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## OSAMA BIN LADEN, AL-QAEDA, AND THE CHANGING FACE OF INTERNATIONAL INSURGENCIES

Major M.J. Lubiniecki

**JCSP 39**

**Master of Defence Studies**

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**PCEMI 39**

**Maîtrise en études de la défense**

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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE – COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES  
JCSP 39 – PCEMI 39  
2012 – 2013

MASTER OF DEFENCE STUDIES – MAÎTRISE EN ÉTUDES DE LA DÉFENSE

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INTERNATIONAL INSURGENCIES**

By Major M.J. Lubiniecki  
Par le major M.J. Lubiniecki

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>THESIS.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>STRUCTURE.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>DELINEATION OF TERMINOLOGY.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>SECTION 2: INSIGHT INTO THE ARCHITECT OF AL-QAEDA - EARLY INFLUENCES AND THE RADICALIZATION OF OSAMA BIN LADEN.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>THE BIN LADEN FAMILY.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>STUDENT.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>EARLY RADICALIZATION INFLUENCES.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>PERSONAL INFLUENCES.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>WORLD AFFAIRS.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>APPRENTICESHIP TO AN ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALIST.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>NATIONAL HERO OR NATIONAL DISGRACE.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>SECTION 3: THE CREATION OF AL-QAEDA – ESTABLISHING THE LONG-TERM ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>NOMAD.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING THE GLOBAL JIHAD.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES DEFINED AND PROCLAIMED .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>SECTION 4: THE ORGANIZATION IN ACTION – THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>ESCALATING ATTACKS.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>9/11 – AL-QAEDA’S DEFINING MOMENT.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>THE ECONOMIC WAR – A NEW STRATEGY IN THE WAR AGAINST THE WEST.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>ISOLATE THE US.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>MEDIA / PROPAGANDA – A NEW WEAPON FOR INSURGENCIES.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>SECTION 5: THE NETWORK IS ESTABLISHED – TRANSITION FROM LOCALIZED INSURGENCY TO GLOBAL NETWORK.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>ALBERTS &amp; HAYES’ POWER TO THE EDGE THEORY.....</b>	<b>44</b>

UNITY OF PURPOSE.....	46
FOCUS.....	47
CONVERGENCE.....	48
AL-QAEDA CORE GROUP.....	48
AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS.....	49
ASSOCIATED ORGANIZATIONS.....	49
ADHERENT ORGANIZATIONS.....	50
AGILITY.....	51
SELF SYNCHRONIZATION.....	55
CONCLUSION.....	56
<b>SECTION 6: MODERN-DAY AL-QAEDA NETWORK – TRANS-NATIONAL OPERATIONS AND GROWING SPHERE OF INFLUENCE.....</b>	<b>57</b>
INTRODUCTION.....	57
AL-QAEDA IN THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB (AQIM).....	58
AL-QAEDA IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA (AQAP).....	61
AL-QAEDA IN IRAQ (AQI).....	64
SHABAB.....	67
ABU SAYYAF GROUP (ASG).....	69
ANSAR AL-ISLAM.....	71
BOKO HARAM.....	73
CONCLUSION.....	76
<b>SECTION 7: CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>84</b>

**ABSTRACT**

Al-Qaeda continues to maintain relevance within the international security environment despite suffering significant losses of key leadership and terrain over the past decade. The ability of al-Qaeda to elevate itself from an unknown localized Islamist organization contained to Muslim states to that of gaining unprecedented notoriety within the global community for its threat to international security and stability is staggering. Further, the ability of a non-state actor to mature to the level currently possessed by al-Qaeda has shaken the core of western security thinking. It has also proven the resiliency of al-Qaeda's core principles and strategic visions having withstood the test of time and conflict. However, the ability to transition from hierarchical organization to global network insurgency is perhaps the greatest accomplishment and lasting development of Osama bin Laden to al-Qaeda's legacy. The transformation has provided al-Qaeda with an increase in overall longevity, effectiveness, and operational capabilities.

## **SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION**

### **Thesis**

This paper argues that Osama bin Laden's influence and ability to transform al-Qaeda from localized Islamist organization into an international insurgent network has increased the overall longevity, effectiveness, and capabilities of al-Qaeda. Network nodes, while maintaining their own respective organizational objectives, provide al-Qaeda with increased autonomy, flexibility, and publicity. The death of Osama bin Laden and the rapid expansion of the al-Qaeda network has not altered the strategic objectives of al-Qaeda as established in 1996 and 1998, but has rather enhanced the capacity of al-Qaeda by unifying adherent, associated, and affiliated network nodes with a common al-Qaeda vision and call-to-arms. Al-Qaeda remains as formidable of a threat to global stability and security today as it did on 9/11.

### **Structure**

This paper will provide a comprehensive study of Osama bin Laden and his defining role in creating the largest and most comprehensive insurgent movement in history. Sections two and three are provided to effectively set the stage and background for the creation of al-Qaeda and the influences upon the key leadership of the network, while sections four to six focus upon modern-day al-Qaeda and its development and increase in influence. Specifically, section two is focussed upon providing the background information required to understand the influences upon Osama bin Laden's development and motivations, to include his education, character influences, jihadist experiences, and the formulation of his belief structure. The early influences and relationships with individuals such as Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyyah, Sayyid Qutb, Abdullah Azzam, and Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri had a significant impact upon not only the shaping of bin Laden, but remain fundamental references and iconic figures within the global insurgent

network. Section three is dedicated to the creation and development of the al-Qaeda organization and Osama bin Laden's role in focussing the initial strategic goals and vision of the original group in the late 1990s. His leadership in this fledgling organization not only established strategic objectives for his followers, but also provided forewarning and the promise of repercussions should his announced adversaries not comply with his edict. This strategic plan has not only survived but thrived despite two decades of expansion, conflict as well as social and technological advancements.

Section four explores the operational actions undertaken by al-Qaeda in its developmental years that led to its rapid expansion and considerable increase in capabilities over a startlingly short period of time. Much of al-Qaeda's proclaimed or perceived success is in large part due to the reactions evoked by the western world following 9/11. The invasion of Iraq and the War on Terror are two examples of the expanding international battlefields upon which al-Qaeda has increased its ability to target US/Coalition forces, create anti-western propaganda, and pursue a war of attrition against the US and western states. Iraq and Afghanistan provided al-Qaeda with the physical domain required to mature as an organization, providing training grounds to increase the experience of its membership, enhancing international recruitment and financial support while solidifying al-Qaeda's legitimacy within the international community.

Section five utilizes the Albert and Hayes' Power to the Edge model as a template to highlight the criteria required for al-Qaeda to rapidly transform from a structured organization into a global insurgent network. It further demonstrates the networks ability to achieve self-synchronization through the achievement of unified purpose, focus, and convergence. The ability of al-Qaeda to not only establish and grow itself as a global insurgency, but to remain

operational throughout the world during a period of increased counter-insurgency campaigns is a testament to the foundations upon which it has been established.

Section six studies the current-day al-Qaeda network nodes in order to identify any variations to the interpretation, pursuit, or execution of al-Qaeda's original strategic visions. A cross-section of network nodes is provided to determine the degree to which the al-Qaeda Core or network hub is capable of influencing or guiding operations and activity. While it is recognized that effectiveness of the nodes varies, all components can be seen to contribute to the overall objectives.

Section seven serves as the conclusion of the paper, reinforcing the thesis that the expansion of al-Qaeda and the loss of Osama bin Laden have not impacted upon the lethality, effectiveness, or strategic objectives of the insurgent network.

## **Introduction**

Al-Qaeda has matured into a significant threat to the global security environment over the past two decades. It has consumed the Western world's military, political, social, and economic efforts in an attempt to eradicate the threat that jeopardizes both state and failing state's security and stability. Prior to 11 September 2001 (9/11), al-Qaeda had not achieved legitimacy as an international non-state actor, nor was it believed to be postured to execute coordinated attacks outside of localized state or regional borders. Obviously underestimated, the core leadership of this burgeoning insurgent organization had developed strategic short and long-term objectives that would allow al-Qaeda to gain essential public support within the Muslim population. This was done to project expanding capabilities into the global community, while building an organization that would be capable of challenging and defeating the United States (US) in a war of attrition similar to that achieved in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union.



Despite increased propaganda and public declarations of war against the US and western powers in the late 1990's, al-Qaeda remained a localized insurgency that had not emerged as a unique or formidable threat to global security. As al-Qaeda continued to develop its organizational capabilities and prepare for a global jihad, the world was unaware of the extent of the looming threat. On 9/11, al-Qaeda gained infamy within the global community; a non-state actor had struck at the heart of a global super power with an effect as powerful as the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbour. Al-Qaeda had overnight transformed from a relatively unknown entity into the largest non-state actor to threaten the western world. While significant, this transformation was only the first that the organization would undergo in the decade that followed.

Against a terrain-based and leadership-dependent adversary, the Global War on Terror was initiated in an attempt to destroy the al-Qaeda organization and neutralize the coordinating leadership of Osama bin Laden. However, al-Qaeda continued to expand and evolve; aided by the information age and globalization, it rapidly grew in size and sphere of influence. As nodes began to establish throughout the world, the network moved towards a self-synchronizing network capable of operating in line with the strategic goals of Osama bin Laden, but without the requirement of formal direction, oversight, or authority. This allowed for the 'branding' of al-Qaeda on significant numbers of insurgent initiatives throughout the world without formally requiring action by the al-Qaeda core, thereby increasing survivability and longevity of the key leadership and of the network itself. By 2006, al-Qaeda had achieved what no other insurgency had been capable of attaining; it had attained the status of an international insurgent network, expanding its freedom of action and influence outside of localized state and regional boundaries into the global community.

The evolution of al-Qaeda from a localized ideal with grand expectations to a survivable and focussed global network was not without challenge or compromise. The influx in membership and the globalization of the network impacted upon the degree of command and control exercised by the al-Qaeda core. However, the gains outweighed the risks and Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda were provided with an insurgent network that exceeded all anticipated capabilities. Success was greatly increased when al-Qaeda attached itself to localized insurgencies or radical fundamentalist organizations operating domestically. The mutually supporting relationship promoted the domestic objectives while concurrently enhancing al-Qaeda's span of influence, recruitment, and public perception of capability to operate internationally.

There is considerable debate over the effect that the death of key al-Qaeda leadership and Osama bin Laden himself will have on the future of al-Qaeda. The initial anticipation of a significant decrease in the effectiveness and operational capabilities of the network has not yet materialized in large part due to the network structure of al-Qaeda. The establishment of clearly defined and consistent strategic objectives, the synchronization of operational level aims, and the focus upon a common enemy has also played a significant role in the continued operational effectiveness of al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda's capability to execute a complex coordinated kinetic attack of considerable magnitude may have reached a pinnacle on 9/11, however, it also reaffirmed the efficacy of the global insurgent network and may yet prove to have greater global effect.

### **Delineation of Terminology**

It must be noted that for the purpose of this paper, there has been a very clear delineation between the usage of the terms 'Terrorist Organization' and 'Insurgency or Insurgent

Organization.’ While the two terms have been interchanged and applied at times out of context by the media, military, and political leadership throughout recent history, there remain subtle defining characteristics between the two. Terrorism is focussed upon the civilian population vice military, para-military, or economic targets in an attempt to achieve political gains through fear and coercion. Traditional terrorist activity has been focussed upon kinetic actions such as assassinations, bombings, hijackings, and kidnapping. Terrorism therefor can be viewed as an action or method employed by organizations in their pursuit of goals and objectives.<sup>1</sup>

Insurgencies must be viewed on a larger scale than that of terrorist organizations based upon the strategic objectives, organizational structure, diversity of tactics, and demographic depth.<sup>2</sup>

Insurgencies are focussed the overthrow of political order rule within an identified area through the employment of a broad spectrum of tactics to include “subversion, terrorism, guerrilla warfare and propaganda.”<sup>3</sup> Throughout history, insurgencies have been characterized by their implementation and execution of “provocation, intimidation, protraction, and exhaustion.”<sup>4</sup>

Within this paper, al-Qaeda is referred to as an insurgency and not a terrorist organization. While al-Qaeda has, and continues to implement terrorist actions and attacks throughout the world, be they first hand or through proxy involvement, terrorism remains a sub-category of al-Qaeda’s overall capability and tactics.

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<sup>1</sup> Bard E. O’Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare* (Washington: Brassey’s Inc. 1990), 24.

<sup>2</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

## **SECTION 2: INSIGHT INTO THE ARCHITECT OF AL-QAEDA - EARLY INFLUENCES AND THE RADICALIZATION OF OSAMA BIN LADEN**

### **Introduction**

To fully comprehend the creation, expansion, and current status of al-Qaeda, it is first important to understand Osama bin Laden as both an individual and as a leader. Through the study of his youth, his education, and the external influences that helped shape and develop not only him, but al-Qaeda as a whole, his decisions and actions seem predestined. This section is provided as the historical background to the creation of al-Qaeda, to discuss the foundations that brought the organization into existence, and the tools required to shape a localized insurgency into a global network. Al-Qaeda was not created in isolation. Instead, several environmental factors helped shape and define the establishment and development of the organization. Several key individuals played a significant role in mentoring bin Laden throughout his life; individuals such as Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyyah, Sayyid Qutb, Abdullah Azzam, and Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri. Further, the geo-political system that existed within the Muslim world, the Saudi Royal Family's invitation for US forces to base within Saudi Arabia, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Iranian revolution, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan were all critical factors in the radicalization of Osama bin Laden.

### **The bin Laden Family**

Mohammed bin Laden, Osama's father, was an ambitious business man and devoutly religious Muslim. He moved his family from Yemen to Saudi Arabia with the hopes of increasing the education and standard of living for his children while improving opportunities for the family construction business. The 1970's oil boom established the conditions for Mohammed bin Laden to enter into business relations with the Saudi elite including the house of al-Saud,

Saudi Arabia's Royal family.<sup>5</sup> The bin Laden company truly made its mark when it was awarded the contract to rebuild and renovate the holy mosques located in Mecca and Medina, after which it continued to be awarded contracts for the expansion and maintenance of local and state infrastructure.<sup>6</sup> While business had initiated the relationship between Mohammed bin Laden and the house of al-Saud, it was his personal initiatives and support for the Royal family during difficult financial times for Saudi Arabia that would cement his relationship as a true 'friend' of the house of al-Saud.<sup>7</sup> It was both the relationship with the Saudi royalty as well as the bin Laden family's vast wealth that proved crucial in enabling Osama bin Laden to establish al-Qaeda and support his global jihad.

## **Student**

Osama bin Laden was born in 1957 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. From an early age, education and religion shaped his development, attending al-Thagher Model School, the prestigious institution sponsored by King Faisal where the Royal family and Saudi elite enrolled their children. Osama was an astute student, undertaking a demanding course load of challenging subjects in addition to a personal dedication to the study and mastery of Islamic history, focusing on the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad, and the umma.<sup>8</sup> Upon completion of high school, he was accepted into the King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah where he studied management and economics.<sup>9</sup> For a period of time, it would appear that Osama would follow in his father's footsteps, assuming responsibility for a portion of the construction empire. However, several

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<sup>5</sup> Elaine Landau, *Osama bin Laden: A War Against the West*. (Brookfield: Twenty-First Century Books, 2002), 28-29.

<sup>6</sup> Yossef Bodansky, *Bin Laden: The Man who Declared War on America* (Toronto: Random House, 2001), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Landau, *Osama bin Laden: A War Against the West...*, 28-28-29.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Scheuer, *Osama bin Laden*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 30-31.

<sup>9</sup> Landau, *Osama bin Laden: A War Against the West...*, 28-30-31.

events transpired during the 1970's that had considerable impact upon Osama and altered his path significantly.

### **Early Radicalization Influences**

While there have been many influences upon Osama bin Laden's life, four major events in the 1970's, all progressively accelerated his transition towards radicalism. During the restoration of the mosques at Mecca and Medina, he established a powerful spiritual connection with both his father and Islam. This increase in spirituality provided him with a focused purity in his lifestyle as well as sparked a pursuit of Islamic teachings.<sup>10</sup> The Arab states' defeat in 1973 by the Israelis during the Yom Kippur War was a conflict that greatly affected Arab national honor and pride and had a significant developmental effect on a young bin Laden. Further, the influence and support provided to Israel by the United States during hostilities promoted the interpretation of the US as an equal enemy to the Arab community.<sup>11</sup> In 1975, the outbreak of Lebanese civil war transformed the once beautiful city of Beirut into a combat zone which saw Muslims and Christians opposed in violent conflict. Many Islamic fundamentalists from Arab states believed that the destruction of Beirut was due to the non-traditional Muslim activities that were allowed to transpire, such as prostitution, drug and alcohol use, gambling and nightclubs.<sup>12</sup> Lastly, the assassination of the Saudi King Faisal by his deranged nephew Prince Faisal ibn Musaid allowed the Islamic fundamentalists to capitalize upon Musaid's American education and westernization as the motivation behind the attack. This proclamation to denounce western ideals and corruption was accepted by the Arab masses, predominantly university students and young Saudis who called into question western values and ethics. "Intellectual leaders made it clear that the only

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<sup>10</sup> Bodansky, *Bin Laden: The Man who Declared War on America...*, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Landau, *Osama bin Laden: A War Against the West...*, 28-32-33.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-33.

way to avoid Western corruption and expel this enemy from the Muslim world was to revert to Islam in the truest sense.”<sup>13</sup> While these external geo-political events impacted upon bin Laden, it would be the fundamental beliefs, preaching, and actions undertaken by several individuals that would play a significant role in creating his belief structure and vision for what would become al-Qaeda.

### **Personal Influences**

Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyyah was such an influence and has contributed significantly to both the modern Islamist movement and the development of al-Qaeda’s future leader. A professor of both Islamic and Qur’anic studies as well as theology, he wrote about the requirement to establish and maintain a caliphate and openly denounced innovation.<sup>14</sup> When the Mongols invaded Baghdad and continued to press the Islamic borderlands, Ibn Taymiyyah participated in the defensive jihad against the Mongols and their Christian allies. Taymiyyah issued a fatwa against the Muslims who surrendered to the Mongols, calling them neither Muslim nor believers due to their apathy for the Mongols and refusal to participate in the jihad.<sup>15</sup> He further promoted the violent jihad over the peaceful jihad, and referenced the Qur’an’s literature to support his stance. Perhaps the most important message established by Taymiyyah was his proclamation to “drive off the enemy aggressor who destroys both religion and the world – there is no religious duty more important than this, apart from belief itself.”<sup>16</sup> Taymiyyah’s actions and writings became a fundamental element in the study and preachings of Osama bin

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Bonney, *Jihad: From Qur’an to bin Laden*. (Chippenham: Antony Rowe Ltd., 2004), 112.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

Laden. Much of Taymiyyah's works have been cited, referenced, and implemented by al-Qaeda as justification for their indiscriminate violent actions throughout the world.<sup>17</sup>

Sayyid Qutb was another key figure in the shaping of bin Laden's development and motivation for a global jihad against the US. Born in 1906, he elevated himself from poverty to obtain an education and achieve recognition as an influential writer.<sup>18</sup> Despite not being drawn to Islamic fundamentalism until the latter part of his life, the political situation in Egypt and across the Arab states set the conditions for his shift towards radicalism in the defence of Muslim territory. The British occupation of Egypt, the apparent complicity demonstrated by the Turkish King Farouk, combined with the post WWII establishment of Israel as a Jewish nation-state within traditional Arab land greatly impacted Qutb's views of the international community. However, the assassination of the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hasan-al-Banna, would commit Qutb to the political uses of Islam and involvement within the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>19</sup> His jaded views of Europe and the US consumed his writing, declaring them as the number one enemy of Muslims, denouncing modernization, their morals, principals, and unscrupulous philosophies. He preached the requirement to protect the Arab youth from these influences, preventing the oppression and ultimate demise of Islam through western expansionism and influence throughout the world. He characterized Americans as the enemy of humanity and promoted their destruction at every opportunity.<sup>20</sup> Accused of involvement in the assassination attempt of Egyptian President Nasser in 1954, he and thousands of the Muslim Brotherhood were imprisoned, during which time he wrote 'In the Shade of the Quran' and 'Milestones,'

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Towers: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*. (New York: Random House, Inc., 2006), 7.

<sup>19</sup> Gilles Kepel and Jean-Pierre Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its Own Words*. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: 2008), 149.

<sup>20</sup> Wright, *The Looming Towers: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11...*, 23.



fundamental literature for the Islamic activists.<sup>21</sup> Once paroled, Qutb regenerated the secret apparatus of the Muslim Brotherhood with the intent of overthrowing the government. However, internal breaches of security led to his arrest and trial where he was proclaimed guilty and sentenced to death, an announcement to which he responded, “thank God...I performed the jihad for fifteen years until I earned this martyrdom.”<sup>22</sup>

Abdullah Azzam was the first true Islamist that directly influenced Osama bin Laden, facilitating the interaction with members of the Afghan Islamic Group and the covert movement into Pakistan and Afghanistan in the early years of the Soviet-Afghan war.<sup>23</sup> Azzam was born in 1941 and was raised in Jordan, receiving his B.A. in Sharia Islamic Law prior to joining the jihad against Israel following the 1967 Sixty Days War.<sup>24</sup> His true contribution to the jihad was not upon the battlefield but instead in the classrooms and mosques whereby he incited and recruited new members to the cause. During this time he fostered many relations with Egyptian Islamic militants that would become instrumental to his endeavours in Afghanistan. Demoralized by the changing ideology of the Palestinian jihad, he disengaged from the armed struggle against Israel and travelled to Saudi Arabia to teach at the King Abdul Aziz University. There he educated his students on the centrality of the jihad and the core requirement to liberate the Muslim world from encroaching western influences.<sup>25</sup> Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Azzam was one of the first Arabs to join the jihad. Leaving Saudi Arabia first for Islamabad where he lectured at the International Islamic University before then moving closer to the front lines of Afghanistan, he established Bait-ul-Ansar in response to the growing requirement to provide specialized

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>23</sup> Abdel B. Atwan, *The Secret History of al Qaeda*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 43-44.

<sup>24</sup> Scheuer, *Osama bin Laden...*, 52.

<sup>25</sup> Bodansky, *Bin Laden: The Man who Declared War on America...*, 11.

services to the mujahedeen.<sup>26</sup> Azzam became Osama bin Laden's first jihadist mentor, engaging in detailed discussions involving current events within the Muslim world and in particular, the requirement to liberate Afghanistan from communist invasion. Azzam's education and influence over bin Laden would continue until the conclusion of the Soviet-Afghan war, at which time differences in strategic goals and visions began to surface, creating a divide amongst the two.

Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden's right hand man and the current leader of al-Qaeda, played a crucial role in the development of Osama bin Laden, working hand in hand in the creation of al-Qaeda, its strategic vision, and the transition to global network. Al-Zawahiri shared a similar upbringing to bin Laden in the fact that he rejected a life of affluence and wealth in exchange for the pursuit of a religious jihad through poverty, hardships, and radical action.<sup>27</sup> Despite being a leading Egyptian physician raised in an upper-class family of doctors, scholars, and Muslim politicians, he was drawn to revolutionary jihadist ideologies from a young age, an affinity that remained with him throughout life. The execution of Sayyid Qutb in 1966, the political situation in Egypt under both Nasser and Sadat, and the Israeli defeat of the Arabs in 1973 were critical influences that helped shape and motivate al-Zawahiri, moving him closer to revolutionary jihadist ideologies.<sup>28</sup> Sayyid Qutb's martyrdom and Islamist writings were critical in establishing the groundwork of al-Zawahiri's ideological beliefs and strategic vision, just as they had for bin Laden.<sup>29</sup> Al-Zawahiri's underground jihadist cell merged with three other Islamic groups to form Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, the most radical Islamist movement of Upper-Egypt, responsible for the assassination of Anwar al-Sadat in 1981 following his peace treaties

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Montasser Al-Zayayat, *The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden's Right-Hand Man* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 9-11.

<sup>29</sup> Kepel and Milelli, *Al-Qaeda in its Own Words...*, 150.

with the Israel.<sup>30</sup> Al-Zawahiri had proclaimed jihad against Zionism, Communism, and Imperialism, further adding the declared apostate regimes of Saudi Arabia and Egypt as the enemies of Islam and his newly formed Islamist movement: Tanzeem al-Jihad (or Egyptian Islamic Jihad).<sup>31</sup> The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a natural draw for al-Zawahiri. He moved to Pakistan to treat Afghan refugees which also allowed him to identify alternate regions suitable to base and train his jihad as the security situation in Egypt deteriorated.<sup>32</sup> It would be here in Afghanistan that he would establish initial contact with Osama bin Laden and lay the groundwork for a relationship that would flourish in the decades to follow.

### **World Affairs**

While these individuals were critical to informing Osama bin Laden's political, religious, and social belief structure, several national and international events occurred that would shape his future and encourage the transition towards Islamic fundamentalism. In 1951 Muhammad Mossadegh became Prime Minister of Iran, pledging to nationalize the state oil industry and limit the power of the Shah, Muhammad Reza Shah. He believed that modernization and nation-building would propel Iran into the modern world, removing the colonial past and allowing it to become a major power within the region.<sup>33</sup> The removal of the Shah provided Mossadegh opportunity to seize extraordinary power and disband parliament. Fearing a dictatorship, a broad anti-Mossadegh coalition formed, and capitalizing on British and American assistance, the military seized control and re-instated the Shah.<sup>34</sup> However, the Shah pursued a similar policy to that of Mossadegh, attempting to establish Iran as the fifth great industrial power by financing

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>32</sup> Wright. *The Looming Towers: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11...*, 44.

<sup>33</sup> James L. Gelvin. *The Modern Middle East: A History*, Third Edition. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 295.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

rapid development through oil revenues. Significant regulations were implemented to repress and eliminate dissent amongst the population and the government, resulting in factions taking up arms against the state in direct opposition to his controversial leadership methods and the pro-Western power relations that were emerging.<sup>35</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini, a local cleric, publically demanded the resignation of the Shah and was subsequently exiled to France for these sentiments. Khomeini continued to organize and coordinate the protests from France, until the Shah was forced to flee Iran.<sup>36</sup> The exile of the Shah was significant for two critical reasons: first, it demonstrated the public's opposition to secular-nationalism as it was influenced by the west. Second, the attempt to secularize power within the government and significantly limit the power of the ulama was seen to oppress the masses.<sup>37</sup> Westernization of Muslim states and the perceived "inauthentic" governance by Muslim leaders generated significant backlash by the population and played a significant role in the influence and development of individuals such as bin Laden, Azzam, and al-Zawahiri.

The twentieth century brought about increased tensions between the Muslim and western worlds, events transpired that fuelled Islamist rhetoric and paved the way for armed conflict. Bin Laden lived the aftermath of these events, however, they have been a cornerstone component within his public declarations of war against the western powers. In 1917, the Balfour Declaration was issued by the British government, outlining its intent to establish a nation-state for the Jewish people in Palestine, an announcement that witnessed increased anti-Jewish clashes by the Arabs.<sup>38</sup> In 1947, having failed to establish the conditions for the coexistence of Jews and

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Ami Gluska, *The Israeli Military and the Origins of the 1967 War: Government, armed forces and defense policy, 1963-1967*. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 2.

Arabs, Britain turned to the UN General Assembly for resolution. This resulted in the decision to partition the country into two states, with Jerusalem identified as an international area. Following additional conflict in 1949, Israel had increased its land mass by 20% above what it had originally been mandated by the UN. Palestinians fled Israel and Jewish immigrants from neighbouring Arab states massed in Israel.<sup>39</sup> In 1967, the six-day war was waged primarily over the Arab League's closure of the entrance to the Red Sea, effectively quarantining the Israeli city of Eilat and freezing shipping routes. Israel commanded victory, capturing Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula.<sup>40</sup> The conflict terminated in a stalemate centred upon the recognition of Israel as a legitimate state versus the return of territory to Arab control. With no Arab League members conceding to negotiations with Israel, the situation stagnated, with many relying upon intervention from the Soviet Union or United States to influence Israel. Egypt and Syria, in an attempt to manipulate United States intervention, engaged Israel once again in the 1973 Sixty-Day war. The results were astonishingly similar to the 1967 conflict with the Arabs suffering the overall defeat, losing Jerusalem to Israeli control and the proclamation of it as the eternal and indivisible capital.<sup>41</sup> Israel had twice shocked the Arab community, increasing anti-Jewish attitudes and sparking the establishment of radical Islamist organizations within the region, paving the way for the rise of al-Qaeda and bin Laden's public declaration of war on the US and Israel.

### **Apprentice to an Islamic Fundamentalist**

While these events influenced Osama bin Laden and facilitated his transformation from heir of the largest Saudi construction company towards Islamic fundamentalist, they did not have

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Gelvin. *The Modern Middle East: A History*..., 284-285.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

the impact that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan would have in transforming his beliefs into actions. In 1978, a leftist group of Soviet trained Afghan military officers overthrew the government and established the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, a satellite state of the USSR.<sup>42</sup> As civil war erupted, the Soviet Union inaugurated President Nur Taraki who immediately set about reforming land claims, women's rights, and the structure of Afghan society. Mujahedeen membership flourished, to include an increasing number of Afghan military members who defected due to the religious proclamation of jihad upon the communist regime. Control became the vital ground in the conflict with both the state and the Mujahedeen desperately trying to expand influence and control outside of the cities and into the countryside where tribes and clans ruled supreme.<sup>43</sup>

In 1979 Prime Minister, Hafizullah Amin, assassinated President Taraki and seized control, however his rule was equally as controversial and soon a significant number of cities and villages had fallen into civil war. With this change in leadership, the Soviet Union had lost influence in Afghanistan and it stood open to interference from other great powers unless control could be re-established. On Christmas Eve, 1979, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, first executing Amin, then replacing him and his government with Soviet nationals. Initial estimates believed that the army would only be required for a period of up to three years in order to institute and oversee the stabilization of the country.<sup>44</sup> Iran, Pakistan, and other bordering neighbours saw the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviets as a potential threat to their own security and nation-state status. In an effort to aid the Mujahedeen and extend the buffer zone along their own borders, they provided financial, logistic, and training support. As the war

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<sup>42</sup> Ali Ahmad Jalali and Lester W. Grau, *The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War*. (Quantico: The US Marine Corps Studies and Analysis Division, 1995), xvi.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

continued, so did the external support for the Mujahedeen, to include the US, Britain, China, France, Italy, and Saudi Arabia. The Soviet Union having experienced success in the early years of the war, now saw Afghanistan become the stage for a global proxy war where they faced an enemy that modernized its tactics and weapons as the war progressed.

The invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979 proved pivotal in exposing bin Laden to key individuals that would greatly influence and mentor him in the creation of al-Qaeda. In 1982, bin Laden moved to Afghanistan to assist the Mujahedeen in their fight against the anti-Islamic occupying force. It was at this time that he became involved with Abdullah Azzam, the creator and operator of Makhtab al-Khadamat, also known as the services bureau. Osama bin Laden was immediately drawn to Azzam and the concept of Makhtab al-Khadamat.<sup>45</sup> While the rudimentary foundation had been established to receive jihadists on their way to fight the Soviet Union, bin Laden exercised his influence and capitalized upon his wealth to further expand MK into a fully operational service that would process a significant number of recruits with specialized training and assign them accordingly to Afghan Mujahedeen leaders. While he had yet to take up arms against the Soviets, his influence in Saudi Arabia to draw recruits, his annual donation of approximately \$300,000, and the large amount of construction equipment provided for defensive fortifications were all significant contributions to the war effort. However, it would be at the battles of Jaji and Jalalabad where Osama bin Laden would emerge as a true leader and gain the trust and support of the local Afghans.<sup>46</sup>

The withdrawal of the Soviet Union was a significant victory for the Afghan jihad, the Mujahedeen, and the foreign fighters who travelled to Afghanistan to fight the occupying

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<sup>45</sup> Scheuer, *Osama bin Laden...*, 54.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-65.

communist force. Despite being a proxy war between East vs. West expansionism, the fact that the USSR had met the same fate as the US in Vietnam was a considerable shot to the status of global super-power, a status that would soon come apart at the seams. The relationship between bin Laden and Azzam was beginning to be strained as differences arose regarding the location of future jihads. A proposal by Makhtab al-Khadamat's Egyptian fighters and al-Zawahiri to train the jihadists fighting in Afghanistan in terrorist tactics was vehemently opposed by Azzam. He had lived in Egypt and was concerned with the increased security measures and counter-terrorism initiatives that had been established by the Egyptian government in recent years. He further proclaimed in a fatwa that the use of jihadi funding for use in terrorist training was in direct violation of Islamic law.<sup>47</sup> Azzam believed that the Afghan Arabs should remain in Afghanistan and continue to remain engaged in the Afghan conflict, whereas al-Zawahiri proposed the jihad against the close enemy, the proclaimed apostate Arab regimes.<sup>48</sup> The death of Azzam shortly after the conclusion of the Afghan-Soviet war opened the door for Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri to foster their relationship and move closer to the development of al-Qaeda as a formed organization. Osama bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia in order to increase his network of supporters, financiers, and recruits, as well as to refine his goals and plans for the global jihad.<sup>49</sup>

### **National Hero or National Disgrace**

Bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia a hero and role model due to his success and actions in Afghanistan, trading his wealth and security for a position along the front-lines of the Afghan jihad. As he had achieved with the Afghan Mujahedeen, he earned the trust and respect of the

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<sup>47</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*. (New York: Berkley Books, 2002), 32.

<sup>48</sup> Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its Own Words...*, 96.

<sup>49</sup> Bodansky, *Bin Laden: The Man who Declared War on America...*, 15-20, 27.



Saudi population.<sup>50</sup> He spoke regularly at mosques and private gatherings, proclaiming the power of the Muslim nation and preaching the words of Azzam. However, hypocrisy amongst the Saudi royals, elite, and religious leadership began to emerge. Despite their support for the Afghan jihad, they opposed the overthrow of the Marxist regime in South Yemen, leaving bin Laden questioning the motives and direction that the Saudi royal family was taking the state.<sup>51</sup> Prior to the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, bin Laden warned senior Saudi officials, including Interior Minister Prince Nayef and the Defense Minister Prince Sultan, of the imminent attack and possible second order effects if Saddam pushed through Kuwait unopposed and crossed into the borders of Saudi Arabia. He further offered to aid Saudi defensive structures through the employment of his family's construction equipment as well as call upon the Afghan combat veterans to aid in the defensive blocking positions.<sup>52</sup> His warnings, advice, and contributions were all rejected by the Saudi royal family, who instead invited the US military to operate from Saudi Arabia as a staging base for Operation Desert Shield. Bin Laden's public denunciation of this action was seen as a liability to the Saudi government due to his public influence and anti-American proclamations. Unable to reconcile these differences, bin Laden returned to Peshawar for a short period before moving to a pro-Islamic region of the Sudan. Bin Laden's belief in Saudi Arabia and the Arabian Peninsula as a region where Islam would flourish and the caliphate would be once again be re-established began to crumble around him. He perceived the war that was unfolding would not be the world against Iraq, but would become the war in which the West

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<sup>50</sup> Scheuer, *Osama bin Laden...*, 79.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

attacked Islam. No longer did he view Iraq as the primary enemy of Islam, the US had assumed that lofty position.<sup>53</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Osama bin Laden's alignment with Islamic radicalization was a gradual process that was based upon significant exterior factors within Arab society, the region, and the world. The oil boom that empowered the Middle East in the 1950-1960s, the Arab-Israeli wars, the revolution in Iran, the Soviet-Afghan war, and the American invitation into Saudi Arabia all progressively informed bin Laden's shift towards the belief in the requirement for global jihad. Further, his interaction and study of such influential individuals as Ibn Taymiyya, Sayyid Qutb, Abdullah Azzam, and Ayman al-Zawahiri helped shape his motivation, confirmed his belief structure, and empowered him to take action within the Muslim community. Once he had established himself as a major player within the Islamist movement, his advice, services, and finances were sought by insurgent organizations throughout the Near and Middle East. While his regional power and influence was increasing, it would be a decade before he would rise to international recognition and stand in a position to challenge the only remaining superpower, the US.

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

### **SECTION 3: THE CREATION OF AL-QAEDA – ESTABLISHING THE LONG-TERM ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY**

#### **Introduction**

Having left Saudi Arabia in late 1991 under unfavorable conditions, without a suitable base of operations, and with growing disappointment and frustration with the emerging situation, Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda began to stagnate. The post Soviet-Afghan conflict brought with it increased challenges as the unified Afghan front against the Soviets was replaced with chaotic, violent and political infighting amongst the various mujahedeen factions. Despite the international community's aid and efforts to install a legitimate government structure in Afghanistan, cooperation with the mujahedeen failed.<sup>54</sup> This social and political infighting educated bin Laden to the fact that while military success may be possible in future conflicts, without unity amongst the participating factions, overall victory would not be possible.<sup>55</sup> The unification of Muslims would become critical to his ability to achieve his long term strategic goals and visions, without which, Muslim communities would forever be in internal conflict, unable to obtain global superiority. Al-Qaeda required a base of operations and a strategic vision that would unite the Muslim population and drive out foreign influences. The skeletal remains of al-Qaeda's training facilities in Afghanistan remained intact after 1988, however, were not resourced to generate this strategic end state.<sup>56</sup> Distancing himself from the internal turmoil in Afghanistan, bin Laden looked to the Sudan to provide him with the required staging ground for the growth and expansion of his insurgency.

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>56</sup> Don Ressler and Vahid Brown, *The Haqqani Nexus and the Evolution of al-Qaeda*. (New York: The Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point, 2011), 26.

## Nomad

In Sudan, bin Laden sought support and security for al-Qaeda, focusing upon developing relations with the leadership of the National Islamic Front, Dr. Hasan al-Turabi, the Sudanese President, Omar al-Bashir, as well as legitimate regional businesses. Bin Laden believed that Sudan, despite its poverty, could be transformed into a modernized Islamic state. His personal wealth became a major injection into the Sudanese economy, augmenting funding within the agriculture, infrastructure, and national bank sectors. His construction business and other investments provided him with legitimate financial profits as well as opportunity to mask the funding of insurgent activity.<sup>57</sup> Concurrently, bin Laden spent upwards of \$2 million in the purchase and development of military training camps within the Sudan's isolated regions where he provided Arabs the required training and education that would become critical in the execution of international attacks.

As the political and military situation in Africa began to deteriorate, bin Laden capitalized upon the opportunity to increase the experience of his organization by distributing key personnel into areas of conflict to assist in the local insurgency's campaign through the provision of finances, tactical advice, and military training. In 1992, Mohamed Atef, bin Laden's second-in-command of the military committee, traveled to Somalia to meet with Somali warlord Mohamed Farah Aideed to negotiate attacks that would be carried out against the American forces intervening in Somalia as part of a United Task Force: Operation Restore Hope. The first of these attacks occurred in Aden, Yemen in December 1992 when a bomb was detonated

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<sup>57</sup> Michael Scheuer, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America*. Washington: Potomac Books Inc., 2006), 129-133.

targeting American soldiers transiting into Somalia.<sup>58</sup> The next attack occurred in October 1993 when Somali militants engaged US forces in a vicious firefight, resulting in the loss of American helicopters and a significant number of US killed and wounded. The success of the attack was credited to the level of training and mentorship provided by al-Qaeda agents.<sup>59</sup> Al-Qaeda claims to have continued the training and mentorship of Somali fighters well into 1993-94 as a means of preventing the US from establishing a foothold in the Horn of Africa. Regardless of the actual effect on the ground, al-Qaeda's ability to create the belief that it played a significant role in the US withdrawal from Somalia greatly bolstered its international image.<sup>60</sup>

Assisting localized insurgent insurrections, al-Qaeda began to expand throughout the Horn of Africa. The Sudanese government and the National Islamic Front grew increasingly concerned over the international attention that bin Laden was drawing towards Sudan. Fearing economic sanctions by the international community, President Bashir and National Islamic Front leader al-Turabi expelled bin Laden from Sudan, forcing him to abandon a significant amount of investment and capital in the region.<sup>61</sup> In 1996 bin Laden returned to Afghanistan, basing himself outside Jalalabad, Tora Bora, and eventually in Kandahar under invitation of the Taliban commander, Mullah Omar, in 1997.<sup>62</sup>

The Taliban-controlled Afghanistan provided bin Laden with the sanctuary and safe haven he would require to further develop al-Qaeda. Afghanistan was equivalent to the 'wild west,' and with the conflict ensuing between the Northern Alliance and the Taliban, recruits

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<sup>58</sup> Jane Corbin. *Al Qaeda: In Search of the Terror Network That Threatens the World*. (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2002), 42.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>60</sup> Scheuer, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America...*, 146-147.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 155, 159.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 166-167.

became extremely experienced in combat. Concurrent to his operations in Afghanistan, bin Laden planned and executed attacks against western powers: the bombings of US Embassies in both Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, a failed bombing attempt targeting Los Angeles International Airport in 1999, the bombing of USS Cole in Yemen in 2000, and the assassination of Ahmed Massoud (Leader of the Northern Alliance) in Afghanistan in 2001. While significant, these attacks had not gained al-Qaeda international recognition as a serious threat outside of the Middle East. That all changed on 9/11 when the attack on the World Trade Centers, Pentagon, and failed attack on Washington DC brought Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda out of the shadows and into the international spotlight.<sup>63</sup>

### **Developing and Implementing the Global Jihad**

The attacks on 9/11 marked Osama bin Laden's decision to establish and operate al-Qaeda within his own framework. Confronted with the option of waging an internal or offensive jihad, bin Laden selected the model that he perceived to offer the greatest probability of success for al-Qaeda, not necessarily the most supported option. Islamic influences such as Al-Banna, Abdullah Azzam, and Sayyid Qutb argued for an internal jihad, whereby domestic enemies and oppressive regimes would first be targeted, expediting the re-establishment the caliphate. Therefore, action would be first taken against Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the North and Eastern states in Africa prior to pursuing external threats.<sup>64</sup> This argument was strengthened through correlations to the Qur'an's definition of defensive jihad and the duty of every Muslim to take up

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<sup>63</sup> IntelCenter. *Al-Qaeda Messaging/Attacks Timeline: 1992-2007*. (Alexandria: Tempest Publishing, 2008), 9-11.

<sup>64</sup> Canadian Security Intelligence Agency. *Al-Qaeda: Propaganda and Media Strategy*. [http://www.itac.gc.ca/pblctns/tc\\_prsnts/2007-2-eng.asp](http://www.itac.gc.ca/pblctns/tc_prsnts/2007-2-eng.asp). (Internet. Accessed 31 January 2013), 5.

arms and act in the defense of their state against all forms of invading threat against religion and sanctity.<sup>65</sup>

In contrast, the offensive jihad promotes the active pursuit of adversaries back to their own lands, waging combat outside of Muslim territory.<sup>66</sup> Once faced with a conflict within internal borders, nations would be forced to re-evaluate their foreign policy against the perceived safety of their population. Osama bin Laden believed that this would effectively change the US policy in the Middle East and reduce the influence and coercion of the perceived weak Muslim governments. This would set the conditions for the disintegration of the domestic opponents as their external support and influential networks were destroyed or weakened.<sup>67</sup>

Osama bin Laden's decision to evoke a global jihad would enable him to enact simultaneously both the offensive and defensive jihad against his enemies, employing not only his own core al-Qaeda elements in the fight, but localized-associated insurgencies that would benefit from the assault on oppressive governments. The amalgamation of offensive and defensive jihad into one overarching global jihad empowered al-Qaeda's actions throughout the world against targets of opportunity that it had identified as threats to Islam.

“The concept of the Global Jihad, which is designated to unite all of the radical Islamic forces and bring about the achievement of a central and supreme goal in the radical Islamic battle. The goal is the annihilation of the United States, which is perceived as the “serpent's head” and, according to Bin-Laden, is the root of every evil in the world.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Raymond Ibrahim, *The Al-Qaeda Reader*. (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), 93.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>67</sup> Yoram Schweitzer and S. Shay. *The Globalization of Terror: The Challenge of Al-Qaeda and the Response of the International Community*. (New Brunswick: The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 2003), 24.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

## **Strategic Objectives Defined and Proclaimed**

Of increasing importance to the establishment of al-Qaeda as an international insurgent organization, more so than the kinetic attacks at that time, was the public announcements offered by bin Laden in 1996 and 1998. It would be these two proclamations that would enable al-Qaeda to obtain acknowledgement of its growing existence and capability by western powers, signifying its position as a legitimate threat to the balance of the global security environment. It was at this time that Osama bin Laden made public the strategic long term goals for al-Qaeda to the world. His announcement followed numerous localized mid-level insurgent attacks, providing him with the credibility from which he made his threats against his proposed enemies of Islam. Bin Laden effectively built al-Qaeda's strategic policy upon four main pillars: Expulsion of the Americans from the Land of the Two Sacred Mosques (loosely defined by the nation of Saudi Arabia), the Arab-Israeli conflict centered upon Palestine, opposition to American/Western foreign policy throughout the world, and the establishment of an Islamic caliphate.<sup>69</sup> It would be these four main pillars that would unify the membership of al-Qaeda, legitimize bin Laden's actions within the Islamic community, and promote the creation of a global insurgent network.

### Expulsion of the Americans from the Land of the Two Sacred Mosques

In August 1996, Osama bin Laden openly declared jihad on the Americans occupying the Land of the Two Sacred Mosques; the US military having been invited to stage its military campaign against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait from the sovereign territory of Saudi Arabia. Further, the Middle-East's oil boom had brought with it significant American oil-related business

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<sup>69</sup> Canadian Security Intelligence Agency. *Al-Qaeda: Propaganda and Media Strategy*..., 9.



able to influence activities within Saudi Arabia. It was these two groups at which bin Laden targeted his message, stating that:

“The greatest [aggression] incurred by the Muslims since the death of the Prophet (PBUH), is the occupation of the Land of the two Sacred Mosques – the foundation of the House of Islam, the place of the revelation, the source of the message and the place of the Noble Ka’ba, the qibla of all Muslims – by the armies of the American Crusaders and their allies.”<sup>70</sup>

Bin Laden continued to outline that the Americans had been invited into the country by the apostate Saudi government and Royal Family, an act that highlighted the requirement for the removal of these leaders and their replacement with true Islamists. He argued that Saudi Arabia was losing its religious structure, citing issues such as human law superseding Islamic law, foreign influence over Saudi oil production, an increasing national debt, and the oppression of religious and tribal leaders under the nation’s regime.<sup>71</sup> Regardless of the degree of legitimacy in his accusations, elements rang true throughout the Muslim community as a whole. He continued to expand upon the American presence in Saudi Arabia as well as within the region, referencing Ibn Taymiyyah’s urge “to fight in the defense of religion and Belief [as] a collective duty.” He said “there is no other duty after Belief that fighting the enemy who is corrupting the life and the religion.”<sup>72</sup> This proclamation called upon all Muslims to set aside internal disputes and join together in the defensive jihad against the Americans, a jihad based upon religious obligations, thereby increasing his credibility and legitimacy in his call for action. Bin Laden highlighted that the western powers had achieved what he termed as ‘historic ambitions’ against the Islamic umma when they occupied and influenced activities over sacred Muslim lands.<sup>73</sup> Bin Laden’s

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<sup>70</sup> Berner, Brad. *Jihad: Bin Laden in His Own Words – Declarations, Interviews and Speeches*. (Library of Congress, 2006), 37.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-42.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>73</sup> Osama bin Laden, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*, ed. and introduced by Bruce Lawrence and trans. by James Howarth (New York: Verso, 2005), 8.

call for the removal of the US from Saudi Arabia received significant support from the local population, and while he did not achieve complete consensus, recruitment and financial aid was increased.

### The Arab-Israeli conflict centered upon Palestine

As outlined in detail in section 2, the conflict between the Jews and Arabs reached its pinnacle at the end of World War II and the decades that followed. The dispute over the sovereignty and formal recognition of Israel as a nation-state, as well as the territorial clashes between Israel and Palestine entrenched a bitter hatred between Arab and Israeli. Bin Laden claimed that Israel only continued to exist due to the foreign aid and protection offered by the US. He indicated that Jews and Americans have diverted public opinion from the expansion of Israel by instead focussing upon fracturing and dividing surrounding Arab states to ensure the continued survival of Israel.<sup>74</sup> Bin Laden called upon his Muslim brothers to take up the jihad against all Israelis, liberating the oppressed Palestinians and returning their land once again to the Islamic caliphate.<sup>75</sup> Jerusalem is considered a religiously iconic location and the occupation by the Jews is seen as an act of tyranny over the Muslims. This sense of oppression over the Palestinians is not limited to the Israelis, but includes all states that promoted, supported, or succumbed to the decision to cede and surrender Jerusalem to Israel.<sup>76</sup> Bin Laden did not only blame the US and western powers for their involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but outwardly accused weak and feeble Muslim governments of betraying their people and religion by capitulating to the influence of western powers.<sup>77</sup> It was this situation that provided Osama

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<sup>74</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror...*, 59.

<sup>75</sup> bin Laden, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden...*, 8.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

bin Laden with the foundations required to justify his 1998 declaration of jihad against the Jewish and American people, however he also tied this announcement into an attack against the overarching foreign policy of the US and western powers.<sup>78</sup>

### Opposition to American/Western Foreign Policy Throughout the Islamic World

Osama bin Laden proclaimed that western powers promote an expansionist foreign policy, citing the presence of US military forces based throughout the world and their involvement in operations ranging from low-intensity to full combat in regions such as Burma, Philippines, Somalia, Eritrea, Bosnia, Iraq, and Afghanistan. He further explained that the western power's foreign policy was in fact an attempt to wage war on Islam through the westernization and influence over Muslim territory.<sup>79</sup> The theory of the war on Islam was further perpetuated through examples such as the secret detentions at Guantanamo Bay, the torture and mistreatment of detainees at Abu Ghraib, and the apparent double standard conveyed by US neutrality during Israel's re-occupation of the West Bank.<sup>80</sup> Perception became reality as Osama bin Laden obtained public support and recruits from Islamist radicals and core fundamentalists, comparing the various US international military installations to historical examples of the Christian crusades in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Mongol armies advances throughout Muslim territories, and the British and French expansionism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For bin Laden and many Islamists, the conflict against Islam has been ongoing for centuries and will continue until what has been termed 'Judgment Day,' regardless of when that may occur.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>78</sup> Berner. *Jihad: Bin Laden in His Own Words – Declarations, Interviews and Speeches...*, 73-76.

<sup>79</sup> Christopher Blanchard, "Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology," in *CRS Report for Congress*. (Congressional Research Services: The Library of Congress: 2007), 3.

<sup>80</sup> Marc Sageman. "The Rise of the Leaderless Jihad" in *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century*. (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 138.

The struggle between al-Qaeda and the western powers can also be seen as a war of attrition or a series of ‘bleeding wars.’ Al-Qaeda attempts to slowly attrite its enemies through dispersed attacks on several fronts, attacking not only on the kinetic plane, but in the financial, social, and public support domains. Iraq, Afghanistan, and Africa are key examples of terrain that al-Qaeda has identified as critical in its efforts to attack the western powers. Al-Qaeda has continued to seek parallel results as obtained during the Soviet-Afghan war and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union as a super-power.<sup>82</sup>

### The establishment of an Islamic Caliphate

Osama bin Laden’s vision for al-Qaeda is tied to the strategic goal of establishing the Islamic caliphate, a unified Islamic state free from Western influence or occupation, predominately in the Arabian Peninsula and land running from Spain to Indonesia.<sup>83</sup> This Islamic caliphate would mark the union of Sunni and Shi’ite Muslims who are currently being oppressed by non-Muslim regimes, reform Islamic societies, and allow for one Muslim nation to be established that would be governed by Sharia.<sup>84</sup> Not only would the establishment of the caliphate be beneficial for the establishment of a single Islamic region, it would fulfill a defensive role in thwarting the influence and occupation of western forces within Muslim lands. The umma, would only be capable of defeating their adversaries and establishing the caliphate if they were able to set aside petty differences and stand united against a common enemy.<sup>85</sup> The

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<sup>81</sup> Brian Jenkins. *Al Qaeda in Its Third Decade: Irreversible Decline or Imminent Victory?* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2012), 9.

<sup>82</sup> Bruce Riedel, *The Search for Al-Qaeda: Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 121.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>84</sup> Sean N. Kalic, *Combating a Modern Hydra: Al-Qaeda and the Global War on Terrorism*. (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press), 22.

<sup>85</sup> Christopher Blanchard, “Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology,” in *CRS Report for Congress*. (Congressional Research Services: The Library of Congress: 2007), 3.

pious caliphate would require a suitable leader that would be capable of not only uniting the umma, but ensuring that it remained intact, setting in place a governance system that ruled with Islamic law, adhering to the Islamic principles of finance and social order. Having spent considerable time in Afghanistan during the Soviet-Afghan war and having fully committed himself to the Afghan jihad, bin Laden viewed Afghanistan as a model Islamic state that could be used to initiate the move towards the Islamic caliphate.<sup>86</sup> Bin Laden's affection for Afghanistan and its significance to his strategic goal for the establishment of the Islamic caliphate aided his decision to fully commit to the development and growth of al-Qaeda from within its borders.

## **Conclusion**

Osama bin Laden capitalized upon his time in the Sudan and Afghanistan to truly develop al-Qaeda into an insurgent organization established upon clearly defined strategic short and long term goals, expanding bases of operation, and the recruitment of Islamist fundamentalists who shared his vision of the potential of al-Qaeda. Initially implementing localized support for domestic insurgencies that required augmentation in resources, finances, and training, bin Laden not only increased the experience and capabilities of his own organization, but he was able to extend the influence and legitimacy of al-Qaeda within the international community. Al-Qaeda began its transformation from a relatively unknown entity operating on the fringes of international foreign policy interests into an organization that would soon challenge the security environment of those same western powers. Bin Laden's public announcement of his global jihad and the clearly defined strategic objectives of al-Qaeda served to both challenge the

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

western powers as well as increase recruitment, financing, and public support for the fight upon which he had embarked.

## **SECTION 4: THE ORGANIZATION IN ACTION – THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

### **Introduction**

Osama bin Laden's public announcements in 1998 calling for the global jihad to target the US, Israel, and western powers yielded minimal reaction from targeted nations. While al-Qaeda did receive recognition as a potential terrorist threat, it had not achieved international legitimacy within the greater western power security services.<sup>87</sup> Only after the 9/11 attacks would al-Qaeda be elevated to the top of the internationally recognized threats against security by both the general public and government departments. The actual capability of al-Qaeda to inflict substantial casualties through deliberate targeted attacks was irrelevant in their ability to achieve the overarching strategic goals of the organization. The perceived threat by the general population and al-Qaeda's ability to force a reaction from the targeted government and government departments is the focus of consideration for this section. It is this popular perception of insurgent capability by the western populace that has leant al-Qaeda their power and elevated them to the level of international insurgent threat independent of actual capacity.

This section focusses upon the attacks executed by al-Qaeda during its rise to international recognition as a legitimate insurgency that expanded to develop into an operational global insurgent network. The attacks executed by the organization have not been limited to kinetic strikes, but have expanded to include non-kinetic methods such as economic and media targeting. It is this multi-pronged pursuit of strategic goals that has allowed al-Qaeda to elevate

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<sup>87</sup> Sageman. "The Rise of the Leaderless Jihad" ..., 125.

itself above common terrorist or insurgent organizations and brand itself as one of the most influential, widespread, and publicized organizations to have existed.

### **Escalating Attacks**

Al-Qaeda has continued to pursue its four stated strategic objectives since 1998, implementing varying methods in its effort to increase public support and force a desired reaction from its opponents. The inclusion of media and economic targets has greatly increased the effectiveness of kinetic attacks. Initial attacks were meant to evoke a response from the US that would see a shift in foreign policy and influence, similar to what had been achieved in Somalia in 1993 when the US withdrew its forces after suffering the highly publicized losses of special operations forces and aviation assets. The 1990's were witness to consistent targeting of Saudi and US elements such as the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia and the 1998 bombings of US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.<sup>88</sup> Despite initial reports that these bombings were in retaliation for the detention and extradition of members of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the fact remains that the targeting of US Embassies fell in line with al-Qaeda's strategic end-state. The 2000 bombing of USS Cole in Yemen was a direct assault on US military power employed within Islamic regions, once again, a clearly defined objective of bin Laden's.<sup>89</sup>

Despite the aforementioned attacks on Saudi and US targets, al-Qaeda was not considered a formidable threat, resulting in US President Clinton decision to execute only a small-scale cruise missile attack into Afghanistan and Sudan to target al-Qaeda training facilities.<sup>90</sup> The strike into Afghanistan resulted in limited tactical success, however, the Sudan

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<sup>88</sup> Brian M. Jenkins, *Countering al-Qaeda*. (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2002), 6.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Sageman. "The Rise of the Leaderless Jihad"..., 125.



strike against a suspected ‘chemical factory’ had the opposite effect. It became a strategic failure for the US when the media reported that the chemical plant manufactured over half of Sudan’s medication for human and animal consumption.<sup>91</sup> Osama bin Laden would continue his efforts to capitalize upon kinetic errors on the part of the western powers in his media campaign to discredit their democratic governments and expand his influence and support within the Muslim population.

### **9/11 – al-Qaeda’s Defining Moment**

It is difficult to assess if Osama bin Laden truly anticipated and appreciated the resulting effects of the 9/11 attacks within the larger strategic objectives of al-Qaeda. While there is no dispute that the targeting of objectives and mechanism of delivery on 9/11 were selected with a clearly defined purpose, US responses to attacks during the 1990’s did not foreshadow the US resolve following 9/11.<sup>92</sup> In 2005, al-Qaeda military commander Sayf Al Adl released a document that highlighted the three main objectives of the 9/11 attacks: 1) to provide a striking blow in retaliation for American military actions throughout the Islamic world, 2) to signal the emergence of the vanguard of the global Islamic movement dedicated to overthrow western power influence of Muslim lands, and 3) to provoke the US to attack al-Qaeda in the Islamic world.<sup>93</sup> The deployment of US and western military forces to Muslim states would provide al-Qaeda with prolonged timelines to execute tactical and operational level attacks while continuing to expand the al-Qaeda network.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Michael Barletta. “Chemical Weapons in the Sudan: Allegations and Evidence, in *The Nonproliferation Review* (Fall 1998), <http://cns.mis.edu/npr/pdfs/barlet61.pdf> (Accessed on 8 February 2013), 115.

<sup>92</sup> Sageman. “The Rise of the Leaderless Jihad”..., 125.

<sup>93</sup> Blanchard, “Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology,”..., 5.

<sup>94</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Al-Qaeda, Trends in Terrorism and Future Potentialities: An Assessment*. (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2003), 8.

While Osama bin Laden did not pre-emptively outline the specific objectives of the 9/11 attacks, his commentary on 3 November 2001 in response to the US attacks into Afghanistan is consistent with Al Adl. He directly correlated the invasion of Afghanistan by western powers as a ‘crusade’ against Islam, highlighting that this assault was only the most recent example of western oppression dating back to WWI where the Middle East influence had been divided amongst European powers.<sup>95</sup> Highlighting the involvement of the British, French, Italian, and the collective whole of the United Nations, he attempted to focus awareness on the conflicts over Palestine, Bosnia, Chechnya, and Iraq in order to increase public opposition to US actions and thereby increase support for the Taliban and al-Qaeda.<sup>96</sup> Bin Laden attempted to isolate the US within the international community and focus kinetic attacks upon stressing and straining the US economy.<sup>97</sup>

### **The Economic War – A New Strategy in the War Against the West**

Insurgencies must find methods to enhance their strengths and exploit the weaknesses of their adversaries, as such, al-Qaeda views the economic battle against the western states as a campaign which they stand to win. The 1990’s were a classical example of an insurgency in its developmental stages, focusing on kinetic actions to gain publicity in the global media while actively pursuing support and recruitment. However, Osama bin Laden was quick to identify the limitations associated with kinetic activity and the requirement for an alternate mechanism for striking adversaries. 9/11 marked the shift towards the economic decline of the US, proclaiming that for every dollar spent by al-Qaeda, it costs the US \$1 million in damages. An examination of the cost related to the aftermath of the World Trade Centers, the wars in both Iraq and

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<sup>95</sup> bin Laden, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden...*, 135-137.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 135-137.

<sup>97</sup> Hoffman, *Al-Qaeda, Trends in Terrorism and Future Potentialities: An Assessment...*, 7.

Afghanistan, and the funds committed to the global War on Terrorism validates this claim and supports an attempt to bring about the economic decline of the US.<sup>98</sup>

Bin Laden balanced the requirement for kinetic attacks against both military and non-military objectives in an effort to achieve the greatest economic impact upon his adversaries.<sup>99</sup> By striking non-military targets a perception of apparent vulnerability is created amongst the general population, forcing an immediate reaction from the government to re-establish security. The end result is a strain on the economy to alleviate and remedy the perceived or actual threat. The aftermath of any attack against civilian targets is lasting, necessitating greater security measures to be enacted to alleviate the subsequent disruption, further adding to the economic burden of the society.<sup>100</sup> The targeting of civilian objectives enhances the probability of success, generates increased casualties, and results in global media coverage which endorses the propaganda component of the insurgency. Success is measured in the second and third order effects of the attack such as changes to security policy, implementation of additional security mechanisms, security related expenditures, and loss in revenue. The attack is a simple means to an ends, the ultimate objective being the infliction of ever increasing economic pressures. Economic attrition warfare can be seen to be more effective than traditional terror tactics as the resulting effects are prolonged, far reaching, and inclusive of entire states.

### **Isolate the US**

Osama bin Laden continued to extend his sphere of influence and perceived power over western nations, namely European states, when in 2004 he offered to broker a peace treaty with

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<sup>98</sup> Peter Bergen, "Al-Qaeda Then and Now," in *Al-Qaeda Now*, ed. Karen J. Greenberg, 3-26 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6.

<sup>99</sup> Kalic, *Combating a Modern Hydra: Al-Qaeda and the Global War on Terrorism...*, 48.

<sup>100</sup> Jenkins, *Countering al-Qaeda...*, 11.

those states that would abandon their support for the US and extract their military forces from Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>101</sup> While the message was not specifically intended for the governments of these states, it was believed that by speaking to the general population, the democratic process would force a reaction by the politicians. This tactic was highlighted in 2004 during the US Presidential elections where bin Laden publically addressed the US population, urging Americans to reconsider their stance with the Islamic world, and carefully elect a President that would amend foreign policy. The alternative would be a prolonged war against the US in which he promised to ‘bleed and bankrupt the United States.’<sup>102</sup> Once again, regardless of the actual threat that al-Qaeda was capable of delivering at that time, the perception of capability and willingness to employ it became critical factors to the success achieved by bin Laden and al-Qaeda.

The Madrid, Spain bombing in 2004 and the 2010 Norway disrupted plot are examples of al-Qaeda’s attempts to influence peripheral US allied states to abandon their support of western powers in the Muslim world.<sup>103</sup> These two examples demonstrate the disparity of state reaction; Spain reacted to the insurgent attacks by withdrawing forces, while Norway remained steadfast in its support for the US lead War on Terrorism. On 12 November 2002, bin Laden addressed the terrorist attacks carried out in Tunisia, Yemen, Pakistan, Kuwait, Bali, and Moscow, calling them ‘reciprocal’ for the killing of Muslims throughout the world by western powers.<sup>104</sup> Of note, the attack in Bali in which 202 civilians were killed was in direct response to warnings for

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<sup>101</sup> Blanchard, “Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology”..., 5.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Bill Braniff, and Assaf Moghadam. “Towards Global Jihadism: Al-Qaeda’s Strategic, Ideological and Structural Adaptations since 9/11,” in *Perspectives on Terrorism*, (Vol 5 Issue 2, May 2011: 36-49), 40.

<sup>104</sup> bin Laden, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden...*, 174-175.

Australia to withdraw forces from Iraq.<sup>105</sup> Al-Qaeda was expanding the battle fields from Muslim lands to ‘westernized’ domestic regions in an increased effort to influence public opinion and affect governmental policy towards activity in the Muslim world. While recognizing the importance of kinetic actions within the strategic objectives of al-Qaeda, the network increased the importance of media relations and propaganda messaging to enhance their capabilities.

### **Media / Propaganda – A New Weapon For Insurgencies**

Osama bin Laden’s messaging was very clear from the onset. Speaking directly to his perceived adversaries on 23 August 1996 and 23 February 1998, he declared jihad on the Americans occupying the land of the Two Sacred Mosques and the jihad against Israel and the US/western powers respectively. Bin Laden has not only identified why and against whom he has declared the jihad, but has also provided terms or conditions that would cease hostilities. While the validity of this last statement is questionable, the fact remains that his messaging through all media channels has remained consistent throughout the years. Bin Laden challenged the intent and intervention of western states in both Iraq and Afghanistan, proclaiming them as US attempts at occupation and control of Holy Islamic territory. This campaign of misinformation further expanded his pool of potential new recruits to join the global jihad against the western powers.<sup>106</sup> Al-Qaeda’s messaging can be broken down into three main overarching components: the widespread explanation and justification for their targets which included stipulations for the cessation of hostilities, education of the Muslim umma pertaining to their religious obligations, and a continued justification regarding the legitimacy of the strategic

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<sup>105</sup> Canadian Security Intelligence Agency. *Al-Qaeda: Propaganda and Media Strategy...*, 13.

<sup>106</sup> Kalic, *Combating a Modern Hydra: Al-Qaeda and the Global War on Terrorism...*, 54.

vision.<sup>107</sup> Through consistent and deliberate messaging, bin Laden attempted to gain legitimacy within the Muslim world and be viewed as a liberator vice a terrorist amongst the international community.

Al-Qaeda has established and placed considerable emphasis upon the media / propaganda wing of the network through the Global Islamic Media Front and the al-Sahab Institute for Media Production, understanding that the desired strategic effect is heavily dependent upon the content, presentation, and delivery mechanism to its audience.<sup>108</sup> The ability to influence the audience is recognized as a centre of gravity for the network because “if propagandists are successful in persuading others to accept their preferred “reality” – through deception and distortion if necessary – all manner of benefits can accrue, which can offset the imbalance of power in an asymmetric war.”<sup>109</sup> Media and propaganda have become force multipliers in modern warfare, exaggerating the perception of power and strength, maximizing psychological effects against targets of terrorist attacks, forcing hasty reactions by politicians due to public outcry, and distorting facts to sway public opinion.<sup>110</sup> While regulated media outlets typically do not actively attempt to deceive the population in their reporting, no such guidelines bind the actions of al-Qaeda. Following 9/11, Global Islamic Media Front products aimed to divide Muslims and non-Muslims by directly challenging the US’ power dominance, an act that was seen as a beacon of inspiration to many Muslim males, resulting in a recruiting propaganda victory.<sup>111</sup>

Al-Jazeera has been a staple in al-Qaeda’s media messaging since the 1990’s based upon bin Laden’s assessment of the network’s un-biased news reports, regardless of ideological

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<sup>107</sup> Canadian Security Intelligence Agency. *Al-Qaeda: Propaganda and Media Strategy...*, 19.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

orientation. Al-Jazeera was initially a conduit to message the Arab and Muslim world due to its un-edited and un-translated broadcast of bin Laden's communiqué, a stark contrast to the traditional state-controlled media organizations.<sup>112</sup> As al-Qaeda and bin Laden expanded and gained legitimacy, Al-Jazeera began to distribute the bin-Laden videos to networks such as CNN, expanding al-Qaeda's global publicity and recognition. Following 9/11, al-Qaeda significantly increased its media distribution through modernization and outlets such as the internet, blogs, audio and video cassette/CD, and print.<sup>113</sup> Al-Zawahiri has emphasized the necessity for modern, well developed, and 'branded' media that will project al-Qaeda's capability, acknowledging that over half of al-Qaeda's campaign will be fought through media outlets. Al-Qaeda has embraced the fact that the first to report on an event maintains the largest audience, and little to no attention is paid to re-prints or amendments to earlier reported errors. As the War on Terror continues, al-Qaeda will employ the media and information technology as its weapon of choice.<sup>114</sup>

While Osama bin Laden's messaging content has remained steadfast, his variations in tone and his desired target audience have matured. In his early media engagements he was seen to speak in a pseudo-nationalist tone when addressing the general population of Saudi Arabia as he attempted to gain support from not only the people, but from influential groups that would benefit al-Qaeda.<sup>115</sup> He has also appealed to moderate Muslims and western audiences by portraying himself as more representative of a statesman than a terrorist, clearly outlining his motives, the course of action he has set upon, and the steps required by the western powers to

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>114</sup> Braniff and Moghadam. "Towards Global Jihadism"... , 39.

<sup>115</sup> Blanchard, "Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology"... , 11.

avoid further al-Qaeda attacks.<sup>116</sup> However, when he addressed the Saudi Royal Family, elements of the Saudi government that he considered to be derelict in their religious leadership duties, as well as the government of the US, his message clearly vowed that death would be reciprocated with death.

## **Conclusion**

Osama bin Laden clearly established and defined al-Qaeda's strategic goals and general campaign plan during his public announcements in 1996 and 1998. The 9/11 attacks established al-Qaeda as a legitimate and lethal threat to security within the international community, despite the fact that the perceived threat was unmatched by actual operational capability. Emphasis was placed upon isolating the US from allies, striking at the economy of the western powers, and exploiting the power of the media, all in an effort to force-multiply al-Qaeda's capabilities against a global super-power. Bin Laden remained the power-broker of al-Qaeda from its infancy. However, as al-Qaeda began to transition from organization to global insurgent network, there is considerable debate as to his ability to ensure that strategic goals remained the focal point for his affiliated, associated, and adherent network nodes.

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*



## **SECTION 5: THE NETWORK IS ESTABLISHED – TRANSITION FROM LOCALIZED INSURGENCY TO GLOBAL NETWORK**<sup>117</sup>

### **Introduction**

Between 2001 and 2006 Osama bin Laden successfully transformed a radical Islamist insurgency into a global insurgent network, pioneering a path for the creation of one of the largest networks capable of self-synchronizing<sup>118</sup> its actions in accordance with the core belief structure of the original organization. This ability to self-synchronize has enabled the network to expand exponentially, breaking the conventional barriers of an organization and allowing for the achievement of a global network. As established in the previous sections, the course which Osama bin Laden set al-Qaeda upon was not haphazard or without calculation. His influences, mentors, and actions provided him the very building blocks required to complete al-Qaeda's transition into a global network.

### **Alberts & Hayes' Power to the Edge Theory**

This section will illustrate the conversion from organization to network by highlighting key milestones along the transformation process, employing elements from the Albert & Hayes' model of Power to the Edge theory<sup>119</sup> which examines the command and control of network

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<sup>117</sup> Elements of this section have been taken from a previously written paper by Major Mark Lubiniecki at the Canadian Forces College: *Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda: Defining Networks at the Edge*.

<sup>118</sup> *Self-Synchronization*: The ability to realize full potential, empower network nodes to exercise autonomy, and produce considerable increases in efficiency. David S. Alberts. "Agility, Focus, and Convergence: The Future of Command and Control." *The International C2 Journal* 1, no. 1 (2007), 12.

<sup>119</sup> *Power to the Edge*: "A change in the power proposition for information... characterized by the widespread sharing of information and the predominance of peer-to-peer relationships... fundamentally different power topology from traditional organizations... virtually everyone is at the edge because they are empowered... The need for the communications and translation functions performed by the middle is greatly diminished and as that need diminishes so will the size of the middle... barriers to information sharing and collaboration disappear... Edge organizations are collaborative organizations that are inclusive... where everyone is empowered by information and has the freedom to do what makes sense... They are organizations that embody a *power to the edge* approach to command and control." D.S. Alberts and R.E. Hayes, *Power to the Edge, Command and Control in the Information Age*. (Washington DC: CCRP Publication, 2005), 176-177.

based organizations within the information age. Unity of Purpose, Focus, Convergence, and Agility are the foundations of self-synchronization, the final stage required to operate at the Edge. The organizational network implemented by bin Laden will be his true legacy, surpassing all kinetic attacks. He has “terrified America in his life and [will] continue to terrify it after his death.”<sup>120</sup>

The Albert & Hayes’ Power to the Edge model focuses on a network’s abilities to enable common awareness and synchronization of input and output.<sup>121</sup> Albert & Hayes further propose that the information age has played a significant role in redefining common approaches to command (Focus)<sup>122</sup>, control (Convergence)<sup>123</sup>, and command and control (Focus & Convergence)<sup>124</sup> (C2). Further, network centric warfare and network enabled organizations became a focal point for study based upon their relevance in today’s global conflicts. The study of networks as they relate to the Albert & Hayes’ Power to the Edge theory resulted in the C2 Approach Space model. Albert & Hayes propose that in order to achieve the functions of command and control, a commander is required to be successful in three interconnected dimensions: “(1) allocation of decision making, (2) dissemination of information, and (3) the pattern of interaction among participants.”<sup>125</sup> This model graphically represents an organization’s ability to progress sequentially along a diagonal vector, between the Conflicted C2 domain in the

<sup>120</sup> Fawaz A. Gerges. *The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda*. New York: Oxford University Press, (2011), 4.

<sup>121</sup> Alberts and Hayes, *Power to the Edge*..., xx.

<sup>122</sup> Command (Focus): “... what command is meant to accomplish while being agnostic with respect to the existence of someone in charge or particular lines of authority... a state or condition permitting clear perception and understanding... a center of activity or attention... directed attention... a point of convergence.” Alberts, “Agility, Focus, and Convergence”... 18-19.

<sup>123</sup> Control (Convergence): “... what control (the verb) is meant to achieve without asserting that control as a verb is possible or desirable... moving toward union or uniformity... coordinated movement to a single point... independent development of similar characteristics... the merging of distinct technologies, industries, or devices into a unified whole.” *Ibid.*, 18, 20.

<sup>124</sup> Command & Control (Focus and Convergence): “...the existence of a set of dynamic interactions between the two functions... maximizing the potential power of the entity... [the convergence of] plans, actions, and effects... melding into a coherent whole with accompanying synergies.” *Ibid.*, 18, 22.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

bottom left corner through to Edge C2 in the top right corner.<sup>126</sup> The ability of an organization to progress further along the trajectory towards Edge C2 is desirable as it will empower individuals at the lowest level, eliminate cumbersome constraints, increase probability of success, and enable collective awareness and consistent command intent. The end result is an organization in its most mature form, continuously operating as a Self-Synchronizing network.<sup>127</sup>

### **Unity of Purpose**

Albert & Hayes have characterized ‘Unity of Purpose’ as a replacement to ‘unity of command,’ theorizing that in an Edge organization, there is no single chain of command but instead a series of players involved and the ‘intent’ is the true component of success.<sup>128</sup> While bin Laden did retain a position of authority within al-Qaeda, it was not a traditional hierarchical structure that is predominantly characterized by business or military organizations. Al-Qaeda was designed with the understanding that it would suffer losses of key individuals, but more importantly, that the greatest effects could be achieved if the network took the form of water; fluid, transparent, and taking on the shape of its environment. J. Arquilla and D. Ronfeldt provide a succinct description of network organizations in their literature, *The Advent of Netwar*, an overview that provides considerable insight into the operation and structure of al-Qaeda.

“The organizational design is flat. There is no single, central leadership, command, or headquarters – no precise heart or head that can be targeted. The network as a whole (but not necessarily each node) has little to no hierarchy; there may be multiple leaders. Decision making and operations are decentralized, allowing for local initiative and autonomy. Thus the design may sometimes

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<sup>126</sup> R. Huber, J. Moffat, D.S. Alberts. *Achieving Agile C2 by Adopting Higher Levels of C2 Maturity*, [http://www.dodccrp.org/events/17th\\_iccrts\\_2012/post\\_conference/papers/021.pdf](http://www.dodccrp.org/events/17th_iccrts_2012/post_conference/papers/021.pdf), (Accessed 19 Nov 2012), 6.

<sup>127</sup> Alberts, *Power to the Edge...*, 5-6.

<sup>128</sup> Alberts, “Agility, Focus, and Convergence”..., 14.

appear acephalous (headless), and at other times polysepalous (Hydra-headed).”<sup>129</sup>

By creating a Unity of Purpose within al-Qaeda, bin Laden not only increased his effectiveness, but gained support and interest from existing radical Islamist organizations who wanted to retain some semblance of independence. The next step was to clearly define and communicate his strategic focus.

### **Focus**

Albert & Hayes believe that Focus concentrates on ideas that bring individuals or organizations together in their pursuit of an identified goal. Further, they contend that Focus has two metrics that must be achieved: shared awareness and shared understanding.<sup>130</sup> The attainment of shared awareness and shared understanding enable an organization to operate in unity, strengthening the network bonds, and increasing the number of receptors within the network exponentially.

Osama bin Laden effectively delivered a clearly defined Focus that unified al-Qaeda during his 1996 and 1998 declaration of global jihad.<sup>131</sup> Further, he achieved shared awareness and shared understanding when he referenced the Qur’an, the Prophet Muhammad, and obtained the support of Islamic scholars, thereby securing religious authority and taking the fatwa out of a single man’s hands.<sup>132</sup> With the declaration of war underway, he needed to foster the conditions for the Convergence and union of other radical Islamic organizations under the umbrella of al-Qaeda, strengthening ties and ever-increasing the evolving network.

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<sup>129</sup> John Arquilla and D. Ronfeldt. *The Advent of Netwar (Revisited)*. [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph\\_reports/MR789.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR789.html), (accessed 19 November 2012), 9.

<sup>130</sup> Alberts, “Agility, Focus, and Convergence”..., 19.

<sup>131</sup> bin Laden, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*..., 23 & 58.

<sup>132</sup> Scheuer, *Osama Bin Laden*..., 113-114.

## Convergence

Albert & Hayes envision Convergence as an organizational move towards uniformity or the merging at a single point, less focussed on outcomes and more aimed at enabling an organization to behave or operate as a single entity where the ‘whole’ is seen to be greater than the sum of its parts.<sup>133</sup> The announcement of the global jihad laid the groundwork for the Convergence of like-minded individuals and organizations. An expanding number of sub-component nodes fell under the al-Qaeda ‘brand’, securing logistical, financial, and specialist support from the al-Qaeda core. By aligning themselves with al-Qaeda and integrating into the network, they were able to project themselves further than if they continued to operate in isolation.<sup>134</sup>

## Al-Qaeda Core Group

There is no dispute that despite having attained network capability, al-Qaeda has and will continue to retain a core-element. The core is structured upon specific responsibilities to include: political/religious, finance, security, military, and information/media sections.<sup>135</sup> This core-group of al-Qaeda has ties to the Soviet-Afghan jihad, bonds forged by the Mujahedeen upon the battlefields, and relationships that have endured time and persecution by western forces. It is through the core-group that affiliate, associate and adherent members are brought under the overarching al-Qaeda span of influence.<sup>136</sup> By incorporating these various nodes within the network, al-Qaeda is able to operate at the national, regional, and international level, capitalizing upon the activities of the network nodes while concurrently shielding the core-group from

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<sup>133</sup> Alberts, “Agility, Focus, and Convergence”..., 20-21.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>135</sup> Global Security.Org. Al-Qaeda Organizational Structure. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/al-qaeda-structure.htm>. Accessed on 5 February 2013.

<sup>136</sup> Jenkins, *Countering al-Qaeda*..., 5.

targeted attacks.<sup>137</sup> The expansion and increase in membership within al-Qaeda has had significant strategic effects, however, despite enhancing operational flexibility, there has been a decrease in influence and control over operations.<sup>138</sup>

### **Affiliated Organizations**

The al-Qaeda core group has carefully identified and authorized the affiliation of insurgent organizations throughout the Middle East, based upon personalities, core values, shared beliefs, and the ability to actively promote and further the overarching strategic aim of the network. The affiliated groups swear allegiance to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, traditionally incorporating ‘al-Qaeda’ into their official name.<sup>139</sup> Organizations such as al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, al-Qaeda in Iraq, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and al-Shabaab are predicted to remain committed to the al-Qaeda core and will continue to operate within its strategic vision, be it in the offensive or defensive jihad.<sup>140</sup> Traditionally, affiliates represent the larger, well established, and predominantly active nodes that comprise the al-Qaeda network. Their affiliation grants them increased privileges, access to specialty resources, personnel, and increased finances as their actions are primarily large scale, prominent in the media, and provide al-Qaeda with the most return on investment.

### **Associated Organizations**

Associated organizations are characterized by their shared beliefs and vision with al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. The relationship or ties to al-Qaeda are less formal than that of the

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<sup>137</sup> Kalic. *Combating a Modern Hydra: Al-Qaeda and the Global War on Terrorism...*, 59.

<sup>138</sup> Angel Rabasa et. al. *Beyond al-Qaeda: The Global Jihadist Movement, Part 1*. (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2006), 34.

<sup>139</sup> Braniff and Moghadam. “Towards Global Jihadism”..., 37-38 and Corbin, *Al Qaeda: In Search of the Terror Network That Threatens the World...*, 47.

<sup>140</sup> James R. Clapper, Unclassified Statement For the Record on the Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Director of National Intelligence January 31, 2012. ([http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/2012\\_hr/013112clapper.pdf](http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/2012_hr/013112clapper.pdf), Accessed on 5 February 2013), 3.

affiliated group and these associates have not sworn allegiance or baya' a to bin Laden.<sup>141</sup>

However, they remain a critical component of the network, providing al-Qaeda with increased publicity, influence, and recruitment. “An attack that carries the al-Qaeda brand, duly credited in the news media to Osama bin Laden, thus enhances his reputation. Each attack becomes a recruiting poster, demonstrating the power of al-Qaeda’s interpretation of Islam, attracting more recruits.”<sup>142</sup> Associates have access to assistance in the form of funding, technical aid, and resources and are often courted by other al-Qaeda network nodes. A very small cross section of associated organizations include Ansar al-Islam (Northern Iraq), Abu Sayyaf Group (Malaysia/Philippines), and Egyptian Islamic Jihad.<sup>143</sup>

### **Adherent Organizations**

Adherent elements compose the most difficult nodes within the al-Qaeda network to identify as potential threats and target prior to their initiation of attacks as they are only linked to the network by shared belief in the strategic goals or ideology.<sup>144</sup> However, the isolationist nature of adherents does not diminish their effectiveness in promoting the strategic effects of the network. Key examples of adherents that have contributed to the al-Qaeda movement and the perception of fear amongst the general population are tied to what has been termed ‘home-grown terrorists’ or ‘home-grown violent extremists’, such as the 2009, Ft. Hood attack conducted by US Army officer Nidal Malik Hasan against his fellow soldiers.<sup>145</sup> These adherents typically are natives of the state that they conduct the attacks within, have received no formal training or

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<sup>141</sup> Braniff and Moghadam. “Towards Global Jihadism”..., 47.

<sup>141</sup> Corbin, *Al Qaeda: In Search of the Terror Network That Threatens the World...*, 66.

<sup>142</sup> Jenkins, *Countering al-Qaeda...*, 5-6.

<sup>143</sup> Braniff and Moghadam. “Towards Global Jihadism”..., 37-38. and Global Security.Org. Al-Qaeda Organizational Structure....

<sup>144</sup> Clapper, Unclassified Statement For the Record..., 4.

<sup>145</sup> Braniff and Moghadam. “Towards Global Jihadism”..., 38.

direction from parent insurgent organizations, and have capitalized upon the internet and information technology to obtain the required skillsets required to plan and execute their attack.<sup>146</sup> This further quantifies the A&H theory whereby every node has a role to play within a network organization, be it affiliated, associated or merely an adherent.

### **Agility**

Albert & Hayes define Agility as the “... ability of an entity... to be effective in the face of a dynamic situation, unexpected circumstances, or sustaining damage.”<sup>147</sup> They further subdivide Agility into synergistic components that combine to achieve effectiveness: “robustness, resilience, responsiveness, flexibility, innovation, and adaptation.”<sup>148</sup> Osama bin Laden was successful in empowering the network, however, it was not long before the network’s unity of purpose and unity of understanding enabled it to self-regulate and promote Agility from within.

Osama bin Laden enabled Robustness<sup>149</sup> by empowering al-Qaeda to operate throughout the world, in states and failing/failed states, capable of executing kinetic strikes, suicide attacks, media exploitation, training, and recruitment. The al-Qaeda network continues to expand into sectors that operate along the fringe of main-stream society, most notably through its use of the internet, highlighting its ability to recruit domestic born terrorists within democracies such as the US, Britain, and Canada.<sup>150</sup> The continued expansion of al-Qaeda to include affiliate, associated, and adherent groups has significantly bolstered its numbers, created exponential new hubs and nodes within the network, and expanded the area of influence that it is capable of influencing

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<sup>146</sup> Clapper, *Unclassified Statement For the Record...*, 4.

<sup>147</sup> Alberts, “Agility, Focus, and Convergence”..., 23.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Robustness*: “ability to maintain effectiveness across a range of tasks, situations, and conditions.” Alberts, *Power to the Edge...*, 128.

<sup>150</sup> Gerages, *The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda...*, 7.



activities. For al-Qaeda to continue to maintain its status or 'brand' as a major insurgent network, it must be cautious to affiliate and associate only those elements that it believes capable of contributing to the larger strategic goals of al-Qaeda. Organizations considered weak, insignificant, or on the verge of collapse or defeat are rejected in order to preserve the status of al-Qaeda in the eyes of the world.<sup>151</sup> Robustness in the view of al-Qaeda is not tied to numbers, it is related to capability, capacity, and ability to contribute.

Networks are innately more Resilient<sup>152</sup> than hierarchical organizations as the destruction or removal of one node is overcome by the network's ability to simply absorb the loss and bypass or replace that node. AQ continues to demonstrate Resilience in its ability to function and operate with limited degradation in capability despite the targeting and killing of key personnel within the organization, culminating with bin Laden in May 2011. Despite the losses that al-Qaeda sustains, the network continues to expand, recently adding al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb to the ranks of al-Qaeda.<sup>153</sup> A less kinetic example of al-Qaeda's Resilience resides in the node's nomadic characteristics, operating internationally without ties to terrain or infrastructure, shifting locations based upon the perceived threat to its existence and security at that point in time.<sup>154</sup>

In current and future conflict, non-state actors will have the ability to control the time and place of combat, the tempo of the engagements, and the intensity in which the war is fought. If a network is able to influence the tempo, they will force their adversary into a reactionary process,

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<sup>151</sup> Braniff and Moghadam. "Towards Global Jihadism"... , 37-38. and Global Security.Org. Al-Qaeda Organizational Structure... , 42.

<sup>152</sup> *Resilience*: "the ability to recover from or adjust to misfortune, damage, or a destabilizing perturbation in the environment." Alberts and Hayes, *Power to the Edge*... , 128.

<sup>153</sup> Gerges, *The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda* ... , 117.

<sup>154</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*... , 128.

never fully capable of achieving the upper hand. The Responsiveness<sup>155</sup> of al-Qaeda was demonstrated in the years immediately following the announcement of the global jihad where they were successful in achieving several key attacks such as: the 7 August 1998 bombing of US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the 12 October 2000 bombing of USS Cole in Yemen, and the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon in the US.<sup>156</sup> Losses sustained by al-Qaeda, to include training camps, freedom of movement, and the targeting of key leadership, have further necessitated an adjustment in their approach to engagements with the western powers.

Insurgencies must avoid becoming decisively engaged with the full weight of conventional forces, necessitating the requirement to avoid predictability and consistently update and amend operating procedures. Innovation<sup>157</sup> has promoted al-Qaeda's ability to maintain a common purpose, generate success in both completed and failed attacks, forcing a reaction by the target. Examples include the 'Christmas Day shoe bomber' and the 'Underwear bomber' attempts on US airlines, the Time Square Bomb threat in New York City, and the Toronto 18 terrorist group.<sup>158</sup> Each of these attempts forced a significant reaction by national security, leading to the implementation of updated policy and technology to counter similar threats, resulting in exorbitant cost in time and money. By devolving decision making and freedom of action within the network, Innovation is encouraged and predictability is reduced.

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<sup>155</sup> *Responsiveness*: "The ability to react to a change in the environment in a timely manner...[and] the ability to control tempo, rather than merely the ability to act rapidly." Alberts and Hayes, *Power to the Edge...*, 128.

<sup>156</sup> Intel Center, *al-Qaeda Messaging/Attacks Timeline 1992-2007...*, 9-11.

<sup>157</sup> *Innovation*: "the ability to do new things and the ability to do old things in new ways," Alberts and Hayes, *Power to the Edge...*, 128.

<sup>158</sup> Gerges, *The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda ...*, 117.

Flexibility<sup>159</sup> will always remain a key tenet to operational success. The continued expansion and evolution of al-Qaeda is characteristic of the Flexibility it has achieved and continues to refine. Al-Qaeda's ability to transfer the training of recruits from physical camps in Afghanistan to internet based websites, the ability to continue to recruit from both within the Muslim states and western(ized) world, and its ability to adapt to the operating environment are key examples of its Flexibility. Al-Qaeda has developed the capability to modify tactical and operational level actions, employing historical data in their attempt to increase probability of success of future operations. Al-Qaeda demonstrates the ability to decentralize operations, decision making, and initiative, while at the same time maintaining a core-group that oversees the strategic level goals and provisions to the nodes within the network. The Flexibility required to balance a hierarchical entity or hub within a network seems to be a contradiction of terms, however, al-Qaeda has managed to balance the requirements and capitalize upon the strengths of each as required to further its strategic goals.<sup>160</sup>

The information age has played a significant role in the Adaptation<sup>161</sup> of al-Qaeda with regards to the development, effectiveness, and globalization of its network. Al-Qaeda has been forced to adapt and employ current technology not only as a means of security from the western powers, but also in an attempt to increase its efficiency and information sharing capacity. Al-Qaeda is the first insurgent network to transition from the physical domain to cyberspace.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> *Flexibility*: "The ability to employ multiple ways to succeed and the capacity to move seamlessly between them." Alberts and Hayes, *Power to the Edge...*, 128.

<sup>160</sup> David Ronfeldt. *Al-Qaeda and its Affiliates: A Global Tribe Waging Segmental Warfare*. (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation), [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org). (Accessed on 6 February 2013), 34.

<sup>161</sup> *Adaptation*: "the ability to change work processes and the ability to change the organization... by altering information distribution... flattening organizational structures... and developing more efficient work processes." Alberts and Hayes, *Power to the Edge...*, 128.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

“With lap-tops and DVDs, in secret hideouts and at neighborhood Internet cafes, young code-writing jihadists replicate the training, communication, planning and preaching facilities they lost in Afghanistan with countless new locations on the Internet.”<sup>163</sup>

The internet is now seen as both a tool and a weapon that can be used to communicate, distribute coded information, circulate directives, and be used as a delivery method for cyber-attacks. The global economies dependence upon technology has enabled hackers of inflicting considerable damage at little cost with minimal threat.<sup>164</sup>

Osama bin Laden established the foundations required for al-Qaeda to achieve Agility within the context of the Albert & Hayes Power to the Edge model, setting the conditions for the network to achieve Self-Synchronization, and operate as an Edge organization.

### **Self-Synchronization**

Albert & Hayes’ theory of Self-Synchronization is a critical element in a network’s ability to attain and sustain operations as an Edge organization. As outlined above, Focus, Convergence and Agility formed the foundations required for Self-Synchronization to occur, effectively resulting in the ability of the network nodes to exercise autonomy to “alter their behaviors and adapt in response to a changing situation within a context of intent.”<sup>165</sup>

Al-Qaeda has demonstrated an exceptional ability to Self-Synchronize at an unprecedented level. The 11 March 2004 Madrid train bombings are a textbook example of an Edge organization’s ability to achieve mission success through the Self-Synchronization of

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<sup>163</sup> Steve Coll and Susan Glasser, “Terrorists Turn to the Web as a Base of Operations,” in the *Washington Post*, August 7, 2005, A01.

<sup>164</sup> Atwan, *The Secret History of al Qaeda* ..., 124-125.

<sup>165</sup> Alberts, “Agility, Focus, and Convergence”..., 11.

internal nodes. The train bombing casualty rate resulted in 191 dead and over 1,800 injured.<sup>166</sup> While significant to Spain, the trains were not the true objective. The group responsible was the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group, an al-Qaeda adherent organization with a stated goal of convincing the local population to overthrow the pro-US Spanish government. Within days of the attack, the opposition party won an upset victory when it promised to withdraw Spanish Troops from Iraq; marking a victory for not only the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group, but for al-Qaeda as well.<sup>167</sup> The ability an al-Qaeda adherent node to execute the attack without direction, resourcing, or influence from the al-Qaeda Core is critical in understanding the level of Self-Synchronization currently possessed by the network.

## **Conclusion**

Within the Albert & Hayes model, Osama bin Laden had set the conditions for the creation of a truly operational network that rapidly transitioned into an Edge organization. By achieving the gateways required to attain Self-Synchronization, al-Qaeda emerged as one of the most predominant and capable insurgencies within history. Despite his position of authority, bin Laden's strategic vision of al-Qaeda ensured that he influenced vice controlled the network. His ability to place the 'cause' or overall objective of al-Qaeda ahead of his ego was what set him apart from any other Islamic radical terrorist leaders within a hierarchical organization. By building his network, enabling it to achieve mission success, and influence when required, bin Laden achieved what no commander has achieved to date. He succeeded in creating a network that is as effective after his death as it was under his command.

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<sup>166</sup> Kenneth R. Timmerman. *Preachers of Hate: Islam and the War on America* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003), 325.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

## **SECTION 6: MODERN-DAY AL-QAEDA NETWORK – TRANS-NATIONAL OPERATIONS AND GROWING SPHERE OF INFLUENCE**

“Al Qaeda today is far more decentralized than it was ten years ago and far more dependent on its autonomous field commands, its affiliates, its allies, and its ability to inspire homegrown terrorists. It has moved from centrally directed and supported strategic terrorist strikes, which culminated in the 9/11 attacks, toward individual jihadism and do-it-yourself terrorism. This has created a more diffuse terrorist threat—less-destructive but still dangerous terrorist plots that often are harder to detect.”<sup>168</sup>

### **Introduction**

Section 6 is dedicated to the analysis of a cross section of al-Qaeda’s affiliated, associated, and adherent network nodes with the view to determine if there has been a fundamental shift in the strategic goals of the al-Qaeda core group, or conversely, if the vision as outlined by Osama bin Laden remains not only relevant, but a fundamental component in the planning and execution of operations within these sub-groups. Decentralization of command and the establishment of the global insurgent network has impacted upon al-Qaeda’s ability to conduct tactical and arguably operational level planning, however, the ability to influence the spectrum of operations has been unimpeded. The death of Osama bin Laden, while symbolic of the western resolve to enact revenge for the 9/11 attacks as well as eradicate the international community of the al-Qaeda threat, has been met with questionable effect upon the al-Qaeda network’s ability to sustain operations and remain a credible threat to the international community.

The selected al-Qaeda component nodes will be examined and assessed with respect to relative power and the ability to influence the security situation both on a domestic and

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<sup>168</sup> Jenkins, *Al Qaeda in Its Third Decade...*, 3.

international setting by studying their establishment, aims/objectives/motivation, and current operations. This information will be compared against the stated objectives and strategic goals of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda core to identify if the situation remains constant, if there are evident signs of deviations in focus, or if complete changes in strategic direction are occurring. As previously outlined in section 3, the stated objectives of al-Qaeda as outlined by Osama bin Laden are: the expulsion of the Americans from the Land of the Two Sacred Mosques, the Arab-Israeli conflict centered upon Palestine, the establishment of an Islamic caliphate, and opposition to American/Western foreign policy throughout the world.<sup>169</sup>

### **Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb**

#### Establishment and Area of Operations

In 1998 the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat was established after splintering from its parent organization over differences in ideology and insurgent targets. Under its new leader, Hassan Hattab, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat grew in strength and power and began to be drawn into the sphere of influence of al-Qaeda. However, it would not be until after Hattab's death that Abdelmalek Droukdel would assume command and formalize the links to al-Qaeda, pledging allegiance in 2006, renaming itself al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb as an al-Qaeda affiliate in 2007.<sup>170</sup> Despite being founded in Algeria, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb's operational environment include Mali, Niger, and Mauritania.

#### Aims and Objectives

The original aim of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat was the removal from power of the Algerian government and its replacement with an Islamic state governed by sharia

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<sup>169</sup> Canadian Security Intelligence Agency. *Al-Qaeda: Propaganda and Media Strategy...*, 9.

<sup>170</sup> Ricardo Rene Laremont, "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Terrorism and Counterterrorism in the Sahel" in *African Security Journal* (2011, 4:4, 242-268), 242-243.

law, an objective that has remained consistent within al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. One amendment to the strategic aim has been a shift from nationalist Islamic ideology to that of a transnational nature, an objective directly tied to the affiliation with al-Qaeda.<sup>171</sup> This has been demonstrated in the expansion of operations outside of Algerian borders and the increased targeting of western objectives. al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb operatives have been identified in the targeting of France, Spain, Belgium, Germany, and the United Kingdom, demonstrating a broad swath of international states in which the al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb is attempting to conduct operations or establish linkages with domestic entities.<sup>172</sup>

### Alliances

Droukdel pledged loyalty to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, offering his forces to “strike whomever and wherever he [Osama bin Laden] wishes and will find nothing but obedience from us and shall only receive what pleases him.”<sup>173</sup> Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has been tied to the training and recruitment of insurgents destined for the conflict in Iraq, as well as aiding in the specialized training of insurgents preparing to launch attacks internally within their domestic states. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has also attempted to establish formalized relations with Boko Haram, an insurgent movement operating within Nigeria, publicly confirming its preparedness to provide specialist training on equipment, weapons, and explosives, providing the overarching al-Qaeda network with an increased sphere of influence.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Manuel R. Torres Soriano, “The Evolution of the Discourse of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Themes, Countries and Individuals” in *Mediterranean Politics*. <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fmed20>. (Accessed on 21 February 2013), 279.

<sup>172</sup> Laremont, “Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Terrorism and Counterterrorism in the Sahel” ..., 245-246.

<sup>173</sup> IHS Jane’s Defence and Security Intelligence and Analysis, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. <https://janes.ihs.com/CustomPages/Janes/ReferenceHome.aspx>. (Accessed on 13 February 2013), 5.

<sup>174</sup> National Counterterrorism Center. *Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)*. <http://www.nctc.gov/site/index.html>. (Accessed on 13 February 2013), 1.



### Threat / Operations

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb routinely exercises its ability to execute a wide variety of operations within its sphere of influence, however, primarily focus kinetic attacks upon domestic and foreign military and para-military elements in an effort to achieve its strategic vision. These targets have also included civilians, to include national governmental officials and foreign oil company workers. The primary mechanisms of attack are comprised of an ambush in conjunction with a form of improvised explosive device, typically forming a coordinated complex attack. Other forms of attack have included suicide bombings and impersonation of host nation security forces in attempts to strike targets.<sup>175</sup> Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has also ventured into criminal activity, exploiting trafficking of drugs and contraband as well as the ‘kidnapping for ransom’ market. This has been done in an effort to raise funds for the organization, inflict fear and terror upon western nationals living and working within the Sahel region, and demonstrate to the international community its ability to operate with relative freedom of action with significant consequences.<sup>176</sup>

### Summary

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, originally focussed nationally, has expanded its attention to fall in line with the greater al-Qaeda vision of international Islamic insurgent operations in an effort to facilitate the strategic goals of the parent network. While the internal jihad will remain an integral part of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb’s strategy, it is a sub-set or building block within al-Qaeda’s overarching plan. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb’s strategy and actions are congruent with those of al-Qaeda: focussing upon the expulsion of US and

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<sup>175</sup> Jean-Luc Marret, “Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb: A “Glocal” Organization” in *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*. <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/uter20>. (Accessed on 21 February 2013), 546-548.

<sup>176</sup> Jonathan Masters, “Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb” in *Council on Foreign Relations*. <http://www.cfr.org/north-africa/al-qaeda-islamic-maghreb-ajim/p12717>. (Accessed on 13 February 2013), 5.

western forces from Muslim lands, the creation of an Islamic caliphate that includes Algeria, and opposition to US foreign policy and pro-western government offices. While al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has not launched any stand-alone significant attacks, it is fighting a continuous attrition-based war against its identified adversaries.

## **Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula**

### Establishment and Area of Operations

Al-Qaeda established its presence in Saudi Arabia in 2002 under Saudi jihadist Yusuf Salih Fahd al-Ayiri, however, it would not be formally confirmed by the Saudi state until 2004 when the al-Qaeda media branch Al-Sahab released information detailing coordinated attacks executed in 2003 within the Saudi capital. Despite the interaction, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula did not formally emerge as a unification of the Saudi and Yemeni branches until 2009.<sup>177</sup> Under al-Ayiri, AQAP maintained strong relations with al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, in part due to bin Laden's ties and maintained interest in the region. This relationship declined after the death of al-Ayiri, however, the establishment of the Saudi Arabian node within the al-Qaeda network had been achieved. While the majority of operations conducted have remained within Saudi Arabia and Yemen, the trend has lent itself to operations within Yemen due to its degraded counter-insurgency capability.

### Aims and Objectives

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula clearly outlined its strategic objectives in a 2010 statement where it highlighted its focus upon the expulsion of Israelis and US/western powers from the Arabian Peninsula, the re-establishment of the Islamic caliphate, sharia law

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<sup>177</sup> Jonathan Masters, "Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula" in *Council on Foreign Relations*. <http://www.cfr.org/north-africa/al-qaeda-islamic-maghreb-aqim/p12717>. (Accessed on 13 February 2013), 1.

implementation, and the liberation of Muslim lands. The objectives are tied to the removal of the Saudi/Yemeni governments, the establishment of an Islamic state, and the removal of western power influence over or within the Muslim world.<sup>178</sup> While there remains a national undertone to the objectives, when considered within the overarching al-Qaeda aim, they are consistent and supportive.

### Alliances

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is an affiliate of al-Qaeda, however, has recently been reported to operating in closer proximity to al-Qaeda in Iraq and Shabab in Somalia. In press releases, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has confirmed its support of al-Qaeda in Iraq, providing insurgents to aid in the fighting as well as capitalize upon experience gained in the Iraqi conflict. The cooperation of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and al-Qaeda in Iraq has also forced the US and western powers to not concentrate within Iraq, but also focus on their rear area/rear bases and supply routes. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Shabab have mutually supported one another's respective operations, often contributing fighters to augment a particular cause or endeavour, highlighting the interoperability and similar levels of training shared by the two network nodes.<sup>179</sup>

### Threat / Operations

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula continues to explore capacity to attack the US and western powers, capitalizing upon the magazine Inspire, a propaganda outlet written in English to target potential home-grown jihadists within western states. It believes that any form of attack

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<sup>178</sup> Michael Page, Lara Challita, and Alistair Harris, "Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: Framing Narratives and Prescriptions" in *Terrorism and Political Violence*. <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ftpv20>. (Accessed on 21 February 2013), 154-156.

<sup>179</sup> IHS Jane's Defence and Security Intelligence and Analysis, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). <https://janes.ihs.com/CustomPages/Janes/ReferenceHome.aspx>. (Accessed on 13 February 2013), 5.

against the US, no matter the size or magnitude, is a contribution to the overarching goal of targeting the US economy through a protracted war of economic attrition.<sup>180</sup> Attacks and attempts focussed at the US have included the famous ‘underwear bomber’ attempt to detonate an airliner over Detroit on Christmas day 2009. This was the first attack inside the US by al-Qaeda since 9/11, and the attempt to detonate hidden explosives in international courier airline companies over US borders.<sup>181</sup> Both of these attempts were tied to US-born Yemeni preacher Anwar al-Awlaqi. Awlaqi was also linked to the US Army psychologist Major Hasan Nidal Malik and his shooting rampage of fellow US soldiers on a US military base. al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula utilizes assassinations, bombings, improvised explosive devices, suicide attacks, and guerrilla operations in pursuit of its objectives, often focussing upon military, police, infrastructure, industry, and government targets.<sup>182</sup>

### Summary

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has demonstrated its ability to not only operate within Saudi Arabia and Yemen with relative freedom of movement in its targeting of attacks, but also internationally, striking at the US and western powers in an effort to inflict economic damage, be it through the actual attack or the required security response. The 2012 statement promoting the ‘contract killing’ of a US ambassador and US soldiers for \$160,000 and \$23,000 respectively clearly outline al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula’s financial strength and resolve to pressure the US to re-examine its foreign policy within Saudi Arabia and Yemen and move towards reducing its footprint of military or political elements within Muslim lands.<sup>183</sup> Further, their 2010

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<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>181</sup> National Counterterrorism Center. *Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)*. <http://www.nctc.gov/site/index.html>. (Accessed on 13 February 2013), 1.

<sup>182</sup> Masters, “Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula”..., 3.

<sup>183</sup> IHS Jane’s Defence and Security Intelligence and Analysis, *Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)*..., 14.

statement of objectives fall in line with those of al-Qaeda, confirmation that al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula remains affiliated to the al-Qaeda core, despite changes in personalities within the leadership of both network nodes.

## **Al-Qaeda in Iraq**

### Establishment and Area of Operations

Following the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, leader of the militant Islamic group Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, renaming itself al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers, but more commonly known as al-Qaeda in Iraq.<sup>184</sup> Al-Zarqawi has been succeeded by several leaders, all having been killed by coalition forces, with Abu Bakr al-Qurashi currently in command. Al-Qaeda in Iraq remains focussed on the close jihad, internal to Iraq, perhaps due to the US invasion and subsequent operations within Iraq's borders. While al-Qaeda in Iraq is not assessed to currently pose a threat to neighbouring states, it does capitalize upon movement corridors into Syria for logistics, recruits, and finances.<sup>185</sup>

### Aims and Objectives

Al-Qaeda in Iraq has confirmed its objectives of defensive jihad against non-Muslim forces within Iraq, forcing their withdrawal as well as the overthrow of the current government whom al-Qaeda in Iraq claims is influenced by western powers. It further expands to highlight the requirement for the creation of an Islamic caliphate ruled by sharia law.<sup>186</sup> The al-Qaeda core has also recommended al-Qaeda in Iraq undertake additional objectives which include

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<sup>184</sup> Brian Fishman, "After Zarqawi: The Dilemmas and Future of Al Qaeda in Iraq" in *The Washington Quarterly*. <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rwaq20>. (Accessed on 21 February 2013), 20-21.

<sup>185</sup> IHS Jane's Defence and Security Intelligence and Analysis, Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). <https://janes.ihs.com/CustomPages/Janes/ReferenceHome.aspx>. (Accessed on 13 February 2013), 3.

<sup>186</sup> Fishman, "After Zarqawi: The Dilemmas and Future of Al Qaeda in Iraq"..., 21.

establishing itself as an Islamic state from which it could be used as a staging area for the expansion of operations into neighbouring states and attacks against Israel.<sup>187</sup> While there have been no direct response from al-Qaeda in Iraq with regards to using Iraq as a staging ground for an assault into Israel, the affiliation of al-Qaeda in Iraq to the al-Qaeda core would suggest that al-Qaeda in Iraq would welcome the opportunity.

### Alliances

Under al-Zarqawi, al-Qaeda in Iraq conducted significant internal sectarian violence campaigns against Shia Muslims, an action that lost the organization credibility and support within both Iraq and the international Muslim community. Osama bin Laden and al-Zawahiri were forced to intervene and influence al-Zarqawi's future operations. Al-Zarqawi was counselled to cultivate internal relations within Iraq and act as its own hub and spoke node with several Sunni jihadist groups being established within.<sup>188</sup> The formation of the Islamic State of Iraq in 2006 was a coalition of jihadist organizations that were led by Iraqi born Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and AQI's Abu Hamza al-Muhajir as the groups Minister for War. Despite the change in name, the Islamic State of Iraq continues to be commonly referred to as AQI and shares the same objectives, however, has increased efforts internationally to isolate the US from coalition support. This was highlighted in the Madrid, Spain train bombings.<sup>189</sup>

### Threat / Operations

Al-Qaeda in Iraq /Islamic State of Iraq continue to remain a formidable opponent for Iraqi security forces and has consistently challenged coalition forces for control and security of regions of Iraq, despite sustaining significant reductions in command positions. While it is not

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<sup>187</sup> IHS Jane's Defence and Security Intelligence and Analysis, Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)..., 2,4.

<sup>188</sup> Atwan. *The Secret History of al Qaeda...*, 204-205.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

assessed capable of overthrowing the current Iraqi government or security forces, it continues to effect significant mass casualty attacks throughout the country. It primarily employs improvised explosive devices, suicide missions, and coordinated complex attacks in its targeting of security forces, economic infrastructure such as banks, stock exchanges and oil facilities, embassies, and government establishments.<sup>190</sup> Sectarian violence has again increased since the withdrawal of US forces, to include the attacking of government officials, tribal leaders, and security forces deemed to be part of the apostate Iraqi government. The attacks on the financial sector, namely the Central Bank and Trade Bank, are closely tied to al-Qaeda in Iraq /Islamic State of Iraq's opposition of the governing bodies of Iraq.<sup>191</sup>

### Summary

Al-Qaeda in Iraq /Islamic State of Iraq has capitalized upon the US invasion of Iraq, transforming the streets of Iraq into a training ground for domestic and foreign jihadists to train, test, and hone their skills for use both within and outside of Iraq's borders. While the relationship with al-Qaeda has been a point of friction due to operations conducted by al-Qaeda in Iraq pertaining to sectarian violence, the establishment of a node in Iraq has proven invaluable to the al-Qaeda network. Al-Qaeda in Iraq consistently demonstrates its ability to maintain resilience in the face of overwhelming odds, emerging from the US/coalition war in Iraq still capable of inflicting consistent mass casualty attacks. Al-Qaeda in Iraq /Islamic State of Iraq share the strategic goals of the al-Qaeda network, however, have been forced to concentrate upon the internal jihad due to coalition operations within Iraq's borders. The withdrawal of the US/coalition from Iraq may provide Al-Qaeda in Iraq /Islamic State of Iraq with the opportunity

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<sup>190</sup> IHS Jane's Defence and Security Intelligence and Analysis, Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)..., 6-11.

<sup>191</sup> Clapper, "Unclassified Statement For the Record on the Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence"..., 3.

to expand its sphere of influence outside of Iraq, fulfilling the stated desires of the node by al-Zawahiri.

## **Shabab**

### Establishment and Area of Operations

Shabab was established in 2002 in Somalia under command of four Somali militants who had received training in Afghanistan. Initially a loosely organized militant group that lacked a distinct identity, it gained legitimacy following its role in the defeat of the last remaining warlord factions within Mogadishu, an act that greatly increased its standing within the Union of Islamic Courts Movement.<sup>192</sup> Shabab and the UIC suffered defeats between 2004-2006 at the hands of Ethiopia's military intervention in Somalia, however the group was able to re-emerge with a resolve to establish itself as the vanguard of the Somali jihad. Shabab maintains freedom of action within the entirety of Somalia and has recently engaged in operations in Kenya and Uganda.<sup>193</sup>

### Aims and Objectives

Shabab's overarching objective remains the establishment of an Islamic state within Somalia ruled by sharia law. The underlying requirements of this objective are the removal of foreign forces from Somali territory, the overthrow of the moderate-Islamic government and President, and a country-wide purge of practices deemed to be un-Islamic.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Daniel Bodirsky, *Islamic Fundamentals in Africa*. <http://www.geopolitical-monitor.com/Islamic-fundamentalism-in-africa-4721>. (Accessed on 13 February 2013), 2.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>194</sup> Jonathan Masters, "Shabab" in *Council on Foreign Relations*. <http://www.cfr.org/somalia/al-shabaab/p18650>. (Accessed on 13 February 2013), 5.



## Alliances

Shabab affiliated with al-Qaeda in 2012, however, it has not changed its name as has been customary for affiliates, nor has it released an updated outline of objectives, despite the fact that the nodes aims are intrinsically linked within those of al-Qaeda's. The formal affiliation was preceded by interoperability between Shabab and al-Qaeda, seeing al-Qaeda jihadists train within Somalia as well as provide specialist training to Shabab. Recently, Shabab has been infiltrating Yemen in an effort to operate under al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula lead attacks, further demonstrating interoperability, coordination of effort, and synchronized objectives.<sup>195</sup>

## Threat / Operations

Shabab is considered a substantial threat internal to Somalia and poses a potential sources of instability in the neighbouring regions if it continues to expand. Originally focussed upon conventional style attacks, the organization has transitioned to the use of improvised explosive devices, assassinations, and suicide attacks to enhance its lethality.<sup>196</sup> Increasing its range of targets, it now strikes at security forces, airports, economic objectives such as hotels, and government buildings. A significant shift in capability and focus has come with Shabab's emphasis upon media and propaganda operations, establishing itself as the vanguard within Somalia and promoting its role and implementation within al-Qaeda's strategic goals.<sup>197</sup>

## Summary

Despite its perceived containment within Somalia, Shabab is beginning to expand its operations into neighbouring states as well as capitalize upon its connections within the al-Qaeda

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<sup>195</sup> IHS Jane's Defence and Security Intelligence and Analysis, Shabab.

<https://janes.ihs.com/CustomPages/Janes/ReferenceHome.aspx>. (Accessed on 13 February 2013), 9.

<sup>196</sup> Andre Le Sage, "Somalia's Endless Transition: Breaking the Deadlock" in *Strategic Forum*. No. 257, (June 2010: 1-8), 3-4.

<sup>197</sup> National Counterterrorism Center. *Shabab*. <http://www.nctc.gov/site/index.html>. (Accessed 13 February 2013), 1.

network. Shabab continues to enhance its lethality within Somalia, targeting security forces, economic infrastructure, and government officials in an attempt to attain its strategic objectives. As an affiliate of al-Qaeda, it shares in the principal aims of the al-Qaeda core, despite maintaining national level goals.

## **Abu Sayyaf Group**

### Establishment and Area of Operations

Originally known as the Mujahedeen Commando Freedom Fighters, a splinter cell of the Moro National Liberation Front, the Abu Sayyaf Group was established under Ustadz Abdurajak, a Wahhabi Islamist who had fought in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Following Ustadz's death, his younger brother Khadaffi Janjalani assumed control of the Abu Sayyaf Group. Predominantly operating in South Philippines, the Abu Sayyaf Group has been connected with international attacks and providing refuge for the operatives who executed the Bali bombings in Indonesia.<sup>198</sup>

### Aims and Objectives

The Abu Sayyaf Group has not established a formal set of publicized objectives, however, it appears to be fighting to establish an independent Islamic republic in the southern part of the Philippines and draws much of its literature from Dr. Abdullah Azzam. The Abu Sayyaf Group focusses upon the defensive-jihad as the primary struggle it must engage in prior to embracing the global jihad.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> IHS Jane's Defence and Security Intelligence and Analysis, Abu Sayyaf Group.

<https://janes.ihs.com/CustomPages/Janes/ReferenceHome.aspx>. (Accessed on 13 February 2013), 2-4.

<sup>199</sup> Renato Cruz De Castro, "Confronting Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: The Case of the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines" in *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*. <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rkj20>. (Accessed on 21 February 2013), 353.

### Alliances

The Abu Sayyaf Group has established ties with al-Qaeda, most notably with Ramzi Yousef, an al-Qaeda member who trained Abu Sayyaf Group members in explosives, assisting in a 1994 airline attack. Al-Qaeda has continued to support Abu Sayyaf Group efforts and has maintained a training cadre of jihadists to develop and enhance the Abu Sayyaf Group's capabilities.<sup>200</sup>

### Threat / Operations

The US counter-insurgency campaign in the Philippines has had a significant effect upon the Abu Sayyaf Group's freedom of movement and ability to execute attacks. However, the prolonged requirement of US forces to be committed to the region has been regarded as a small victory for the insurgency, claiming to be contributing to the economic 'bleeding of the US to bankruptcy' campaign established by al-Qaeda. 'Kidnapping for ransom' has become a key element of Abu Sayyaf Group operations, funding the organization as well as increasing recruitment based upon its ability to prosper within a poor socio-economic nation.<sup>201</sup> Improvised explosive devices and bombings are the preferred method of attack for Abu Sayyaf Group, targeting economic infrastructure, foreign and domestic security forces, and Christian populations.<sup>202</sup>

### Summary

The Abu Sayyaf Group is an associate node of the al-Qaeda network, capitalizing upon al-Qaeda specialist training to execute localized attacks.<sup>203</sup> Despite variations in the themes of

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<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 350-351.

<sup>201</sup> McKenzie O'Brien, "Fluctuations Between Crime and Terror: The Case of Abu Sayyaf's Kidnapping Activities" in *Terrorism and Political Violence*. <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ftpv20>. (Accessed on 21 February 2013), 325-327.

<sup>202</sup> National Counterterrorism Center. *Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)*. <http://www.nctc.gov/site/index.html>. (Accessed 13 February 2013), 1.

<sup>203</sup> O'Brien, "Fluctuations Between Crime and Terror"... , 324.

stated objectives, Abu Sayyaf Group is fundamentally supporting the overarching vision of al-Qaeda: expelling the US from Muslim lands, implementation of an Islamic caliphate or republic, and the containment of US foreign policy within the Muslim world. The counter-insurgency that has been waged by the US within the Philippines, regardless of perceived success by western powers, has not been capable of eradicating Abu Sayyaf Group and has had a considerable economic effect upon the US, a victory that is being claimed by the Abu Sayyaf Group.

## **Ansar al-Islam**

### Establishment and Area of Operations

Ansar al-Islam is based upon several transformations of Islamic Movements within Northern Iraq, predominantly within Kurdistan. Abdullah al-Shafi'i had received encouragement and seed money to establish a new Islamist group from al-Qaeda in 2001, at which time it took the name Ansar al-Islam. The group has remained operational in Kurdistan, however sustained considerable losses following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.<sup>204</sup> Reports indicate that Ansar al-Islam may have expanded operations to include international targets, such as the foiled attack against Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi during a German Bank reception in Berlin.<sup>205</sup>

### Aims and Objectives

The primary objectives of Ansar al-Islam remain the establishment of an Islamic state governed by sharia law, the expulsion of foreign occupation forces through defensive-jihad, and the refusal to acknowledge the legitimate authority of the Iraqi government.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Kenneth Katzman, "Iraq and Al Qaeda: Allies or Not?" in *CRS Report for Congress*. <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/34715.pdf>. (Accessed on 13 February 2013), 6.

<sup>205</sup> IHS Jane's Defence and Security Intelligence and Analysis, Ansar al-Islam. <https://janes.ihs.com/CustomPages/Janes/ReferenceHome.aspx>. (Accessed on 13 February 2013), 3.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

## Alliances

While Ansar al-Islam remains independent, it has received financial support from al-Qaeda as well as has maintained informal relations with al-Qaeda in Iraq. The two organizations have shared media distribution agencies and specialist personnel, namely explosive experts. While not an affiliated member of al-Qaeda, Ansar al-Islam maintains a liaison post within the al-Qaeda network.<sup>207</sup> Reports have also suggested that Ansar al-Islam received between \$300,000 to \$600,000 (USD) as seed money to establish the organization and ensure that it would have sufficient resources and personnel to establish itself within Northern Iraq.<sup>208</sup>

## Threat / Operations

Ansar al-Islam is not capable of obtaining its strategic objectives in its current state. However, it remains a credible threat to the national security of Iraq and has the potential to become a staging base from which select al-Qaeda operations can be launched from. Ansar al-Islam continues to target domestic and foreign security forces, political leaders, and the Shia population through assassinations, bombings, improvised explosive devices, and complex attacks.<sup>209</sup> The group has also attempted to capitalize upon propaganda pertaining to the abduction, torture, and execution of foreign nationals, most notably the videotaped beheadings of western contractors.<sup>210</sup>

## Summary

Ansar al-Islam remains an associate node within the al-Qaeda network, choosing to align itself with the larger strategic visions and objectives of the al-Qaeda core while maintaining

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<sup>207</sup>United Nations. "Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 1267 and 1989 Concerning al-Qaeda and Associated Individuals and Entities." <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQE09803E.shtml>. (Accessed on 21 February 2013), 1.

<sup>208</sup> Jonathan Schanzer, "Ansar al-Islam: Back in Iraq" in *The Middle East Quarterly*. <http://www.meforum.org/579/ansar-al-islam-back-in-iraq>. (Accessed on 21 February 2013), 2.

<sup>209</sup> Thomas Joscelyn and Bill Roggio, "Ansar al-Islam Names New Leader" in *The Long War Journal*. <http://www.longwarjournal.org>. (Accessed on 21 February 2013), 1-2.

<sup>210</sup> IHS Jane's Defence and Security Intelligence and Analysis, Ansar al-Islam..., 6-7.

autonomy of leadership. The association with al-Qaeda continues to provide the insurgent network with an increased sphere of influence, mutual targets, and the potential to increase the territory that would become the Islamic caliphate. While Ansar al-Islam is currently engaged in the defensive jihad, it remains an important operational base for al-Qaeda to transit or operate from within, potentially providing Ansar al-Islam with the resources and motives to expand into the global jihad in the future.

## **Boko Haram**

### Establishment and Area of Operations

Jama'atu Ahlu-Sunnah Lidda'Awati wal, Jihad, the official name of the Nigerian militant organization has also been called the Nigerian Taliban, but is more commonly referred to as Boko Haram. The organization was established under command of Abubakar Lawan in 1995, but was succeeded in 2003 by Mohammad Yusef, a young cleric who was chosen for the position by shura.<sup>211</sup> Between 2003 and 2009, Boko Haram suffered at the hands of the Nigerian counter-insurgency effort, greatly reducing the operational and tactical level effectiveness and strength of the group. Following Yusef's death in 2009, Sanni Umaru assumed command and immediately re-invigorated the group and warned of a renewal of insurgent actions, attempting to rebrand the group in an effort to rebuild its strength and capability.<sup>212</sup> Boko Haram operates internal to Nigeria, however, has the potential to spread into neighbouring states depending upon state-lead counter insurgency operations within Nigeria.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Strategic Comments. "Boko Haram: Nigeria's Growing New Headache" in *Strategic Comments*. <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ftpv20>. (Accessed on 21 February 2013), 1-2.

<sup>212</sup> IHS Jane's Defence and Security Intelligence and Analysis, Boko Haram. <https://janes.ih.com/CustomPages/Janes/ReferenceHome.aspx>. (Accessed on 13 February 2013), 2.

<sup>213</sup> Hakeem Onapajo, Ufo Okeke Uzodike and Ayo Whetho. "Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria: The International Dimension" in *South African Journal of International Affairs*. <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ftpv20>. (Accessed on 21 February 2013), 345.

### Aims and Objectives

Boko Haram is primarily focused upon the establishment of an Islamic state, governed by sharia law, and the eventual expansion outside of the borders of Nigeria, essentially forming an Islamic caliphate. Boko Haram has comparable objectives to al-Qaeda, in particular with regards to the requirement to wage defensive jihad against occupying forces and governments determined to be ‘apostate’ in the opinion of the organization.<sup>214</sup>

### Alliances

Boko Haram has no official links or ties to international insurgent organizations, however, senior al-Qaeda leadership’s have confirmed their position of support for Boko Haram. This support would be in the form of training and resources, ensuring that Boko Haram was resourced fully to accomplish Boko Haram’s goals.<sup>215</sup> In addition, Boko Haram has publically announced that it identifies itself with Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda as well as declaring itself a version or variation of the network core that is in line with their own ambitions. Boko Haram leadership went as far as to say that the organization would carry out bin Laden’s command in Nigeria until the strategic objective of an Islamic state was attained.<sup>216</sup>

### Threat / Operations

Boko Haram has increased its attacks in the years following its apparent defeat, emerging as a moderate threat to national security within Nigeria in the past three years.<sup>217</sup> While the attacks have been mainly on the smaller-scale in comparison to other international insurgencies, they have resulted in significant casualty rates. Targets typically include police and

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<sup>214</sup> National Counterterrorism Center. *Boko Haram*. <http://www.nctc.gov/site/index.html>. (Accessed 13 February 2013), 1.

<sup>215</sup> IHS Jane’s Defence and Security Intelligence and Analysis, *Boko Haram*..., 3.

<sup>216</sup> Onapajo, Uzodike and Whetho. “Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria”..., 346.

<sup>217</sup> Strategic Comments. “Boko Haram: Nigeria’s Growing New Headache” ..., 1.

para-military personnel and instalments, assassinations against security, government and local religious leaders, as well as civilians and Christian establishments.<sup>218</sup> In addition, economic targets have become common place, including attacks upon oil facilities, international airports, and international hotels, all attempting to affect the international trade and economy of not only Nigeria, but international players with stakes within Nigeria. Further, the investment of US funding towards the counter terrorism efforts in Nigeria has come at an expense of \$8.4 million, a further example of resources and funds that will play into the overarching al-Qaeda network attempt to bleed the US slowly into bankruptcy.<sup>219</sup>

### Summary

Boko Haram is an example of the resilience of insurgent organizations, once thought to be decimated. Its revival has been witness to increased attacks and a newfound energy in its pursuit of objectives. The organization has also expanded into the criminal realm, conducting kidnap for ransom and bank robberies in an effort to increase their capacity to purchase arms, equipment and resources required to fund their initiatives.<sup>220</sup> Despite only having a loose association with al-Qaeda to be truly characterized as an adherent organization, Boko Haram has publically aligned itself with the al-Qaeda network's strategic objectives. It has further attempted to emulate the al-Qaeda core in its endeavours to expand its influence within the region, encouraging splinter groups within the region to conduct mirrored attacks with similar objectives.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Lise Waldek and Shankara Jayasekara. "Boko Haram: The Evolution of Islamist Extremism in Nigeria" in *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*. <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ftpv20>. (Accessed on 21 February 2013), 171-172.

<sup>219</sup> Onapajo, Uzodike and Whetho. "Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria"..., 349.

<sup>220</sup> Abee Olufemi Salaam. "Boko Haram: Beyond Religious Fanaticism" in *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*. <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ftpv20>. (Accessed on 21 February 2013), 149, 156.

<sup>221</sup> Waldek and Jayasekara. "Boko Haram: The Evolution of Islamist Extremism in Nigeria"..., 173-174.



## Conclusion

Notwithstanding al-Qaeda's success in self-synchronization, there is an inherent risk in such a vast and empowered network. Some elements may operate on the fringe of the organization's intent or take action that is contradictory or in contravention to the network Focus. The public endorsement and naming of Abu al-Zarqawi as the emir of al-Qaeda in Iraq due to his gallant operations against the US forces is a prime example. When Zarqawi began to target Iraqi civilians (women and children) as well as mass killings of Shiites, bin Laden was forced to remain supportive until Zarqawi's death, at which time he expressed his error and asked for forgiveness from the Muslim population citing the Prophet Muhammad's acknowledgement and forgiveness of human error.<sup>222</sup> In a terrorist network, it is acknowledged and accepted that there will be collateral damage and actions outside of desired intent, however, over the continuum of time, the greater good of strategic Self-Synchronization will outweigh any tactical deviation.

The al-Qaeda network continues to expand, introducing into its sphere of influence affiliates, associates, and adherent network nodes. It is through these nodes that the network continues to draw its legitimacy, public recognition, and ultimately its power and ability to influence its activities on a global scale. The al-Qaeda network continues to operate at an effective level, forcing state-born and international organizations to conduct counterinsurgency operations in an attempt to stabilize and establish regional security throughout states and failing states. The death of key al-Qaeda and network node leadership has impacted on the overall global insurgency, at times causing a brief pause in operations, however, it has not garnered the anticipated significant results. Setbacks have been temporary and in certain situations,

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<sup>222</sup> Gerges, *The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda* ..., 106-110.

insurgencies that had been believed destroyed, were capable of re-emerging and re-establishing operations within very short timelines.

The global al-Qaeda network is successful and will remain relevant in the future security environment due to the fundamentals in which it has established itself: its strategic objectives, and its ability to continuously morph and modernize to meet the demands of the evolving times. “Al-Qaeda survives best where it can attach itself to deeply rooted local movements, which it then proceeds to radicalize.”<sup>223</sup> It is capable of evolving as a network at a rate faster than that of its western adversary, capitalizing upon flexibility, modernization of the information and media realm, and capitalizing upon information and dis-information campaigns within its propaganda wing.

Al-Qaeda oversees an expanding network that increases its ability to project throughout the globe, outside of the Muslim world and into western power states, capitalizing upon the freedom of action of nodes organic to their environment and decreasing the requirement to transport material and personnel for the execution of attacks. While 9/11 may have been the culmination in al-Qaeda’s ability to plan and execute massive coordinated and complex attacks, it provided the organization with a lasting legacy that no amount of kinetic attacks could produce. 9/11 established al-Qaeda as an international insurgent organization that is capable of and focussed upon challenging the last remaining global super-power. This action brings with it affiliates, associates, and adherents that align themselves with al-Qaeda, forming a global insurgent network that has withstood over a decade of conflict with the world’s most modern and

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<sup>223</sup> Jenkins, *Al Qaeda in Its Third Decade...*, 3.

economically wealthy nations. Despite set backs along the way, al-Qaeda cannot be discredited, and is certainly not out of the fight.

## SECTION 7 - CONCLUSION

*The Americans only have predications and old intelligence left. It will take them a long time to understand the new form of al-Qaeda.*

- Thabet bin Qais, Al Qaeda Spokesperson, May 2003.<sup>224</sup>

Al-Qaeda continues to maintain relevance within the international security environment despite suffering significant losses to key infrastructure and terrain over the past decade. The ability of al-Qaeda to elevate itself from an unknown localized insurgent organization contained to Muslim states to that of gaining unprecedented notoriety within the global community for its threat to international security and stability is staggering. Further, the ability of a non-state actor to mature to the level currently possessed by al-Qaeda has shaken the core of western security thinking. It has also proven the resiliency of al-Qaeda's core principles and strategic visions having withstood the test of time and conflict. However, the ability to transition from hierarchical organization to global network insurgency is perhaps the greatest accomplishment and lasting development of Osama bin Laden to al-Qaeda's legacy. The transformation has provided al-Qaeda with an increase in overall longevity, effectiveness, and operational capabilities.

The creation of al-Qaeda and the radicalization of Osama bin Laden did not occur out of happenchance but rather was a slow, deliberate process that was dependent upon considerable external influences. Bin Laden's study and connection to radical Islamists such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Sayyid Qutb, Abdullah Azzam, and Ayman al-Zawahiri had a profound impact upon his development and the direction in which he influenced al-

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<sup>224</sup> Sarah el Deeb, "Al-Qaeda Reportedly Big New Attack," *Associated Press*, 8 May 2003. Quoted in Bruce Hoffman, "The Changing Face of Al Qaeda and the Global War on Terror," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*. Washington: The RAND Corporation, 2010, 549.

Qaeda. In addition, the socio-economic situation within the Middle-East during the 1960's and 1970s with events such as the Arab-Israeli wars, the Iranian revolution, the Soviet-Afghan war, and the American invitation into Saudi Arabia steered the path al-Qaeda would take during this period of growth. Despite al-Qaeda's infancy in the 1980's and 1990's, bin Laden was developing into an influential and recognized figurehead within the Islamist community, a persona based upon action and resolve to a 'cause' that would be announced to the world in 1996 and 1998.

The requirement for well established, clearly defined, and highly publicized strategic goals allowed for the maturation of al-Qaeda and its climb towards international recognition and global recruitment. Capitalizing upon his ability to resource and mentor localized insurgencies throughout the Middle East and Africa, bin Laden increased his sphere of influence, established and fostered relationships and support, and generated considerable recruitment for al-Qaeda as an umbrella organization. More importantly for al-Qaeda as a developing hub within a network was the ability to develop and provide experience for its core membership as well as increase its recognition within the international security community and state actors. However, despite moderate attempts to attack international targets, al-Qaeda had not yet been capable of achieving the international recognition necessary to attain its strategic goals. The US, while acknowledging the presence of al-Qaeda, had yet to feel any significant threat or challenge to domestic or foreign security.

The 1996 and 1998 public declarations of the forthcoming conflict against the western powers and the global jihad marked the emergence of al-Qaeda as a truly formidable opponent to global security and stability. Despite having not yet conducted complex coordinated attacks, the announcement served as a forewarning for events that

would transpire over the 15-plus following years. It would be the 9/11 attacks that would propel al-Qaeda into the global media circuit, identify Osama bin Laden as “public enemy number one” for the US, and signify al-Qaeda’s rising legitimacy within the international community. While the decade following the 9/11 attacks were not witness to an event as catastrophic or complex in design, al-Qaeda continued to strike fear into the population throughout the world, consuming a considerable amount of military and security resources and financial commitment by western states. As the sphere of influence and publicity of al-Qaeda’s capacity for operations increased so did the recruitment of affiliate, associate, and adherent membership within the expanding network.

The A&H model for Power to the Edge organizations has provided the foundation for the analysis of al-Qaeda as a global insurgent network, constantly evolving towards self-synchronization and the ability to operate at the Edge. Focus, Convergence, and Agility have been developed and promoted within al-Qaeda in an effort to strengthen the network, increase resilience to outside influences, and improve efficiency and the achievement of strategic level objectives. Accountability is the major limiting factor preventing western democracies from attaining the same degree of self-synchronization as al-Qaeda. Within organization such as al-Qaeda there remains a responsibility to the very people for whom it is attempting to re-establish the Islamic caliphate. The major difference lies with the production and distribution of information and mis-information within the media outlets, an area where al-Qaeda has identified potential for success and has focussed considerable resources. The hub and spoke network that has been created continues to evolve and expand due in large part to the information age and

advancements in technology. These advancements have provided al-Qaeda with the tools required to recruit, train, and resource the network while reducing its actual footprint on the ground. Additionally, the network has diminished the perceived requirement for a hierarchical structure based upon command and control necessities. As the network continues to ‘flatten’ decisions are progressively made at the lower levels, increasing anonymity, probability of success, capacity to strike in a diversified operating environment with concurrent protection of the network nodes.

Al-Qaeda as a parent or umbrella organization continues to increase the number of network nodes that are capable of furthering the strategic goals of al-Qaeda while maintaining relevance within their own localized sphere of influence. It is important for al-Qaeda to retain some degree of control over which network nodes are capable of affiliating themselves with the al-Qaeda core as there is a commonality of official name. Any significant losses or operational level defeats of an al-Qaeda affiliate will have considerable implications for the parent organization, with fallout impacting recruitment, public support, operational capability, and funding/resourcing. Associate membership and adherent participation in al-Qaeda strategic objectives provide al-Qaeda with substantial benefits with reduced liability or associated risks. The al-Qaeda network continues to play a role in the successful operations of associate and adherent nodes and has the luxury of remaining silent or dismissing failed attempts or losses associated with the associates and adherents.

The global al-Qaeda insurgency continues to challenge and threaten the future security environment as it matures, capitalizes upon technological advancements, and maintains a strategic focus upon a perceived common enemy. Kinetic attacks will continue to play an important role within al-Qaeda’s capacity to influence its operating environment. However, the

acknowledgement and transition towards non-kinetic operations will continue to evolve what was once thought to be a primitive organization. The focus upon economic targets and the benefit of prolonged conflict affecting state economies provides al-Qaeda with an opportunity to change the balance between super-power and non-state actor. Coupled with an emphasis on media production and delivery of key messages throughout the world, al-Qaeda stands to remain relevant and pose a serious threat to not only the US, but the international community as a whole.

While al-Qaeda is not the most significant or imminent threat to global security or stability, it has surpassed the expectations and life-cycle many had predicted. The ability to transition into a global network, its understanding of the changing battlefield, and its maintenance of strategic objectives has prolonged its longevity. As highlighted earlier, insurgencies must maximize their capabilities while identifying and exploiting that of their opponents if they are to achieve a position of equality or elevate their capability above that of their adversary. This is what al-Qaeda has done in its growth as a global insurgent network.



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