

The evolution of Al-Qaedaism

Ideology, terrorists, and appeal

Edwin Bakker and Leen Boer

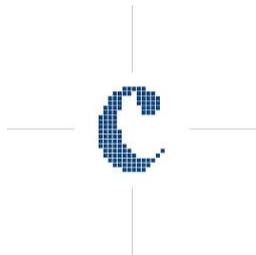
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Foreword

For the past six years, the phenomenon that is Al-Qaeda has been the subject of intensive study, and many publications, in all realms of today's global landscape: politics, government (not in the least by its intelligence and security services), international co-operation, non-governmental circles, journalism, science and academia. So when Edwin Bakker and Leen Boer started on their work on "The evolution of Al-Qaedaism", it seemed a tall order indeed to write something meaningful and original, adding value to what we already know about Al-Qaeda and its terrorists. The reader will obviously judge for her- or himself, but to me this booklet has succeeded in bringing something useful to the crowded landscape of thoughts, speeches, articles and books on Al-Qaeda.

If Al-Qaeda can be described as a dune, ever changing in form, location and nature, the present publication certainly can be described as beach grass, giving its reader, in a very concise yet detailed ways, at least some grip on this phenomenon. It gives the beginning reader on the subject useful information on the origins, motivations and manifestations of Al-Qaeda and the terrorists behind it. At the same time, it is a useful reference work for those working on terrorist issues on a daily basis. Its appearance, moreover, is very timely: events in the recent past in Denmark, Germany, Algiers and likely also Ankara have shown that unfortunately Al-Qaeda is by no means a thing of the past, but has the nature to

adapt and regroup itself, networking with ostensibly more autonomous groups or terrorist cells around the world. In its core the message of Al-Qaeda is about violence, oppression, domination and power, irrespective of Al-Qaeda as the vanguard, the base or the maxim. Understanding this phenomenon better will help us fight it and preserve our freedom and our other values. The present publication is an important contribution to this process.

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The Hague, October 2007

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1. Introduction

1.1 Basic questions

More than six years after the attacks on the United States, Al-Qaeda is still perceived by many as one of the most important threats to the security of the West, most notably to the United States. In September 2001 it was obviously a very serious physical threat to security. In the years following these catastrophic events, Al-Qaeda has not managed to repeat a deadly attack that has been anywhere near the scale of '9/11'. This has partly been the result of the 'Global War on Terror', including the fall of the Taliban regime and the hunt for persons belonging to or associated with Al-Qaeda.

Despite being deprived of its bases in Afghanistan and losing many of its operational leaders, Al-Qaeda has, however, managed to support or motivate others to attack Western targets, both in the Islamic world and beyond. Evidence of this include (foiled and failed) attacks in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Europe. Often, it remains unclear in what way and to what extent these attacks can be ascribed to the Al-Qaeda network. Far more certain is the notion that Al-Qaeda still constitutes a threat to security as a label that is used by various terrorist groups and as a source of inspiration of a new generation of jihadi terrorists. In

that particular shape, Al-Qaeda constitutes a conviction or creed that can best be described as Al-Qaedaism.

Despite the fact that Al-Qaeda has made headlines for about a decade, it remains unclear what makes it tick. This is not due to a lack of scholarly research. Think of studies by Montasser Al-Zayat, Peter Bergen, Jason Burke, John Gray, Rohan Gunaratna, Marc Sageman, and Mohammed Sifaoui.¹ The heart of the problem is that Al-Qaeda's evolution seems to take place at a pace that is too fast for researchers to follow. Six years later, the Al-Qaeda of '9/11' seems of a totally different nature than the Al-Qaeda we face today. Even the 'Al-Qaeda' associated with the Madrid bombings is very different from the Al-Qaedaist attacks on the London public transport less than one-and-a-half years later. On top of that, the Al-Qaeda in Iraq seems to change size, shape or tactics almost every season.

Given the extreme fluidity of 'Al-Qaeda', this study will not try to analyze the latest developments or to describe the Al-Qaeda of today. Instead we go back to basics and look at the different forms and phases of Al-Qaeda. In addition we investigate the persons and ideas behind it. With regard to the latter, our primary focus is not on the many post-'9/11' studies on Al-Qaeda, but on the documents and statements of Al-Qaeda itself.

The basic research questions of this study can be divided into two sets. First it focuses on the following two questions:

- How did Al-Qaeda develop since the early 1990s? (chapter 2)
- Who are the Al-Qaeda terrorists? (chapter 2)

Next, the study zooms in on Al-Qaeda's ideology:

- What does Al-Qaeda stand for? (chapter 3)
- What discontentment does Al-Qaeda feed on? (chapter 4)
- Why, how and to what extent does Al-Qaeda appeal to various groups of Muslims? (chapter 5)

¹ Montasser Al-Zayat, *The Road To Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden's Right-Hand Man*, 2004; Peter Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden*, 2002; Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*, 2004; John Gray, *Al Qaeda and What It Means to Be Modern*, 2005; Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, 2003; Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, 2004; Mohammed Sifaoui, *Inside Al Qaeda: How I Infiltrated the World's Deadliest Terrorist Organization*, 2004.

The study concludes with a brief exposé on possible future developments and a number of recommendations for policy makers and suggestions for further research.

1.2 'Al-Qaedaist terrorism' defined

What is terrorism? Our working definition of this highly sensitive and political term is derived from one particular academic effort to define the term, that of Alex Schmid and Bert Jongman. Within the academic world their definition is among the most often quoted ones. In 'Political Terrorism. A new guide to actors, authors, concepts, data bases, theories and literature' they cite more than one hundred different definitions of terrorism, which they obtained from leading academics in the field. Analyzing the definitions, Schmid and Jongman categorized the following recurring elements: violence, force (appeared in 84% of the definitions); political (65%); fear, emphasis on terror (51%); threats (47%); psychological effects and anticipated reactions (42%); discrepancy between the targets and the victims (38%); intentional, planned, systematic, organized action (32%); methods of combat, strategy, tactics (31%).

In this study, we follow their extensive attempt to define terrorism. According to Schmid and Jongman, 'terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-)clandestine individuals, groups, or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal, or political reasons, whereby - in contrast to assassination - the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperiled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought.'².

The term '*Al-Qaedaist terrorism*' indicates the above define actions committed by those that follow 'Al-Qaedaism'. The latter term refers to the set of political ideologies of the Al-Qaeda leadership as can be derived from its documents and statements. The particular characteristics and development of this set of political ideologies will be described in chapter 4. In addition, the term 'jihad' or 'jihadi

² Alex Schmid and Bert Jongman, *Political Terrorism. A new guide to actors, authors, concepts, data bases, theories and literature* Amsterdam: SWIDOC, 1988.

terrorism' is used frequently. In the context of this study, by jihad we mean a violent form of the so-called lesser jihad, a fight or a quest that is claimed by its supporters and practitioners to be in furtherance of the goals of Islam as they interpret it.

1.3 Outline of this study

The outline of the study is as follows. First it elaborates on the organizational development of Al-Qaeda. In several phases, from the early 1990s until now, it developed from a rather classic organization with leaders and followers to a much more diverse movement or 'network of networks'. The study then focuses on a number of terrorist attacks carried out by Al-Qaeda and by different types of groups that are associated with or inspired by Al-Qaeda. The second chapter deals with the question: 'Who becomes a terrorist, and how?' It also describes the characteristics of persons involved in Al-Qaedaist terrorist activities in an attempt to find out whether there are specific features that distinguish jihadi terrorists from other people. Chapter three deals with the ideology of Al-Qaeda, on the basis of statements of the major leaders and spokesmen of Al-Qaeda itself, as well as the views of analysts. We will then, in the fourth chapter, briefly explore the 'roots' of the widespread discontentment among (Arab) Muslims that Al-Qaeda tries to feed on and articulate. In Chapter Five, we will then explore the relationships between the classic Al-Qaeda core around Osama bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri and the other groups in the worldwide Al-Qaeda network, as well as with the grassroots. The concluding chapter offers some conclusions and recommendations.

2. Al-Qaeda

The Arab word 'Al-Qaeda' is probably one of the most often quoted non-European words in Western politics and media. It is used on a daily basis, but what is exactly meant by it? Among the general public and politicians, many would agree that the word Al-Qaeda means 'the base' or 'the source' in Arab and that it is the name of a terrorist organization headed by Osama bin Laden. Among scholars, this general description is not very satisfying and raises questions. First, the Arab word 'Al-Qaeda' has many different meanings. More important, however, the idea of 'Al-Qaeda' as an 'organization' is contested. The 'terrorist organization' Al Qaeda may best be described as a shadowy and highly complex phenomenon that, in organizational terms, appears to be a movement or a 'network of networks' and affiliates. In addition, it seems to be a movement or network that is continuously changing its shape, size and content.

As a 'terrorist organization' Al-Qaeda is difficult to compare with traditional terrorist organizations, such as the IRA, the PKK, Hamas or many of the smaller Islamist terrorist organizations. Especially since the 2001 United States-led assault on the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda does not fit in the traditional typology of terrorist organizations. It differs in organizational structure,

modes of thinking and patterns of behavior from other terrorist organizations.³ The complexity, as well as the evolutionary character of Al-Qaeda makes it extremely difficult to describe. As a working concept, we use the notion of a 'network of networks and affiliates' that has developed through different phases and that continues to evolve. In the next paragraph we will focus on the first three phases in the development of Al-Qaeda. In paragraph 2.4, we will discuss whether Al-Qaeda is currently moving to a next phase.

2.1 Phases in the development of Al-Qaeda

As mentioned in the introduction, the Al-Qaeda of today is very different from that of '9/11' and that of the 1990s. Various different - though partly overlapping - phases can be distinguished with regard to the development of Al-Qaeda. We use the classification formulated by Jason Burke, a renowned expert on Al-Qaeda and chief reporter of *The Observer*, for which he covered the war of 2001 in Afghanistan and that of 2003 in Iraq. In his much-appraised '*The True Story of Radical Islam*'⁴ he distinguishes three phases in the evolution of Al-Qaeda in the more than fifteen years since the end of the fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Using the different meanings of the word Al-Qaeda, he sees a change from Al-Qaeda as a 'vanguard' to Al-Qaeda as a 'base', to Al-Qaeda as the 'maxim', the 'precept' or the 'rule'.

According to Burke the first phase lasted from around 1989 to around 1996. In this period, *'hundreds of activists who had been involved in the war against the Soviets or were fighting local struggles against regimes in the Middle East worked, often independently, at radicalizing and mobilizing those who had hitherto shunned extremism. These activists saw themselves as 'the vanguard' - 'Al-Qaeda Al-sulbah' - and saw their role as enlightening and then leading the masses into war and into a just society.'*⁵

The second phase took place in the years between 1996 and the attacks on the United States in 2001. During these years, in the opinion of Burke, *'much of this vanguard came together in Afghanistan, where an unprecedented terrorist infrastructure*

³ S. Mishal and M. Rosenthal, Al Qaeda as a Dune Organization, in: Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, vol. 28, nr. 4, pp. 275-293; 279-280, 283-284.

⁴ In 2003 Jason Buke authored, 'Al-Qaeda: Casting a Shadow of Terror'. The book was updated and republished as 'Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam'. London: Penguin Books, 2003.

⁵ Jason Burke, Al-Qaeda. The true story of radical Islam, p. 290.

*was available. Though many remained independent, a large number became associated with bin Laden, who by the autumn of 1998 had the highest profile of all the alumni of the war against the Soviets. Using that profile... bin Laden was able to create something that approximated 'the base'....'*⁶

The second phase ended with the United States-led reaction to the attacks on '9/11', which destroyed that base. According to Burke, in 2003, *'we are now in the third phase, where 'Al-Qaeda'... is instead accurately characterized by the third translation...: the methodology, the maxim, the precept, the rule, the way of seeing the world.'*⁷

Predecessors of Al-Qaeda

The oldest organization that can be linked to 'Al-Qaeda' is the Maktab al-Khadamat (MAK, Office of Order in English, also known as the Afghan Services Bureau), which funnelled money, arms and Muslim fighters from around the world to fight the Soviet Union and its local allies in Afghanistan. In addition it provided relief to refugees and injured foreign fighters. The MAK is believed to have been founded in 1984 by the Palestinian Sheikh Abdullah Azzam (see box) and his former pupil Osama bin Laden.

Abdullah Azzam

The Muslim leader most responsible for expanding the jihad in Afghanistan into a full-blown international affair was not Osama bin Laden, but Sheikh Abdullah Azzam. Born in Palestine in 1941, Azzam moved to Jordan and then to Saudi Arabia to teach, before migrating to Pakistan at the start of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. In Peshawar, Azzam set up the Office of Services of the Holy Warriors and set about re-igniting the Islamic power rage against those non-Islamic powers that in his eyes had conspired against Islam since before the Crusades. Azzam combined hatred for the West – Christians and Jews – with a nostalgia for the days of the Islamic caliphate, when non-Muslims were treated formally as second-class citizens. Between 1985 and 1989, Azzam and his top aide, Palestinian Sheikh Tamim Al-Adnani, succeeded in recruiting thousands of believers.

Abdullah Azzam started off in one storefront in Peshawar, but managed to expand his activities with the help of the financial support of Osama bin Laden (see box). At the end of the 1980s, they had activated tens of thousands (mainly

⁶ Jason Burke, Al-Qaeda. The true story of radical Islam, p. 290

⁷ Jason Burke, Al-Qaeda. The true story of radical Islam, p. 290

Arabs) to volunteer for the jihad in Afghanistan. As the war ended, a difference in opinion emerged between Azzam and Bin Laden over the future direction of MAK. The conflict culminated in 1989 when Azzam was killed by a devastating bomb blast that also killed two of his sons. No perpetrator was ever found responsible, but many of Azzam's followers blame the United States for the assassination.⁸ Following Abdullah Azzam's death, Bin Laden assumed control of MAK and the organization was absorbed into al-Qaeda.⁹

The young Osama bin Laden

Osama bin Laden was born in March 1957 as the son and seventeenth child of Muhammad bin Laden, a wealthy man close to the Saudi royal family. The Bin Laden family owns one of the largest construction firms in the Islamic world. Osama bin Laden was educated in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. At university, he was influenced by professors with strong ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, among them Abdullah Azzam and the brother of Sayyid Qutb. Bin Laden's wealth and connections assisted his interest in supporting the mujahedeen, fighting the Soviet Union and its local allies in Afghanistan. His old teacher, Abdullah Azzam, had relocated to Pakistan to play an active role in that fight. After leaving university in 1979 Osama bin Laden joined Azzam to support the mujahedeen by organizing a guesthouse in Peshawar for Muslim fighters (mainly Arabs). By 1984, Osama bin Laden was involved in the MAK funneling money, arms and Muslim fighters from around the world into the Afghan war. Bin Laden's inherited family fortune paid for air tickets and accommodation, dealt with paperwork with Pakistani authorities and provided other such services for the fighters. By 1988, Bin Laden had split from MAK because of differences of opinion on strategic issues. While Azzam and his MAK organization acted as support for the Afghan fighters and provided relief to refugees and injured, Bin Laden wanted a more military role in which the Arab fighters would not only be trained and equipped by the organization but also led on the battlefield by Arab commanders. One of the main leading points that led to the split and the creation of al-Qaeda was the insistence of Azzam that Arab fighters be integrated among the Afghan fighting groups instead of forming their separate fighting force.¹⁰

⁸ Steve Emerson. Abdullah Assam: The man before Osama bin Laden. International Association for Counterterrorism & Security Professionals, see: <http://www.iacsp.com/itobli3.html>

⁹ Yoram Schweitzer and Sari Goldstein Ferber, Al-Qaeda and the internationalization of suicide terrorism, Memorandum no. 78, November 2005, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Israel.

¹⁰ Jason Burke, Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam, 2004; Rohan Gunaratna, Inside Al Qaeda (NY: Berkley Books, 2003); The Osama bin Laden I Know by Peter L. Bergen; Young Osama, How he learned radicalism, and may have seen America. Steve Coll, The New Yorker, December 12, 2005.

Al-Qaeda as ‘the vanguard’

In the late 1980s, when Moscow withdrew its troops, Bin Laden used his contacts and resources from the anti-Soviet struggle to turn the organization’s focus toward new perceived enemies of Islam beyond Afghanistan’s borders. The group changed its base of operations, principally due to pressure by various governments and authorities, from Afghanistan to Saudi Arabia (1990), to Sudan (1991) and finally back to Afghanistan (1996).

Sudan became the base for business operations and the base for preparing for terrorist activities elsewhere. As a result, in the mid 1990s the government of Sudan came under growing international pressure to expel Osama bin Laden, among others by the United States, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. By late 1995, senior figures in the Sudanese government were beginning to think that their bid to turn Sudan into a centre for Islamic radicalism might be a miscalculation. Sudanese intelligence started to put Bin Laden on notice and warned that the time had come to leave.¹¹ In May 1996, partly as a consequence of this pressure, Osama bin Laden returned to Afghanistan. There he managed to receive the support of a new host, the Taliban regime, and established a base in their territories.

Al-Qaeda as ‘the base’

Back in Afghanistan, during the second phase in its development, Al-Qaeda allied and supported terrorist groups throughout the world. These included groups fighting governments with allegedly apostate Muslim rulers (in Egypt, Algeria and Saudi Arabia), groups fighting regimes perceived to oppress their Muslim citizens (in Kosovo, India, Indonesia, Uzbekistan and Russia), and groups fighting to establish their own Islamic state (in Palestine, Chechnya, Dagestan and Mindanao). Al-Qaeda supported these groups by training group members in its camps and by sending its own members to help these groups in their struggles elsewhere. Training for its own members and for members of allied groups focused on terrorist techniques, as well as on insurgent warfare. In Afghanistan, thousands of recruits are thought to have passed through these training camps. Many of them fought in Afghanistan on the side of the Taliban regime. Smaller groups left for Tajikistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kashmir, Mindanao, Chechnya, Lebanon, Nagorno-Karabakh, Algeria, and Egypt.¹²

¹¹ Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda. The true story of Radical Islam*, p. 156

¹² Gregory, F. and Wilkinson, P., (2005) *Riding pillion for tackling terrorism is a high risk policy*, ISP/ NSC Briefing Paper 05/01, London, Chatham House

Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001 and 2002 ended the Taliban's rule in Kabul and destroyed a large part of its training camp infrastructure. As a consequence Al-Qaeda as 'the base' ceased to exist with the exception of relatively small groups that managed to survive in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region. This is the area in which Osama bin Laden seems to have vanished and from which the architect of Al-Qaeda ideology, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, is generally believed to continue his operations (see box).

Ayman Al-Zawahiri

Ayman Al-Zawahiri was born in 1951 to a prominent middle class family in Egypt, and was reportedly a studious youth. His father was a pharmacologist and a professor coming from a large family of doctors and scholars, while his mother, Umayma Azzam came from a wealthy and politicized clan. He became more religious than his relatively secular family. By fourteen he joined the Muslim Brotherhood as a student and follower of Sayyid Qutb. After studying at Cairo University, in 1979 he moved on to the much more radical Islamic Jihad and eventually became one of its leading organizers and recruiters. He was one of hundreds arrested following the assassination of the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat. After serving jail time, he went to Afghanistan to participate in the fight against the Soviet Union's occupation. There he met Abdullah Azzam and Osama bin Laden. Later when the MAK fractured al-Zawahiri joined Bin Laden in organizing Al-Qaeda. Since then, Ayman Al-Zawahiri is believed to serve as Bin Laden's spiritual adviser and doctor, and the main architect of the Al-Qaeda ideology. In 1998, he was the second of five signatories to Bin Laden's notorious 'fatwa' calling for attacks against US civilians under the title 'World Islamic Front Against Jews and Crusaders'. After the attacks on September 11, 2001, Al-Zawahiri has appeared in many Al-Qaeda videotapes. He escaped a number of attacks on his life. His wife and some of his children, however, were reported killed in a United States air strike in late November or early December 2001.

Al-Qaeda as 'the maxim'

In the third phase, Al-Qaeda turned into a maxim or a methodology rather than an organizational structure. This development is in part a result of the war against terrorism – in which Al-Qaeda not only lost its bases, but also many of its key figures – and partly a consequence of the evolutionary and fluid disposition of Al-Qaeda, which allows it to adapt to new situations rather naturally.

Key characteristics of this new manifestation are the written and electronic communiqués that are broadcasted through the internet and Arab and Western media, and the terrorist activities by groups that claim affiliation with Al-Qaeda. In the case of Iraq, the terrorist group of the late Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi is acting

as Al-Qaeda's acknowledged local affiliate. Also Saudi Arabia has had to deal with subsequent local 'leaders of Al-Qaeda'.

With regard to the cases of Madrid, Bali and London, the threat of Al-Qaeda is less determined by its organizational capacities than by the 'capacity' of Al-Qaeda as a maxim. This does not mean that Al-Qaeda has ceased to exist as an organizational structure, and it definitely does not mean that Al-Qaeda as 'the maxim' is weaker or less dangerous than Al-Qaeda as 'the base'.

In fact, six years after Operation Enduring Freedom, many argue that Al-Qaeda has adapted very well from the many blows to its organization. It adopted a new mode of operation and managed to turn the strategic constraints and military obstacles set up by the United States and its allies into strategic advantages. According to Mishal and Rosenthal, 'Al-Qaeda's activities challenged two principal prerequisites of the conventional organizational structures ... the conduct of organizations [that] relies on an imminent affiliation with an explicit territorial rational and a permanent institutional presence.'

'... [D]e-territorialization, instead of affiliation with definite territorial location, and disappearance rather than institutional presence, have become Al-Qaeda's organizational trademarks.' Against this background, Mishal and Rosenthal have described Al-Qaeda as a 'dune organization'. Their concept of the dune organization 'is based on the argument that the strategic behavior of Al-Qaeda relies on a process of vacillation between territorial presence and a mode of disappearance'. According to the authors, it resembles a dune as it is almost randomly moving from one territory to another, affecting each territory and changing its characteristics. The Al-Qaeda maxim or grand vision constitutes a key feature of this type of organization, as it functions as a substitute for affiliation to a specific territory.¹³

In their publication on Al-Qaeda as a dune organization, Mishal and Rosenthal also note that in some of its operations, Al-Qaeda may still rely on conventional organizational structures. This idea is subject to debate. Few experts would dare to argue that Al-Qaeda as a base was entirely destroyed. In fact, recent reports on Al-Qaeda seem to indicate a growing capacity to organize terrorist activities, as is visible in Pakistan.¹⁴ However, opinions differ with regard to the extent in which Al-Qaeda has managed to maintain or rebuild conventional structures. The same

¹³ S. Mishal and M. Rosenthal, *Al Qaeda as a Dune Organization*, in: *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 28, nr. 4, pp.275-293: 279-280, 283-284).

¹⁴ See for instance, AIVD 2006 Annual Report, p. 30.

holds for the question whether or not Osama bin Laden and other key figures can still be considered in control of Al-Qaeda and of operations that are organized under the Al-Qaeda maxim. Despite these open questions, it is safe to say that there is overlap between the phases of Al-Qaeda as 'the base' and Al-Qaeda as 'the maxim'.

2.2 Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks

Today, Al-Qaeda is generally considered the most threatening terrorist organization worldwide. Whether this is true or not, many of the most 'spectacular' and most lethal terrorist attacks in recent years have been ascribed to Al-Qaeda. Often, however, it is unclear which 'type' of Al-Qaeda is behind the attack: is it the vanguard, the base, or the maxim? In the case of the latter, some other group is primarily responsible for the attack, but the deadly incidents are nonetheless ascribed to Al-Qaeda. Not only the media and governments tend to do this, but also in some cases those primarily responsible for the attack use the Al-Qaeda label themselves. This has particularly been the case in Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

The most well-known examples of Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks include the bombing of United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania (1998), several attacks on Western targets in Saudi Arabia (1996-2005), and, of course, the most deadly terrorist strike in history, the one on 11 September 2001. In addition, there are dozens of other attacks that have been labeled Al-Qaeda terrorist acts and that have been executed by Al-Qaeda affiliates or groups that are inspired by Al-Qaeda. These 'affiliates' are considered to have been responsible for acts such as the nightclub bombings in Bali (2002), the attack on a hotel near Mombassa (2002), the targeting of Jewish sites in Casablanca (2003), the suicide car-bomb attacks in Istanbul (2003), the bombings in Madrid (2004), the deadly suicide attacks in London and in Amman (2005), and many car bombs and assassinations in Iraq (2003-2007).

According to the dataset of the MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base, the attacks associated with Al-Qaeda and its recognized affiliates in the Arabian peninsula, Iraq, and the Maghreb (see next paragraph) have caused more than 12.000 injured victims and more than 5.000 fatalities (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: *Attacks and number of casualties by Al-Qaeda (until October 2007) **

Group	Incidents	Injuries	Fatalities
Al-Qaeda	32	8,864	3,464
Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula	5	25	14
Al-Qaeda Organization in the Land of the Two Rivers	216	3,764	1,888
Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb	47	401	126
Totals	300	13,054	5,492

* Source: MIPT, Terrorism Knowledge Base

In addition to these attacks, Al-Qaeda is linked to various plots that were disrupted or somehow not carried out, or failed. Examples include attempts to assassinate Pope John Paul II during his visit to Manila in late 1994, to bomb United States trans-Pacific flights in 1995, and to set off a bomb at Los Angeles International Airport in 1999. In December 2001, suspected Al-Qaeda associate Richard Reid attempted to ignite a shoe bomb on a transatlantic flight from Paris to Miami. In Kenya, Al-Qaeda affiliates tried to down an Israeli chartered plane with a surface-to-air missile as it departed the Mombassa airport in November 2002. In February 2006, a group linked to Al-Qaeda failed in its attempt to attack Saudi Arabia's largest oil processing facility.

2.3 Al-Qaeda's worldwide presence

The above-described attacks that are associated with Al-Qaeda indicate a large operational area both inside and outside the Islamic world. Unfortunately, Al-Qaeda's presence is not limited to the countries that have fallen victim to its terrorist crimes. The 'network of networks and affiliates' has a presence in many other countries, in all parts of the world.

Depending on the 'directness' of the link between local organizations or networks with the Al-Qaeda leadership, different authors and institutions have come up with different lists of countries in which Al-Qaeda is believed to be present. For instance, the National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism in Oklahoma mentions 45 countries. Other sources, such as Gregory and Wilkinson,

even speak of as many as 65 countries. This list includes states in the wider Middle East (Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia), Western Europe (France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, United Kingdom), Eastern Europe (Bosnia, Serbia & Montenegro, Russia), Africa (Eritrea, Somalia, Kenya, South Africa) and Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines).¹⁵

The content of this 'presence' varies very much from country to country and relates to the differences between Al-Qaeda as a base and Al-Qaeda as a maxim. In general four different categories or types of 'presence' can be distinguished.

- The Al-Qaeda leadership
- Recognized affiliates of Al-Qaeda
- Self-proclaimed affiliates of Al-Qaeda
- Groups and individuals that are inspired by Al-Qaeda but who do not link themselves to it

The leadership

Defining 'the leadership' of Al-Qaeda must be considered a simplification in view of the complexity of this network of networks. However, a number of persons can be considered to be the key persons. Apart from Bin Laden, the 'Emir General', and Al-Zawahiri, these are the men who, at least until operation Enduring Freedom, were sitting on the organization's *majlis al shura*. This consultative council consisted of very experienced members that approved major decisions such as terrorist attacks and the issuing of *fatwas*. Periodically, its membership changed. Prominent personalities and trusted personal followers of Osama bin Laden were appointed to key positions. These council members also play or played primary roles in the organization's four major committees - military, finance and business, fatwa and Islamic study, and media and publicity - which are or were filled out by lower ranking Al-Qaeda members. This group of people, or what is left of it, is believed to be located in the border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

It remains unclear whether its activities are best described by 'hiding' or by 'organizing'. Whereas in the months after the United States-led intervention in Afghanistan the former was the dominant view, more and more observers tend to believe that the Al-Qaeda leadership has managed to establish some kind of new base from which they are able to plan and control certain activities. Abundant

¹⁵ Gregory, F. and Wilkinson, P., (2005) Riding pillion for tackling terrorism is a highrisk policy, ISP/ NSC Briefing Paper 05/01, London, Chatham House

speculations and repeated statements by Pakistan and the United States that they were close to arresting Bin Laden have become less frequent. The fact that Al-Zawahiri and Bin Laden have managed to continue to release video statements after the intervention in Afghanistan may be regarded as 'proof' that the Al-Qaeda leadership is still out there and is able to communicate with the outside world.

Recognized affiliates

Recognized affiliates of Al-Qaeda exist in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the Maghreb and Afghanistan. In Iraq, in late 2004, Al-Qaeda 'merged' with the organization of the late Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, "Jamaat Al-Tawhid wal Jihad" (Monotheism and Holy War Movement). The new organization operates under the name "Qa'idat Al-Jihad fi Bilad Al-Rafidayn" (Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers). Its goals have shifted considerably over the years. Iraq became Zarqawi's main focus after the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein. The American forces and their foreign and local allies became the main targets. The goal of the attacks against them is to force a withdrawal of the foreign "occupying" troops, to topple the Iraqi interim government and to assassinate "collaborators". Moreover, Al Zarqawi's network aims to marginalize the Shiite Muslim population and defeat its militias, and to subsequently establish some kind of Islamic state. Its followers and fighters are predominantly drawn from the ranks of Iraq's Sunni population, but it also manages to attract many foreign fighters. Most of them are from Saudi Arabia.¹⁶

¹⁶ Murad Al-Shishani, *The Salafi-Jihadist Movement in Iraq: Recruitment Methods and Arab Volunteers*, in: *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor*, Volume 3, Issue 23, December 2, 2005.

Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi

Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian also known as Ahmed Al-Khalayleh, is believed to have spearheaded Al-Qaeda's campaign against the United States occupation of Iraq. In February 2004, the United States military released a letter it claimed to have intercepted in which Zarqawi apparently asks Al-Qaeda to help ignite a sectarian conflict in Iraq. His name was linked to the deadly suicide bombings targeting Iraqi Shia Muslims and security services. He was also suspected of direct involvement in the kidnappings and execution of foreign workers in Iraq. A \$25 million bounty was placed on his head. Al-Zarqawi was tried in absentia and sentenced to death for planning attacks in his native Jordan. Intelligence officers in Morocco and Turkey also implicated him in high-profile suicide attacks in these countries in 2003. He was believed to have travelled extensively since 9/11, reportedly spending time in Iran, Pakistan, Syria, Lebanon and Turkey. After many failed attempts by Iraqi and US forces, Zarqawi was killed in an air raid by the US Air Force in Iraq, in June 2006.

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Al-Qaeda operates, among others, under the name 'the Organization of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula'. The precise relationship between the Al-Qaeda leadership and the network of Al-Qaeda terrorists operating within the Saudi Kingdom is not very clear. Its founding father, Yusuf al-Uyairi¹⁷ had strong links with Osama bin Laden.¹⁸ He died on 31 May 2004 in a clash with the police.¹⁹ Most of the leaders he had recruited from among his acquaintances in Afghanistan, such as Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin²⁰, were also killed in 2004. His successor, Saud bin-Hammoud Al-Otaibi died in an armed clash with Saudi security forces early April 2005. Despite many losses and despite the fact that many of the original 'Afghan' veterans within Saudi Arabia are no longer active terrorists, the organization still manages to recruit followers, especially among lower class, unemployed Saudis. However, after these killings, opinions differ whether 'Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula' can still be considered as a recognized affiliate or should be seen as a network that is

¹⁷ Yusuf al-Uyairi is also known for his writings, in particular his political analyzes and works on strategy. See William McCants and Jarret Brachman, *Militant Ideology Atlas, Executive Report* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, www.ctc.usma.edu/atlas/) p. 9; and also Hegghammer "Global Jihadism", p. 16..

¹⁸ Faris bin Hazzam, "Qissat ta'sis al-Qaida fi al-Sa'udiyya," Part I. (The story of the founding of al-Qaida in Saudi Arabiyya), *al-Riyad*, 27 September 2005.

¹⁹ See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 4 June 2003 and 30 July 2003.

²⁰ See Thomas Hegghammer, "Terrorist Recruitment and Radicalisation in Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Policy*, 13 (Winter 2006) 4, pp. 39-60.

operating without any 'formal' recognition by Osama bin Laden. In its activities, the network seems to operate independently from the Al-Qaeda leadership.

A third recognized affiliate is 'The Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb'. The organization has operated in Algeria since 1996 under the name 'The Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC)'. As the GSPC, the group broke away from the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), which was the primary terrorist entity during the 1992-2000 insurgency in Algeria. While the GSPC broke away from GIA in the late 1990s, both groups share the objective of overthrowing the secular Algerian government and establishing an Islamist state in the country. The GSPC has also pledged to attack Western targets and has been linked to several foiled attacks against targets in Western Europe.

In recent years, the GSPC has usurped GIA as the primary terrorist force in the country, and because of its minimal attacks against Algerian civilians, GSPC benefits from a larger support network in the country. According to some reports, GSPC has also been able to take over many of GIA's contacts with other extremists, including al-Qaeda allies. GSPC has publicly pledged its allegiance to many of these terrorist entities, and also officially pledged its allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2003. In September 2006, Ayman al-Zawahiri publicly approved the merge of Al-Qaeda with GSPC and to work together against French and American interests.²¹ In January 2007, GSPC announced a formal change of name into Al-Qaeda in a public announcement following six near-simultaneous attacks of police stations in towns east of Algiers.²² In April 2007, The Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb claimed responsibility for the Algiers bombing, which killed some 30 persons.²³

'Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan' may be considered a fourth recognized affiliate. In May 2007 the Egyptian Mustafa Ahmed Muhammad Uthman Abu al-Yazid was named as the 'general leader' of the group's activities in Afghanistan. Michael Scheuer's interpretation is that from Al-Qaeda's perspective, Abu al-Yazid's assignment must be seen as a move that keeps a strong, talented and respected hand managing Al-Qaeda's activities in Afghanistan, allowing Bin Laden and Al-

²¹ Group profile, 'The Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb', MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base; Daniel Lav, 'The Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb': The Evolving Terrorist Presence in North Africa, MEMRI, Inquiry and Analysis Series - No. 332; Andrew Black, The Reconstituted Al-Qaeda Threat in the Maghreb, Terrorism Monitor, Volume 5, Issue 2 (February 1, 2007); "Al-Qaida joins Algerians against France", Associated Press, 14 September 2006.

²² Brand Al-Qaeda, Sydney Morning Herald, 28 January 2007.

²³ William Maclean and Lamine Chikhi, Al Qaeda claims deadly Algiers bombings, Reuters, 11 April 2007.

Zawahiri to devote more thought and time to projects elsewhere in the world.²⁴ Abu al-Yazid, born in 1955, was a member of Al-Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad, went to Afghanistan in 1988 and is reported to have been one of the founding members of Al-Qaeda, in the same year, and a member of its supreme council (shura). In his new capacity as leader of Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan he pledged personal allegiance to Taliban leader Mullah Omar. In Scheuer's view, this is a similar 'keep-the-locals-in-the-lead effort' to the one that Al-Qaeda undertook after the death of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq. The insurgency in Afghanistan has to be seen by "the traditionally insular Afghans" as being led by Afghan mujahideen and not by "foreign Arabs".²⁵

Self-proclaimed affiliates

Self-proclaimed affiliates of Al-Qaeda are found in the Middle East, South-East Asia, Africa, and Europe. These groups or networks consider themselves, or are considered by others, to operate under the label of Al-Qaeda. These groups operate more or less autonomously. Their link with the Al-Qaeda leadership is indirect – and in some cases both sides may not even be aware of any connection between individuals within their network. Well known examples of these self-proclaimed affiliates include: Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines; Lashkar Al-Toiba, Jaysh Muhammad, and Harakat Al-Ansar in India; Al-Itkihad Al-Islami in Somalia; and Al-Jama'a Al Islamiya in Indonesia. New groups in this category seem to pop-up in many countries, especially in the Middle East.

A typical example of a new self-proclaimed affiliate is the "Echo of Tuwayq Brigades in Al-Zulfa". This Saudi network announced its presence through jihadi forums in October 2005. On an internet forum called Al-Tajdeed, it was announced that this new group was subordinated to the above-mentioned Organization of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. The group, which takes its name from the Jabal Tuwayq escarpment that runs north to south through the area of Riyadh, declared its allegiance to Mullah Omar, Osama bin Laden and the late Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi. It also pledged its loyalty to the 36 members of the 'most wanted' list issued by the Saudi authorities in June 2005.²⁶

²⁴ Michael Scheuer, Al-Qaeda's new leader in Afghanistan: A profile of Abu al-Yazid. Jamestown Terrorism Focus, Volume 4, Issue 21 (July 3, 2007).

²⁵ Michael Scheuer, Al-Qaeda's new leader in Afghanistan: A profile of Abu al-Yazid. Jamestown Terrorism Focus, Volume 4, Issue 21 (July 3, 2007).

²⁶ Stephen Ulph, Another Al-Qaeda group forms in Saudi Arabia. Jamestown Terrorism Focus, Volume 2, Issue 19 (October 18, 2005).

Inspired by Al-Qaeda

Groups and individuals that are inspired by Al-Qaeda are found in all parts of the world. This particular category of Al-Qaeda presence is the most difficult one to define as it concerns small groups and individuals with no direct links with the Al-Qaeda leadership, or even with no links at all. Most of them also do not seem to have direct contacts with recognized affiliates. This raises many questions, in particular with regard to a number of cases in Europe. Should the groups that were responsible for the two attacks in London be considered Al-Qaeda inspired terrorists? And what about the so-called 'Hofstadgroep' in the Netherlands? Osama bin Laden is an important figure to many of its members. In court, Mohammed Bouyeri, the killer of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, was compared by the public prosecutor with Osama bin Laden (see box). Bouyeri reacted saying "That you compare me with Osama bin Laden, does not give enough credit to this man and is too much honor for me, which I do not deserve. But if you see me as a man holding the black banner of Islam, you fill me with honor, pride and joy".²⁷ However, it should be stressed that he and the other members of the 'Hofstadgroep' were also influenced by many other Islamist figures (among them many present-day Salafi thinkers). In addition, they were inspired by nationalist-religious struggles, in particular in Chechnya and Palestine. The same holds for comparable terrorist groups in Western Europe. Also in other countries and regions, such as Iraq, groups inspired by Al-Qaeda are at the same time inspired by a whole range of other leaders, ideologies and struggles. This is why this type of Al-Qaedaist groups are very difficult to define, and why it is highly arbitrary to label them as such.

²⁷ 'Dat u mij vergelijkt met Osama bin Laden, doet die man veel te kort en u verleent mij daarmee te veel eer die mij niet toekomt. Maar dat u mij ziet als de zwarte vaandeldrager van de islam in Europa, vervult mij met eer, trots en blijdschap'. Elsevier, Bouyeri: Vergelijking met Bin Laden te veel eer, 2 februari 2006.

Mohammed Bouyeri

Bouyeri, the killer of Theo van Gogh, was raised in a neighbourhood in Amsterdam with a high concentration of immigrants. At school he did not distinguish himself from other pupils and was rather withdrawn and obedient. After secondary school, he decided to study accountancy. Five years later, he had switched studies more than once without getting a degree. Various setbacks are believed to have contributed to his more aggressive behaviour. He got involved in a number of fights, which resulted in a conviction for abuse and intimidation. He was sentenced to 12 weeks in prison, where he began studying the Koran. Soon afterwards, his mother died. Quitting college and unemployment followed frustrations in his endeavour to establish a youth centre in his neighbourhood. Mohammed began to resort to religion, searching Islamic texts on the internet that appealed to him. He visited a controversial mosque in Amsterdam where he made contact with men from Egypt, Algeria and Syria, who gave special courses and lectures. In his home, meetings were organized of radical youngsters. They invited a charismatic Syrian to give some lectures. In December 2002 Mohammed had radicalised to the extent that he embraced the idea of violent jihad. Two years later, the self-appointed martyr took his assignment seriously. Bouyeri shot and stabbed Theo van Gogh before cutting his victim's throat and sticking a message into the victim's chest containing an incitement to holy war.²⁸

The virtual Al-Qaeda

In reaching out, attracting active supporters, and inspiring autonomous or 'self-organized' jihadist groups, Al-Qaeda has been rather proficient in using modern information and communication technologies. These were initially audio and videotapes, subsequently satellite television and lately, on an increasing scale, the Internet.

From the beginning, the rise of political Islam and, in its track, jihadism, has been bound up with the use of modern communication technologies. From the 1970s onwards, the audiocassette played an important role in the advance of political Islam, especially in the 1979 revolution in Iran. It was at that time a technology that was ideally suited to the mass distribution of sermons and speeches, at low cost, through underground channels. The late 1980s and 1990s also brought Arab satellite TV, initially from outside the region, especially from Western Europe, with Britain in particular. Much of this broadcasting, however, remained

²⁸ Albert Bensschop, Kroniek van een aangekondigde moord, http://www.sociosite.org/jihad_nl.php

under the firm control of states.²⁹ An important reason was the costs involved. The independently operating Al-Jazeera, in Qatar, is a different case. For a while now, Al-Jazeera has been used by Al-Qaeda as a primary (but not exclusive) outlet of its video- and audiotaped messages.

Recently, however, internet-publishing has quickly gained in importance. It provides a medium of communication that is not only low-budget, but also has appeared to be very difficult to control. Al-Zarqawi, in particular, has been given credit for making the World Wide Web into a powerful tool of global jihad. While Bin Laden and his associates traditionally relied on satellite television, Al-Zarqawi went straight to the Internet, showing what he wanted people to see. The video clips of the bombings and beheadings his group carried out in Iraq inspired not only jihadis in Iraq, but elsewhere as well.³⁰ He even created “an online news service of his exploits, releasing tactical details of operations multiple times a day”.³¹

The Internet is used primarily for propaganda, indoctrination, radicalisation, incitement and (virtual) recruitment. Apart from that, the Internet is increasingly used for training purposes too, allowing ‘home-grown terrorists’ or so-called ‘insider jihadis’³² to acquire the knowledge and capabilities to stage attacks.³³ An example is an instructional video laying out in precise detail how to construct a suicide bomber’s explosive belt, found on the Internet in 2004.³⁴ Jihadist websites and bulletin boards have rapidly proliferated. Sections of the web have been made into “an open university for jihad”.³⁵

In addition there is the influence of websites and chat rooms on the Internet that do not (openly) preach violence, but that do contribute to the radicalisation of young Muslims. To this particular category, the Internet is increasingly a source of religious inspiration to those that are dissatisfied with ‘the Islam’ they have been raised in. They compile their own ‘cut-and-paste’ Islam. That is in particular, the case among second- or third generation children of Muslim migrants in Europe. They are not only wrestling with their identity because they are members of a religious minority, but also because they are living in a very individualized society, while they have been raised in a tradition in which the

²⁹ Halliday 2005: 250-251.

³⁰ The New York Times, June 9, 2006.

³¹ The Washington Post, August 9, 2005.

³² A term used by Leiken (2005) to differentiate jihadis that are second- or third-generation children of migrants to Europe from outsiders that became jihadis, aliens, typically asylum seekers or students.

³³ Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding 2006.

³⁴ The Washington Post, August 9, 2005.

³⁵ Reuven Paz, Head of the Project for the Research of Islamist Movements in Israel, quoted in The Washington Post, August 7, 2005.

family and collective behaviour are still considered very important. During this 'cut-and-paste process', some develop their own 'Al-Qaedaism', which leads to new and diverging compilations of 'cut-and-paste' Al-Qaedaism. As a result, the Internet has produced new mergers of ideas and opinions, which are not necessarily in line with the ideas and opinions of the Al-Qaeda leadership, making the virtual Al-Qaeda an extremely fluid and vague phenomenon.

2.4 A new phase?

As mentioned in the introduction, the rapid evolution of Al-Qaeda requires constant rethinking with regard to its current developmental status. At the time of writing, two developments stand out. The first is the above-mentioned emergence of new Al-Qaedaist cells and groups that are linked to Al-Qaeda in such an indirect way that it becomes increasingly difficult to label them still as 'Al-Qaedaist'. Or in other words, 'the maxim' appears to be in the process of becoming so vague that it can be argued that Al-Qaeda is moving beyond that phase towards a phase of proliferating differentiation and maybe fragmentation.

This development, however, is mainly taking place outside the Muslim world. Within it, there appears to be a return to the situation in which Al-Qaeda can still be described as 'the base' (physically located in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region). The idea of 'Al-Qaeda as the maxim' still holds for Iraq and Saudi Arabia, and has been strengthened by developments in the Maghreb, in particular the merger of Al-Qaeda with GSPC. The agenda of these groups with closer links to Al-Qaeda may become more focused on local situations.

These developments of, on the one hand, a weakening of the importance of Al-Qaeda and Al-Qaedaism to newly emerging cells and groups, and, on the other hand, regrouping and new mergers of the earlier generation groups and movements, may be the characteristics of a new phase. It could very well be a phase of fragmentation or of a proliferating differentiation, in which Al-Qaeda as an organization and Al-Qaedaism as an ideology have increasingly diverging meaning and relevance to different groups in different regions. To some cells and groups, Al-Qaeda and its leadership will become just one of many sources from which they derive their ideas. As it gets vaguer and more virtual, it will be less of a 'network of networks'. In a few regions, in particular in the Muslim world itself, Al-Qaeda may continue to inspire, mobilize and support groups in their local fight against the existing order and the presence of foreign troops, ex-pats or companies, either as part of 'the network of networks' or even in the form of a return to Al-Qaeda as the base.

3. Al-Qaeda's ideology: inside and outside perspectives

What does Al-Qaeda stand for? What is 'Al-Qaedaism'? What are the core messages of Al-Qaeda's ideology? Is Islam or 'politics' the prime mover of Al-Qaeda? Texts of Al-Qaedaists, Osama bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri in particular, will be the starting point in answering these questions. These sources represent the inside perspective. Al Qaeda's statements (most of them written texts and transcriptions of audio- and videotapes) can be found on the internet as well as in several compilations that have been published in the past few years.³⁶ Of course, these statements may contain distortions for reasons of propaganda, disinformation, hidden agenda's, and the like. Therefore, the proclaimed ideology may give us an incomplete or distorted picture.

Because of this, the ideology emerging from the Al Qaeda texts will be complemented with the views of some analysts of Al-Qaeda's ideology. One might say that these represent the outside perspective. This chapter is concluded with a summary of the clear and constant elements of Al-Qaeda's ideology and its less clear elements.

³⁶ See, for example: Hegghammer 2002; Hegghammer 2005; Kepel et al. 2005.

3.1 Al-Qaeda's ideology in its own words

The documents used below to present Al-Qaeda's ideology have been arranged according to the three phases Jason Burke distinguishes in the development of Al-Qaeda as described earlier: Al-Qaeda as 'the vanguard', as 'the base' and as 'the maxim'.

Al-Qaeda as 'the vanguard'

Al-Qa'idah al-Sulbah (the Solid Base) (Abdullah Azzam, 1988)³⁷

The Palestinian Abdullah Azzam is generally considered to be the founder and one of the ideological fathers of Al-Qaeda (see also the paragraph on the 'Predecessors of Al-Qaeda' in Chapter 2). He earned a doctorate in Islamic law from Al-Azhar University in Cairo during the 1970s. He embraced and adapted the radical jihadist doctrines of Sayyid Qutb, also often considered to be an ideological father of Al-Qaeda (see the text box on Qutb in §4.2.). During the late 1970s Azzam was a teacher in Jeddah, where Osama bin Laden was one of his pupils. Subsequently Azzam was appointed as a lecturer to the Islamic University in Islamabad. From there he moved on to Peshawar in 1984, where he established the 'Office of Services'. With Bin Laden as his partner, he recruited Arab volunteers to fight against the Soviets on Afghanistan's battlefields. In 1988, the year before he died, Abdullah Azzam had conceptualized 'Al-Qaeda' in Al-Jihad, a journal of the Afghan Arabs.

For Azzam, Al-Qaeda is the indispensable vanguard: 'Every principle needs a vanguard to carry it forward and, while focusing its way into society, puts up with heavy tasks and enormous sacrifices. There is no ideology, neither earthly nor heavenly, that does not require such a vanguard that gives everything it possesses in order to achieve victory for this ideology. It carries the flag all along the sheer, endless and difficult path until it reaches its destination in the reality of life, since Allah has destined that it should make it and manifests itself. This vanguard constitutes Al-Qa'idah al-Sulbah for the expected society.'

He formulated eight guidelines for training this vanguard, amongst which: 'This vanguard has to abstain from cheap worldly pleasures and must bear its distinct stamp of abstinence and frugality. In like manner it must be endowed with firm belief and trust in the ideology, instilled with a lot of hope for its victory. There must be a strong determination and insistence to continue the march no matter

³⁷ See, a.o.: Coll 2004: 85, 155, 204; the quotes are taken from: Gunaratna 2002: 3-4.

how long it takes. [...] They must be aware of the existence of anti-Islam machinations all over the world.’

Join the caravan’ (Abdullah Azzam, 1987)³⁸

Jihad is an obligation for each capable individual Muslim, Abdullah Azzam emphasized in ‘Join the caravan: ‘Jihad is currently Fard Ain - individually obligatory - in person and by wealth, in every place that the disbelievers have occupied. It remains Fard Ain continuously until every piece of land that was once Islamic is regained. [...] The word Jihad, when mentioned on its own, only means combat with weapons, [...]. Allah has not excused anybody to abandon Jihad other than the ill, the cripple and the blind, as well as children who have not yet reached puberty, women who have no way of emigrating and performing Jihad and those advanced in years.’

For participating in jihad one will be rewarded, if not here on earth, than in paradise: “It has been reported in the authentic Hadith narrated by Imam Ahmad and AtTirmidhil, on the authority of Al-Miqdam bin Ma'd, that: ‘The martyr has seven special favours from Allah:

he is forgiven his sins with the first spurt of his blood, he sees his place in Paradise (before his soul leaves his body), he is clothed with the garment of faith, he is wed with seventy-two wives from the beautiful maidens of paradise, he is saved from the Punishment of the Grave, he is protected from the Great Terror (of the Day of Judgement), on his head is placed a Crown of Dignity, a jewel of which is better than the World and all it contains, and he is granted intercession for seventy people of his household.’

A physical base is crucial, Azzam wrote in ‘Join the caravan’: “Establishment of the Muslim community on an area of land is a necessity, as vital as water and air. This homeland will not come about without an organized Islamic movement, which perseveres consciously, and realistically upon Jihad, and which regards fighting as a decisive factor and as a protective cover. The Islamic movement will not be able to establish the Islamic community except through a common, people's Jihad which has the Islamic movement as its beating heart and deliberating mind. It will be like the small spark which ignites a large keg of explosives, for the Islamic movement brings about an eruption of the hidden

³⁸ The text quoted here was accessed at <http://www.islamistwatch.org/texts/azzam/caravan/part1.html>, on 20-02-07. See also Kepel et al. (2005).

capabilities of the Ummah [the community of believers], and a gushing forth of the springs of Good stored up in its depth.”

‘Declaration of war against the Americans occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places’
(Osama bin Laden, 1996)³⁹

Osama bin Laden’s ‘Declaration of war against the Americans’ was first published, in August 1996, in Al Quds Al Arabi, a London-based newspaper. Bin Laden started to stress ‘[...] that the people of Islam had suffered from aggression, iniquity and injustice imposed on them by the Zionist-Crusaders alliance and their collaborators; to the extent that the Muslims became the cheapest and their wealth as loot in the hands of the enemies.’ He referred to recent “[...] massacres [among Muslims] that send shivers in the body and shake the conscience” and to “[...] a clear conspiracy between the USA and its allies and under the cover of the iniquitous United Nations [...]’. ‘The latest and the greatest of these aggressions [...] is the occupation of the land of the two Holy Places [...] by the armies of the American Crusaders and their allies.’ But, he claimed: ‘The people of Islam awakened and realised that they are the main target for the aggression of the Zionist-Crusaders alliance.’ And: ‘The situation at the land of the two Holy Places became like a huge volcano at the verge of eruption that would destroy the Kufr [unbelievers] and the corruption and its sources.’

In his declaration, bin Laden denounced ‘the oppressive and illegitimate behaviour and measures of the ruling regime’ of Saudi Arabia: ‘[...] to use man-made law instead of the Shari’a and to support the infidels against the Muslims is one of the ten ‘voiders’ that would strip a person from his Islamic status [...].’ ‘[...] the situation can not be rectified [...] unless the root of the problem is tackled. Hence it is essential to hit the main enemy who divided the Ummah into small and little countries and pushed it, for the last few decades, into a state of confusion.’ Quoting Ibn Taymiyyah, Bin Laden continued: ‘People of Islam should join forces and support each other to get rid of the main ‘Kufr’ who is controlling the countries of the Islamic world, even to bear the lesser damage to get rid of the major one, that is the great Kufr.’ So, ‘[...] after Belief there is no more important duty than pushing the American enemy out of the holy land.’ ‘To repel the greatest of the two dangers on the expense of the lesser one is an Islamic principle which should be observed.’

³⁹ The text used here was accessed at
http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa_1996.html, on 19-10-05.

In the light of later Al-Qaeda actions, it is remarkable that in this 1996 'Declaration' Bin Laden reminded '[...] the Muslims not to be engaged in an internal war among themselves [...]', because of the consequences, such as 'consumption of the Muslims human resources as most casualties will be among the Muslims people' [sic] and 'destruction of the oil industries'.

Tellingly, Bin Laden paid a lot of attention to the role of the Muslim youth in addressing the enemy, saying: 'Our youths believe in paradise after death', and 'They have no intention except to enter paradise by killing you. An infidel, and enemy of God like you, cannot be in the same hell with his righteous executioner'. He made himself therefore their spokesman: 'The youths hold you responsible for all of the killings and evictions of the Muslims and the violation of the sanctities, carried out by your Zionist brothers in Lebanon; you openly supplied them with arms and finance. More than 600,000 Iraqi children have died due to lack of food and medicine and as a result of unjustifiable aggression (sanction) imposed on Iraq and its nation. The children of Iraq are our children. You, the USA, together with the Saudi regime are responsible for the shedding of the blood of these innocent children. Due to all of that, whatever treaty you have with our country is now null and void.'

'The cure for believers' hearts' (Ayman al-Zawahiri, 1996)⁴⁰

The core of Al-Qaeda's political view is to be found in a 1996 treatise by Al-Zawahiri, 'The cure for believers' hearts' In it he ranks the main issues facing the islamist movement in order of priority. The issue of Palestine is at the top of his list. He declares that all Arab and Muslim regimes, including the PLO, had lost their credibility by the mere fact that they have accepted the authority of the United Nations and the legitimacy of Israel.

Al-Zawahiri's second issue is the individual believer's personal responsibility: every Muslim who, in any way, supports the 'un-islamic' regimes governing Muslim countries places himself outside the fold of Islam. Jihad is the individual Muslim's duty. It is, as it were, a sixth pillar of Islam. The argument of personal liability is also expanded to the West. As civilians in the West elect and pay for their governments, they are therefore responsible for the actions of their governments. As such, they lose their status of innocent non-combatants in Islamic law and become legitimate targets.

⁴⁰ See: Azzam 2003; Hellmich 2005..

Finally, Al-Zawahiri propounds the twin ideas of the greater good and the need to react to exceptional circumstances. He embraces the idea of martyrdom to deal with the absolute prohibition of suicide under Islamic law and to argue that an Islamist can commit suicide for the greater good. In order to justify killing children and even Muslims as unintentional victims or collateral damage of jihadi attacks, Al-Zawahiri claims that Muslims are facing exceptional circumstances, with weak resources and an overpowering enemy.

Al-Qaeda as 'the vanguard': Key issues

Summarizing, in the eyes of Azzam and Al-Zawahiri, the West is a permanent threat to Islam and a continuous source of aggression. Regimes like the one in Saudi-Arabia support the infidels against the Muslims and use man-made law instead of Allah's Shari'a. Every Muslim who in any way supports such regimes governing Muslim countries places himself outside the fold of Islam. Al-Qaeda is the indispensable vanguard. It should give everything it possesses in order to achieve victory, no matter how long it takes. A physical base is crucial. Until every piece of land that was once Islamic is regained, jihad is an individual obligation for each capable Muslim. It is as if it were a sixth pillar of Islam. Muslims are facing exceptional circumstances. Killing children or even Muslims as collateral damage of jihadi attacks is therefore allowed. Without participation of the ummah the vanguard will not succeed in establishing the Islamic community.

Al-Qaeda as 'the base'

'Jihad against Jews and Crusaders: World Islamic Front Statement'
(Osama bin Laden et al., 1998)⁴¹

The 1998 World Islamic Front Statement of Osama bin Laden was co-signed by, amongst others, Ayman al-Zawahiri. It is, again, a declaration of war against the Americans and their allies, be it much shorter than the 1996 one. It starts with a quotation from Allah's Book: 'But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem [...]'. In reaction to 'crimes and sins committed by the Americans' which 'are a clear declaration of war on Allah, his messenger and Muslims', the authors issue a fatwa to all Muslims: 'The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies - civilians and military - is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Holy Mosque from their grip, and in order

⁴¹ The text used here was accessed at <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.html>, on 14-07-07.

for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty Allah, 'and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together', and 'fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah.' They continued that, 'We - with Allah's help - call on every Muslim who believes in Allah and wishes to be rewarded to comply with Allah's order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it.'

'The will and fatwa of the prisoner Sheikh Doctor Omar Abdel Rahman' (1998)⁴²

At the press conference, organized by bin Laden on May 26, 1998, to announce the above mentioned 'World Islamic Front Statement' the sons of the Egyptian cleric Omar Abdel Rahman distributed small plastic-laminated cards containing their father's 'will'.

Rahman is well known because of his involvement in the attempt to blow up the Twin Towers in New York in 1993 and has been in an American prison since then. In the preceding years, Rahman already was a very important spiritual leader to many of the Egyptian militants, who were committed to violent struggle to promote their concept of Islam, some of whom would become core members of Al-Qaeda.

On the card distributed by Rahman's sons was Arabic script with a picture of a Muslim cleric praying in a prison cell. The fatwa on the card contains the basic ideology of Al-Qaeda. The major part of the text, translated into English, reads: 'My brothers ... If they [the Americans] kill me, which they will certainly do – hold my funeral and send my corpse to my family, but do not let my blood be shed in vain. Rather, extract the most violent revenge, and remember your brother who spoke the truth and died for the will of God ... The Mujahid Sheikh Omar Abdel al Rahman. In the name of God the kind and merciful. The fatwa of the prisoner Sheikh Doctor Omar Abdel Rahman: America is in the process of eliminating the ulema who are speaking the truth. [...] And the Koran has made a decree upon these Jews and Christians, which we have forgotten or allowed to be forgotten: Allah said: 'If they could, they will continue to kill you until they make you turn away from your religion.' And so all Muslims everywhere. Cut off all relations with [the Americans, Christians, and Jews], tear them to pieces, destroy their economies, burn their corporations, destroy their peace, sink their ships, shoot down their planes and kill them on air, sea, and land. And kill them wherever you may find them, ambush them, take them hostage, and destroy their

⁴² Bergen 2006: 202-209.

observatories. Kill these infidels. Until they witness your harshness. Fight them, and God will torture them through your hands, and He will disgrace them and make you victorious over them, and the nation of the believers is on the verge of creation, and the rage will go from them. Your brother Omar Abdel Rahman from inside American prisons.'

According to Peter Bergen the significance of Sheikh Rahman's fatwa to Al-Qaeda has not been remarked by analysts. Al-Qaeda may be led by Bin Laden and his deputy Al-Zawahiri, but neither of them has any standing as a religious scholar, while Sheikh Rahman has a doctorate in Islamic jurisprudence from Al-Azhar University in Cairo. His fatwa appears to have been the first time that a Muslim cleric had given his religious sanction to attacks on Americans and their economic interests in terms that could not be misunderstood. Bergen even goes as far as stating that Sheikh Rahman's fatwas are the nearest equivalent that Al-Qaeda has to an ex cathedra statement by the pope.

'Knights under the prophet's banner' (Ayman al-Zawahiri, 2001)⁴³

Al-Zawahiri's book 'Knights under the prophet's banner' was published at the end of 2001 in the form of a series of excerpts by the London based, Arabic newspaper Al-Sharq al-Awsat. In a (disputed) letter from Al-Zawahiri, dated July 9, 2005, intercepted by the Americans and released later in 2005, he wrote that the newspaper published it truncated and jumbled. He continued: "I think that the American intelligence services provided the aforementioned newspaper with it from my computer which they acquired, because the publication of the book coincided with a publication of messages from my computer in the same newspaper."⁴⁴

Part of the book is autobiographical. Writing on his 'Afghan' period Al-Zawahiri wishes to rectify the distorted image of the 'Afghan Arabs' in the western media. He argued that they had been portrayed 'as obsessed half-mad people'. He pointed out that these lies were intended to deprive the Muslim nation of the honor of heroism. An important topic in the book is Zawahiri's defense of the fatwa on the killing of Americans, which contradicts the traditional strategy of the Egyptian Al-Jihad Organization (fighting the near rather than the distant enemy), of which Al-Zawahiri used to be a prominent leader.

⁴³ The text used here was accessed at http://www.liberalsagainstterrorism.com/wiki/index.php/Knights_Under_the_Prophet's_Banner, on 14-07-07.

⁴⁴ See: <http://www.globalsecurity.org>, 9 February 2006

For Al-Zawahiri Afghanistan was like an incubator for the jihadist movement: ‘A jihadist movement needs an arena that would act like an incubator where it seeds would grow and where it can acquire practical experience in combat, politics, and organizational matters.’ He also claimed it to have been a watershed in the sense that: ‘The Muslim youths in Afghanistan waged the war to liberate Muslim land under purely Islamic slogans, a very vital matter, for many of the liberation battles in our Muslim world had used composite slogans, that mixed nationalism with Islam and, indeed, sometimes caused Islam to intermingle with leftist, communist slogans.’ He continued: ‘In Afghanistan the picture was perfectly clear: A Muslim nation carrying out jihad under the banner of Islam, versus a foreign enemy that was an infidel aggressor backed by a corrupt, apostatic regime at home.’

Al-Zawahiri acknowledged the key role of Sayyid Qutb (see also the text box in §4.2.), ‘the most prominent theoretician of the fundamentalist movements’: ‘Sayyid Qutb’s call for loyalty to God’s oneness and to acknowledge God’s sole authority and sovereignty was the spark that ignited the Islamic revolution against the enemies of Islam at home and abroad.’

In his book Al-Zawahiri appeared clearly concerned about the extent of the gap in understanding between the jihad movement and the common people: ‘The fundamentalist movement’s message continues to be mostly geared toward the elite and the specialists. The public and the masses do not understand this message. This is a gap that the jihad movement must strive to fill [...]’. In a sense targets merge with means: ‘[...] stepping up the jihad action to harm the US and Jewish interests creates a sense of resistance among the people, who consider the Jews and Americans a horrible symbol of arrogance and tyranny.’

In Al-Zawahiri’s view, the current role of the United States is not to be misunderstood: ‘Except for Israel, which is in fact a huge US military base, the United States did not resort in the past to conspicuous and intensive military presence to run its affairs in the Middle East until the second Gulf war erupted. When that happened, the United States rushed to the region with its fleets, its land troops, and air power to manage its own affairs with its own hands under the shadow of its own guns. With this conspicuous US military presence, several new facts emerged, including, first of all, the transformation of the United States from a mover of events from behind a veil to a direct opponent in its battle against the Muslims.’

Al-Zawahiri claimed that the jihadist movement had become so strong that the United States felt compelled to confront it with direct US military power. ‘[...] the west has played a colluding role in establishing Israel in the heart of the Muslim nation. The US role in this crime was and remains one played by the

leader of all criminals. It also transpires that in playing this role, the western countries were backed by their peoples, who are free in their decision.' He continued: 'These peoples have willingly called for, supported, and backed the establishment of and survival of the State of Israel. The western peoples continued to make this demand for decades, and it was not a haphazard demand. It was the fruit of a tree watered by hatred of Islam and the Muslims for several centuries. Based on this fact, we must build a realistic policy toward the west so that we do not fall from the sky of illusions to hit the land of reality. In addition, we must acknowledge that the west, led by the United States, which is under the influence of the Jews, does not know the language of ethics, morality, and legitimate rights. They only know the language of interests backed by brute military force. Therefore, if we wish to have a dialogue with them and make them aware of our rights, we must talk to them in the language that they understand.'

In 'Knights under the prophet's banner' Al-Zawahiri admitted that victory in the form of restoring the caliphate in the heart of the Islamic world is not an easy or close target. He stated that western forces hostile to Islam, joined by Russia, are using several tools to fight Islam, including the United Nations, the friendly rulers of the Muslim people, the multinational corporations, the international communications and data exchange systems, the international news agencies and satellite medium channels and the international relief agencies (used as a cover for espionage, proselytizing, coup planning, and the transfer of weapons).

Against these forces jihad is the only solution: 'The jihad movement must come closer to the masses, defend their honor, fend off injustice, and lead them to the path of guidance and victory.' [...] 'The jihad movement must dedicate one of its wings to work with the masses, preach, provide services for the Muslim people, and share their concerns through all available avenues for charity and educational work.' [...] 'We must win the people's confidence, respect, and affection.' [...] 'The one slogan that has been well understood by the nation and to which it has been responding for the past 50 years is the call for the jihad against Israel.' Al-Zawahiri's Al Qaeda is looking for a (physical) base: 'Armies achieve victory only when the infantry takes hold of land. Likewise, the mujahid Islamic movement will not triumph against the world coalition unless it possesses a fundamentalist base in the heart of the Islamic world.' But, '[...] we must move the battle to the enemy's grounds to burn the hands of those who ignite fire in our countries [...]', as 'It is clear [...] that the Jewish-Crusade alliance will not give us time to defeat the domestic enemy then declare war against it thereafter. The Americans, the Jews, and their allies are present now with their forces, as we explained before.'

Al-Qaeda as 'the base': Key issues

The fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan has been a crucial incubator for the Islamist movement: war was waged there not under nationalist slogans, but under purely Islamic and Islamist ones. In the eyes of Osama bin Laden c.s., a Muslim nation was carrying out jihad under the banner of Islam, versus a foreign infidel enemy, backed by an apostate Afghan regime. Islam superseded nationalism. The gap between the jihad movement and the common people still has to be filled. Stepping up jihad is a means to do that. The United States rushed to the Middle East with its fleets, its land troops, and air power to manage its own affairs with its own hands, because it considered the jihadist movement a too great threat. The battle must be moved to the enemy's grounds in the West. The West only knows the language of force. It hates Islam. The West is using a number of tools to fight Islam, including the United Nations, the rulers of Muslim countries, the multinational corporations and the international relief agencies. Against these forces jihad is the only solution. The peoples of the West are guilty too, because they elected their governments. Killing the Americans and their allies is an individual duty for every Muslim who is capable of doing it. The western economies have to be destroyed. Allah will provide victory to the Muslims. The nation of the believers is on the verge of creation, yet restoring the caliphate in the heart of the Islamic world is not an easy or a close target. Realising a fundamentalist base in the heart of the Islamic world is crucial step towards the end-goal.

Al-Qaeda as 'the maxim'

*Bin Laden's audiotape offering an armistice to Europe (April 14, 2004)*⁴⁵

The message on audiotape in which Bin Laden offered an armistice to Europe was aired by the Arabic satellite channels al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya. No details about the origin nor the total length of the recording were provided. The statement was addressed to the Europeans and offered an armistice conditional on the withdrawal of European forces from Iraq and Afghanistan. It said Europe had three months to consider the proposal. It referred to the terrorist attacks in Madrid, the preceding month. Some said the message indicated a change of strategy on the part of the Al-Qaeda leadership, from a strategy of unconditional and total war on all things Western to a politically more pragmatic strategy open to temporary ceasefires. Others interpreted the statement as a clever attempt to drive a wedge between the US and Europe, drawing on the European scepticism to the Western military presence in Iraq, and exploiting the uneasy atmosphere in

⁴⁵ Hegghammer 2005: 56-59.

Europe after the Madrid attacks. European politicians, however, immediately rejected Bin Laden's armistice proposal.

Bin Laden: 'I also offer a reconciliation initiative to [the European peoples], whose essence is our commitment to stopping operations against every country that commits itself to not attacking Muslims or interfering in their affairs - including the US conspiracy on the greater Muslim world. [...] The reconciliation will start with the departure of its last soldier from our country. The door of reconciliation is open for three months of the date of announcing this statement. For those who reject reconciliation and want war, we are ready. As for those who want reconciliation, we have given them a chance. Stop shedding our blood so as to preserve your blood.'

Bin Laden's audiotape "Message to brothers and sister in the whole Islamic Nation" (January 4, 2004)

On an audiotape released just a few months earlier (on Sunday, January 4, 2004) and aired by the Arabic TV station Al-Jazeera, Bin Laden's message had been quite different: 'The West's occupation of our countries is old, yet new. The struggle between us and them, the confrontation, and clashing began centuries ago, and will continue because the ground rules regarding the fight between right and falsehood will remain valid until Judgment Day. Take note of this ground rule regarding this fight. There can be no dialogue with occupiers except through arms. This is what we need today, and what we should seek. Islamic countries in the past century were not liberated from the crusaders' military occupation except through jihad in the cause of God. Under the pretext of fighting terrorism, the West today is doing its utmost to tarnish jihad and kill anyone seeking jihad. The West is supported in this endeavour by hypocrites. This is because they all know that jihad is the effective power to foil all their conspiracies. Jihad is the path, so seek it.' (Hegghammer 2005: 49-50).

Letter from Musab al-Zarqawi to Osama bin Laden (January 2004)⁴⁶

Early in 2004 a letter was intercepted in Iraq, purportedly from Musab al-Zarqawi to Osama bin Laden. It was translated and published by the then Coalition Authority in Iraq. In the letter Al-Zarqawi claims to have completed 25 operations in Iraq and asks for aid from al-Qaeda to continue efforts to destabilize Iraq and undermine Coalition forces.

⁴⁶ Coalition Provisional Authority (2004, February)

Al-Zarqawi also elaborates upon his sectarian agenda: 'In general, Iraq is a political mosaic, an ethnic mixture, and scattered confessional and sectarian disparities that only a strong central authority and an overpowering ruler have been able to lead [...]'. '[The Kurds] have given the bargain of their hands and the fruit of their hearts to the Americans. They have opened their land to the Jews and become their rear base and a Trojan horse for their plans.' '[The Shi'a are] the insurmountable obstacle, the lurking snake, the crafty and malicious scorpion, the spying enemy, and the penetrating venom. We here are entering a battle on two levels. One, evident and open, is with an attacking enemy and patent infidelity. [Another is] a difficult, fierce battle with a crafty enemy who wears the garb of a friend, manifests agreement, and calls for comradeship, but harbours ill will and twists up peaks and crests (?)⁴⁷.' 'The unhurried observer and inquiring onlooker will realize that Shi'ism is the looming danger and the true challenge. 'They are the enemy. Beware of them. Fight them. By God, they lie.' History's message is validated by the testimony of the current situation, which informs most clearly that Shi'ism is a religion that has nothing in common with Islam except in the way that Jews have something in common with Christians under the banner of the People of the Book.'

According to Al-Zarqawi the Shi'a try to avoid a direct battle with the Sunnis. '[...] they maliciously and cunningly proceeded another way. They began by taking control of the institutions of the state and their security, military, and economic branches. As you, may God preserve you, know, the basic components of any country are security and the economy. They are deeply embedded inside these institutions and branches.' 'They are infiltrating like snakes to reign over the army and police apparatus, which is the strike force and iron fist in our Third World, and to take complete control over the economy like their tutors the Jews. As the days pass, their hopes are growing that they will establish a Shi'a state stretching from Iran through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon and ending in the Cardboard Kingdom of the Gulf.' 'These people (the Shi'a) are continuing to kill those who call for Islam and the mujahidin of the community, stabbing them in the back under cover of the silence and complicity of the whole world [...]'. '[The Mujahidin] are the quintessence of the Sunnis and the good sap of this country. In general, they belong to the Sunni doctrine and naturally to the Salafi creed.' But, 'Jihad here unfortunately [takes the form of] mines planted, rockets launched, and mortars shelling from afar. The Iraqi brothers still prefer safety and returning to the arms of their wives, where nothing frightens them. Sometimes the groups have boasted among themselves that not one of them has been killed or captured. We have told them in our many sessions with them that safety and

⁴⁷ Question mark in original (translation).

victory are incompatible, that the tree of triumph and empowerment cannot grow tall and lofty without blood and defiance of death, that the [Islamic] nation cannot live without the aroma of martyrdom and the perfume of fragrant blood spilled on behalf of God, and that people cannot awaken from their stupor unless talk of martyrdom and martyrs fills their days and nights.’

Al-Zarqawi claims he accomplished a lot: ‘So where are we? Despite the paucity of supporters, the desertion of friends, and the toughness of the times, God the Exalted has honored us with good harm to the enemy. Praise be to God, in terms of surveillance, preparation, and planning, we have been the keys to all of the martyrdom operations that have taken place except those in the north.’ Dragging the Shi`a into battle is the key to change, continues Al-Zarqawi: ‘I mean that targeting and hitting them in [their] religious, political, and military depth will provoke them to show the Sunnis their rabies ... and bare the teeth of the hidden rancor working in their breasts. If we succeed in dragging them into the arena of sectarian war, it will become possible to awaken the inattentive Sunnis as they feel imminent danger and annihilating death at the hands of these Sabeans. Despite their weakness and fragmentation, the Sunnis are the sharpest blades, the most determined, and the most loyal when they meet those Batinis (Shi`a), who are a people of treachery and cowardice.’ ‘Our fighting against the Shi`a is the way to drag the [Islamic] nation into the battle.’ ‘All that we hope is that we will be the spearhead, the enabling vanguard, and the bridge on which the [Islamic] nation crosses over to the victory that is promised and the tomorrow to which we aspire.’

At the time, the authenticity of Al-Zarqawi’s letter, discussed above, was disputed, one of the arguments being that ‘the document outlines interests and goals discordant with those of Al-Qaeda’ (Novikov 2004). The latter may be right in itself, but was no hindrance for a formal alliance, concluded at the end of 2004, between Al-Zarqawi and Al-Qaeda.

Letter from Al-Zawahiri to Al-Zarqawi (July 9, 2005)⁴⁸

In October 2005, the White House released an English translation of a letter from Al-Qaeda’s ‘second in command’, Ayman al-Zawahiri to the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, dated July 9, 2005. The authenticity of this letter was also disputed, particularly, but not exclusively in the Arab media.⁴⁹ In the letter Al-Zawahiri tried to rein in the extreme violence of the leader of Al-Qaeda

⁴⁸ GlobalSecurity.org (2005); see also: Donnelly (2005), Lerch (2005), Steinberg (November 2005).

⁴⁹ CNN.com (2005, October 19); see also: Ulph 2005.

in Iraq, referring to its impact on Muslim public opinion. However, he also made clear why the struggle in Iraq is so important to Al-Qaeda. He strongly emphasized the strategic importance of having a physical base in the heart of the Islamic, i.e. Arab world.

‘I want to be the first to congratulate you for what God has blessed you with in terms of fighting battle in the heart of the Islamic world, which was formerly the field for major battles in Islam's history, and what is now the place for the greatest battle of Islam in this era [...]. It has always been my belief that the victory of Islam will never take place until a Muslim state is established in the manner of the Prophet in the heart of the Islamic world, specifically in the Levant, Egypt, and the neighbouring states of the Peninsula and Iraq; however, the centre would be in the Levant and Egypt.’ ‘If our intended goal in this age is the establishment of a caliphate in the manner of the Prophet and if we expect to establish its state predominantly [...] in the heart of the Islamic world, then your efforts and sacrifices - God permitting - are a large step directly towards that goal.’

However, he also stressed the importance of getting popular support: ‘If we look at the two short-term goals, which are removing the Americans and establishing an Islamic amirate in Iraq, or a caliphate if possible, then, we will see that the strongest weapon which the mujahidin enjoy - after the help and granting of success by God - is popular support from the Muslim masses in Iraq, and the surrounding Muslim countries.’ Indeed, more than that: ‘If we are in agreement that the victory of Islam and the establishment of a caliphate in the manner of the Prophet will not be achieved except through jihad against the apostate rulers and their removal, then this goal will not be accomplished by the mujahid movement while it is cut off from public support, even if the Jihadist movement pursues the method of sudden overthrow. This is because such an overthrow would not take place without some minimum of popular support and some condition of public discontent [...].’

Additionally, if the Jihadist movement were obliged to pursue other methods, such as a popular war of jihad or a popular intifadah, then popular support would be a decisive factor between victory and defeat.’ ‘Therefore, the mujahid movement must avoid any action that the masses do not understand or approve, if there is no contravention of Sharia in such avoidance [...].’ ‘We don't want to repeat the mistake of the Taliban, who restricted participation in governance to the students and the people of Qandahar alone. They did not have any representation for the Afghan people in their ruling regime, so the result was that the Afghan people disengaged themselves from them. Even devout ones took the stance of the spectator and, when the invasion came, the amirate collapsed in days, because the people were either passive or hostile.’

Though acknowledging that: ‘People of discernment and knowledge among Muslims know the extent of danger to Islam of the Twelve school of Shi’ism.’, and that: ‘The collision between any state based on the model of prophecy with the Shia is a matter that will happen sooner or later.’, Al-Zawahiri tries to convey to Al-Zarqawi that this is not the time for a conflict with the Shia. ‘We must repeat what we mentioned previously, that the majority of Muslims don't comprehend this and possibly could not even imagine it. For that reason, many of your Muslim admirers amongst the common folk are wondering about your attacks on the Shia. The sharpness of this questioning increases when the attacks are on one of their mosques, and it increases more when the attacks are on the mausoleum of Imam Ali Bin Abi Talib, may God honor him. My opinion is that this matter won't be acceptable to the Muslim populace however much you have tried to explain it, and aversion to this will continue.’

Al-Zawahiri further worried that “Indeed, questions will circulate among mujahidin circles and their opinion makers about the correctness of this conflict with the Shia at this time. Is it something that is unavoidable? Or, is it something can be put off until the force of the mujahid movement in Iraq gets stronger? [...] And is the opening of another front now in addition to the front against the Americans and the government a wise decision? Or, does this conflict with the Shia lift the burden from the Americans by diverting the mujahidin to the Shia, while the Americans continue to control matters from afar? And if the attacks on Shia leaders were necessary to put a stop to their plans, then why were there attacks on ordinary Shia? [...] And can the mujahidin kill all of the Shia in Iraq? Has any Islamic state in history ever tried that? And why kill ordinary Shia considering that they are forgiven because of their ignorance? And what loss will befall us if we did not attack the Shia?”

‘Among the things which the feelings of the Muslim populace who love and support you will never find palatable - also - are the scenes of slaughtering the hostages. You shouldn't be deceived by the praise of some of the zealous young men and their description of you as the shaykh of the slaughterers, etc. They do not express the general view of the admirer and the supporter of the resistance in Iraq, and of you in particular by the favor and blessing of God.’

Al-Qaeda as 'the maxim': Key issues

Summarizing, with regard to a number of issues Al-Qaeda became more vague in the 'maxim' phase. Within a few months (in 2004) Osama bin Laden declared that jihad against the West would continue until Judgment Day as well as offered the European part of the West an armistice and reconciliation. In 2004 Al-Qaeda entered into a coalition with Al-Zarqawi, despite its misgivings about his butcher-like attacks in Iraq and his untimely focus on attacking the Shi'ites. In Al-Zarqawi's perspective: [...] the [Islamic] nation cannot live without the aroma of martyrdom and the perfume of fragrant blood spilled on behalf of God [...]. Iraq appeared to be of crucial strategic importance to Al-Qaeda as (the beginning of) a physical base in the heart of the Islamic, i.e. Arab world. Support from the Muslim masses is considered to be extremely important for establishing an Islamic emirate, and eventually a caliphate, and for the final victory of Islam. In the view of Al-Zawahiri the jihad movement must avoid any action that the masses do not understand or approve. Actual practice was different.

3.2 Al-Qaeda's ideology as interpreted by analysts

We began this chapter by asking ourselves a number of questions. What does Al-Qaeda stand for? What is 'Al-Qaedaism'? What are the core messages of Al-Qaeda's ideology? Is Islam or 'politics' the prime mover of Al-Qaeda?

We tried to answer the first three questions 'by allowing Al-Qaeda's spokesmen to speak' in the preceding paragraph. But, of course, Al-Qaeda's statements cannot be taken at face value. As noted earlier, they may contain distortions for reasons of propaganda, disinformation, and the like. So what are the views of analysts who studied Al-Qaeda's ideology and that of earlier radical Islamic movements? What are their conclusions? Is Islam really the prime mover of Al-Qaeda? Does that also mean that Al-Qaeda's ideology is totalitarian and uncompromising? Or is Al-Qaeda's agenda in the end political in nature and as such open for bargaining and compromise?

As noticed above, in 2004 Bin Laden himself appeared to take both positions, the compromising and the uncompromising one, within just a few months time. In order to be able to explain this and to answer the above-mentioned questions, it is imperative to first give the ideological, political and religious background of the international violent jihad that Al-Qaeda represents. The birth of Al-Qaeda should be seen against the background of the failure of political Islam to gain a

really firm foothold in (the greater part of) the Muslim world in the eighties and the nineties of the last century.

The genesis of political Islam and jihadism

In an insightful book on the future of political Islam, Graham Fuller (2004: 193), a former employee of the United States' Central Intelligence Agency, concludes that it cannot properly be viewed as an alternative to ideologies such as democracy, fascism, socialism, liberalism, and communism. Instead, political Islam, also called islamism, is not an ideology, but "a religious-cultural-political framework for engagement on issues that most concern politically engaged Muslims".

Islamism is, as it were, an alternative vocabulary. It is "a political movement that makes Islam the centrepiece of its own political culture and then proceeds to improvise on what this means in the local political context". Islamism is not a political program in itself, though there are some "predispositions such as a conservative social agenda, a call for political change, a defensive cultural/nationalist bent, and a rhetorical call for adoption of Islamic law that means different things in practice".⁵⁰ No one actually knows exactly what an 'Islamic state' should be (Fuller 2004: 99). Political Islam thus appears in a great variety of forms. It can be traditional, but also modernist, radical, but also moderate, democratic, but also authoritarian.

Seen from the perspective of political history, islamism was the successor of secular nationalism and pan-arabism that dominated the Middle East and North Africa in the period from the 1950s to the 1970s, during and in the aftermath of decolonisation. Secular nationalism and pan-arabism failed eventually because of their ineffective statist economics, authoritarianism and an inability to meet social needs.

A very important psychological factor in the demise of pan-arabism and secular nationalism was the disastrous defeat of the Arab armies in the 1967 war against Israel. "The *naxa*, setback, was so unexpected in its totality, stunning in its proportion, and soul-destroying in its impact that it will be remembered as the greatest defeat of the Arabs in the twentieth century. The Arabs are still undergoing a slow process of political, psychological, and sociological recovery. It is easy to trace all that afflicts the Arab world today to the defeat which the 1967 War produced" (Aburish 2004: 249).

⁵⁰ For the diversity of sharia in the Muslim world, see: Otto 2006.

As a political vision, islamism clearly has supra-national pretensions. Islamism is as it were pan-islamism in principle. In practice, however, it has almost always been closely intertwined with identity politics on the basis of nationalism or ethnicity, in spite of the rhetorical condemnation of these by islamists as ‘divisive and retrogressive forces’.

In all its diversity islamism is currently the most powerful movement in the Muslim world. It is as such, as Fuller (2004) rightly emphasizes, remarkably in tune with many major trends evolving elsewhere in the world, all in response to contemporary global challenges. Of course, the Muslim world is not on its own in its struggle with the dilemmas of modernisation. Since the 1970s, in - what used to be called the Third World, as a whole religion emerged as a very strong factor in politics. Westerners, in their self-confidence and West-centric outlook, tended to be rather ignorant of these ideological trends developing in the ‘Third World’, according to Fuller (2004: 81). In the context of developing world concerns and frustrations political Islam is in its focus rather unexceptional.

Up until now, islamists have been rather unsuccessful in gaining power. Moreover, Fuller (2004: 97-118), acknowledging that at the time the database was rather narrow (Afghanistan, Iran and Sudan), argued that the experience of islamist governance had also not really been encouraging. In all three cases that Fuller analyzed, the islamists gained power by force. Fuller dryly remarked that the Iranian regime inadvertently demonstrated a central tenet of Shi’ite faith, namely the corrupting character of government and power. In Iran “the clergy indeed did become corrupted by both money and power, losing its moral authority in the face of the public” (Fuller 2004: 105). The clergy also failed to develop a successful Islamic road to economic development (Kitschelt 2004: 182). It has been pointed out that the price of failure might be high. There is a serious risk of an ‘islamisation of failure’: islamists run the risk of the association of (their) failure with Islam.

In the past few years, there have been two more cases of islamists gaining power. There was the rather short-lived reign of the Council of Islamic Courts in Somalia. In December 2006 it had to cede power to a Transitional Federal Government, following an intervention of Ethiopian military forces.⁵¹ There is also the - maybe somewhat atypical - case of the democratically elected Hamas government in the Palestinian Territories. Part of the explanation of the electoral success of Hamas is the deeply felt frustration among a great deal of the Palestinians with the corruption of the preceding governments (Levitt 2006).

⁵¹ See: International Crisis Group 2006, August 10, and 2007, January 26.

It is, of course, too early to judge what the future of islamism will be. As yet, however, in most Muslim countries, they have not been successful in gaining power. The actions of the violent extreme on the spectrum of islamism, jihadism, may have contributed to this. The prolonged orgy of violence in Algeria and the very violent incidents in other Muslim countries, like the 1997 Luxor massacre in Egypt (which had a very negative impact on the country's tourism sector), effectively mobilized Muslim public opinion against the jihadis. That made it even easier for many regimes in Muslim countries to repress the jihadis heavily (Gerges 2005: 151-3).

The adversities in their home countries and the opportunities that the Afghan war offered for coalescing, provided the reasons and the opportunity for a number of jihadis to shift the target of their struggle from the 'near enemy', the 'apostate regimes' in their home countries, to the 'far enemy', the Western powers, in particular the United States, perceived by them as 'the powers behind the near enemy'.

This particular Al Qaeda strategy has been heavily criticized and opposed by religious nationalists among the jihadis, who prefer to concentrate on changing the Muslim world rather than taking the fight global (Gerges 2005). It should, however, be stressed that the ultimate goal of the fight against the 'far enemy' is to weaken its willingness and capacity to support the 'apostate regimes', which would make it possible to topple these 'near enemies'. Nonetheless, so far, the Al Qaeda strategy has not produced the desired results, at least not in the eyes of those who, for instance, try to topple the regimes in Cairo or Riyadh. In both capitals, the ruling elite has not seen its positions weakened by '9/11' or other attacks against the 'far enemy'.

In a religious sense, Al-Qaedaism is generally considered to belong to the broader movement of salafism. Salafism, however, can also be conceived as a conservative variant of islamism. Salafis strive to profess pure Islam by returning to its origin, by strictly following the Qur'an, the Sunna (traditions of the Prophet Muhammed) and the consensus of the companions of the Prophet. They say to reject later innovations and interpretations. Their ideal is a society that mirrors the society set as an example by the life of the Prophet Mohammed and his companions.

A very prominent salafi thinker was Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, an eighteenth century reformer in the Arabian Peninsula. He claimed that Islam had been corrupted already a generation or so after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. He denounced all theology and customs that developed after that

period as ‘un-Islamic’. His line of thinking is still dominant in nowadays Saudi-Arabia.⁵²

Salafis are not necessarily violent jihadis. There is serious disagreement and fierce debate within the salafist movement on the use of violence. This disagreement in itself reflects the difficulty of emulating the past. Apparently there is disagreement on what the past looked like. Wictorowicz (2005: 76) therefore pointedly remarks that jihadis, while continuing to use the same texts and religious evidence as other salafis, have developed definitely new and diverging understandings about ‘defense against aggression’ and ‘civilians’.

In an ongoing and evolving process the jihadist salafis justify or ‘legalise’ their increasing use of violence, their choice of new instruments of violence such as suicide bombing, their appropriation of the right to declare other Muslims’ belief apostasy and even of the right to kill fellow Muslims (also those not excommunicated as apostates) as a kind of ‘collateral damage’.

In fact, there is a continuous erosion in jihadist salafi thought of critical constraints used in classical Islam to limit violence and warfare. Hellmich (2005: 41-42) put this in a wider context by pointing out that even the modern fundamentalist notion of an islamic system, as exemplified by an islamic state is an ‘invention of tradition’. She rightly posited that the simultaneous denial of cognitive adaptation to reality, while actually and effectively doing exactly the same thing, is rather striking.

Islam is the prime mover

Having brought to light the ideological, political and religious background of the international violent jihad that Al-Qaeda represents, one can attempt to answer the earlier formulated questions: what is the prime mover of Al-Qaeda? Is it Islam, and does that also mean that Al-Qaeda’s ideology is totalitarian and uncompromising?

Hellmich (2005) is an example of an analyst who considers Islam to be the prime mover of Al-Qaeda. She argues that anthropological research shows that religious fundamentalists throughout the world, the followers of Al-Qaeda included, act and consider themselves as the true believers. Hellmich refutes the idea suggested by a great deal of the literature she reviewed, that Bin Laden and his followers are intentionally utilising Islam as a tool to rally popular support and legitimise

⁵² Gunaratna 2005: 63; Habeck 2006; Steinberg 2005: 143-145.

terrorism in the pursuit of their purely political goals. According to Hellmich, it would be misleading to take that perspective. Instead, it is crucial to acknowledge that Islamic fundamentalists advance a concept of Islam that sees no contradiction or separation between belief and political action. Yet, at the same time Hellmich maintains that the key to the ideology of Al-Qaeda also lies in the political view of the situation in Muslim societies in general, and the Middle East in particular.

Habeck (2006) is another example of an analyst emphasizing the role of Islam as the prime mover of Al-Qaeda. According to her, the one voice missing among all the explanations for the '9/11'-attacks is that of the attackers themselves. She asks herself (and thus the reader): What were the reasons they gave themselves? Her answer is simple and direct. The attackers and Al-Qaeda, the group they were associated with, claimed to carry out the attacks in the name of Islam. That does not make all Muslims responsible, she adds in haste, but it would be just as wrong to conclude that Al-Qaeda has nothing to do with Islam. Habeck continues to argue that focusing on factors such as nationality, oppressive governments and colonialism and neglecting the role of Islam says more about western scholars than about the jihadis.

Clearly, the jihadis themselves tell us that they intend to destroy the secular world as a first step towards an Islamic utopia. So why would one not believe them? In their view, Islam is the only way of life for the whole of humanity, nobody excluded. Here Habeck emphasizes that violence permeates jihadist thought. In their reading of history, the conflict between Islam and the West, the United States in particular, is part of the universal struggle between good and evil, between belief and infidelity. That struggle began with the first human beings and will continue until the end of time. Muslims must therefore rid the earth of democracy or else the supporters of democracy will destroy Islam.

Jihadis completely reject all other belief systems, religious or secular. In many ways, the jihadist war is a struggle over who will control the future of Islam. The jihadis themselves are not interested in dialogue or compromise. Habeck (2006: 121-2) points out that the main jihadist ideologues, among whom include Qutb (see the text box), expect the ongoing war with falsehood to continue until Islam has 'liberated' the entire world from darkness, tyranny, and servitude to mere men. "Jihadis thus neither recognize national boundaries within the Islamic lands nor do they believe that the coming Islamic state, when it is created, should have permanent borders with the unbelievers. The recognition of such boundaries would end the expansion of Islam and stop offensive jihad, both of which are transgressions against the laws of God that command jihad to last until Judgment

day or until the entire earth is under the rule of Islamic law.” According to Ulph (2005) the strategy documents published by Al-Qaeda for non-Western audiences do indeed indicate that the struggle will not end with a territorially defined settlement, but will remain an existential one.

Al-Qaeda’s ideological father: Sayyid Qutb

The Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) is generally considered to be the most important spiritual and ideological father of Al Qaeda.⁵³ “In jihadis’ eyes, Qutb appears bigger than life, a model to live up to and an example to be imitated”.⁵⁴ Qutb despised the West and called it “an overwhelming danger to humanity”.⁵⁵ ‘He saw it as a gigantic brothel, steeped in animal lust, greed, and selfishness’.⁵⁶

He built upon ideas elaborated centuries earlier, on tawhid (the unity of God), on jahiliyya (the state of barbarism and ignorance that existed in the Arabic Peninsula before the Prophet Mohammed disclosed the revelations), on the duty of Muslims to wage jihad against fellow Muslims declared apostates (takfiris), and on Islam as a revolutionary force. Qutb’s doctrine of tawhid implies that sovereignty can be ascribed only to Allah and not to intermediaries, be they rulers or spiritual leaders. In his eyes Islam is the universal declaration of the freedom of man from servitude to other men.⁵⁷ Islam is the way of life ordained by God for all mankind. Not only are all non-Muslim societies ‘jahili’ societies, i.e. societies living in barbarism and ignorance, but also all so-called ‘Muslim’ societies, as they do not submit to God and His laws alone, but to others, humans, and their human-made laws as well. The struggle against ‘jahiliyya’ has to be carried out by the masses under the leadership of a vanguard.

Qutb’s line of thinking is definitely at odds with Sunni tradition. That tradition strongly condemns ‘fitna’, chaos and disunity, within the ummah. It even prefers a bad Sunni ruler to fitna. The tradition Qutb stands for legitimising a revolt against Muslim rulers who are not considered to be ‘true Muslims’. The ideas of Qutb and his predecessors provided the core of the ideology of Al-Qaedaism.

⁵³ See, for example: Berman 2004: 60-106, Mcgregor 2004, Sageman 2004: 8-14, Wiktorowicz 2005.

⁵⁴ Gerges 2005: 8

⁵⁵ See, for example, Zimmermann 2004: 224-228.

⁵⁶ Buruma and Margalit 2004: 117.

⁵⁷ Berman 2004: 95.

Politics is the prime mover

Unlike Habeck and Hellmich, there are analysts who come to the conclusion that the political factor is more important than Islam in explaining Al-Qaedaism. They regard politics to be the prime mover of Al-Qaeda, which might imply that Al-Qaeda's agenda might be open for bargaining and compromise.

Pape (2005) is the prime example of those analysts. He argues that the widely presumed connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism is a fallacy. Though many suicide terrorists' attacks have been carried out by Muslim terrorists professing religious motives, it does not necessarily mean that Islamic fundamentalism is the central cause of suicide terrorism.

On the basis of an analysis of a database of every suicide bombing and attack around the globe from 1980 through 2003 (315 attacks in all, about half of which were associated with Islamic fundamentalism), Pape concludes that nearly all have a specific secular and strategic goal in common: to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland. According to Pape, religion is rarely the root cause, and it is also not a necessary condition, though it is often a tool used by terrorist organizations in recruitment. Religion is also used to reinforce the national boundaries between the local community and the 'occupiers', putting the latter at a greater social and cultural distance. "[...] religious difference can inflame nationalist sentiments in ways that encourage mass support for martyrdom and suicide terrorism".⁵⁸

Suicide terrorism occurs mainly in campaigns, Pape contends. Although the motives of individual attackers matter and may be religious in nature, the strategic logic of suicide terrorism is aimed at political coercion. The main goals of suicide terrorist groups are, in his view, profoundly of this world: suicide terrorist campaigns are primarily nationalistic. "Even Al-Qaeda fits this pattern", Pape (2005: 21, 47, 51) argues, its central purpose being to end "the American occupation of the Arabian Peninsula", Afghanistan and Iraq.

Examination of the seventy-one Al-Qaeda terrorists who actually killed themselves on missions from 1995 to 2003 taught Pape⁵⁹ that the presence of American forces for combat operations on the homeland territory of the suicide terrorists is a stronger factor than Islamic fundamentalism in predicting whether

⁵⁸ Pape 2005: 88.

⁵⁹ Pape 2005: 103-4.

individuals from that country will become Al-Qaeda suicide terrorists.⁶⁰ “For Al-Qaeda, religion matters, but mainly in the context of national resistance to foreign occupation.”

Yet, national origin may not always be what it looks like. Bradley, for example, rightly points out “[...] that the endgame of the global jihad preached by Al-Qaeda will be played out in Saudi Arabia”.⁶¹ Saudi Arabia is indeed the country with two of Islam’s holiest mosques. Osama bin Laden’s focus on Saudi Arabia does therefore not necessarily have to be ‘nationalistic’ or ‘political’, but might also be inspired by his Islamic beliefs.

In Pape’s line of thinking, Al-Qaeda is less a trans-national network of like-minded ideologues than a cross-national military alliance of national liberation movements working together against what they see as a common imperial threat. The idea that all Muslims around the world are quietly anti-American because Islam encourages hatred for American values for democracy and free markets does not square with the facts, according to Pape.⁶² He uses this as an argument to underline that American military presence is a more important factor than Islamic fundamentalism. He refers to ‘robust evidence’ that would show that American military policies, not revulsion against Western political and economic values, are driving anti-Americanism among Muslims (see also Chapter 6). This is an argument that is often put on the table, and it is probably right for many mainstream Muslims. Anti-Western sentiment does indeed not have to imply a total rejection of Western values such as personal liberty or of support for elected government (Burke 2004).

However, in the context in which Pape is using the argument its relevance must be questioned, as, of course, not all Muslims are jihadis. Gerges interviewed scores of former jihadis or militant Islamists, but says that he did not meet a single one who had anything positive to say about America or even the West in general.⁶³ They were as much opposed to Western liberal policies as to Western

⁶⁰ Pape’s results indicate that, Al-Qaeda suicide terrorists are twice as likely to come from Muslim countries with Islamic fundamentalist populations compared to Muslim countries with tiny or no Islamic fundamentalist populations. They are, however, ten times more likely to come from Muslim countries where there is an American military presence for combat operations than from other Muslim countries and twenty times more likely from Muslim countries with both an American military presence for combat operations and Islamic fundamentalist populations compared to other Muslim countries.

⁶¹ Bradley 2005: 140-141.

⁶² Pape 2005: 242-3.

⁶³ Gerges 2005: 48.

foreign policies. He therefore rightly remarked that there is more at stake than Western foreign or military policies alone, at least as far as the jihadis are concerned.⁶⁴

Pape underexposes that the struggle against the ‘far enemy’ tends to be rather closely linked to the fight against the ‘near enemy’. The fight against the invaders and occupiers is closely linked to that against the regimes at home. In the eyes of trans-nationalist jihadis like Bin Laden, as Gerges (2005: 144-150) rightly emphasizes, “[...] the center of political gravity and power lies in Washington and New York, not in Cairo, Riyadh, Baghdad, Amman, Algiers, or elsewhere”. For real change to occur in Muslim countries, the far enemy must be forced to retreat from Muslim lands. Local regimes are independent in name only and do not run the show. They are just “insignificant tools and agents in the hands of the Americans”. In Bin Laden’s view these regimes would fall like ripened fruits once the United States is expelled from the area. Apart from these considerations, Bin Laden also used to be hesitant to strike inside Muslim countries for fear of fitna, a state of discord among Muslims that might play into the hands of the foreign powers. That kind of thinking appears to have disappeared into the background since Al-Zarqawi’s actions - in the name of Al-Qaeda - in Iraq.

On the basis of an analysis of primary sources on the debates among jihadis, Gerges concludes that in focusing on the trans-national struggle, Bin Laden represents just a minority of jihadis. The majority consists of ‘religious nationalists’. They fight the ‘near enemy’, the regime in their own countries. Many of them actually oppose the struggle against the far enemy, if only for tactical reasons. Gerges points at the many ideological differences among jihadis. These ideological differences and debates, such as the recent one between the late Al-Zarqawi and his former ‘teacher’ Al-Maqdisi on tactics in Iraq, such as using suicide-bombing and targeting Shiites, have become increasingly public.⁶⁵ Gerges also draws attention to the many other non-religious and non-ideological dividing lines among jihadis, such as tribal, regional and national identity, power politics and conflicting ego’s. There is much less unity among jihadis than often suggested.

It is also quite popular to suggest that the lack of civil liberties in Muslim countries is an important political factor in generating popular support for terrorism. This seems a bit odd at first in view of the fact that most, if not all, jihadis abhor democracy and its concomitant civil liberties. According to Atran,

⁶⁴ See also: Fradkin 2005, Habeck 2006.

⁶⁵ Brooke 2006.

however, “[...] survey data reliably show that most Muslims who support suicide terrorism and trust Bin Laden favour elected government, personal liberty, educational opportunity, and economic choice.”⁶⁶ He argues that rising aspirations followed by dwindling expectations, particularly regarding civil liberties, are critical factors in generating support for Islamist suicide terrorism.⁶⁷ Disentangling the relative significance of political and economic factors in the Muslim world is difficult, however, and may even be impossible, he also concludes. Testas even goes as far as concluding that the ideals democracy is grounded in - tolerance, compromise, respect for individual rights, equality of opportunity, and equal status under the law - are largely absent in the Middle East.⁶⁸

Islam politicized, politics islamized

Against the background of the various opinions on what moves Al-Qaeda, we believe that both the best and weakest answer to the question about the prime mover of Al-Qaeda is that there is no prime mover. Both narrowing down ‘Al-Qaedaism’ to a political program only and reducing it to just an ideology only inspired by Islam (as in the Al-Qaedaist interpretation) lead to a seriously distorted picture of reality.

In explaining Al-Qaedaism, the religious as well as the political dimensions count. Several other factors have to be taken into account as well: social, cultural, economic and even (social-) psychological ones (see Chapter 5). In any case, there remains the issue of different frameworks of reference, especially between insiders and outsiders. Maybe Haynes (2004: 15) hit the nail on the head by remarking: “When we ask: ‘What do they want?’, we seek to apply a western concept implying that the aim is achievement of certain *finite* [italics in original] goals. The question however can be posed differently: ‘Why do Al-Qaeda bombers believe that they *must* [italics in original] act in the ways they do?’. It may well be that they literally believe they have no other choice. Such a presumption is underpinned by the timbre of militant statements from captured Al-Qaeda personnel.”

In Al-Qaeda’s reality the political and the religious merge: Islam is politicized and politics islamized. It is the mix that colors Al-Qaedaists’ perception of history and

⁶⁶ Atran 2004: 73.

⁶⁷ Sageman (2004: 78) argues that rising rather than falling expectations induce people to wage jihad. See also §3.2.

⁶⁸ Testas 2004: 269.

of the self, as righteous Muslim, in relation to the other. That is not to say that the exact composition or balance of this mix cannot and does not vary in time and place. This does explain the sometimes puzzling differences in positions over various issues by the Al-Qaeda leadership within just a few months time.

3.3 Al-Qaeda's ideology: Clear and rather vague at the same time

As described above, Al-Qaeda's ideology is a mix of Islam politicized and politics islamized. Although complex and varying in time and place, it does have clear and constant elements. In fact, its core message appears to be rather clear and simple. It appears to give clear-cut messages to discontented Muslims on who is to blame for whatever causes them to feel frustrated or discontented. Other aspects of Al-Qaeda's ideology, however, are rather vague or contradictory.

This combination is, in fact, one of the key characteristics of 'Al-Qaedaism'. Being clear and vague at the same time, makes Al-Qaeda a true vanguard to its followers and supporters who fully understand and adhere to its core message, and who trust their leaders to deal with all that is less clear to them. It also makes Al-Qaeda quite mysterious, which adds to both its appeal to (potential) sympathisers, and to its wickedness, if not evilness, to its enemies.

This paragraph summarises the two different elements of Al-Qaeda ideology as presented by the Al-Qaeda leadership and as analyzed by outsiders. First it lists the clear and constant elements in Al-Qaeda's ideology. Then the less clear elements in Al-Qaeda's ideology will be highlighted. Both types of elements will be analyzed and discussed in the final chapters on the appeal of Al-Qaeda and how to counter it.

Clear and constant elements in Al-Qaeda's ideology

The clear and constant element of Al-Qaedaism that should be mentioned first is its claim to profess the original and pure Islam, the Islam of the Prophet Mohammed and his companions. Islam is the only and ultimate truth. Islam is also the only way of life. From this, it follows that sovereignty rests with Allah alone. Allah made the laws mankind needs. There is no need for man-made laws and therefore no need for democracy. Democracy is, in fact, blasphemy. Allah's laws are given and immutable and need only be applied.

Al-Qaedaists also appropriate the right to judge whether other Muslims are up to par in their Islamic belief with the standard of 'original and pure Islam'. Those

not up to par are condemned and bereft of their Islamic status. This also holds for most if not all rulers of Islamic countries, who say they rule in the name of Islam, but who are actually bad Muslims or even apostates, according to Al-Qaeda. All these apostate rulers and regimes should be overthrown. They are 'the near enemy'. They are kept in the saddle, however, by the western powers, 'the far enemy'.

Concerning the latter, Al-Qaedaism shows that there is a long and continuous history of hatred and aggression of the West against Muslims, not only during the crusades and colonialism, but also in-between and already before the crusades. Nowadays western enmity takes the form of military occupation, support to Israel and to the apostate rulers of Muslim countries. The western powers are responsible for the deplorable situation in the Muslim world, because of their persistent enmity and hatred and their interventions in Muslim countries and affairs. Western values have been and are still corrupting the land of Islam. In the eyes of Al-Qaeda, the peoples of the West are guilty too, because they themselves elect their governments.

According to al-Qaeda's ideology, the infidels, including the so-called 'people of the book', the Christians and the Jews, are not to be tolerated. They have to be expelled from Muslim countries, first of all from the holy land of Saudi Arabia. Infidels can and have to be killed.

Al-Qaeda is also very clear about the way ahead. A return to pure and authentic Islam and the violent jihad against the non-believers and apostates are the only way to restore the original glory of Islam. This jihad is an obligation for each individual capable Muslim, until every piece of land that was once Islamic has been regained. To this end, it is also essential to have a physical base for the struggle against the infidels and the apostates, preferably in the heart of the Islamic world. That base will be the starting point for re-establishing the pan-Islamic caliphate. However, without the participation of the community of believers, the ummah, the vanguard, which is Al-Qaeda, will not be able to re-establish the Islamic society and caliphate.

Less clear elements in Al-Qaeda's ideology

Although Al-Qaedaism is clear on the issue of how to reach the ideal pan-Islamic caliphate, it does not have a clear program for the organization of the Islamic society it intends to create. The return to pure and authentic Islam is in itself the political program. To do so in modern circumstances leaves a lot of - often very practical - questions unanswered. This also holds for many other issues.

In Al-Qaeda's declarations, it is repeatedly stated, sometimes with a rather strong emphasis, that grassroots' support to Al-Qaeda's jihad is crucial. At the same time, many of Al-Qaeda's actions suggest otherwise, because of their clearly alienating and very often expectable effects on Muslim public opinion. It makes one wonder how important the support of the Muslim masses really is to the vanguard that Al-Qaeda considers itself. It appears to be difficult for the vanguard to reconcile its grand strategy and tactical considerations, especially in terms of restraint. Is the support of the ummah only considered relevant or expected in the long term? Is the lack or loss of its support in the short term considered unavoidable and taken for granted? Is the vanguard maybe overrating its own importance and capabilities? The issue of the relationship between the vanguard and the ummah will be addressed in Chapter 6.

Other questions regarding Al-Qaeda's ideology relate to strategic issues. For instance, there has been a lot of analysis and speculation in the literature on Al-Qaedaism on whether the 'near' or the 'far' enemy is the major or the only target of jihadism. Analyses of debates among jihadis show that the majority of them appear to focus on the 'near' enemy. Moreover, Muslims are very often the victims of jihadist violence, as most all attacks take place in the Muslim world. Has the importance of the dichotomy between the near and the far enemy been overestimated? Do jihadis only focus on one of both for tactical reasons, just postponing the struggle with the other? If the distinction was important in the past, does it then now tend to fade away into the background because of the steadily increasing number of Muslims declared apostates and deemed worthy to be killed?

Finally, there is the unanswered question about the ultimate goal of Al-Qaedaists. What do they really want? Where are the borders of the 'land of Islam', the pan-Islamic caliphate they want to establish? Azzam referred to regaining 'every piece of land that was once Islamic'. Does that mean that as far as Europe is concerned Al-Qaeda will stop its intended advance in 'El Andalus' and 'Vienna'? Or is the actual goal a worldwide pan-Islamic caliphate?

Whereas the clear elements of Al-Qaeda's ideology pose a very difficult challenge for all who want to question or even defuse them, it should be stressed that the less clear and contradictory elements in Al-Qaeda's ideology make up a weak spot that could be exploited to counter Al-Qaedaism. This possibility will be discussed in the final chapter. First, however, we focus on discontentment over various issues among Muslims, especially among Arabs in the Middle East and North Africa. Next to Al-Qaeda's ideology, this discontentment unquestionably also partly explains Al-Qaeda's appeal to different segments among the ummah.

4. The buffet from which Al-Qaeda feeds

Discontentment is widespread among Muslims, in particular among Arabs in the Middle East and North Africa. Al-Qaeda feeds on this discontentment. It has made itself the mouthpiece of the discontented. It also amplifies the voices of the discontented. Moreover, Al-Qaeda's ideological messages are clearly meant to further and strengthen Muslims' feelings of dissatisfaction, frustration and victimization.

The major reasons or sources of discontentment have already been touched upon in Chapter 3, in which we discussed Al-Qaeda's ideology. Al-Qaeda keeps reiterating on, for instance, the current dysfunctioning of the regimes of Muslim countries and the 'permanent threat and aggression of the West to Islam'. The widespread discontentment among (Arab) Muslims is deeply rooted in specific views on the history of Muslims in relation to 'non-Muslim others' and the current cultural and religious differences, political disputes and economic inequities between, especially, the West and the (Near) East. These views provide meaning to the discontentment felt and thus help explain it. They are passed on to the next generation and reproduced by the usual mechanisms, such as the education system and communication media. Of course, these views are not

direct causes of Al-Qaedaism and terrorism. But all together they provide the buffet from which Al-Qaeda can feed its inner and outer circles.

Analyzing this buffet, we will start with the developmental problems the Arab world has been wrestling with in the past decades. In the eyes of many analysts, these problems are the key issue. Immediately linked to these problems is the question whether exogenous or endogenous factors are more important in explaining socioeconomic and political stagnation. Contrasting views on the role of colonialism figure prominently in this discussion. We will then move on to the historical issues that constitute an important part of the buffet of discontentment. Next we focus on cultural issues, in particular on the perception of powerlessness and victimization. Finally we address the notion of ‘a clash of civilizations’ and the challenges to western modernity and its claim of universalism.

4.1 Socioeconomic and political stagnation

“[...] [T]he Middle East appears to be trapped in a vicious circle of low growth, bad institutions of governance, and resistance to economic globalization.” Kitschelt (2004: 163), a German political scientist, has certainly not been the first or the only one to make such an observation. The Middle East and North Africa are among the regions with the worst performing economies in the 1980s and 1990s. From 2002 onwards the social, economic and political development problems of the Arab region have been scrutinized, in a series of four ‘Arab Human Development Reports’, published by the United Nations Development Program and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development. These reports addressed the issues of freedom and good governance, women’s empowerment and access to knowledge. It was considered a major advance that these critical reports were written by teams from the region itself. That in itself is saying a lot.

The question has been raised whether Islam is the problem underlying economic stagnation, because ‘it fuses religion with politics and economics’. Kitschelt’s conclusion is clear. Not Islam, but authoritarian and predatory rule is the cause of weak economic performance in the Middle East. Such rule means high levels of corruption, patrimonial systems of resource allocation, few civil and political liberties and low levels of civil service competence. In combination these are a clear cut recipe for economic underdevelopment and stagnation.

Colonialism, an exogenous factor, is often offered as the crucial factor in the explanation for the underdevelopment of the Arab region, especially from within

the region and definitely also by Al-Qaedaists. Kitschelt (2004: 166), however, turns the argument completely around. Extended British rule might actually have improved the quality of institutions in the region. The comparative shallowness of British colonialism in the Middle East, next to oil as a source of wealth and the considerable inequality in the control of it, are among the factors he puts forward as an explanation for the persistence of predatory authoritarianism in the Middle East. In line with this, Fred Halliday (2005: 69-71), Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics, emphasizes that the colonial period as such in the Middle East was a matter of decades only. One of the conclusions in his thorough study of 'The Middle East in International Relations', is that the prevailing 'western sense' about the Middle East, in 1900, 1950 or 2000, was not of power, but of powerlessness, in the face of ideas, social forces and states over which they had not, and could never have, significant control.

4.2 History's golden ages and traumas

"'History' on its own explains and legitimises nothing", Halliday (2005: 222) also notes. The use people make of 'history' in everyday life suggests a different reality, however. People tend to pick and choose from history, according to their taste, as if it were a buffet. They also start the timeline of history at whatever moment is most convenient to them. Inconvenient 'facts' are left out, of course. There are thus many different 'historical truths'. Perspectives on one and the same event can be totally different. For the individual 'consumer' at the buffet, however, his or her version of the truth tends to be the only one. Compiling history is an important weapon in identity politics and conflicts. The 'history' of the relationships between the West and the (Middle) East and between Islam, Christianity and Judaism is no exception, but rather a prime example. It is a history of conquering and re-conquering, of colonialism and interventions, of wars, violent incidents and many traumas.

As already noticed, Bin-Laden and his followers (and many other Muslims as well) are constantly referring to the Crusades, to colonialism and to other interventions of the West in Muslim countries in their descriptions of the attitude of the West towards Muslims. Israel tends to be depicted as a purely western implant. A number of westerners are then tempted to point to the Arabic-Islamic conquest, starting with the Prophet Mohammed in the seventh century, from within the Arabian Peninsula throughout the Middle East and North Africa, reaching far into Europe and Asia. According to Karsh (2006), for example, the imperial rise of Islam in its early centuries fits in a Middle Eastern millenarian imperial tradition. "Contrary to the conventional wisdom, it is the Middle East

where the institution of empire not only originated (for example, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Iran, and so on) but where its spirit has also outlived its European counterpart” (Karsh 2006: 2).

4.3 A culture of powerlessness, rancour and distrust

According to Fuller (2004: 1-2, 91) there is a historically based anti-western impetus in much of Muslim culture itself, “ideologized” into religious differences rather than originating from these. Faced with current impotence and marginalization, many Muslims are lacerated by self-doubt in contemplating what has gone wrong. For some it is tantamount to a fall from the grace of Allah. Many Muslims attribute the past achievements of Islamic civilization to Islam itself, and therefore they tend to perceive straying from that faith as a direct source of decline, failure and victimization. This, according to Fuller, constitutes the key psychological reality of political Islam today. In line with this, Fawaz Gerges (2005: 245), born in Lebanon, but currently Professor of Middle East Studies in the United States, makes the observation that: ‘A sense of powerlessness permeates Muslim civil society; Arabs and Muslims feel they have no major say over decisions affecting their life and that their identity and culture are threatened by forces beyond their control.’

Fred Halliday (2005: 11-12) identifies three reasons for pessimism about the Middle East, the first two being the regional conflicts and the troubled economies. The third reason is the ideological atmosphere that has been increasingly prevalent in the Middle East from the late 1970s onwards. He describes it as an atmosphere of “often stifling nativist self-delusion, phrased in terms of religion, tradition, ‘authenticity’, that inhibited open discussion and rational solutions in many countries by the inhabitants themselves, rewarding the retrogressive and the particularist.” There was ‘[...] some supposedly enduring ‘faultline’ between ‘Islam’ and the ‘West’. All three of these latter terms, so apparently reasonable as they sounded, were on closer examination historical myths, ignoring both the enormous variations of power and idea within each bloc, and the many shared values and interests between them. Far from recognising or expressing real cultural differences, they instead promoted an instrumental, selected when not invented, definition of culture that led to further rancour, suspicion and conflict.’ This mutual imaging is often couched in terms of the ‘Orient’ and the ‘Occident’.

Occidentalism

In 2004, Buruma and Margalit (2004) published a book on ‘occidentalism’.⁶⁹ This concept is apparently intended to mirror the concept of orientalism. They define occidentalism as the dehumanising picture of the West painted by its enemies. They describe the concept as an accumulation of destructive images: the West is soulless, rootless, godless, mechanical, superficial, trivial, corrupt, greedy, money-grubbing, insensitive, parasitic, mediocre, materialistic, racially mixed, fashion-addicted, selfish, decadent, arrogant ..., all boiled together in a venomous brew. Buruma and Margalit ask themselves why the West is being confronted by so much hostility. Their answer is that western, liberal democracy is seen as a threat by religious radicals and other collectivist seekers after purity and heroic salvation. Liberal democracy is anti-utopian. It is, by definition, unheroic. It promises individual freedom. It not only allows for exceptional talents and achievements, but also for those who lead unexceptional lives, for mediocrity. The notion of occidentalism as defined by Buruma and Margalit seems widespread in the Middle East among the many anti-democratic forces in the region. One often tends to focus on resistance to democracy from above, from elites and from the states they captured. But public opinion and opposition movements, as Halliday (2005: 161) noted, also quite often reflect an ideologically particularist, illiberal and anti-democratic character.

4.4 The concept of a clash of civilizations

For more than a decade ‘the clash of civilizations’ has been a hotly contested notion in western academic debates on international affairs, especially with regard to the relationship between Islam and the West. In his 1996 book on the clash, Samuel Huntington (1996), a Harvard University Professor of International Studies, posited that in the post-Cold War world, cultural distinctions between people have become critical, instead of ideological or economic ones. He makes the observation that many of the troubles in world politics are on the fault lines between civilizations. Demography, the population explosion in Muslim countries in particular, would inevitably change global politics. Asian civilizations are expanding their economic, political and military power. The West is declining in relative influence. Modernization is producing neither a universal civilization nor the westernization of non-western societies. The West’s universalist pretensions would increasingly bring it into conflict with other civilizations, most seriously with Islam and China. Huntington’s advice to westerners is to accept their own civilization as unique but not universal and to unite to preserve it against

⁶⁹ See also the review of their book in Boer 2004.

challenges from non-western societies. The avoidance of a global war of civilizations depends, such is Huntington's conclusion, on world leaders accepting and cooperating to maintain the multi-civilizational character of global politics.

Huntington's book met with a decade of severe criticism. Popular topics of critique were his delineation of the civilizations he identified as such, his 'essentialism' (reducing culture to a defining essence) and, linked to that, his tendency to 'reify' culture into something with a reality of its own. Some were of the opinion that Huntington had cast Islam in the role of an enemy civilization: Muslims could only be bad.⁷⁰

Often neglected, however, was the fact that Huntington's notion of a clash fits perfectly in the ideology of Al-Qaedaism. Such a clash is actually Al-Qaeda's goal.⁷¹ It tries to create this by provoking more radical reactions from western societies to terrorism, by preference forms of repression that limit the openness and freedom of those societies. Therefore, it is conceivable that criticism or Huntington has been on based on academic and theoretical niceties. The heuristic and signal value of Huntington's book, however, have been underestimated. While it is true that civilizations as a whole do not clash, if only because they do not have a reality of their own, one could imagine - in the abstract - a picture of civilizations rubbing against each other, creating frayed ends. As a result of globalization and increasing temporary and permanent migration individuals of different 'civilizations', religions and world views 'meet' each other more frequently and intensively than ever before. Some groups and individuals have difficulty coping with this, and Al-Qaedaism partly builds on what some believe to be a clash of civilizations.

4.5 Western modernity and universalism

One of Huntington's observations in his 1996 book on 'the clash of civilizations' was that modernization is not the same as westernization and that it is producing neither a universal civilization nor the westernization of non-western societies. Ten years later that is still not the common view in the West. Yet, political Islam and its violent offshoot Al-Qaedaism, are definitely contesting the western 'monopoly' on the definition or design of modernity.

⁷⁰ Mamdani 2004.

⁷¹ Cf. Kepel 2004; Roy 2004.

In his book 'Good Muslim, Bad Muslim', Mahmood Mamdani (2004), a political scientist and third-generation East African of Indian descent teaching at Columbia University in the United States (living in Kampala as well as in New York City), argues that political Islam emerged as the result of the modern encounter with western power. Islamic fundamentalism is not a throwback to some pre-modern culture but definitely a response to an enforced secular modernity, Mamdani posits.

Mazarr offers a more or less psychologised variant of Mamdani's line of reasoning. He points at what might be a bit rephrased as 'the fear of individual freedom' or 'the fear of taking the responsibility of making choices': "By breaking the chains of tradition and conformity, modern life offers a bewildering, paralyzing degree of choice about everything [...]"⁷²

In a context of freedom of choice, self-actualization appears to become the imperative. Identity cannot be taken for granted anymore. To the contrary, it is something that has to be actively reconfirmed or even recreated.

Olivier Roy (2004), a well-known French expert on Islam, sketched an even broader picture in his book, 'Globalised Islam'. The relationship of Muslims to Islam is being reshaped, not only by westernization and globalization, but also by the migration of many Muslims to the West and the impact on the individual's religious life of living as a minority in a context where religion has lost its social authority. Islam is in the midst of a process of 'deterritorialisation'. A third of the world's Muslims now live as members of a minority. Those in recently settled minorities have to reinvent what makes them Muslim (and youngsters often do so on the internet, creating their own cut-and-paste Islam, as we noticed earlier). In Olivier Roy's perspective (neo-) fundamentalism is one of many forms of religious revival. As such it may be understood as an attempt to islamise modernity, as a negative of westernization.

In general, there is a worldwide trend towards fragmentation of religious identity and authority, going hand in hand with a blossoming of new and different forms of religiosity. In Muslim countries themselves too, the social authority of religion has gradually become weaker. In a way, people are thrown upon their own spiritual and intellectual resources, upon their own individuality.

Paradoxically, islamist movements themselves have contributed to this individualization. They tend to address individuals or peer groups of friends or kin rather than traditional, often more hierarchical solidarity groups.

⁷² Mazarr (2004: 40)

Contemporary religious revival in Islam, in particular in its virtual manifestations, is calling to the *individual's* spiritual needs. 'Theological debate' gives way to a personal relationship to faith, deity and knowledge. Even the new jihad is in the end an individual and personal decision. Many of the current Al-Qaedaists of the 'maxim' phase cut the links with the communities they come from and join a virtual or imagined one.

Olivier Roy points out that the way in which Islam is adapting to contemporary, individualized forms of religiosity is being overlooked by those observers who keep stressing that Islam has missed a European-style enlightenment. Islam is adapting to modernity, but in the process, it is not necessarily copying or following the European example.

4.6 An extremely rich buffet

The issues of discontentment which Al-Qaedaism feeds on appear to be deeply rooted in selective perceptions of history and in actively reproduced stereotypes in 'the perception of the other' in people's mindsets. They are also rooted in structural social, economic and political development problems in Muslim countries (particularly in the Arab region) and in problems associated with the integration of migrants and their children (especially in Europe). Last, but not least, they are based in challenges to the western design of modernity, that is framed by some as a clash of civilizations. Al-Qaedaism thus feeds on an extremely rich buffet of discontentment.

Although we do not want to suggest that this discontentment is the root cause of Al-Qaedaist terrorism, it is definitely an issue that needs to be addressed in dealing with this threat. In the eyes of many that have some sympathy for Al-Qaeda, the discontentment partly justifies its fight against the 'far' and the 'near enemy'. In addition, the discontentment serves as a rich pool of examples and issues that is used by Al-Qaeda's propaganda aimed at those not yet sympathizing with its fight and ideology. These (potential) sympathizers of Al-Qaeda are subject of the next chapter.

5. Al-Qaeda's appeal to its outer circles and Muslim masses

As mentioned in the previous chapter, as a result of widespread discontentment in the Middle East and the Muslim World at large, Al-Qaeda has managed to become the mouthpiece of the discontented by amplifying the voices of the despondent. One could even argue that, to a certain extent, Al-Qaeda is in line with Muslim public opinion. But is that really what contributes to sympathy with Al-Qaeda in the Muslim World? And how essential is the support of the Muslim masses to Al-Qaeda's existence?

5.1 Inner and outer circles

With regard to the 'attractiveness' of joining Al-Qaeda, analysts are still formulating preliminary hypotheses. Few empirical studies exist on how individuals turn into Al-Qaedaist terrorists, with a number of individual biographies compiled on Al-Qaedaists and its leadership. As previously noted, it is worth repeating that the characteristics and motivations of people like Osama bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri may differ significantly from those of the 'followers' they inspire. Consequently, much less is known about such lower ranking jihadi terrorists.

Several studies have been conducted on groups and individuals responsible for major terrorists attacks including those responsible for '9/11', Madrid bombings in 2004 and a number of (foiled) attacks, such as the assault on the World Trade Center in February 1993 and the U.S. millennium plot in December 1999. While the number of studies collecting detailed information about the characteristics of known Al-Qaeda terrorists is increasing – with Roel Meijer's research of "Al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula" and Robert Leiken's contribution compiling a database of 212 suspected and convicted North African Al-Qaeda terrorists, being notable examples – the much needed comparative analytical studies of individual and group profiles and processes remain scarce.

The members of the relatively 'simple' organization that Al-Qaeda was prior to '9/11' considered themselves to be the vanguard that would lead the Muslim grassroots in realizing the ultimate goal of the true Islamic society on earth. Reality has, of course, never been as simple as this image of 'an organized vanguard' leading 'the grassroots' suggests. As a consequence of Al-Qaeda's development into a much broader movement or 'network of networks', it has definitely become a far more complex phenomenon. At the moment there is a broad range in relationships between 'the vanguard', classic Al-Qaeda's core or central staff, and its (potential) followers and supporters.

Apart from the leaders, ideologues and rank and file of the Al-Qaeda organization, there are now 'recognized affiliates' and 'self-proclaimed affiliates' of Al-Qaeda, as well as individuals, groups and organizations that do not consider themselves part of Al-Qaeda, but do acknowledge it as an important source of inspiration, either because of ideology, leadership, actions, or a combination of all the above. Additionally there is a 'grassroots' movement, which varies from sympathizers that provide some form of active, direct or indirect ideological or logistical support to Al-Qaeda or its affiliates, to those who silently approve of the organization's ideology or actions.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Al-Qaeda's ideology is simultaneously clear and vague. While the core messages are clear and simple, providing an attractive common ground on which a variety of groups can unite, an air of vagueness continues to prevail. The advantage of that vagueness for Al-Qaeda lies in the fact that groups of people can join on their own terms, without being repelled by statements with which they do not agree. Thus, the combination of being ideologically clear and vague is an asset that fits with the organizational requirement to be a broad movement or a 'network of networks', in a context of a rich proliferation of counterterrorism efforts, at the national as well as the international level.

The consequence in everyday reality is that the groups and individuals that are 'just' inspired by the Al-Qaeda leadership and its ideology act more or less on their own, following different strategies and mixing many different ideologies, amongst which is 'Al-Qaedaism'. To a high degree, this is also true for the self-proclaimed affiliates. It is even true, be it to a somewhat lesser extent, for the recognized affiliates. Such groups or individuals seem to follow the path of 'Al-Qaedaism' as marked by the Al-Qaeda leaders, but in their own peculiar coloring. In other words, the link between the inner and outer circles is very weak and seems to be growing even weaker. In fact, it is arguable whether one can even still speak of an outer circle of the Al-Qaeda network of networks.

The relationship between the Al-Qaeda leadership and the Muslim masses or the ummah is also far from clear. Al-Qaeda's leadership has acknowledged time and again that they, as a vanguard, will not succeed in realizing their goal without the support of the Muslim masses. Yet, the relationship of the vanguard with its grassroots appears to be rather problematic, and as a result of Al-Qaeda's actions, has become even more so in the past few years. As we will demonstrate below, for some reason, in real life, getting the support of the grassroots does not appear to be the first priority of Al-Qaeda's leadership.

5.2 Al-Qaeda's relationship with affiliates and inspired jihadist groups and individuals

Recognized affiliates

Only a few organizations or networks can be described as explicitly recognized affiliates of Al-Qaeda. These are the earlier mentioned 'Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers', operating in Iraq, 'The Organization of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula', mainly operating in Saudi Arabia, 'Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb', which is at the moment one of the most active terrorist groups in North Africa and 'Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan'.

The precise relationships between Al-Qaeda's leadership and these affiliates however remain unclear. This is due to the fact that apart from the obvious secrecy surrounding these groups, many of their activities do not seem to be in line with the ideology and tactics of the Al-Qaeda leadership.

Much has been written about the relationship between the leader of 'Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers', the late Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. (A formal alliance was concluded at the end of 2004

between Al-Zarqawi's group and Al-Qaeda). It seems that Al-Zarqawi formally accepted Osama bin Laden as his leader in return for recognition of Al-Zarqawi's rather independent group as an Al-Qaeda affiliate, with the intent of obtaining a firm footing and a base in Iraq. The relationship, however, appears to have been troublesome to say the least.⁷³ Differences of opinion on both ideology and tactics arose when the goals of Al-Zarqawi's network shifted considerably away from that of Al-Qaeda.

Initially, the activities of the network were aimed at forcing a withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq, toppling of the Iraqi interim government and subsequent establishment of some kind of an Islamic state. However, increasingly, Al-Zarqawi's group started to target the Shi'ite Muslim population and its militias. The nature of the support for Al-Qaeda's ideology and strategy may thus be regarded as opportunistic and superficial in scope, with the Al-Qaeda label used mainly for recruiting Muslim fighters, many of whom were outside Iraq. As Al-Zarqawi's ideological framework is not widely published, it remains rather difficult to obtain specific insight on the degree of ideological consistency, except that his actions were clearly not in line with the wishes of Al-Qaeda's leadership.

The same holds for 'Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula' operating within Saudi Arabia. In its activities, the network seems to have been acting independently of Al-Qaeda's leadership, and its strategy appears to have diverged from that of Al-Qaeda. In a 2005 study, Roel Meijer analyzed available biographical information for 64 members of 'Al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula', discovering that its members were quite diverse, tribally and socially, with regard to their geographical origin within Saudi Arabia. Meijer found several non-Saudi members within the group's leadership and observed a decline in the average age of participants, with most being in their twenties. Analysis of levels of education illustrated remarkable specialization in religious studies. However, many 'Arab Afghans' received their religious and ideological training 'on the spot'.

While the Saudi security forces were successful in hunting down the members of the original group, the high level of violent actions of 'Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula' shocked the Saudi public. Many fought themselves to death, an action called 'indirect suicide' or 'the method of suicidal resistance' by a commentator,⁷⁴ and one of its top leaders surrendered to the Saudi authorities in 2003 – a clear breach of Al-Qaeda leadership's views on self-sacrifice.

⁷³ See, for instance, Napoleoni 2005 and Steinberg 2005.

⁷⁴ Quoted in: Meijer 2005: 282.

Originally called the ‘Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat,’ the ‘Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb’ was created in 1998 as an offshoot of an earlier Islamist group that had been fighting the Algerian government in a decade-long civil war. While the membership of the group has been seriously eroded by offers of amnesty by the government and a subsequent manhunt by Algerian security forces, hundreds of people within the core of the group rejected reconciliation and aligned themselves with Al-Qaeda in 2006. Ayman al-Zawahiri publicly appointed the group as Al-Qaeda’s representative in North Africa on the fifth anniversary of the ‘9/11’ attacks.

Global salafi fighters

In his much-acclaimed study of global salafi fighters, Marc Sageman, an ex-CIA case officer and forensic psychiatrist, compiled personal information including names, nationalities and demographics of 172 Al-Qaeda terrorists in an effort to analyze the development of individual and group dynamics.⁷⁵ In his analysis, Sageman distinguished four sets of individuals: 1) the central staff of Al-Qaeda (32 persons), 2) Maghreb Arabs (53 persons), 3) Core Arabs (66 persons) and 4) Southeast Asians (21 persons). Having studied the level of education, socioeconomic and marital status, among other factors, of the individual cases, Sageman discovered more differences than similarities within and between the four groups, concluding that there is no standard profile of a global salafi fighter. He did, however, isolate patterns that may explain how and why certain individuals and groups join the jihad.

Emphasizing the importance of group dynamics, Sageman found that social bonds often exist between individuals prior to joining the jihad, and are a crucial element of the process.

These bonds facilitate the process of joining the jihad through mutual emotional and social support, development of a common identity, and encouragement to adopt a new faith. [...] They are more important and relevant to the transformation of potential candidates into global mujahidin than postulated external factors, such as a common hatred for an outside group. [...] As in all intimate relationships, this glue, in-group love, is found inside the group. It may be more accurate to blame global Salafi terrorist activity on in-group love than out-group hate.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Sageman speaks of mujahedin and salafi jihadist terrorism.

⁷⁶ Sageman, p. 135.

Distinguishing four important affiliations within the data for 150 mujahidin - friendship, kinship, discipleship and worship - Sageman discovered that friendship was the most significant, with 68 percent of the global salafi fighters joining the jihad in small clusters of friends. Kinship played a less significant role, accounting for only 14 percent of the individuals within the sample. Findings from the combined figures for friendship and kinship – eliminating overlap – reveal that about 75 percent of the mujahidin decided to join the jihad as a group of friends or relatives, and some having had pre-existing social bonds to members already involved in the global jihad.

Sageman's study further illustrates that the critical and specific element in the process of joining the jihad is the availability of a distinctive link, such as a chance encounter with formal members, without which prospective candidates would remain sympathizers rather than full-fledged mujahidin. Sageman argues that after evaluation of the trainees in a jihad training camp, Al-Qaeda offered the opportunity to join its ranks to only ten to thirty percent of such trainees.⁷⁷ With this in mind, it should be noted that Sageman's study predominantly covers a period prior to the fall of the Taliban regime and Al-Qaeda's loss of its bases in Afghanistan in 2001 – a phase of Al-Qaeda often referred to as the 'base' – when the network was still able to formally accept and support prospective salafi fighters.

Based on his findings, Sageman makes a strong plea for loneliness and the search for companionship as explanatory factors for joining the jihad. In his sample, the mujahidin "... were isolated when they moved away from their family and friends and became particularly lonely and emotionally alienated in [a] new individualistic environment." Moreover these individuals felt a personal sense of grievance and humiliation as a consequence of underemployment and discrimination, as well as a lack of spiritualism in a utilitarian culture. They sought a cause that would give them emotional relief, social community, spiritual comfort, and cause for self-sacrifice. Sageman points out "although they did not start out particularly religious, there was a shift in their devotion before they joined the global jihad, which gave them both a cause and comrades."⁷⁸ Transforming from isolated individuals to members of a community of fanatics, Sageman's conclusions on the process of joining the jihad contrast sharply with the common notions of recruitment and brainwashing as explanations for affiliation.

⁷⁷ Sageman, p. 121.

⁷⁸ Sageman, p. 97.

Self-proclaimed affiliates

In addition to the recognized affiliates, there are numerous self-proclaimed affiliates of Al-Qaeda. As mentioned earlier, these groups or networks tend to associate themselves to the label of Al-Qaeda and may not even have a direct link with its leadership. Operating autonomously, many of the groups utilize the Al-Qaeda label for purposes of recruitment or simply attaining higher status of perception. Such efforts, however, do not imply that the groups or networks do not share Al-Qaeda's ideas or even have common goals. All groups, for example, share anti-Western sentiments, support goals of toppling 'puppet regimes' in their countries of origin or ones in which they are active and may even apply common tactics such as suicide bombing. The motivation of individuals to join such self-proclaimed Al-Qaeda affiliates is a product of a mix of personal circumstances and collective grievances. With regard to the latter, the violent conflicts in Iraq, Chechnya, and Kashmir in particular stand out as focal points of collective indignation.

Groups and individuals inspired by Al-Qaeda

This category of groups and networks – or even individuals – includes persons inspired by the events on '9/11' and the figure of Osama bin Laden, as well as groups that adhere to the Al-Qaeda ideology and try to practice the Al-Qaeda strategy on their own behalf and under their own name. It is, however, very difficult to determine exactly the nature and extent of the support for the Al-Qaeda ideology and strategy among them. For most in this category the Al-Qaeda ideology and strategy appears to function as a general guideline. For many Al-Qaeda is nothing more than a symbol or the actor that cast the first stone in a fight in which they participate for a variety of personal, social or political reasons that may have little to do with the motivations of the Al-Qaeda leadership. They may simply seek to achieve a certain status, obtain revenge, express their identity, or accomplish a concrete political goal related to a local or national issue.

To better understand the characteristics of Al-Qaedaist terrorists, and how they became involved in violent jihad, we briefly discuss an empirical study by Edwin Bakker that is based on that of Marc Sageman and that analyzes individuals participating in jihadi terrorism in Europe.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ The two studies are marked by notable differences, including the time frame of analysis and scope of research. Sageman's study focuses on investigating global salafi terrorists active in the period from mid-1990s to 2003 (phases of Al-Qaeda as the vanguard and base), while Bakker's

Jihadi Terrorists in Europe

With a focus on European jihadi terrorists, Edwin Bakker's study attempts to explain why individuals participate in jihad. Using an approach similar to Sageman's methodology, Bakker analyzed the psychological make-up of jihadi terrorists, their geographical and social background, as well as the conditions under which they joined the jihad. Focusing on the time period after '9/11' – a phase of Al-Qaeda often referred to as the 'maxim' – Bakker's study found that a large majority of jihadi terrorists in Europe are of non-European descent and are either first, second or third generation migrants.⁸⁰ In fact, only a few cases revealed that the families of jihadi terrorists originated from Europe. In the event they did, the individual was often a convert, child of a mixed marriage or from Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁸¹ Furthermore, few jihadi terrorists within the sample were residents of a non-European country prior to being involved in terrorists activities in Europe.

After conducting a thorough analysis of all available information, Bakker's study reveals a similar conclusion to Sageman's – that there is no standard profile of a jihadi terrorist in Europe. However, a number of common traits can be identified including the fact that a clear majority of individuals originate from Arab countries and have roots in North Africa and Pakistan. Many of the first, second or third generation immigrants came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and a strikingly high number had prior criminal records. Finally, Bakker's study further demonstrated that almost all jihadi terrorists in Europe are male and that many of them relate to each other through social bonds of kinship or friendship.

Comparing groups

On the basis of a comparison of the different categories of Al-Qaedaist groups, a few generalizations are possible with regard to the focus of their grievances, the 'attractive' aspects of Al-Qaedaism and the goals they hope to achieve (see Figure 2). The focus and goals of groups that are further away from the core of Al-Qaeda, also tend to be further from the Al-Qaeda leadership's global aims. For the affiliates, and certainly for the inspired groups and individuals, concrete issues at home and personal experiences and circumstances appear to be far more important than the distant goals and ideas of the Al-Qaeda leadership. For the

research concentrates on a sample of a European group of jihadi terrorists in the period after '9/11' and the fall of the Talib regime (phase of Al-Qaeda as the maxim).

⁸⁰ Bakker, p. 38

⁸¹ Bakker, p. 38.

inspired ones, the ‘brand’ of Al-Qaedaism and its prestige often appears central to the issue.

It should be stressed that there may be significant differences in terms of motives between a group and its individual members *within* the different categories of Al-Qaedaist groups. The same holds, of course, for the individual level. Political considerations may be more important to the leaders of a group than to people active on a more operational level. As already indicated, personalities matter too. Based on his interviews with many (former) jihadis, Gerges goes as far as to conclude that personalities rather than ideas or organizations appear to be the drivers behind the jihadi movement. “It is a personality-driven animal that devours idealistic and alienated young Muslims.”⁸²

Figure 2: Comparing different Al-Qaedaist groups

Category of Al-Qaedaist groups	Focus of political grievances	Attracted to what aspects of Al-Qaedaism	What they hope to achieve
Core members of Al-Qaeda	The perceived attacks by the West on Islam and the Ummah, in which the regimes in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Afghanistan assist and collaborate	The Al-Qaeda ideology / the privilege of being part of the vanguard	The true Islamic society, by toppling the regimes ‘at home’ and fighting the non-believers.
(Recognized) Affiliates	Fighting the (especially western) invaders of specific countries, such as Iraq), as part of the global struggle	Al-Qaeda’s image and brand, to instill fear, but also to attract followers; possibly support from Al-Qaeda	More or less concrete political goals in the country in which they are active
Those inspired by Al-Qaeda	Local and personal issues	Al-Qaeda’s image and brand; joining in the fear that Al-Qaeda instills	Revenge, status, identity; sometimes more or less concrete political goals in the country in which they are active

⁸² Gerges (2005: 34-35)

5.3 The grassroots

Al-Qaeda's practice alienates Muslim public opinion

Al-Qaeda often portrays itself as the vanguard that will awaken the Muslim masses from apathy and slumber. It is a widely held view that Al-Qaeda seriously intended to arouse the Muslim masses with the '9/11' attacks and while some shared sentiments that the US was given a taste of its own medicine, many more regarded the incident as an indiscriminately violent attack against the civilian population, including Muslims. In that respect, the attacks were a dismal failure for the terrorists. The same holds true for the attacks within the Muslim world. Though many elements in the ideology and messages of Al-Qaeda appear to appeal, at least superficially, to large numbers of Muslims, its actions, in particular the indiscriminate violence against fellow Muslims, have alienated the great mass of Muslims. Against that background it has been a bit surprising that Al-Qaedaists have been pushing back the frontiers, a great distance even, regarding the 'legitimate' use of violence. Earlier debates focused on the legitimacy of violence against the women and the children among the non-believers. Subsequently the issue was whether Muslims might be coincidental victims, as a kind of unintended collateral damage. Now for several years, the debate focuses on which Muslims may be targeted (by first declaring them apostates and thus non-Muslims). In this process Al-Zarqawi played a prominent role.

The massive use of terrorist attacks he helped initiate against Muslims in Iraq, propelled and broadened Al-Qaeda's ideology of violence and terror. Despite the objections raised by people such as Al-Zawahiri, Al-Zarqawi persisted in his sectarian violence and still became a formal ally of Al-Qaeda.⁸³ Apparently getting access to the Iraqi arena was considered more important than the support of Muslim public opinion. The increasingly indiscriminate use of violence by Al-Qaedaists has alienated many 'mainstream' Muslims. That is the general picture emerging from, in particular, public opinion polls. A 2005 'Pew Global Attitudes Survey' showed that in a number of Muslim countries support for terrorism, including suicide bombings, had declined considerably in the two preceding years (yet, majorities or near majorities in those countries still believed suicide bombings against Americans or other Westerners in Iraq to be justified).⁸⁴

⁸³ Donnelly 2005; see also: Chehab 2006, Napoleoni 2005, Steinberg 2005.

⁸⁴ The Pew Global Attitudes Project 2005; The New York Times, July 15, 2005.

5.4 *Al-Qaeda's next generation*

In the absence of other data sets with reliable biographic data, most studies on the next generation of Al-Qaeda followers are based on individual cases or plans and ideas of a future generation formulated by the Al-Qaeda leadership itself. It is important to stress that planning for the next generation is not a new phenomenon and has, in fact, been an integral part of Al-Qaeda's strategy since the mid-1990s. Osama bin Laden once described his fight against the United States and its 'puppet regimes' as a potentially multi-generational struggle.

Many experts believe that Al-Qaeda, as a 'vanguard', 'base' and 'maxim', has indeed managed to create a next generation. In his article for the *Jamestown Terrorism Focus*, Michael Scheuer still speaks of this generation in the future tense, calling them 'mujahideen' and claiming that "the next mujahideen generation's piety will equal or exceed that of bin Laden's generation. The new mujahideen, having grown up in an internet and satellite television-dominated world, will be more aware of Muslim struggles around the world, more comfortable with a common Muslim identity, more certain that the United States-led West is 'oppressing' Muslims, and more inspired by the example bin Laden has set - bin Laden's generation had no bin Laden."⁸⁵

With regard to the level of professionalism, Scheuer argues that the next generation is less likely to follow the example of some notorious first-generation fighters who were not only Islamist, but also swashbuckling – leading many to being captured. Today, the Al-Qaeda network teaches young terrorists techniques to prevent the next generation from making the same mistakes as many fighters of the first-generation. An important instrument in this respect is the Internet.

According to Scheuer, "[t]he rising mujahideen are less likely to follow the example of some notorious first-generation fighters, and more likely to model themselves on the smiling, pious, and proficient Mohammed Atef, Al-Qaeda's military commander, killed in late 2001. [...] A former Egyptian security officer, Atef was efficient, intelligent, patient, ruthless, and nearly invisible. He was a combination of warrior, thinker, and bureaucrat, pursuing his leaders' plans with no hint of ego."⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Michael Scheuer, Al-Qaeda's next generation: less visible and more lethal, in *Jamestown Terrorism Focus*, vol. 2, nr. 18, 4 October 2005.

⁸⁶ Michael Scheuer, Al-Qaeda's next generation: less visible and more lethal, in *Jamestown Terrorism Focus*, vol. 2, nr. 18, 4 October 2005.

According to Scheuer, the relative disguise of these professionals is also characteristic of those individuals who are on the Saudi lists of "most wanted" Al-Qaeda fighters. "[This] suggests the semi-invisible Atef-model is also used by Gulf state Islamists. Finally, the U.K.-born and -raised suicide bombers of July 7, 2005 foreshadow the next mujahideen generation who will operate below the radar of local security services."⁸⁷ This general picture of highly motivated and professional fighters does not seem to hold true for the majority of European cases. With the exception of the Madrid and London bombings, these groups or cells were not particularly successful. Some like the so-called 'Al-Zarqawi Cell' in Germany, the 'Hofstadgroep' in the Netherlands and the 'Martyrs of Morocco' in Spain were caught as a result of unprofessional operations. In fact, of the almost 30 plots by jihadi terrorists in Europe since '9/11' for which individuals have either been in custody or convicted, only three could be considered 'successful': the Madrid (2004) and first London (2005) bombings, as well as the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Michael Scheuer, Al-Qaeda's next generation: less visible and more lethal, in *Jamestown Terrorism Focus*, vol. 2, nr. 18, 4 October 2005.

⁸⁸ Bakker, 2006.

6. Concluding remarks

Under the title “**The evolution of Al-Qaedaism: Ideology, terrorists, and appeal**” we have analyzed a highly complex and continuously changing phenomenon. We have looked at the different phases of Al-Qaeda and its evolution into something broader than an organization or a movement, into ‘Al-Qaedaism’. We have looked at its members and followers, its ideology and its appeal and inspiration to others.

In this final chapter, we want to try to go a few steps further. We want to draw some conclusions, to make a few generalisations and to list the key factors that explain what makes Al-Qaeda and Al-Qaedaism tick. We will also make an assessment of Al-Qaeda’s successes and failures. Then we will we focus on possible future developments. We will conclude by formulating some clues for research and policy development.

6.1 What makes Al-Qaeda and Al-Qaedaism tick?

There is no single or prime mover behind Al-Qaedaism. Its breeding ground has a very rich composition. There is a variety of ‘causes’ or contributing factors. Most of these are more or less intertwined. And, of course, (diverging) perceptions (on these causes) matter too: these are often important causal factors in themselves.

To begin with, there are **political causes at the national level**. Many Muslim states, the Arab ones especially, have rather authoritarian regimes and a lack of civil liberties. In such circumstances some repressed voices may turn violent. Many predecessors of Al-Qaeda, such as the Egyptian ‘Islamic Jihad’ of Al-Zawahiri, were resistance movements trying to overthrow national regimes.

There are also important **political causes at the international level**, in particular the Western interventions in Muslim states, the last decades in particular in the Middle East, and, of course, the local perceptions of these interventions. The large-scale immigration of Muslims to Europe in the past few decades has had the effect of increasing the importance and the sensitivity of the relation between the West and Islam.

History plays an important role too. Some people go back to the crusades in recounting interventionism, others refer to the expansionism of Islam in its early period, some focus on colonialism or neo-colonialism. Most people, however, point to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its wider impact in the Middle East and upon Muslims in general.

Socio-economic causes are important as well. Many Muslim nations, again Arab countries in particular (and definitely not all Muslim countries), have very persistent developmental problems, in the economy as well as in the social sectors.⁸⁹ The Middle East is seen as trapped in a vicious circle of low growth, badly functioning institutions and resistance to economic globalization. This is a major source of discontentment among the population.

There are also **cultural causes**. There is widespread resistance within the Muslim world against Western cultural domination, and especially against Western secular influences that may have an impact on Muslim societies or communities. Fred Halliday described the ideological atmosphere, increasingly prevalent in the Middle East from the late 1970s onwards, as one “of often

⁸⁹ See, for example, the Arab Human Development Reports, the first of which was published by UNDP in 2002.

stifling nativist self-delusion, phrased in terms of religion, tradition, ‘authenticity’, that inhibited open discussion and rational solutions in many countries by the inhabitants themselves, rewarding the retrogressive and the particularist” (see also Paragraph 5.3).

This brings us, last but not least, to **the religious factor**. The particular jihadist salafist blend of Islam propagated by Al-Qaedaists is the vehicle as well as the source of inspiration of their ideology as well as their agenda for the fight against unbelievers and apostates.

All together these causal factors create ‘a fertile breeding ground’ or ‘an enabling environment’ in which specific groups and individuals challenge the existing order and find both the incentives and the justification for violent political action. There is no specific type of individual involved. There are rather more differences between the individual Al-Qaedaists than similarities, as appeared from our analysis in Chapter 5.

Other ideologies, such as socialism, Arab nationalism and pan-Arabism, also thrived on many of the above-mentioned causal factors in the past. Many observers consider the religious factor to be the major difference between islamism, and its jihadist offshoot Al-Qaedaism, and these earlier ideologies.

However, more important and unique than its ‘fuel’, the above-mentioned causal factors, and therefore perhaps a better answer to the question of what makes it tick, is the engine of Al-Qaeda and Al-Qaedaism: **its evolving organizational concept**. Hierarchical parties and movements were the organizational ‘bearers’ of Arab socialism, nationalism and pan-arabism. Al-Qaedaism has appeared to be much more individualistic in nature. If Al-Qaeda was hierarchical in nature in its ‘vanguard’ and ‘base’ phases, it has become rather quickly less so in the ‘maxim’ phase and beyond that. Moreover, organizationally Al-Qaeda has appeared to be extremely flexible in adapting to outside pressures and organizational needs and opportunities.

As we described in Chapter 5, there is now a proliferation of inner and outer circles. Apart from the Al-Qaeda organization there are currently different types of affiliates and even complete autonomous organizations and groups operating under the flag of ‘Al-Qaeda’. Even rather small groups and individuals are now allowed to participate in the struggle to overthrow the existing order, without any involvement at all of the Al-Qaeda leadership. The leadership does not deny that these groups and individuals are operating under the flag of ‘Al-Qaeda’ or even openly acknowledges that they do so.

The individualistic and non-hierarchical nature of Al-Qaedaism fits several requirements. First of all it corresponds with the way aspiring jihadists side with Al-Qaedaism: they often do so as a small group of friends or kin, as ‘a bunch of guys’, as we described in Chapter 5.

However, we should note that this is a two-way process. As we pointed out in Paragraph 4.5, Islamist movements have also been contributing themselves to the trend of individualization that is currently taking place among Muslims in the West and in Muslim societies. They tend to address individuals or peer groups of friends or kin rather than traditional, often more hierarchical solidarity groups. They also often induce them to distance themselves from the latter. Secondly, the focus on individuals within Al-Qaedaism probably also keeps people going. It was already noted that at times Al-Qaeda has been considered a personality driven organization. We also noted, in Chapter 6, that ‘the vanguard’ might be focusing a bit too much on itself and its own glorious role, in other words, might be somewhat egocentric. Providing space for the needs of the individual egos may be necessary to keep them going, to motivate them in violent jihad. Thirdly, it is Al-Qaeda’s strategy for survival as well as for maximum impact. Organizational flexibility on the basis of individualistic and non-hierarchical participation in the violent jihad appears to be the key in making Al-Qaeda and Al-Qaedaism tick. It has made it continue to tick even after many arrests and the decapitation or isolation of its leadership.

Al-Qaeda’s ideology, as articulated by its leadership (see Chapter 3), has also been very functional with regard to its organizational flexibility. Against the background of the complexity of the problems in the Muslim world, and in the Middle East in particular, the core messages of Al-Qaeda’s ideology are rather simple and straightforward. At the same time they also remain vague enough to appeal to a broad spectrum of (Arab) Muslims. The Islamic world is not doing well. This has already been the case for a very long time. The reason is the hostility, the hate and the continuous interference of the unbelieving West. Thanks to Western support the current corrupt regimes in Muslim countries remain firmly in the saddle. Returning to original Islam through jihad against the unbelievers is the only solution, the only means to restoring the lost glory of Islam.

With this analysis **Al-Qaeda appeals to a broad range of discontented Muslims, both inside and outside the Muslim world.** In Arab countries in particular, there is a widespread and deeply rooted discontent and frustration, linked to persistent social-economic and political problems. It is a quite general and somewhat diffuse, but deeply rooted sentiment to blame outsiders, especially

the West. Al-Qaeda did not create that sentiment, but it has been appealing to it continuously.

Importantly, there is no elaborate political program for the society Al-Qaeda wants to establish. *Islam* is the program. Fighting for (the return to) Islam is the self-appointed task of Al-Qaeda. If Al-Qaeda would have had a more concrete political program for the Islamic society to be realized upon its victory, it would almost certainly have created a lot of divisiveness among its current active supporters and followers.

6.2 Has Al-Qaeda been successful?

Al-Qaeda did not succeed in mobilizing the great mass of (Sunni and/or Arab) Muslims behind it. On the contrary, it appears to have succeeded in alienating the majority of 'mainstream' Muslims, in particular by continuously stretching the definition of permissible violence, gradually not only including Muslims as unintended but unavoidable collateral damage, but as intended and targeted victims as well. And indeed, many Muslims have fallen victim to attacks carried out by or in name of Al-Qaeda.

While Al-Qaedaism has managed to recruit thousands of fighters, even this remains an insignificant number when it is compared to the size of the ummah of more than a billion Muslims world-wide, as well as when seen against the background of Al-Qaeda's huge task of changing the world by establishing a real Islamic society. Even in the countries where these fighters have managed to hit their opponents repeatedly, such as in Iraq and, at times, in Saudi Arabia and Morocco, they have not succeeded in bringing down regimes or enforcing hastily withdrawals of foreign forces. In fact, some of the regimes hated by Al-Qaeda are stronger than ever, one of the reasons being that they saw their way clear to hit back really hard at Al-Qaeda and its affiliates in the slipstream of '9/11' and the United States' 'war on terror'.

Al-Qaeda also failed in expelling Western military forces from the Middle East. Quite the contrary! In that sense '9/11' has appeared to be a pyrrhic victory. The attacks on New York and Washington induced the United States to attempt to deal summarily with the Taliban in Afghanistan and with Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. 'The crusaders' have not been chased away from the Middle East. There are now far more Western military in the region than before '9/11'.

Western societies have appeared to be rather resilient in the confrontation with Al-Qaedaism. Neither Al-Qaeda nor its associates have succeeded in changing the western way of life. There has been an increase in tensions between groups in Western societies, especially between ‘autochthons’ and (the descendants of) Muslim immigrants, but these tensions have remained ‘manageable’. Most Muslims in the West seem to be interested primarily in leading peaceful and prosperous lives. Al-Qaeda did not succeed in really raising hell in the West, not in 2001, and not since then. In this sense, until today, Al-Qaeda has also failed. Life went on in the West, maybe not completely as usual for everybody, but for the majority of the population it definitely did.

Yet, Al-Qaeda and Al-Qaedaism still have been a considerable nuisance to the West. In that sense Al-Qaeda had some success. Terrorism and Al-Qaedaism, Islam, the clash and the dialogue between the West and Islam have not been out of the news since ‘9/11’. There have been wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, which are still continuing in the form of tenacious guerrilla warfare and terrorism. ‘9/11’ and the other Al-Qaedaist attacks have caused a lot of economic damage and costs. Investments in counterterrorism have been considerable. Intelligence and security services were expanded and sometimes new institutions created. New laws and regulations have been implemented. Some of these are complicating and slowing down public transport, creating additional economic costs.

Especially in the immediate aftermath of the shock of ‘9/11’ a number of governments clearly did not know where to draw the line in responding to terrorism. It took some time for the dust to settle down and to get a clearer view on the potential unintended and sometimes even counterproductive effects of actions intended to fight terrorism.

In more than one sense counterterrorism is a tough business. It requires constraint and this not always easy. ‘Al-Qaedaists’ try to provoke Western states and societies into displaying behavior that is inimical to the fundamental principles of democracy and human rights, the freedom of speech and the rule of law, openness and tolerance. That is not only because Al-Qaedaists detest these principles, but also because such behavior allows them to depict the West as hypocritical.

Responding to the threat of Al-Qaedaist terrorism is a balancing act and it apparently takes time to learn to master that act. Such is the case at very different playing fields. Here we will just give a few examples. While many political and military analysts and commentators understood the attack on the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in the months following ‘9/11’, many of them had difficulty

understanding the attack on Saddam Hussein's Iraq, at least from a perspective of fighting Al-Qaedaist terrorism. The intervention in Iraq in 2003 and its aftermath have appeared to be a lifebuoy for Al-Qaeda, after it had been hurt severely in Afghanistan. Iraq not only became a new arena for action, in the Arab heartland, but also a powerful issue from a public relations perspective, in view of the many negative reactions to 'the occupation of Iraq' among Muslims, and Arab Muslims in particular.

Legal instruments are at another level. In the slipstream of '9/11' the United Nations and the European Union were quick in drawing up lists of terrorist organizations and individuals in order to deny them access to money and other resources. Several of these instruments have been mended since, so as to allow people to appeal to 'listing' decisions and to include procedures to make 'delisting' possible. Many countries introduced counterterrorism legislation, often provoking debates on its impact on civil liberties.

Whether all these investments and regulations have effectively countered terrorism and given value for money remains an open question. Neither Al-Qaeda nor its affiliates or the groups inspired by Al-Qaedism have been capable of an attack comparable to '9/11'. It is clear that Al-Qaeda as an organization suffered a tremendous battering when the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001. It is far less clear what all the other counterterrorism efforts have accomplished. A surprisingly large number of terrorist attempts failed, either by coincidence or because of a lack of professionalism at the side of the terrorists.

Paradoxically, a failure of Al-Qaedism, both in terms of getting the support of the ummah and in terms of achieving political goals, might have its shadow sides as well. Its flexibility combined with its self-image of a privileged and maybe even chosen vanguard, and the embrace of suicide as a legitimate weapon, allows for further radicalization and a nihilistic kind of violence in which the achievement of concrete goals or getting popular support simply do not matter anymore. The jihad counts; nothing else and no one else matters.

Jihad therefore may become the means and the end in itself. Not much appears to be needed for such an evolution towards nihilism. Al-Qaeda's ideology only appears to be clear, simple and straightforward, but it is not concrete and therefore is vague in the end. The same applies to Al-Qaeda's strategy and tactics. Al-Qaeda does have a clear answer to the question of what is wrong and who is to blame, but Al-Qaeda does not have a clear plan, in the sense of concrete actions to be taken, targets and benchmarks to be achieved, et cetera, for realizing its envisaged Islamic society on earth.

6.3 Exposing and exploiting the weaknesses of Al-Qaeda and Al-Qaedaism

In the fight against Al-Qaedaism, the 'hard' approach has dominated in the past six years. After '9/11' the 'War on Terror' began with a direct attack on Al-Qaeda and its hosts, the Taliban, in Afghanistan. The invasion of Saddam Hussein's Iraq was next, with all its repercussions. Much has been invested in intelligence and security services, repressive measures and legislation.

By contrast, the 'soft' approach received less attention. True, in the past few years more attention is being paid in Europe to countering the socio-economic marginalization of young people of foreign, Muslim origin and the feelings of exclusion and alienation they experience with the intention is to prevent radicalization. In foreign policy, as far as the 'soft' approach is concerned the West tends to focus on reconstruction aid, as in Afghanistan, and other forms of development aid, and on 'dialogue' between 'religions' or 'civilizations'. Yet, the latter is almost always an elite affair.

Apart from these approaches, there is a lot of talk on 'public diplomacy', trying to present a clearer and more positive image of Western policies to the public in general, in this case, Muslims, in particular, through the media, opinion makers, non-governmental organizations, and the like. Big words are used in this context. It is a 'war for Muslim hearts and minds' or a 'war of ideas to counteract the Al-Qaedaist message'. But 'public diplomacy' itself does not appear to live up to its promise, at least up until now. Al-Qaeda, its affiliates and its followers themselves alienated their intended grassroots through their actions. The loss of popularity of Al-Qaeda among Muslims does not appear to have been through the merit of Western public diplomacy.

Assertive public diplomacy

We think the West could be much more assertive in using public diplomacy in the 'war for Muslim hearts and minds'. Although the room to manoeuvre has been very much limited due to the situation in Iraq, there are at least five areas for 'counter attacks' in this particular 'war on terrorism'. They can be divided in possibilities to improve the image of the West, and possibilities to demystify or demythologize Al-Qaeda and Al-Qaedaism.

The West is freedom of religion for Muslims

The West should have more faith in the intrinsic value and attraction of democracy and human rights. Nowhere else is the freedom of religion as

guaranteed as in Western countries. That also applies to Muslims, mainstream, liberal, as well as salafist. In general, even despite discrimination and prejudices, Muslims are more free and have more chances in life in the West than in Muslim countries. That is not emphasized enough. There is, of course, a price to be paid for that freedom and that is tolerance of others, believing something else. That should be part and parcel of public diplomacy messages too – and of domestic policies and attitudes in the West that, at least in some countries, are less tolerant towards Muslim communities.

The West helps Muslims in need

In addition, the West has frequently come to the help of Muslims in need. Think of the Bosnians and the Albanians in former Yugoslavia, or aid provided to victims of the 2005 earth quake in Pakistan and of the 2004 tsunami in South-East Asia. This could be used too, to counter the simplistic message of Al-Qaedaist groups that portray the West as only an evil force. In addition Europe, Canada, the US and Australia could emphasize the quite large numbers of Muslim refugees they have accepted in recent decades. Representatives of these communities, including quite radical groups from Egypt and Syria, could play an active role in spreading this message.

Stressing Al-Qaeda's ideological weaknesses

The West should also be much more active and assertive in fighting Al-Qaedaism at the level of ideology and propaganda. In that it should also expose and exploit the weaknesses of Al-Qaedaism, without making Al-Qaedaist groups and individuals the underdog, of course. Several characteristics of Al-Qaeda and Al-Qaedaism that we identified as strengths or assets can easily turn into weaknesses and some of these can also be directly exposed as such and exploited.

Al-Qaeda can and should be made to look “a jerk” in the eyes of Arabs and Muslims. Al-Qaeda's ideology has simple and straightforward answers to the questions of what is wrong with the Muslim or Arab world and who is responsible. Their answer to the question of what to do about it is also rather simple and amounts to ‘violent jihad against all unbelievers and apostates’ -- in other words against everybody who thinks differently. Al-Qaedaists do not have a political program for the Islamic society they intend to realise on earth, apart from phrases like ‘the rule of Islam’. On earth, however, human beings will be involved and ‘man’ is fallible, as we know. And Muslims too know this. Against this background, it should be stressed that Al-Qaedaists are not concrete about the institutional setup, the polity of their ideal Islamic society. Not being clear is taking the line of the least resistance, which makes it possible to portray Al-Qaedaists as rather spineless.

Al-Qaeda's as a bunch of killers of innocent Muslim civilians

Al-Qaedaist attacks are very often a choice for taking the line of least resistance too. And that is why so many innocent children and women and so many innocent Muslims fall victim to Al-Qaedaist violence. Evidently, the Al-Qaedaists do not care. Taking the line of least resistance in actual attacks may be 'easy', but it also does not show much courage (apart, maybe, from the suicide bombers and other 'martyrdom-seekers').

It could be argued that the Al-Qaeda's core leadership got 'value for money', for example, in the form of satisfaction for their egos, but others had to pay. Statistics show that most of these 'others' are Muslims. Moreover, Al-Qaeda's stated objective is to fight the West, but it primarily has caused 'fitna' - conflict, civil war and schism - within the community of Muslims itself. These facts, which are most visible in the case of Iraq, give ample room to show the hypocrisy and ruthlessness of Al-Qaeda and to portray it as nothing more than a bunch of killers of innocent civilians who disturb the unity and peace among Muslims.

Al-Qaedaists as a bunch of losers

We have described Al-Qaeda's evolving organizational concept and its flexibility as crucial means of survival. Both enabled Al-Qaedaism to remain operational. That is why its flexibility can be considered to be an important asset. At the same time the looseness of its organizational structure (which is sometimes so loose that it makes one wonder whether there is any structure left) limits and inhibits its organizational capabilities. It appears to be difficult for Al-Qaeda to carry out a common strategy and even to agree on tactics. The discussion between Al-Zawahiri and Al-Zarqawi on the latter's actions and tactics in Iraq is a well-known example, but the core leadership can also do nothing but wait for what self-generated cells like the Hofstad Group in The Netherlands do or not do. The looseness of current Al-Qaedaism is probably an important explanation for the amateurism and the lack of professionalism many Al-Qaedaists display.

One may also wonder whether or not, in the slipstream of '9/11' and the shock it brought about in the Western world, the strategic genius of the core leadership has been overrated. It is true, '9/11' was a real blow. At the same time, the many jihadists who wanted to focus on the 'near enemy' out of fear that provoking the 'far enemy' would have counterproductive effects, appeared to be quite right. '9/11' was a welcome pretext to the regimes in their home countries for harsh repression of islamists and especially jihadists. And, as we already remarked, there are now more foreign troops in the Middle East than before '9/11'. Western society and the Western way of life were not really hurt by Al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda may have been a nuisance, but it has definitely also been a failure, at least until

now. Its building blocks may have been and often still are ‘bunches of guys’, but they tend to end as ‘bunches of losers’. This cannot be stressed enough. The simple question: “and what did they achieve?”, should be posed more often in the war for Muslim hearts and minds.

Our plea for demystifying or demythologizing Al-Qaeda and Al-Qaedaism does not mean that we underestimate the threat of jihadism. We are very much aware that it does not take that many terrorists to inflict severe damage and kill large numbers of people. But, in its current form, Al-Qaeda and Al-Qaedaism are certainly not a strategic threat. A better balance between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ is needed in tackling Al-Qaedaism to keep it that way and to prevent unintended and contrary policy consequences.

There is, of course, also still an important role to play for ‘old-fashioned foreign diplomacy’. We should not forget that problems in the Muslim world itself, in the Middle East and North Africa in particular, lay at the origin of the current wave of violent jihadism. It may be convenient to blame outsiders, but in the end, only the peoples in the Muslim and the Arab world themselves can solve their problems of political and socio-economic stagnation. The West does not have the key or the power to do so. The West could and should, however, invest more diplomatic effort in trying to help solve the conflicts in the region, especially the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It would not be the fix-for-all solution, but it would definitely help.

6.4 Recommendations for further research

In this study we have focused on the evolution of Al-Qaedaism since the 1990s. As the ideology, the operational practice and many of the persons behind it are constantly changing, the phenomenon needs intensive monitoring. It is especially important to keep track of new developments if we want to avoid disastrous surprises such as the attacks on ‘9/11’ and the Madrid and London bombings.

Looking at the situation in Western Europe, particular attention should be paid to the new self-generating cells and groups for which Al-Qaeda is the maxim, or at least one of the sources of inspiration. Think of the several cases of mainly young Muslims in Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom. More in-depth studies are needed to address key questions, such as why Al-Qaedaism appeals to these groups and individuals and why only to a relatively small group. We need more insight in the processes of radicalization, and especially in the last phase, the step to violence. Expanding the database, in

volume and in depth, with data on jihadists would certainly help carry out such research. What is the role of the Internet in the process of radicalization? What is the potential of the Internet as a tool for counterterrorism? Also helpful would be a serious comparative analysis between Muslim immigrants in Western Europe and those in the United States, Canada and Australia. A similar comparative analysis should be done with regard to the ethnic and national origin of Muslim immigrants.

More insight is also needed into the exact nature of the relationships of Al-Qaeda's core leadership with the different types of affiliates. That is an increasingly dangerous topic for empirical research 'in the field' by academics and journalists. It is probably also a hard nut to crack for the intelligence services.

Research is also needed to clear up the disconnection between the declared significance to Al-Qaeda of grassroots' support and its persistence in carrying out actions that alienate the potential grassroots. Last but not least, there is the issue of the risk of a further evolution of Al-Qaedaism to nihilism, which may manifest itself in more and more catastrophic or unconventional terrorist attacks. That risk certainly deserves further analysis.

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