, as a result, often found herself in conflict with her husband. Reportedly by the time Osama was born, Hamida had been ostracized by the family and had been nicknamed “Al Abeda” (the slave). As her only child, Osama was referred to as “Ibn Al Abeda” (son of the slave). Unlike the other bin Laden children who had natural allies in their immediate circle of siblings, Osama and his mother had no such natural allies in the family and, as a consequence, there may have been a defensive alliance between Osama and his mother against the larger family which treated “the slave and the son of the slave” with contempt. This familial exclusion was perhaps the basis of Osama bin Laden’s later estrangement from his family. Reports are inconsistent as to how much of a presence Hamida was in her son’s life during his early developmental years,<sup>5</sup> but it

is clear that Mohamed bin Laden divorced Hamid prior to his death in 1967, when Osama bin Laden was ten years old.

Osama bin Laden attended King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah. He is a certified civil engineer, and was working toward a degree in Business Management (although it is not clear that he completed his course work) preparing him to play a leadership role in the family's far flung business interests.<sup>6</sup> These two skill areas would serve him in good stead in Afghanistan.

An important influence on Osama bin Laden's political ideology was Abdullah Azzam, a radical Palestinian professor at the university who became an important intellectual mentor for bin Laden. It was Azzam, a noted Islamist, who provided the vision to bin Laden of what should be done in response to the invasion of the Muslim state of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, and what role bin Laden could play. In particular, he conveyed to bin Laden the importance of bringing together Muslims from around the world to defend Afghanistan against the godless Soviet Union.

Demonstrating his already blossoming management skills, Osama bin Laden assisted Assam who founded the international recruitment network Maktab al-Khidamat (MAK - Services Office). The MAK advertised all over the Arab world for young Muslims to fight the Afghanistan jihad. In addition to the Arab and Muslim world, recruitment booths were set up in the United States and Europe. This massive international recruitment effort brought in Muslims from around the world – 5,000 were recruited from Saudi Arabia, 3,000 from Algeria, and 2,000 from Egypt. These were to become known as the Afghan Arabs, the nucleus of bin Laden's loyal followership.

A leader is not formed until he encounters his followers, and bin Laden's leadership experience during the struggle in Afghanistan against the Soviet invasion was crucial in the psychological development of bin Laden as a leader and was transformational for him. He came to Afghanistan unformed, and naïve. Using his own funds, he built clinics and hospitals, generously contributing to the *Mujahideen* movement. Eschewing an opulent life style, he lived an ascetic life in caves with his followers.

Regularly preaching about their holy mission, and inspirational in his rhetoric, bin Laden inspired his followers who came to adulate him. That they were able, with substantial American aid to be sure, to triumph over the Soviet Union, in what was to become the Soviet Vietnam, surely confirmed for Osama bin Laden and his followers the correctness of bin

Laden's vision. In the Koran it is said that Allah favors the weak and the underdog. Surely they could not have triumphed over the godless Soviets unless God was on their side. This was the template of the destructive charismatic relationship between bin Laden and his religiously inspired Islamic warriors, the *Mujahideen*.

Bin Laden had not yet broken with the Saudi government, which after all was the main foundation of his family's wealth. But he had successfully vanquished one of the three major enemies identified by Muhammad Abdel Salam Farag, who wrote *The Neglected Duty: The Existing Arab State, the Western-Zionist Nexus, and the Communists*. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the critical enemy among this triad was the "enemy who was near," the Arab state, according to leading Islamic fundamentalists. In Farag's manifesto, he argued, "We must begin with our Islamic country by establishing the rule of God in our nation...the first battle for *jihad* is the uprooting of these infidel leaders and replacing them with an Islamic system from which we can build."<sup>7</sup>

Bin Laden came to see the Soviet superpower as a "paper tiger" that could be defeated, but also set his sights on the remaining super-power, the United States, as a next target. This represented a fundamental departure from the strategy of Farag, replacing "the enemy that is near" with "the enemy that is afar," the superpowers.

With the victory in Afghanistan, bin Laden the warrior king and his loyal Afghan Arab fighters were eager to continue to pursue the *jihad*. Bin Laden broadened his vision and determined to pursue the *jihad* on a worldwide basis, seeking to reconstruct the nation of Islam throughout the world, assisting Muslims who were in conflict: Algeria, Angola, Bosnia, Chechnya, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, and so forth.

While bin Laden was committed to the international struggle, Abdullah Azzam believed in focusing all efforts on building Afghanistan into a model Islamic state, leading to increasing tension between Osama and his mentor. Following a split with Abdullah Azzam in 1988, bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, a founding father of the Islamic Jihad in Egypt, with the nucleus of their loyal followers established al Qaeda (The Base) as a direct outgrowth of MAK. The following year Abdullah Azzam died in a mysterious car bomb explosion. The most prominent theory has been that the Pakistani Intelligence Service (ISI) engineered the assassination.<sup>8</sup> Supporting this theory was that earlier that year Azzam had publicly and savagely attacked Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United

States, accusing them of the “massacre” of thousands of *mujahideen* in Afghanistan.

Another key area of speculation has been the rivalry between the Egyptian and non-Egyptian members in the growing MAK/al Qaeda empire. There are reports that it was the Egyptians, directed by Zawahiri, who killed Azzam, with or without bin Laden’s knowledge and acquiescence, thus removing a major obstacle to Zawahiri’s growing influence over bin Laden. There has been widespread speculation that as a result of their diverging views of the future of MAK/al Qaeda it was Osama who engineered his mentor’s death, but there has never been any proof linking him to the death of his one-time mentor.<sup>9</sup>

Regardless of who was responsible for the death of Azzam, bin Laden was left as the undisputed leader of the movement. Between the dismissal of U.S. help and the removal of Azzam from his leadership role, in the minds of both the leader and his followers, bin Laden became solely responsible for the victory over the Soviet superpower and the expansion of the jihadist movement.

With the defeat of the Soviet Union, the warrior king bin Laden and his loyal warriors had lost their enemy. As Eric Hoffer has observed, the power of a charismatic leader derives from his capacity to focus hatred against a single enemy, as Hitler did in the 1930s, unifying the German people in their hatred of the Jews. While in Sudan in 1993, bin Laden found his previous allies, the United States, with a military base on Saudi soil in the wake of the crisis in the Gulf. Decrying this “desecration” of holy Saudi soil by the infidel Americans, bin Laden had seamlessly transferred his enmity from the first defeated superpower, the Soviet Union, to the remaining superpower, the United States. As if to reinforce bin Laden’s messianic vision to his followers, over the next decade al Qaeda had a series of triumphs against this new enemy: The bombing of the Khobar Towers, the first World Trade Center bombing, the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the attack on the U.S.S. Cole in Yemen, and of course the most spectacular terrorist act in history, the events of September 11, an act of mass casualty super-terrorism.

Moreover, bin Laden actively criticized the Saudi royal family for their apostasy, decrying their stewardship of the land of the two cities, Mecca and Medina. The vigor of his criticism led Saudi Arabia to revoke his citizenship in 1994, and his family, which depended upon the Saudi leadership for their wealth, turned against him. Now bin Laden was

righteously attacking the other two enemies in the triad of enemies, the Western-Israeli nexus, and one of the newly designated apostate Arab nations, Saudi Arabia. But he maintained the primary focus on the external enemy, the United States.

Yes, the leadership of the apostate nations had to be replaced, but now it was the United States that was the prime enemy, for America was responsible for propping up the corrupt leadership of these countries. Thus, he continued the strategy born in Afghanistan of focusing on the enemy who is afar, the Zionist-Crusaders, rather than the enemy who is near, the targhut or oppressive domestic rulers.

In the October 1996 Declaration of War, bin Laden justified his aggression as defensive aggression, asserting that the Islamic nation was under attack.

*. . . The people of Islam had suffered from aggression, inequality and injustice imposed on them by the Zionist-Crusader alliance and their collaborators to the extent that Muslims' blood became the cheapest and their wealth looted in the hands of enemies. Their blood has spilled in Palestine and Iraq. The horrifying pictures of the massacre of Qana, in Lebanon are still fresh in our memory. Massacres in Tajikistan, Burma, Kashmir, Assam, Philippines, Somalia, Chechnya and In Bosnia-Herzegovina took place, massacres that send shivers in the body and shake the conscience.<sup>10</sup>*

With this, bin Laden and Zawahiri, who is widely believed to be bin Laden's pen, justified defensive jihad, while blaming the Zionist-Crusader alliance for every fight against Muslims. But the fourth jihad, the jihad of the sword, is a defensive jihad only, that is against those who take up arms against Muslims. In 1996, the target was only the American military in Saudi Arabia, with the stated goal of expelling the U.S. from Arabian soil, although the Declaration of War did expand the enemy to include not only military bearing arms but also non-combatants, justifying the attack in June 1996 on the American military barracks in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, Khobar Towers. Of course, to bin Laden's stated dismay, the enemy "that is afar," the United States, in fact, was near, indeed within the holy land of Arabia.



In 1998, a major expansion of the mission occurred, with the “Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and Crusaders” in which all Americans, civilian and military were declared to be the enemy, the civilians because they supported anti-Muslim U.S. policy.

*From: Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders  
World Islamic Front Statement (February 1998 Fatwa)*

*In compliance with God’s order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims:*

*The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies -- civilians and military -- is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty God, “and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together,” and “fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God.”*

*We -- with God’s help -- call on every Muslim who believes in God and wishes to be rewarded to comply with God’s order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it.*

According to bin Laden’s fatwah, it is not bin Laden, but God, who has ordered religious Muslims to kill all the Americans, God, for whom bin Laden speaks with authority. There is not an action that bin Laden orders that is not couched and justified in language from the Koran.

## **Al Qaeda: Ideology and Philosophy**

The ideological and philosophical underpinnings of al Qaeda can be found in several important documents. During my service as expert

witness in the spring 2001 trial of Osama bin Laden terrorists convicted for the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, I obtained a copy of the al-Qaeda operations manual. This document, introduced into evidence by the U.S. Department of Justice, was seized in Manchester, England in the home of Anas al-Liby, a fugitive charged in the al Qaeda terrorism conspiracy.

The provenance of the manual is somewhat obscure. Portions of it were circulating in radical Egyptian circles, suggesting that Ayman al Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden's personal physician and designated successor, a founder of the Islamic Jihad of Egypt, probably played a central role developing the al Qaeda terrorism manual. Evidence in support of the conjecture that it is Zawahiri that is actually the author is the absence of references to Jews and Christians in the cited religious verses, for the main target of the radical Egyptians were Muslim leaders, referred to as apostates or murtid, those who renounce Islam.

This is an altogether remarkable document. On the one hand, it resembles nothing more than a basic tradecraft-training manual, concerned with how to operate in a hostile environment. There are detailed instructions on everything from ciphers to how to resist interrogation. But it is also a manual of terror, with no less than three of the eighteen lessons (chapters) devoted to techniques for assassination.

But it is not merely a list of instructions, for it is also written to inspire the undercover operator as he carries on his dangerous work. And the language at times is quite eloquent. The document reflects a sophisticated approach on the part of al Qaeda operational officials, for there is a continuing emphasis on lessons learned. Many of the chapters cite previous mistakes, which provide the basis for the points emphasized in the lesson. And they do not learn lessons only from their past mistakes, but from adversaries as well. In one section, they cite the astute observational skill of an Israeli Mossad counter-espionage agent who foiled a terrorist plot, and cite Soviet KGB sources in others. Thus, the manual reflects the adaptive learning of the organization, and the care with which al Qaeda prepares its operatives. No detail is too small, as exemplified by the instruction in lesson eight, which is concerned with Member Safety, "Do not park in no parking zones."

Many of the instructions are accompanied by elaborate justification, citing *suras* (verses) from the Koran, scholars who have provided commentary on the Koran, or *hadiths* (tradition). These elaborate

justifications are offered especially when the instructions recommended seem to contradict Islamic teaching. In this text, the *suras* are not numbered, and while some are fairly well known, others are more obscure. Similarly, the sources of some of the *hadiths* are given, while the sources of others are not identified. The authenticity of many of the *suras* and *hadiths* is questionable, and several of the *suras* are taken out of context. For the Islamic youth taught to respect without questioning religious scholars, these can provide apparently persuasive religious authority justifying acts of violence. As Daniel Brumberg<sup>11</sup> sagely notes, in evaluating the authenticity of the sources, *sura* 3, 78, which speaks to Christians and Muslims, seems most aptly to apply to the writers of this manual.

*There are among them (People of the Book)  
A section who distort  
The Book with their tongues  
(As they read the Book) you would think  
It is part of the Book  
But it is not part  
Of the Book: and they say  
“That is from Allah,”  
But it is not from Allah:  
It is they who tell  
A lie against Allah  
And (well) they know it.*

This document goes a long way towards explaining how the September 11 hijackers were able to maintain their cover, in the United States, “the land of the enemies.” Lesson Eight, Measures That Should Be Taken By The Undercover Member, instructs the members to:

1. *Have a general appearance that does not indicate Islamic orientation (beard, toothpick, book, (long) shirt, small Koran)*
2. *Be careful not to mention the brother’s common expressions or show their behaviors (special praying appearance, “may Allah reward you”, “peace be on you”, while arriving and departing, etc)*
3. *Avoid visiting famous Islamic places (mosques, libraries, Islamic fairs, etc.)*

The explanation offered to “An Important Question: How can a Muslim spy live among enemies if he maintains his Islamic characteristics? How can he perform his duties to Allah and not want to appear Muslim?” in lesson eleven is compelling.

*“Concerning the issue of clothing and appearance (of true religion), Ibn Taimia – may Allah have mercy on him – said, “If a Muslim is in a combat or godless area, he is not obligated to have a different appearance from (those around him). The (Muslim) man may prefer or even be obligated to look like them, provided his actions brings a religious benefit...Resembling the polytheist in religious appearance is a kind of “necessity permits the forbidden” even though they (forbidden acts) are basically prohibited.”*

Citing verses from the Koran, the instruction in effect says that Allah will forgive you for not living the life of a good Muslim, for it is in the service of Allah, in the service of jihad.

An interesting example of the manner in which episodes in the life of the prophet are employed to justify acts which Muslim tradition forbids is found in the section “Justification for Beating and Killing Hostages” in lesson eleven.

*“Religious scholars have permitted beating. (The handbook provides an example from the life of the prophet.) The prophet – Allah bless and keep him – who was praying, started to depart saying, “Strike him if he tells you the truth and release him if he lies.” Then he said, “That is the death of someone (the hostage).” In this tradition, we find permission to interrogate the hostage for the purpose of obtaining information. It is permitted to strike the non-believer who has no covenant until he reveals the news, information and secrets of his people. The religious scholars have also permitted the killing of a hostage if he insists on withholding information from Moslems. They permitted his killing so that he would not inform his people of what he learned about the Muslim condition, number and secrets. In the Honein attack, after one of the spies learned about the Muslims kindness and weakness then fled, the prophet*

– Allah bless and keep him – permitted (shedding) his blood and said, “Find and kill him.”

The reference to religious scholars as the authoritative source is to be noted. These scholars “use a tradition” (i.e., a hadith) from Imam Mosallem, who in turn quotes Thabit Ibn Ans, probably a companion of the Prophet. The discussion is in the wake of the battle of Badr, in which a black slave was taken hostage, and apparently beaten on the orders of the Prophet himself. During the battle of Badr, there were two targets, one a line of traders with a wide variety of goods, led by Abu Sayfan coming from Syria, and the other a large army, which could not easily be vanquished. Mohammad had his men attack the latter, confirming the Muslims’ virtue in their readiness to abandon worldly goods for their cause. And in the battle supreme enemies of the Muslims were killed.

There is, it should be emphasized, no reference in any of the relevant *suras* in the Koran (for example *sura* 8, 5-19, that Mohammad gave his permission to beat or to kill hostages. Rather the key point is that the victory came only from Allah who (*sura* 9) provided “a thousand angels” and, as in *sura* 10, “there is no help except from Allah.”

Thus, the battle is used as a parable to signify man’s dependence on God, not to justify beating and killing hostages. Once again, by lifting the story of the battle out of context, the authors have misused religious stories and verses to provide justification for their goals. Furthermore, there is no reference in the Koran to the actions or statements attributed to Muhammad, although what the *hadith* claims may be accurate. But it is possible this story of the action and command of the Prophet was created to be persuasive. Indeed, the cold order attributed to the Prophet to “Find and kill him” is in jarring contrast to the image of the Prophet stressing mercy and compassion found throughout the Koran.

The assertion that the Prophet says, “Islam is supreme and there is nothing above it” can not be found in the Koran. The singular in the statement is discordant with many *suras* in the Koran, which while advancing the truth of Islam, do not imply that Islam is superior, nor are they meant to suggest that previous religions were intrinsically untrue.

In a more disturbing section of the training manual, the authors outline the “Characteristics of Members that Specialize in the Special Tactical Operations.” Among the various characteristics listed are:

- Individual's physical and combat fitness (jumping, climbing, running, etc.)
- Good training on the weapon of assassination, assault, kidnapping, and bombing (special operations); Possessing cleverness, canniness and deception
- Possessing intelligence, precision and alertness
- Tranquility and calm personality (that allows coping with psychological trauma such as those of the operation of bloodshed, mass murder.) Likewise, (the ability to withstand) reverse psychological traumas, such as killing one or all members of his group. (He should be able) to proceed with the work with calmness and equanimity.

These characteristics resemble those of the stated requirements for members in general, but with some refinements. The member in general shall have a calm and unflappable personality that can tolerate murder. While the special operations member, according to the last point, shall not only be calm in the face of mass murder but must be able to kill "one or all members of his group," and to do this with calmness and equanimity – surely a description of a psychopathic personality.

The training manual's dedication provides perhaps one of the best insights into the al Qaeda leadership's view of their struggle:

*In the name of Allah, the merciful and compassionate  
To those champions who avowed the truth day and night ...  
... And wrote with their blood and sufferings these phrases ...  
The confrontation that we are calling for with the apostate  
regimes does not know Socratic debates ..., Platonic ideals ...,  
nor Aristotelian diplomacy. But it knows the dialogue of bullets,  
the ideals of assassination, bombing, and destruction, and the  
diplomacy of the cannon and machine-gun...*

*Islamic governments have never and will never be established  
through peaceful solutions and cooperative councils. They are  
established as they [always] have been  
by pen and gun*

*by word and bullet*

*by tongue and teeth*

The literary quality and rhetorical force of this dedication is striking. Socratic debates, Platonic ideals, Aristotelian diplomacy—characteristics of a democracy—are dramatically contrasted with the absolutist, uncompromising nature of the confrontation with apostate regimes, referring to the moderate modernizing Islamic nations, who have strayed from the Islamist path, who will know only “the dialogue of the bullet, the ideals of assassination, bombing and destruction, and the diplomacy of the cannon and machine gun.”

The three dangling last lines, in their pairing of qualities responsible for the establishment of Islamic governments pair words connoting violence (gun, bullet, teeth) with words reflecting persuasive rhetoric (pen, word, tongue.) Powerful rhetoric is highly valued in Arab leaders, and a notable aspect of Osama bin Laden’s leadership is his capacity to use words to justify and to inspire.

### **Al Qaeda: Leadership, Structure and Organization**

Al Qaeda is unique among terrorist organizations in its organization and structure. Perhaps reflecting his training in business management, bin Laden in effect serves as chairman of the board of a holding company (“Radical Islam, Inc.”), a loose umbrella organization of semi-autonomous terrorist groups and organizations with bin Laden providing guidance, coordination, and financial and logistical facilitation.

Unlike other charismatically led organizations, such as Guzman’s Sendero Luminosa (Shinning Path) of Peru, or Ocalan’s terrorist PKK (Kurdistan’s Workers Party) of Turkey, both of which were mortally wounded when their leader was captured, bin Laden has established a system by which designated successors are seamlessly promoted into open positions. Ayman al-Zawahiri has been designated as bin Laden’s successor and number two. A leading Islamic militant, Zawahiri is a physician who founded the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the new faction, Talaa’al al Fateh (Vanguard of Conquerors.) It was Zawahiri’s group that responsible for the attempted assassination of President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and is considered responsible for the assassination of President Sadat. In fact, Zawahiri, who is responsible for more day to day decisions, can be seen as serving as CEO to bin Laden as Chairman of the Board. Chairman of the Islamic Committee and responsible for many of the

Fatwas and other official writings of al Qaeda, Zawahiri indeed is reputed to be even more apocalyptic and extreme in his views than bin Laden. There has been speculation about the amount of influence Zawahiri has over bin Laden, with some believing that Zawahiri is the charismatic “behind the scenes” driving force of al Qaeda. The now deceased number three, Atef, also of the Islamic Jihad of Egypt, was chairman of the military committee and training before his death in Afghanistan in the fall of 2001 during U.S. raids following the September 11th attacks in the United States. In another example of the successor system, following Atef’s death, Abu Zubaydah formerly head of personnel and recruiting, became head of the Military Committee until his capture by U.S. and Pakistani forces in Pakistan in the Spring of 2001. No doubt another successor has moved into the vacant position. Despite the fact that neither bin Laden nor Zawahiri has been seen in public since the fall 2001 U.S. attacks in Afghanistan, the fact that the al Qaeda’s global network continues to operate is testimony to the effective leadership structure of the organization.

Conceptually, al Qaeda differs significantly from other terrorist groups and organizations in its structural composition. Unprecedented in its transnational nature, al Qaeda has proved a challenge to law enforcement officials. It’s organizational structure, diffuse nature, broad based ethnic composition, emphasis on training, expansive financial network and its technological and military capabilities makes it not only a formidable force but difficult to detect.

Al Qaeda was reorganized in 1998 to enable the organization to more effectively manage its assets and pursue its goals. Gunaratna has characterized the revamped al Qaeda structure as having four distinct but interconnected elements: (1) a pyramidal structure to facilitate strategic and tactical direction, (2) a global terrorist network, (3) a base force capable of guerrilla warfare inside Afghanistan, and (4) a loose coalition of transnational terrorist and guerrilla groups. Strategic and tactical direction comes from al Qaeda’s Consultation Council (Majlis al-Shura) consisting of five committees (Military, Business, Communications, Islamic Studies and Media), each headed by a senior leader in the organization, which oversee the operations of the organization.

It is believed that bin Laden himself oversees the Business Committee, which has developed and continues to oversee al Qaeda’s extensive and sophisticated global financial resources. The committee, comprised of professional bankers, financiers and accountants coordinates



the vast financial empire of al Qaeda including legitimate institutions such as state and privately funded charities, banks and companies, as well as more clandestine entities. Although Gunaratna claims that many estimates of al Qaeda's funding for external operations have been exaggerated, he does place the annual budget of al Qaeda around \$50 million.<sup>12</sup> Despite efforts by the international law enforcement community, al Qaeda's financial network appears to remain strong.

Ayman Al Zawahiri is believed to head the Islamic Studies Committee. Comprised of various Islamic scholars and religious clerics, this committee issues the organization's Fatwas and other official writings. Although less has been written about this committee, they are clearly crucial to maintaining and generating the support of the masses of followers who subscribe to the organization's ideology.

The military committee, responsible for recruiting, training and operations is clearly one of the most powerful committees within the al Qaeda organization. Prior to his death in the fall of 2001 during the conflict in Afghanistan, Mohammed Atef headed this committee. Following his death, Abu Zubaydah seamlessly replaced Atef. In addition to maintaining and running the various training camps throughout the world, including those in Afghanistan, this committee reportedly planned and directed many of the organization's terrorist attacks. There have been a series of operational triumphs for al Qaeda over the past decade —Khobar Towers, the first World Trade Center bombing, the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the attack on the U.S.S. Cole in Yemen, and, of course, the most spectacular terrorist act in history, the events of September 11, the largest single act of mass casualty super-terrorism ever. Additionally, the military committee is responsible for developing the training methods and materials used in the various camps. As head of the committee, as in his previous position, Zubaydah screened applicants for al Qaeda training camps and sent successful recruits to various places in the world to establish new al Qaeda cells. Following the capture of Abu Zubaydah by U.S. and Pakistani forces in March 2002, it is unclear who now heads this committee, although there is no doubt the position has been filled.

Al Qaeda also maintains its own guerrilla army, known as the 55th Brigade, an elite body trained in small unit tactics. This group, comprised of approximately 2,000 fighters, was reportedly the "shock troops" of the Taliban, having been integrated into their army from

1997-2001.<sup>13</sup> These elite fighters came from Arab states such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and others, Central Asian states such as Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, and Asian and Southeast Asian states, primarily Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia. Most of the members had fought in either the Soviet/Afghan war or other regional conflicts including conflicts in Kashmir, Nagorno-Karabakh and others.<sup>14</sup> Well-equipped with weaponry left by the Soviets after their retreat from Afghanistan as well as newer technology this group remains a formidable presence despite having suffered serious losses during the fall 2001 U.S.-led attacks on Afghanistan.

Al Qaeda's global network consists of permanent or independently operating semi-permanent cells of al Qaeda trained militants established in over seventy-six countries worldwide as well as allied Islamist military and political groups globally.<sup>15</sup> The strict adherence to a cell structure has allowed al Qaeda to maintain an impressively high degree of secrecy and security. These cells are independent of other local groups al Qaeda may be aligned with, and range in size from two to fifteen members. Al Qaeda cells are often used as support for terrorist acts. Moreover, as was the case with the al Qaeda bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, locals who have been trained by, but are not official members of, al Qaeda, may be activated to support an operation. Although the September 11 hijackers were members of sleeper cells in the United States, most cells are used to establish safe houses, procure local resources and support outside operatives as needed to carry out an attack.

Al Qaeda's approach of allying itself with various existing terrorist groups around the world enhances the organizations transnational reach. Al Qaeda has worked to establish relationships with diverse groups – not only geographically diverse but they have also developed working relationships with organizations, such as Hezbollah and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), that do not necessarily follow the strict al Qaeda version of Salafi/Sunni Islam. According to Gunaratna, al Qaeda established relationships with at least thirty Islamist terrorist groups, including such well known groups as the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Harakat ul-Ansar (Pakistan); Al-Ittihad (Somalia); Islamic Jihad and Hamas (Palestine); and Al Gama`a al-Islamiya (Egypt). In addition to its primary logistical base in Afghanistan, al Qaeda maintained a direct presence in Sudan, Yemen, Chechnya, Tajikistan, Somalia, and the Philippines through relationships with Islamist organizations already existing in these

countries.<sup>16</sup> In essence, Bin Laden and his senior leaders have “grown” the al Qaeda “corporation” through mergers and acquisitions. Bin Laden has worked to minimize differences between the groups within the organization, emphasizing their similarities and uniting them with the vision of a common enemy – the West.

Having maintained bases in Pakistan, Sudan, Afghanistan and elsewhere as well as an ideological doctrine that rings true to much of the Islamic community, al Qaeda’s membership base reaches every corner of the world encompassing several dozen constituent nationalities and ethnic groups.<sup>17</sup> Its ideology has allowed al Qaeda to unite the previously unorganized global community of radical Islam, providing leadership and inspiration. Beyond the actual al Qaeda cells maintained in over 60 countries worldwide, al Qaeda sympathizers exist in virtually every country on earth. The sympathizers are not only the disenfranchised youth of impoverished communities, but include wealthy and successful businessmen in countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Like many terrorist organizations, al Qaeda does not have a formal recruitment strategy, rather it relies on familial ties and relationships, spotters in mosques who identify potential recruits and the volunteering of many members. Al Qaeda members recruit from their own family and national/social groups, and once trained these members are often reintegrated into their own communities. Very similar to the Muslim Brotherhood, the concept of “brotherhood” draws on the concept that familial ties in the Islamic world are binding. Al Qaeda members refer to each other as “brother” and tend to view the organization as their extended family.

Al Qaeda training camps have trained both formal al Qaeda members as well as members of Islamist organizations allied with al Qaeda. According to reports, al Qaeda training is broken into essentially three separate courses: (1) Basic Training – training specific to guerrilla war and Islamic law; (2) Advanced Training – training in the use of explosives, assassination and heavy weapons; and (3) Specialized Training – training in techniques of surveillance and counter-surveillance, forging and adapting identity documents and conducting maritime or vehicle-based suicide attacks.<sup>18</sup>

Al Qaeda has developed extensive training materials used in their camps and other training situations. In addition to paramilitary training, a great emphasis is placed on Islamic studies – Islamic law, history and

current politics. The extensive training materials produced by al Qaeda, exemplified by the manual discussed at the beginning of this paper, clearly demonstrate al Qaeda's twin training goals – the indoctrination of recruits in both military and religious studies.

### **Al Qaeda: What Next?**

The unique and far reaching transnational nature of al Qaeda represents one of the greatest threats currently facing the international security. Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, on New York and Washington D.C., NATO, for the first time since its founding 52 years ago, invoked article V stating that an attack on one member state of NATO was considered an attack on all member states of NATO. A massive air and ground campaign was launched against al Qaeda, its operational bases and its Taliban supporters in Afghanistan. As a result of the campaign, al Qaeda has suffered severe losses, including the death and or capture of several senior leaders. Despite these losses and the dispersal of members throughout the world, in testament to its organizational structure al Qaeda remains operationally in tact – wounded for sure, but certainly not destroyed.

For many al Qaeda followers the fall 2001 attacks in Afghanistan only served to reinforce their sense of righteous belief in their cause and their perception of the west as anti-Islamic aggressors. Although we have not seen a second large-scale al Qaeda attack, there is nothing to suggest that al Qaeda is no longer operational. Al Qaeda spends up to years planning a single operation, so it is quite conceivable they already have other terrorist events planned. Despite al Qaeda's Afghan base having been destroyed and its leadership dispersed, its cellular structure remains intact with active cells and sleeper cells throughout the world. Most likely though, due to the highly focused international attention, the next wave of al Qaeda attacks will be on a smaller scale and undertaken by cells operating independently.

There are several possible scenarios to consider for the future of al Qaeda following the September 11 terrorist attacks and subsequent U.S.-led war in Afghanistan:

1. In the event of Bin Laden's death or capture, al Qaeda's flat, dispersed organizational structure, the presence of a designated successor, the nature of Bin Laden's and Zawahiri's leadership and charisma and their enshrined religious mission-all suggest that the terrorist network would survive. His loss would assuredly be a setback, but since Zawahiri is already running al Qaeda's daily operations, his transition to the top job would be virtually seamless. The organization's luster for alienated Muslims would dim, but, within the organization, Zawahiri's considerable stature and charismatic attractiveness should permit him to carry on the network's mission. Bin Laden has not been seen in public since September 23, 2001, and he is believed by some to have been killed or seriously wounded in the attack on Tora Bora. Bin Laden's death would surely lead to his designation as a martyr in the cause of Islam and might well precipitate terrorist actions. His capture could lead to retaliatory hostage-taking or other terrorist actions. In either event, al Qaeda would survive.

2. There have been various reports that Zawahiri had been killed or seriously injured in bombing raids in Afghanistan in the Fall of 2001. A number of inner-circle members have also been said to have died. Should Zawahiri, in fact, be dead or incapacitated, and Bin Laden survives, this would also be a major setback. But because it has systematically prepared individuals for and promoted them to leadership positions, al Qaeda, with Bin Laden alive, would eventually recover and continue.

3. Should both Bin Laden and Zawahiri, *as well as other key leaders*, be killed or captured, in effect eliminating the leadership echelon, this would be a major, possibly fatal, blow to the terrorist network, although the international jihadist movement inspired by al Qaeda and its senior leadership would no doubt continue. It is likely that in this scenario members of most al Qaeda cells would disperse and attach themselves to locally based groups, and reprisal attacks could be expected. Other groups inspired by al Qaeda's success and mission would continue to operate, most likely though limited to their regional area of operation. The transnational nature of the al Qaeda as an

effective terrorist network in and of itself would most likely be destroyed.

4. Finally, should Bin Laden disappear, the myth of the hidden imam would probably be infused with mythic power, and others might well speak in Bin Laden's name in attempting to continue al Qaeda's terrorist mission.

While President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair have taken pains to clarify that the War on Terrorism is not a war against Muslims, but a war against terrorism, seeking to frame this as a religious war, bin Laden has now laid claim to the title of commander-in-chief of the Islamic world, opposing the commander-in-chief of the Western world, President George W. Bush. Alienated Arab youth find resonance in his statements, and see him as a hero. For many al Qaeda followers the fall 2001 attacks in Afghanistan only served to reinforce their sense of righteous in their cause and their perception of the west as anti-Islamic aggressors. Al Qaeda has become a catalyst for an international jihadist movement that will continue to grow independent of the original parent organization.

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## Notes

1. Jerrold Post is Professor Psychiatry, Political Psychology and International Affairs at the George Washington University, Washington, D.C. He is the co-author of *Political Paranoia: The Psychopolitics of Hatred*, which has been published in Germany.

2. There are varying reports about Osama bin Laden's exact location within the family, although 17th of 20/25 sons of 52 or 53 children is the most consistent figure available. Example sources include: Dickey, Christopher and Daniel McGinn. "Meet the bin Ladens" Newsweek. Found at: <http://www.msnbc.com/news/639250.asp>; Dorschner, John, "Osama bin Laden: The Mastermind of Terror." Knight Ridder Newspapers, September 24, 2001. Found at: [http://www.freep.com/news/nw/terror2001/osama24\\_20010924.html](http://www.freep.com/news/nw/terror2001/osama24_20010924.html); Miller, John. ABC interview with Osama bin Laden, see <http://www.terrorism.com/documents/crs-report.shtml>.

3. As noted, there is no single agreed upon figure as to the inheritance of Osama bin Laden and reports vary. Sources include: Beyer, Lisa. "The Most Wanted Man in the World." Found at: <http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101010924/wosama.html>; McFadden, Robert D., "Bin Laden's Journey From Rich, Pious Boy to the Mask of Evi," The New York Times, September 30, 2001.; Dorschner, John, "A Shadowy Empire of Hate was Born of a War in Afghanistan," Knight Ridder Newspapers, September 24, 2001.

4. Nearly all reports refer to Osama bin Laden as the only child (or the only son) of his mother with Muhammed bin Laden. Following her divorce, Osama bin Laden's mother remarried and subsequently started a second family.

5. While some reports (see Robinson) claim that Muhammed had Hamida removed from the family before Osama turned one-year-old, other reports more consistently note that she was ostracized by the family but do not indicate that her departure from the family (following her divorce with Muhammed) was as early as Robinson indicates.

6. While most reports indicate that Osama did indeed obtain his civil engineering certificate and at least start his degree in Business Management, Rohan Gunaratna in his *Inside al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), states that contrary to other reports, bin Laden did *not* study engineering.

7. Hashim, A. "Usama bin Laden's" Worldview and Grand Strategy," paper presented to conference at Navy War College, November 19,2001.

8. Adam Robinson, *Bin Laden: Behind the Mask of the Terrorist* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2001).

9. Gunaratna, op. cit.



10. *Declaration of War (1)* available on the World Wide Web at <http://www.msanews.mynet.net/MSANEWS/199610/19961013.10.html>.

11. The editor wishes to acknowledge his appreciation of the critical review of the text by Daniel Blumberg, an expert on radical Islam who is Professor of Government and Middle Eastern Affairs at Georgetown University. Commentary on the *suras* draws on the analysis of Professor Blumberg.

12. Gunaratna, 60-63.

13. Gunaratna, 58.

14. Gunaratna, 59.

15. Countries believed to have active al Qaeda cells include: Britain, France, Germany, Bosnia, Croatia, Albania, Bosnia, Spain, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Trinidad and Tobago, Australia, Papua New Guinea, Borneo, Brunei, Nauru, Fiji, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, UAE, West Bank and Gaza, Egypt, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, Comoros, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, South Africa, U.S., Canada, as well as a growing presence in South America. See Gunaratna, 79.

16. Gunaratna, Rohan. *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, 5-6.

17. Gunaratna, 96.

18. Gunaratna, 72

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