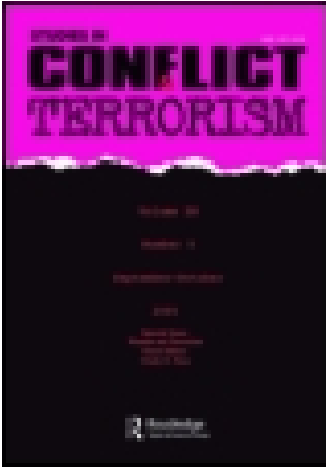


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### Al Qaeda's Operational Intelligence—A Key Prerequisite to Action

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## Al Qaeda's Operational Intelligence—A Key Prerequisite to Action

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*For Al Qaeda, intelligence is a critical operational resource. Its vigorous collection, scrutiny, and dissemination within the organization have proven fundamental to its capacity to engage in carefully crafted acts of terrorism. In addition to its operational utility, intelligence fulfills a range of other functions, including an ability to contribute to Al Qaeda's symbolic goals and elevate the confidence of operatives and leadership alike. Ultimately, however, Al Qaeda's collection and use of detailed intelligence reveals a capacity to calculate the consequences of alternative courses of action, thereby helping to dispel notions of an irrationality or fanaticism in which decision making is somehow removed from reality.*

*Any organization that desires to raise the flag of Islam high and proud, must gather as much information as possible about the enemy.<sup>1</sup>*

*We have to watch our target by microscopic eyes.<sup>2</sup>*

*The Mujahedeen need a strong Islamic intelligence system to confront the risks associated with secret work inside the cities. . .<sup>3</sup>*

Al Qaeda's efforts to inflict mass casualties has become one of its defining features, distinguishing it from the more restrained targeting usually practiced by secular groups such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA). This, however, does not mean to say that Al Qaeda engages in uncontrolled or poorly constructed acts of violence, or is indifferent to how its violence is perceived by audiences internal and external to the organization. In this way at least, Al Qaeda is no different to organizations that exemplify the "old" form of terrorism, presuming, of course, that this is even a useful typology.<sup>4</sup> As with the IRA, Al Qaeda's capacity to engage in acts of violence capable of invoking images of control, power, and legitimacy is fundamental to organizational survival, and indeed, goes to the very heart of what it means to be a terrorist organization. For instance, the radicalization and mobilization

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of Muslims who share Al Qaeda's worldview is a major organizational objective and one that depends on its capacity to engage in successful and carefully choreographed acts of terrorism.<sup>5</sup> Acts that fail to achieve operational success or even result in unintended deaths<sup>6</sup> can lead to a range of adverse outcomes, including alienating existing and potential supporters, diminishing the impact of its political and ideological message, and undermining its attempts to craft images of control and omnipotence.

This article will demonstrate that the ability of intelligence to assist Al Qaeda in constructing and implementing carefully crafted acts of violence is critical in allowing the organization to instill fear, garner support, and project images of power. For an organization whose actions are replete with symbolism,<sup>7</sup> the need to meticulously craft and orchestrate its acts of violence to convey messages to multiple audiences is of central importance. The result is an organization that has shown a predisposition to conduct extensive and lengthy surveillance of its targets during which it strives to uncover every detail that might reveal a vulnerability that can be exploited or a risk that needs to be avoided. This extensive intelligence collection, especially in the form of surveillance of potential targets, has become a routine and integral part of Al Qaeda's planning and decision-making process. Ultimately, intelligence allows Al Qaeda to engage in rational behavior by allowing it to make considered and carefully measured decisions on the basis of realistic assessments of its operating environment.

In fact, Al Qaeda's training material routinely emphasizes the need for operatives to adopt a rational approach to the planning and execution of operations, in which a professional, almost scientific approach is required.<sup>8</sup> For example, Sayf Al-Adl<sup>9</sup> defines "planning" as, "...the scientific pre-examination of targets to identify the right target and the best means to work on him. This is done by putting together a set of special coherent, comprehensive, and firm measures aimed at misleading and surprising the enemy and *reducing as much as possible the losses from the act if it is uncovered.*"<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Al Qaeda's definitions of intelligence reflect an organizational understanding of the relationship between intelligence and decision making. For instance, the volume on intelligence and security contained in the *Encyclopedia of the Afghan Jihad* (hereinafter *The Encyclopedia*) simply says, "[i]ntelligence is providing the necessary information for policy making."<sup>11</sup> Another Al Qaeda-related manual, *Declaration of Jihad Against the Country's Tyrants* (hereinafter *The Declaration*), observes that espionage (which it uses interchangeably with the term "intelligence") is "... the covert search for and examination of the enemy's news and information for the purpose of using them when a plan is devised."<sup>12</sup>

The examination of intelligence will, therefore, reveal something of Al Qaeda's overall approach to the planning and execution of its operations in which the need for certainty exerts a strong influence over decision making.<sup>13</sup> Al Qaeda's training manuals, for instance, display a persistent emphasis on the centrality of intelligence to the organization's survival and operational success. The Al Qaeda publication, *Al-Battar Training Camp*, which included a regular feature entitled "Security and Intelligence," observes that, "[i]nformation ... is significant because it is the pivot on which any endeavour turns. A Muslim group seeks to obtain the information that will help it to achieve its objectives."<sup>14</sup> Demonstrating the tremendous importance attached to this activity, the author, Al-Adl, goes on to explain that one of the "great benefits" of intelligence is that, "[i]t guarantees that the task will be carried out successfully." Similar views can also be found in *The Declaration*, which contains two lengthy chapters on intelligence, and additional chapters on counterintelligence and security.<sup>15</sup> To this extent, Al Qaeda's use of intelligence echoes Herman's description of intelligence as "... a significant part of the modern state and a factor in government's success and failure."<sup>16</sup>

The thoroughness of Al Qaeda's intelligence preparations is, therefore, both a reflection of, and a means of satisfying, its broader need to minimize risk and act when the likelihood of operational success is high. It will be argued that the ability of intelligence to achieve this resides primarily in its predictive capacity to forecast and describe conditions most likely to be encountered during the execution of operations. In this way, Al Qaeda manifests a deep need to act under circumstances where levels of operational certainty are high and desired outcomes almost assured.

Al Qaeda's attention to detail is evident in other areas, reflecting its belief that successful attacks are determined by extensive planning and preparation designed to eliminate chance or circumstantial factors. On almost every subject of importance to operational planning, Al Qaeda's training material provides detailed and itemized procedures to be followed by operatives on a range of activities, including those relating to secure transportation,<sup>17</sup> secure communications,<sup>18</sup> and processes relating to the purchase and transportation of weapons.<sup>19</sup>

By satisfying the organization's need for operational certainty and providing a basis upon which detailed plans can be constructed, intelligence is the fulcrum on which Al Qaeda exists. Demonstrating the broad role of detailed intelligence in meeting Al Qaeda's various needs, *The Declaration* observes that information about a target is required by the organization's command, "... in order to make safe plans, reach firm decisions, and avoid surprises."<sup>20</sup> Promoting good intelligence practices through training and education is, therefore, an important focus for Al Qaeda. Its commitment to intelligence manifests itself in other ways too, including its use of Islam to propagate the merits of intelligence to imbue *jihadists* with a sense of religious obligation and validation on all matters pertaining to its collection and use.

### Islam, Intelligence, and Al Qaeda

In a 2002 interview with journalist Yosri Fouda, one of the coordinators of the 9/11 attacks, Ramzi Binalshibh, said that you should, "... put the events of 9/11 and what subsequently occurred in this Crusade against Muslims in the historical and religious context of the conflict between Muslims and Christians. . ."<sup>21</sup> Binalshibh was expressing a view common to Islamic militants throughout the world. Indeed, religion and history form the basis of Al Qaeda's motivation and worldview. An understanding of this worldview is important not only in comprehending the impetus behind contemporary Islamic extremism, but also because of what it is able to demonstrate about the place of intelligence within these organizations, Al Qaeda included.

The location of contemporary grievances within the extensive and rich history of Islam and radical Islamic theology forms an integral part of the extremists' motivation and focus. Bin Laden's 1996 *fatwa* provides a powerful example of the fusion of history, religion, and politics, providing a catalog of political and economic complaints against a backdrop of religious discourse designed to inspire and legitimize *jihad*.<sup>22</sup> For instance, the perceived advances of the West against Islam in the modern era are placed in an historical context, believing them to be a continuation of the Crusades and colonial periods.<sup>23</sup> But it is in the context of purifying Islam by strictly following the *Qur'an* and the *Sunna* that the connection between the past and the present is strongest. Extremists who place themselves under the mantle of the Prophet evince a sense of moral superiority underpinned by a belief that they are the true defenders and interpreters of the faith.<sup>24</sup> This, in turn, serves to legitimize their agendas and tactics, including, it will be shown, their thinking on intelligence. In accordance with theories of fundamentalism,<sup>25</sup> Al Qaeda has thus made religion inseparable from behavior. In its dichotomized world, there is no room for dissension, interpretation, or

deviation from its worldview and Islam's place within it, enabling the organization to exert a powerful influence over the conduct of its followers. In this way, Al Qaeda has proven adept at infusing a religious flavor into its efforts to ensure that intelligence is integrated into decision making at all levels throughout the organization. The propagation of stories of the Prophet Mohammed and other prominent religious identities as practitioners of intelligence worthy of emulation are intended to achieve precisely this effect. *The Declaration* informs its readers that the Prophet and his companions used intelligence extensively in their military operations, employing informants in most of their attacks. It recounts a series of episodes involving the Prophet's and his companions' successful use of spies to gauge the intentions of the enemies of Islam.<sup>26</sup> A cited example alludes to the need for a ubiquitous intelligence network:

The prophet—Allah bless and keep him—had local informants in Mecca who told him everything, big and small, that might harm the Muslims' welfare. Among those [enemies] were his uncle Al-Abbas Ibn Abd Al-Mutlib, and Bashir Ibn Soufian Al-Atki. Al-Khulafa Arrashidun [Mohammed's successors] advised their commanders about the importance of using scouts and informants to learn the enemy's secrets.<sup>27</sup>

Rooting good intelligence practices in the golden days of Islam and Islamic jurisprudence establishes it as an activity not only worthy of emulation, but one that is a religious duty.<sup>28</sup> Al Qaeda has, therefore, sought to make good intelligence practices consistent with the habits of a good Muslim and modern-day *jihadi*. Indeed, *The Declaration* refers the reader to a more detailed treatment of espionage by referring him to *The Spying Journal: Religious Duty and Human Necessity*.<sup>29</sup> *The Declaration* goes even further, explaining that Muslims are obliged to engage in spying in the name of defending the *Ummah* or the world Islamic community. Reflecting the importance of intelligence to successful operations, while also acknowledging the dangers posed by spies to the global *jihadi* movement, *The Declaration* observes that, “[s]ince Islam is superior to all human conditions and earthly religions, it permits spying for itself but not for others.”<sup>30</sup> Positioning good intelligence practices in the glory days of Islam is evident in other *jihadi* manuals, including *The Encyclopedia*, which provides a religious rationale for the vigorous pursuit of intelligence before providing a detailed description of the contemporary importance of intelligence and security to the *jihadi* movement.<sup>31</sup>

Some radical Islamists in the contemporary era echo this theme of intelligence as the purview of Muslims. For example, *The Islamic Verdict on Spies and Those Who Perform Espionage Against the Muslims*, by Abu M' uadh Al-Makki, explains that, “[s]pying can be Kufr [blasphemous] if it is done for the sake of helping the disbelievers against the believers. Such an action takes the person out of the fold of Islam and makes him an apostate because it entails supporting the disbelievers against the believers.”<sup>32</sup> It concludes, in accordance with the views of select Islamic scholars, that the punishment for those who spy in such a way should be death. Similarly, Sheikh Bakri Muhammad issued a *fatwa* in June 2001 declaring that, “. . . a Muslim is forbidden to spy whether as an individual curiosity or a job for Muslims or non-Muslims and it is prohibited for Muslims to work in intelligence services such as ISI, CIA, FBI, MI5 or MI6 or in the intelligence services of the world.”<sup>33</sup>

## Al Qaeda's Intelligence Doctrine

Fundamental to Al Qaeda's intelligence outlook is the principle of "know thy enemy," a principle that guides the organization and its operatives to develop a detailed understanding of its targets and the methods and customs of its foes. In addition to the counterintelligence implications of this doctrine, this intelligence principle is considered by Al Qaeda strategists as one of the key determinants of operational success or failure. *The Declaration* observes,

[t]he nation that wants to achieve victory over its enemy must know that enemy very well. It also must know the site of the battle in detail. Those who fight an enemy that they do not know, do not win because a successful military plan must be built on clear and trustworthy information. The commander who fights an enemy and does not know his strength . . . is blind and destined to fail and fall.<sup>34</sup>

*The Declaration* goes on to describe the scope of these intelligence requirements, observing that intelligence is important for the following reasons:

1. Based on the enemy's up-to-date information, his capabilities, and plans, the Organization's command can design good-quality and secure plans.
2. Information about the enemy's intention provides early warning signs for the command, which in turn makes appropriate preparation and thwarts the enemy's opportunity.
3. Information benefits the Organization's command by providing information about the enemy's strengths and weaknesses.
4. Information benefits the Organization's command by providing information about movements of the enemy and his members.<sup>35</sup>

As this article will demonstrate, this intelligence is the decisive factor in determining the feasibility of an attack along with the operational details required for success. Its collection reveals an understanding that knowledge is essential to Al Qaeda's capacity to make realistic assessments of its operating environment and form expectations on the likelihood of operational success. An Al Qaeda document on assassinations demonstrates the role and thoroughness of the organization's intelligence preparations. Referring to the collection of biographic data on the target, the document's author, Abdulaziz Al-Moqrin,<sup>36</sup> sets out the intelligence requirements for the operative in the following terms:

. . . his name, age, photo, residential address, his car (its model, colour, plate number and make), his daily schedule, for instance, he normally leaves home at 8:00 a.m. and returns at 2:00 p.m. then goes out again at 4:00 p.m. and so on, and his weekly schedule. He might have one day a week when he has fewer guards and runs away from his routine, or he might be promiscuous and immoral so he escapes from his guards and escorts to be able to commit his immoral acts. He can then be hunted down in holiday places. Is he trained or not, is he armed or not, does he have guards or not (and if the answer is yes then how many guards does he have and what are their shifts, are they trained . . . and what kind of weapons do they have?)<sup>37</sup>

The practical applications of this intelligence will be examined more fully in the following section.

## The Application of Intelligence

Al Qaeda, and those disparate groups inspired by its ideology and methods, has demonstrated remarkable consistency in the manner in which they plan and execute operations. Clearly defined and distinct stages are apparent from the moment a target is selected, to the execution of the operation, making the entire process amenable to analysis. This *modus operandi* is crucial in gaining an understanding of intelligence by placing it within the context of the organization's broader operational planning process. Al Qaeda's operational planning is usually defined by the following stages:

- a. *Identifying a target.* This process involves the selection of a target from all those available to the group. A range of factors are considered at this stage, including feasibility, the likelihood of success, and the extent to which a successful strike against this target might promote the organization's strategic and symbolic goals. Intelligence is the tool used primarily, although not exclusively, at this stage of the planning process. Initial target identification and the compilation of a detailed intelligence report have been described by one Al Qaeda operative and trainer as the first part of the military process.<sup>38</sup>
- b. *Determining the means of executing the operation.* The most important element to be determined at this stage of the planning process is the method of carrying out the operation. The intelligence collected on the target is critical in helping to make this determination.
- c. *Communicating the plan from command to those responsible for its execution.* Al Moqrin provides advice that it should be the commander's responsibility to review the plan with members of the crew until they "have absorbed the plan perfectly."<sup>39</sup>
- d. *Preparing for the operation.* This will normally involve the procurement of weapons and the selection of personnel, along with the carrying out of dry runs. This phase will likely also entail other stages, including an approach plan and an attack plan.<sup>40</sup>
- e. *Execution of the operation.*
- f. *Withdrawal of the operational team/s.* Not all Al Qaeda operations involve suicide tactics. Some post-operation escape plans are worked out in detail, and may include the preparation of fake identity documents to facilitate travel.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, it is common practice for members not responsible for carrying out the operation to depart the area immediately prior to its execution. The senior members of the bombmaking cell, for example, are known to be among those that depart shortly before the execution of an operation, a pattern seen in the East Africa bombings (1998) and the bombing of the U.S.S. *Cole* (2000).<sup>42</sup>

The use of intelligence, too, usually follows clearly discernible patterns and phases, each with their own purpose and intelligence requirements. In chronological order, these phases typically include *target identification*, *construction of a detailed plan*, and the *final intelligence run*.<sup>43</sup> These phases, however, are not always as distinct nor as formalized as this classification might suggest. They sometimes overlap and blur so that the intelligence gleaned during the "target identification" phase will be used to support the "construction of a detailed plan." Similarly, intelligence normally obtained during the later stages of the intelligence continuum might on occasions be collected during the initial intelligence

phase. For example, intelligence on the security arrangements surrounding the target might be identified during the first phase, but subsequent phases will expand on this and confirm its veracity. Furthermore, some stages might be by-passed altogether, where, for instance, the *al Qaeda* leadership was able to identify the target without specific intelligence.

Each of these intelligence phases will be examined next.

### ***Target Identification***

Target identification consists of narrowing the field of targets from among all those potentially available. Due to the nature of its real and perceived grievances, the range of targets available to Al Qaeda is greater than that previously available to any other terrorist group in history. Intelligence aids in target identification by providing the basic information needed to assess a given person or object as a preferred target, separating it from the tens of thousands of others that are theoretically available. This knowledge frequently consists of intelligence capable of revealing, in a rudimentary and preliminary fashion, the probability of success through the identification of vulnerabilities and threats. It may also provide an early indication of potential casualties and the most effective attack methods. The identification of targets through surveillance and other intelligence collection methods, and its dissemination to the Al Qaeda leadership for examination and assessment, are the first stages in most Al Qaeda operations.<sup>44</sup> The key elements to this process are presented next.

*Intelligence Sources.* To assist in target identification Al Qaeda may exploit any of the thousands of people that have passed through its training camps over the years. This has provided the organization an intelligence network that spans the globe, capable of providing preliminary intelligence to the Al Qaeda leadership on a wide spectrum of targets. The intelligence received by the organization during this phase might be solicited or unsolicited.<sup>45</sup> The case of Australian Muslim convert, Jack Thomas, is a typical.<sup>46</sup> In 2001, Thomas received broad instructions and US\$3,500 from senior Al Qaeda figures, including Khalid bin Attash, to conduct surveillance of military installations in Australia.<sup>47</sup> Another Australian convert, Jack Roche, also received instructions in 2000 to conduct surveillance on Israeli targets in Australia. Roche's instructions were similarly broad, with Al Qaeda's military operations chief, Mohammed Atef, directing Roche to collect as much intelligence as he could on any target he considered viable. The following letter, found on a computer used by Ayman al-Zawahiri, provides instructions similar to those that would have been given to Thomas and Roche.

Special file for our brother Abu Bakr al-Albani on the nature of his mission.

First, the mission: Gather information on:

- 1 Information on American soldiers who frequent nightclubs in the America-Canada border areas
- 2 The Israeli embassy, consulate, and cultural center in Canada
- 3 If it is possible to enter America and gather information on American soldier checkpoints, or on the American army in the border areas inside America
- 4 Information on the possibility of obtaining explosive devices inside Canada

...

I have given to our brother \$1,500 for travel expenses in Canada and America, and also the cost of the ticket for the trip back to us after four months, God willing.<sup>48</sup>

This intelligence would be communicated to the Al Qaeda leadership to assess if the target was suitable.<sup>49</sup> These examples indicate that Al Qaeda hoped to use assets like Thomas and Roche to keep the organization informed of a range of potential targets throughout the world.<sup>50</sup> This practice has continued in the post-9/11 period. Al Qaeda suspect, Anwar Al-Jilani, informed a Yemeni court in early 2005 that he collected intelligence on the British embassy after, "I was entrusted by the brethren in Saudi Arabia to plan an operation against the British embassy. We collected information which we passed on to the brothers in Saudi Arabia."<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, intelligence capable of identifying potential targets might also originate from sympathizers with no direct connection to Al Qaeda. For example, the organization has made broad appeals for intelligence from those most sympathetic to its worldview. Appealing to their faith, Al Qaeda encourages Muslims to engage in espionage as a means of demonstrating their loyalty to Islam and the *jihadist* cause. On occasions, these instructions have effectively amounted to an intelligence collection plan specifying the type of intelligence sought by the organization.<sup>52</sup>

Alternatively, the organization might task reconnaissance teams of varying sizes to scout targets after deciding on the country or area to be attacked. The reconnaissance team involved in the bombing of the U.S.S. *Cole* in 2000 is believed to have numbered only two.<sup>53</sup> It was during Al Qaeda's preparations for the East Africa bombings, however, that intelligence's role in target identification was most apparent. In December 1993, bin Laden dispatched Ali Mohammed<sup>54</sup> to Nairobi for the purpose of conducting surveillance on potential targets. Given broad instructions to conduct surveillance on American, British, French, and Israeli targets in the Kenyan capital, it was left to Mohammed to decide which specific targets to surveil. He subsequently conducted surveillance on a number of targets in Nairobi, including the U.S. embassy, the U.S. AID building, the U.S. Agricultural Office, the French Cultural Centre and the French embassy.<sup>55</sup> L'Houssaine Kherchtou, one Mohammed's associates in East Africa, even became a member of the French Cultural Center and British consulate library in Nairobi, most likely for the purpose of enhancing his access to intelligence on these targets. On occasion, he was also accompanied to the French Cultural Center by Mohammed.<sup>56</sup> In addition to his surveillance work in Nairobi, Mohammed was also tasked by the Al Qaeda leadership to conduct surveillance of American, French, and other targets in Djibouti and Senegal.<sup>57</sup>

Mohammed carried out his duties with diligence, taking pictures and drawing diagrams of potential targets. After conducting his surveillance activities, he assembled his findings in a report and traveled to Khartoum where they were presented, along with supporting photographs, to bin Laden, Mohammed Atef, Adu Ubaidah, and others. After examining the photographs and surveillance reports, it was determined that the U.S. embassy would be targeted, with bin Laden himself identifying a vulnerable entry point in which a truck driven by a suicide bomber could enter.<sup>58</sup>

Despite Mohammed's elaborate efforts, the volume of intelligence necessary to identify a target need not always be substantial. Demonstrating the potential for intelligence to raise confidence levels, mere familiarity with a target is sometimes sufficient to strengthen its appeal.<sup>59</sup> The case involving Ahmed Ressay is instructive in this regard. His desire to attack a U.S. airport to mark the new millennium led him to consider three possible targets,

settling eventually on Los Angeles International airport. The reasoning behind his decision to focus on this target was revealed in subsequent court testimony. The following exchange between Ressay and the prosecutor is revealing.

Q. Now, what do those three circles represent on that map?

A. Each one points to an airport.

Q. Were those potential targets?

A. Yes.

Q. Were you planning to attack all three?

A. No.

Q. What was your preference?

A. The airport of Los Angeles.

Q. Why was that your preference?

A. Because I have landed in it in the past, so I have an idea about it.<sup>60</sup>

*The Casing Report.* The surveillance, or casing report, is Al Qaeda's principle intelligence document and primary means of target identification. Disseminated to the Al Qaeda leadership, they are used to identify those elements fundamental in determining a target's attractiveness, including the feasibility of attacking the target and the likelihood of operational success.<sup>61</sup>

Al Qaeda operatives are expected to complete these reports in a prescribed manner, demonstrating the existence of a bureaucratic and formalized approach to intelligence reporting and target identification. This helps to ensure standardization and the inclusion of information critical to the full and accurate reporting of intelligence to the Al Qaeda leadership. For instance, one Al Qaeda training manual provides instructions on how to write such an intelligence report. It instructs operatives to include details such as a security classification for the report ("Normal," "Secretive," "Very Secretive," or "Sensitive"), its priority, the author, and the subject.<sup>62</sup> Adherence to a process and format was also revealed by Al Qaeda operative L'Houssaine Kherchtou, who described report preparation in the following terms: "[w]riting the report normally, in the front paper you say how secret it is in the top, the target you are using, and the daytime date, the date, and even the time you started your work, and the name of the target, and you start describing the target and putting all the information of the target. You draw the pictures, if there is a map, and some addresses."<sup>63</sup> Operatives were also encouraged to include as much detail as possible, with one Al Qaeda training document found in Afghanistan advising members that information about a target is to be committed in detailed reports that should include photographs and maps.<sup>64</sup>

A lesson contained in *Al-Battar Training Camp* provides an example of a casing report prepared as part of a plan to assassinate the Saudi Interior Minister, Prince Nayef. The report demonstrates the type of pre-operational intelligence used to identify those aspects of the target's routine that can be exploited to form the basis of an attack plan. The level of detail is also indicative of the amount of time invested by Al Qaeda in preparation for an operation. The report is reproduced as Table 1.

Although the details contained in this document are superficial when compared to other sample casing reports prepared by Al Qaeda, it nevertheless exemplifies a mentality in which the risk of circumstance and chance can be minimized through an exhaustive knowledge of the target and target environment. An example of a casing report contained in *The Encyclopedia*, which exceeds sixty pages and contains dozens of photographs and

**Table 1**  
Sample Al Qaeda intelligence report

**The target:** Nayef ben Abdul Aziz. He will be receiving at King Khaled International Airport a foreign security figure on a secret visit to the Kingdom.

**Specifying the target:** Nayef ben Abdul Aziz Aal Saoud.

**Particulars of target:**

**Name:** Nayef ben Abdul Al-Aziz Aal Saoud

**Age:** 71 years, born 1933

**Position:** Saudi Interior Minister

**Residential address:** Riyadh – several palaces (amongst them the palace in Arqa and Om Al-Hamam Palace. He also has a number of other places which he frequents)

**Daily program:** He sleeps just before dawn until the afternoon, goes out to the Ministry on some days and this is from seven o'clock in the evening until eight thirty in the evening, the rest of the day is spent on night outings, parties and private meetings.

**Number of guards:** Eight trained.

**Type of armament:** Light

When the target alights from the car the guards are close to him but without body contact.

The movement of the motorcade: the roads are closed and the target car travels in the middle of the motorcade with look-alike cars. Note that they may put more than one similar motorcade for camouflage.

The guarding crew breaks up surveillance.

The guarding crew sometimes carries out a change of route.

The number of guarding cars in the motorcade is no less than ten cars and their job is to clear the road. The first car is the car with the oscillating light then the cars where the target is and these are often similar in colour, model and without numbers or have similar numbers, then the protection cars followed by the patrol cars which block off the motorcade. Sometimes the motorcade travels without the target who travels in a small motorcade along side streets.

The target changes his car.

Mostly, no cars come close to the motorcade and the reason is that the roads are blocked off.

Route information: the distance from Arqa palace to the airport 40 kilometers.

**Route description:** Arqa – the Western Circular – the Northern Circular - the Airport Highway with the probability of travelling along other routes such as: (Arqa – Kharees Highway – the Eastern Circular – the Airport Highway).

(Arqa – Kharees Highway – Jaber Al-Sabah Highway – the Northern Circular – the Airport Highway)

(Arqa - Al-Dariyah – the Al-Aamariah turn-off – then proceeds easterly then comes back to the usual route then proceeds to the Airport Highway)

**(Date of) departure for the reception:** 15/4/1425 Hijri

**Time of departure:** Six pm

*(Continued on next page)*

**Table 1**  
Sample Al Qaeda intelligence report (*Continued*)

---

**Arrival time:** Six twenty five pm

**Side routes:** Several, amongst those are the exists of the circulars (4-5-6-7) and (the Western Gates of the University of King Saoud) (Prince Abdullah Highway)

**Bridges:** The Field linking the Western Circular and the Eastern Circular to the Airport Highway.

**Car parks and deserted places:** None.

**There are several turns/bends:** Amongst those the bend where the Western Circular meets the Northern Circular, and the bend where the Northern Circular meets the Eastern, and there are trees of medium density, parks and soccer grounds.

And there is also a high building of several stories that belongs to the Sabek Company, and the Imam University building as well as trees in the medium strip which separates the two roads and which is suitable for hiding, setting up ambushes, or planting time bombs and at the entrance to the airport highway there is a gate which can be closed.

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*Source:* Abdulaziz Al-Moqrin, "The Group or Crew of Execution", *Al-Battar Training Camp*, no. 11, 27 May 2004.

hand drawn diagrams of the target and its surrounds, and seeks to describe almost every conceivable detail, is indicative of this mindset.

The composition of these casing reports is reflected in the skills expected of an Al Qaeda intelligence team. Al-Moqrin describes these skills in the following terms:

It is necessary to distribute the roles in this group, and this is in accordance with the following:

- A Computer Technician/Operator, who can enter data and retrieve it as required, whether this data is images/photos or films or secret documents or statements and written reports, so, in general, he is an expert in working on computers.
- B A member for classifying the information (raw data) and his job is to classify raw data and to arrange it, he then presents it to the computer technician to enter it and archive it. . .
- C Photo laboratory technician, and we need to mention here that photography developed significantly in the late nineties and it still is to the extent that it has reached very advanced levels in the technicalities of photography, and it may be that the old method (developing) will be totally dispensed of through the use of digital cameras connected to the computer because these are more secure, easier to work with, to enlarge or to minimize. . .
- D Communication member, and he takes on the (job) of preparing the Dead Boxes [covert and indirect communication between two parties], organizing meetings and secret communications.<sup>65</sup>

Several Al Qaeda intelligence reports targeting U.S. financial centers exemplify the thoroughness of these documents and their role in eliminating operational uncertainty. Based

on surveillance conducted by Dhiren Barot,<sup>66</sup> Nadeem Tarmohamed, and Qaisar Shaffi between August 2000 and April 2001, it is clear that Al Qaeda also considered attacking the International Monetary Fund World Headquarters and the World Bank Headquarters in Washington, the Prudential Corporate Plaza and World Headquarters Building in Newark, New Jersey, and the New York Stock Exchange and the Citigroup Center in New York.<sup>67</sup> These reports are indicative of Al Qaeda's preoccupation with intelligence detail in which almost ever observable feature is recorded for future assessment. In reference to these reports, a senior U.S. intelligence official reportedly commented that the terrorists have, "...made a determined effort over many years [and] every vulnerability has been identified," so that even the smallest security and structural details have been studied.<sup>68</sup> The computer on which these casing reports were stored also reportedly contained more than 500 photographs of the surveilled targets.<sup>69</sup>

These casing reports demonstrate the way intelligence is used by the Al Qaeda leadership to support decision making.<sup>70</sup> Going beyond the descriptive, they contain detailed assessments of vulnerabilities and other particulars that might affect the outcome of an attack. They provide the information necessary to make informed decisions on whether to proceed with an attack, especially where decisions of this sort are reserved for a leadership based thousands of miles from the target. During Barot's sentencing hearing in 2006, the prosecutor compared these casing reports to "business plans."<sup>71</sup> Some of the intelligence contained in Barot's casing reports and its possible applications are presented in Table 2.<sup>72</sup>

Another Al Qaeda intelligence report assessing Heathrow Airport revealed similar details. The report included information on runways, buildings, the perimeter road and the length of tunnels used by members of the public and cargo. It also included descriptions of the length of time a traffic light remained on red, the position of "sleeping policemen," and the volume of traffic at different times of day.<sup>73</sup>

If intelligence reveals that security presents insuperable operational problems and increases the chance of failure, the leadership might decide to refrain from carrying out an attack. Barot's intelligence report (discussed earlier) on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, observed that due to the high security surrounding the buildings, mounting an attack would be "tricky."<sup>74</sup> Intelligence reporting provided by Al Qaeda operative and U.S. citizen, Iyman Faris, in 2002, also eliminated the Brooklyn Bridge as a target after reconnaissance revealed that its destruction by severing its cables was unlikely to succeed because of the bridge's security and structure.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, difficulty in gathering intelligence on a target might be sufficient to protect it from attack. Mohammed Atta, for example, considered attacking a nuclear facility in the vicinity of New York after seeing it during his numerous familiarization flights. This idea, however, was abandoned because the airspace around it was restricted, thus making reconnaissance flights impossible.<sup>76</sup>

*Political Intelligence.* Al Qaeda has also utilized political intelligence to help narrow the field of potential targets. Consistent with Al Qaeda's use of operational intelligence to focus on those targets most likely to achieve its objectives at minimum risk or expenditure, there are indications that political intelligence is used in a similar manner. At times very sophisticated, this strategic analysis is highly rational and is usually devoid of the religious rhetoric that normally accompanies publicly released Al Qaeda documents. One document in particular is illustrative of this thinking. In December 2003, a document entitled *Jihadi Iraq, Hopes and Dangers* was released on the Al Qaeda-linked website *Global Islamic Media*. The document argues that the United States is most likely to withdraw from Iraq if the economic costs become too great. It reasons that this can be achieved by reducing the

**Table 2**  
Al Qaeda intelligence report and possible applications

Intelligence contained in casing reports	Possible applications
Flow of pedestrian traffic outside a building, observing that 28 people passed every minute. Also includes information on when people take lunch and smoking breaks and public events scheduled near the buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Indication of potential casualties</li> <li>● Timing of attack so as to exploit the gathering of large crowds, especially those which exhibit a routine</li> </ul>
Location of police and fire stations, schools and hospitals situated near the targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Timing of response to an attack by law enforcement and other emergency services</li> <li>● Timing and location of attack</li> </ul>
Description of construction of buildings, in one case noting that a building, “is almost completely made to resemble a glass house . . . that when shattered, each piece of glass becomes a potential flying piece of cutthroat shrapnel!”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Indication of potential casualties</li> <li>● Attack method and size of explosive device</li> </ul>
Location and number of security cameras in the vicinity of surveilled targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ability to safely conduct further surveillance on the target</li> </ul>
Observation that undercover security officers were likely to be positioned in the vicinity of the potential targets. This led the author of the report to conclude that security officials must, “regularly review, refresh and reinforce” their undercover teams for the purpose of concealing their identity.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Counterintelligence utility, alerting operatives, future surveillance teams, and the <i>al Qaeda</i> leadership of the possibility of a covert security presence in the vicinity of certain targets. This would reinforce the need for vigilance. It might even act as a potential deterrent since the inability to establish the routine or identity of security personnel could jeopardise future surveillance activities, including the execution of the operation itself.</li> </ul>
Detailed descriptions of security guards, including uniform descriptions and type of arms carried if any	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Impersonation of security personnel to facilitate penetration of security barriers</li> <li>● Potential levels of resistance to attackers</li> <li>● Opportunities for follow-up surveillance</li> </ul>
Locations from which a building could be scouted (for example, from a window table at a nearby coffee shop)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Opportunities for follow-up surveillance</li> </ul>

number of U.S. allies in Iraq, thereby transferring the full economic burden onto the United States. The document then analyses three countries in depth: Poland, Britain, and Spain. It concludes that Spain is the most vulnerable to attack, because opposition to the war within the country is assessed as almost total. After conducting a detailed analysis of the domestic political situation in Spain, the document explains:

[t]herefore we say that in order to force the Spanish government to withdraw from Iraq the resistance should deal painful blows to its forces. . . . It is necessary to make utmost use of the upcoming general election in Spain in March next year. . . . We think that the Spanish government could not tolerate more than two, maximum three blows, after which it will have to withdraw as a result of popular pressure. If its troops still remain in Iraq after these blows, then the victory of the Socialist Party is almost secured. . .<sup>77</sup>

Supporting this analysis is Al Qaeda's intelligence doctrine, defined by the notion of "know thy enemy." Rational and lucid assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy are integral to the analysis, a position that is plainly stated by the author who argues for the need to learn "the characteristics and qualities of the enemy."<sup>78</sup> This document demonstrates a capacity for Al Qaeda to make realistic assessments of its operating environment, and to calculate the political consequences of its actions. Indeed, analysis of this sort reveals Al Qaeda's ability to acquire an empathetic-like understanding of its adversaries based on a detailed knowledge of a range of characteristics of the target countries.<sup>79</sup>

### ***Construction of a Detailed Plan***

Operationally, this is the most important phase of Al Qaeda's intelligence effort. It is also the one that is likely to form part of any Al Qaeda operation, regardless of its size or complexity. Once a decision is made to proceed, Al Qaeda will engage in a thorough process of intelligence collection on which to construct a precise plan of attack. The aims of this intelligence phase are twofold; first, to establish target and environmental familiarity based on detailed and current intelligence, and second, to identify routines associated with the target. These will determine the details of the operation, including the precise timing of the attack, the method by which the target will be approached, the roles and responsibilities of each operative, and the resource requirements. This intelligence serves as the basis on which the attack will be choreographed, often down to the finest detail.

The first priority in surveiling the target at this time is to identify routines capable of forming a solid basis on which a plan can be constructed. In identifying this pattern of behavior, the organizer or the operative are, in effect, attempting to glimpse into the future, confident that these routines will be followed at the moment of the attack. The importance of identifying target routines was emphasized during intelligence training in Al Qaeda's various camps. In describing the type and purpose of reconnaissance that might be conducted on a target selected for assassination, Ahmed Ressayd recalls being taught, "[a] person . . . that you plan to assassinate, you would first observe him, surveil him, you watch when he comes in and leaves, and you find where he lives and you find out where his vulnerabilities are, and that is the place where you pick."<sup>80</sup>

Al Qaeda operations also demonstrate that the identification of routines is a decisive precursor to action. The 9/11 hijackers engaged in extensive reconnaissance to detect routines in activities ranging from airport security procedures, to how aircrews respond to troublesome passengers and under what circumstances cockpit doors were opened.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, a U.S. intelligence official involved in the investigation of the bombing of the U.S.S. *Cole* informed the author that those involved in the attack spent considerable time surveiling the port of Aden. According to this official, establishing routines would have been straightforward, as ships entering the port followed standard docking and security procedures.<sup>82</sup> Earlier discussion on Barot's 2000 and 2001 casing reports demonstrate that the identification of routines relating to static targets is also a high priority.

More aggressive intelligence probes might also be conducted to determine the finer details of an operation. For instance, it is suspected that those responsible for the bombing of the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in June 1996 probed the compound's perimeter in an attempt to identify vulnerabilities and test security responses and procedures.<sup>83</sup> On one occasion, it was reported that an individual drove his vehicle into one of the concrete barriers along the perimeter, driving away after moving it slightly.<sup>84</sup> It was, ultimately, the attackers' ability to identify various vulnerabilities, such as the fact that only 85 feet separated residential structures within the compound from the perimeter fence, coupled with other intelligence that revealed that these residential structures were occupied by U.S. personnel,<sup>85</sup> which established the building as a viable target. The 9/11 hijackers used similar aggressive intelligence probes to elicit responses from security and airline staff to gauge more accurately the conditions likely to exist at the moment of the operation's execution.

This intelligence phase also sought to provide a detailed description of the operational environment. In the case of the bombing of the U.S. embassy in Nairobi, this became more important than the identification of a routine. In the week prior to the attack, the embassy was reconnoitered at least twice, in all probability to identify the most suitable position for the truck bomb. On each of these occasions, senior organizing members of the cell were present,<sup>86</sup> reinforcing the likelihood that these surveillance missions fulfilled a decisive planning function. On at least one of these occasions a member of the suicide team was also present, perhaps to receive instructions on where to position the bomb.<sup>87</sup>

To assist in the construction of a detailed plan, intelligence might also be collected by other means, including open source documents such as maps, transportation timetables, specialist magazines, and telephone directories.<sup>88</sup> Jack Roche, for instance, while receiving broad instructions to reconnoiter Israeli targets in Australia, was also directed to gather specific intelligence on high-profile Australian-Jewish businessman, Joe Gutnick, who Roche says was identified as a target by the Al Qaeda leadership prior to his arrival in Afghanistan. Instructed to gather detailed intelligence on Gutnick so that a precise plan could be devised, Roche used open sources such as the Internet and street directories to compile a dossier on the Australian businessman.<sup>89</sup>

### ***Final Intelligence Inspection***

The final phase of Al Qaeda's intelligence process is intended to identify any unanticipated issues or changed circumstances in the operating environment that might undermine the likelihood of success. It is a final attempt to ensure that the leadership and the operative are acting on the basis of the most current information and that this remains consistent with earlier assessments and expectations. This phase normally takes one of two forms: the dry run or the final reconnaissance mission. Each of these is examined next.

*The Dry Run.* The dry run, or operational rehearsal, involves replicating as closely as possible the conditions likely to be encountered at the time of the attack. In this way, surprise and other unforeseen circumstances are likely to be minimized. According to *The Declaration*, rehearsals are a useful means of "discovering any unexpected element detrimental to the operation."<sup>90</sup> To accurately replicate these conditions, it recommends that rehearsals take place shortly before the execution of the operation.

The 9/11 hijackers used dry runs in an attempt to reconstruct their operating environment as accurately as possible. This included flying on the same type of aircraft they intended to hijack and carrying weapons aboard aircraft to probe the effectiveness of airport

security screening.<sup>91</sup> Testing and probing security responses appear to be a key objective of the dry run. For example, Ahmed Ressam indicated that it was his intention to surveil his intended target, Los Angeles International Airport, and place luggage in a position where he believed it would arouse least suspicion and observe the reaction of security guards and monitor their response times.<sup>92</sup> It is possible that the dry run can also elevate confidence levels by creating familiarity with the operational plan and target environment.

Al Qaeda's former leader in Saudi Arabia, Al Moqrin, has identified target familiarity and operational repetition as important to create operational certainty. This is evident in his description of the training that might be undertaken in preparation for an operation:

Training to carry out the plan, and in this phase the Command must provide an atmosphere, circumstances and an appropriate location similar to the actual location where the operation will take place. This is to enable the members of the execution to adapt to the building or the location where the enemy will be eliminated and to train more than once the brothers who will participate in the operation. This is so they will live in the same atmosphere in which they are going to carry out the operation, and for the Commander to know how much time it will take to carry out the task.<sup>93</sup>

It is plausible that the ability for operational rehearsals to elevate certainty levels and maximize the likelihood of success has also led to its widespread use by *jihadists* in general. Three of the suicide bombers involved in the 7 July 2005 attack on the London transportation system conducted a dry run nine days before carrying out the operation. The bombers, attempting to duplicate the conditions most likely to be encountered on the day of the attack, carried backpacks, followed the same route, and conducted their dry run close to the time of the actual operation.<sup>94</sup> It is alleged that those suspected of the British-based 2006 plot to destroy multiple passenger aircraft in mid-flight, also planned a dry run just days before their arrest.<sup>95</sup>

*The Final Reconnaissance Mission.* The final reconnaissance mission involves conducting a final visual inspection of the target, the target environment, and routes to the target. Its purpose is to ensure that there have been no changes to the anticipated operating environment, thereby minimizing the likelihood of encountering circumstances not factored into the planning process. In describing this phase of an operation, *The Declaration* advises that, "[s]hortly before the operation, reconnaissance should be repeated in order to confirm that nothing new has occurred."<sup>96</sup> The documented evidence indicates that this activity should be conducted as close to the day of the attack as possible, thereby raising the prospect of accurately identifying the conditions likely to be encountered at the moment of its execution.<sup>97</sup>

If carried out by the person executing the operation (for example, a suicide bomber), the final reconnaissance mission is intended to familiarize the operative with the target and surrounding area immediately before the attack, creating what might be referred to as "ground truth." This is particularly important where the execution team is brought into the country days before the attack. Mohamed Al-Owhali, one of the intended suicide bombers involved in the 7 August 1998 bombing of the U.S. embassy in Nairobi, conducted this type of intelligence activity in the days leading up to the attack. Arriving in the country only days before the operation, he conducted surveillance of the embassy on 4 August. He also reviewed photographs and sketches of the embassy.<sup>98</sup> Similar methods have been used by the Al-Quds Brigade, a Saudi-based Al Qaeda affiliate. Its commander,

Fawwaz bin Muhammad Al-Nashami, in describing his group's May 2004 attack on Khobar, explained that those involved in the operation were shown the targets for the purpose of familiarization. "I showed them the targets, and we reconnoitered [*sic*], in addition to a previous reconnaissance, and we learned by heart the paths leading to the sites."<sup>99</sup>

The aforementioned intelligence phases are instructive because of their ability to reveal something about Al Qaeda as an organization and the place of intelligence within it. First, these phases illustrate that prior to the 9/11 attacks, the intelligence function within Al Qaeda was highly centralized, demonstrating its importance in target selection and decision making in general. Much of the intelligence collected by the organization, including its affiliates, was often disseminated to the central leadership who used it as a means of determining a range of issues, including the feasibility and potential benefits of conducting an attack. The leadership showed that it often had a "hands-on" approach to intelligence, taking a keen and detailed interest in developments in this area. It is known, for example, that senior Al Qaeda military commander Mohammed Atef visited an apartment in Nairobi at a time when it was being used for surveillance purposes, including the development of reconnaissance photos.<sup>100</sup> The Al Qaeda leadership, especially Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, demonstrated a similar level of interest in intelligence during preparations for the 9/11 attacks.<sup>101</sup>

The centralized nature of intelligence within Al Qaeda also enabled the leadership to exercise some measure of control over the activities of other militant groups that might have come to it for funding or other forms of logistical support consistent with Burke's thesis of Al Qaeda acting as a venture-capitalist firm.<sup>102</sup> In this way, it has been able to allocate its resources to those projects that have the highest probability of success or those that are most likely to meet organizational objectives. The discovery of video reconnaissance, taken by Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) operatives in 1999, is illustrative in this regard. JI operatives in Singapore, planning an attack against a shuttle-bus service used by American military personnel and their families, conducted extensive video surveillance of the targeted areas. These recordings were made many times, eventually forming part of a final composite video, a copy of which was found by U.S. forces in the Kabul home of Mohammed Atef. Atef was subsequently further briefed by another visiting JI member who presented notes and diagrams of the target areas.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, a computer found in Afghanistan and known to have been used by Ayman al-Zawahiri contained a number of casing reports for international attacks,<sup>104</sup> suggesting that Al Qaeda constantly explored or was presented with ideas for operations, only some of which were ultimately approved.

It should be noted at this stage that the Al Qaeda leadership does not, and cannot, take such an active and involved interest in every operation it sanctions or supports. The sheer volume of operations with which it is involved, sometimes in the most peripheral sense, precludes the possibility of monitoring each. It is, therefore, possible for an operation to proceed without it passing through any of the intelligence phases identified here, and without the Al Qaeda leadership being provided intelligence updates. Sometimes it is sufficient for the organization to provide assistance, secure in the knowledge that it is doing its part in propagating global *jihad*.

Ahmed Ressay is a case in point. Intent on attacking Los Angeles Airport, to the point of purchasing the relevant ingredients and attempting to smuggle them into the United States via Canada, he received financial assistance from Al Qaeda and the endorsement of bin Laden. This, however, was the extent of Al Qaeda involvement in the planning of the operation.<sup>105</sup> At no point did Ressay engage in actual intelligence collection as part of a process to determine the suitability of the target or the viability of the operation, nor did he report on his progress to Al Qaeda. There is also no indication that Ressay intended or was expected to report on his progress.<sup>106</sup>

Second, the intelligence collection and reporting practices employed by Al Qaeda in support of the various intelligence phases is indicative of the organization's appetite for detail. For example, the use of video reconnaissance is commonplace and has allowed Al Qaeda to capture and study in great detail the target and its surrounds. As early as 1997, Al Qaeda used video reconnaissance in its casing of New York landmarks, including the World Trade Center. The arrest of Al Qaeda operatives has also uncovered video reconnaissance of other potential targets, including the Sears Tower in Chicago, Disneyland, and the Golden Gate Bridge.<sup>107</sup> The visual record of the target enables the capture of detail and perspective approximating that of "ground truth." Indeed, the Al Qaeda leadership has demonstrated a preference for video reconnaissance over other methods of recording intelligence. For instance, Jack Roche was instructed by the Al Qaeda leadership to utilize this method while conducting surveillance on the Israeli embassy in Australia. "The video is a lot better in some respects. It's not static, it's moving, you get a feel for the place. It's as if you're actually there."<sup>108</sup> This, in turn, has direct implications for planning. The ability to study these videos at leisure has enabled the Al Qaeda leadership to extract details capable of allowing it to assess the feasibility, resource commitment, and likely impact of an attack.

Similarly, the extensive use of casing reports allows for the dissemination of detailed and varied intelligence by those with firsthand contact and knowledge of the target. They allow for the reporting of intelligence that may have been accumulated over a period of days, weeks, or months, thus permitting the identification of routines. They might also complement video surveillance by providing technical information and other details that it is not practical or possible to capture on video. Together, these collection and reporting methods provide the Al Qaeda leadership with a highly detailed record on which to base its decisions. Jack Roche, for instance, received instructions to compile a casing report based on his reconnaissance activities. Commenting on the Al Qaeda leadership's request for a casing report, Roche observed, "[t]he more detail the better. And that, I think, was the basic criteria."<sup>109</sup>

Third, the various intelligence phases typical of Al Qaeda operations demonstrate the level of intelligence detail accumulated on a target prior to it being attacked. As Al Qaeda moves from one intelligence phase to the next, the amount of intelligence in its possession increases, so that by the time of the attack, the target, along with other elements critical to the operation, are well known to the organization and those responsible for its execution. It is plausible that confidence in the success of the operation also increases with each intelligence phase as perceptions of success and control are bolstered by the receipt of additional intelligence. With each phase, the likelihood of the target being the subject of an attack may, therefore, increase significantly. Consistent with the organization's long-term view on the collection of intelligence, Al Qaeda has been known to add intelligence to casing reports over a period of years.<sup>110</sup>

Finally, these intelligence phases ensure that the Al Qaeda leadership and its operatives make decisions on the basis of timely intelligence. The structure of these phases and their placement relative to the actual execution of the operation encourages the replenishment of the organization's intelligence holdings up to the time of the attack.

### **Psychological Effects of Intelligence**

Intelligence has provided Al Qaeda the means by which to predict the outcome of alternative courses of action with a significant degree of certainty. By pursuing detailed intelligence, Al Qaeda seeks to acquire a complete description of the consequences that will follow its decisions, especially if that decision is to engage in an attack. It is this predictive capacity

of intelligence that has allowed Al Qaeda to avoid the type of surprise or unanticipated events that can frequently end in catastrophe. In this way, the organization is well placed to select alternatives that either maximise expected utility, or else have a high probability of leading to behavior consistent with its objectives.

Such lofty intelligence goals are indicative of rational decision making more sophisticated than the means–ends criteria typically applied by scholars in their attempts to describe terrorist rationality.<sup>111</sup> That is to say, terrorist use of intelligence is indicative of a desire to achieve something akin to an objective or universal rationality, in which knowledge serves to inform the decision maker fully of the outcome of each alternative available. This goes beyond the mere alignment of means with desired ends, which may still constitute rational behavior even if decisions are based on incomplete or flawed intelligence. This is not to suggest that Al Qaeda always pursue near-perfect intelligence, or that this is possible even under ideal circumstances. The limits on perfect rationality and the function of incomplete knowledge in preventing its attainment are well known and readily acknowledged. But its pursuit by Al Qaeda, especially under conditions of perceived risk, demonstrates a heightened sense of rationality motivated by a desire to minimize the uncertainty in an otherwise unpredictable and hazardous environment.

The utility of intelligence as a means of reducing uncertainty is demonstrated further by its capacity to mitigate not only the actual level of risk, but in some instances, perceptions of risk. As noted earlier, Ressam's sole reason for choosing LA International Airport from the several others available stemmed from the simple fact that he had landed there in the past.<sup>112</sup> It is plausible that this contact with the target instilled in Ressam a sense of confidence derived from some level of familiarity with the target environment. This may also have allowed him to formulate a rudimentary plan and form some expectation of the likelihood of operational success.

Indeed, the research found that the ability of intelligence to boost confidence may also be reflected in the level of intelligence detail typically sought by Al Qaeda. On occasions, intelligence reports have even demonstrated a level of detail suggestive of a utility beyond the practical. The intelligence reports compiled by Dhiren Barot and samples contained in Al Qaeda training manuals are indicative of this conduct. In the case of Barot's intelligence activities, the collection of 500 photographs of a handful of buildings is indicative of this type of obsessive behavior. This number of photographs, along with captured surveillance video, would seem to be excessive if their sole purpose was to act as a visual representation of the potential targets. Indeed, the video footage of New York alone totaled eighty minutes.<sup>113</sup> The author of the current work has inspected Barot's intelligence reports and found them to be extraordinary in their level of detail. The casing report relating to the Citigroup Center amounted to twenty-nine pages, and was accompanied by a Powerpoint presentation on the Citigroup Center compiled by Barot. This, too, was exceptional in its detail, containing an array of plans and photographs obtained via open sources, along with photographs taken internally, evidently by Barot. However, many of the photographs and architectural type drawings contained in this presentation were so similar that their operational utility was limited.

It is plausible that this practice reflects intelligence's capacity to provide or satiate terrorists' strong psychological need for assurance. An argument can be made that this need for confidence is so important that groups such as Al Qaeda vigorously pursue intelligence, including that which may be defined as objectively useless or of limited operational utility.<sup>114</sup> The collection of all manner of details, including that incapable of revealing new information beyond that which is already known, is supportive of this position.<sup>115</sup> These perceptions are reinforced by an organizational doctrine which portrays

intelligence as an essential element to each operation. Al-Adl's descriptions of intelligence as a means of guaranteeing success,<sup>116</sup> or *The Declaration's* comments that victory is dependent on a thorough knowledge of the enemy,<sup>117</sup> seem to have contributed to a mindset among Al Qaeda's operatives and planners in which intelligence and operational success are inextricably linked. In fact, Al-Adl has observed that counterintelligence implications emerge from the nexus between intelligence on the one hand and confidence and reassurance levels on the other. For Al-Adl, Al Qaeda commanders sometimes find it difficult to refrain from the unnecessary dissemination of intelligence to operatives for this very reason.<sup>118</sup>

## Conclusion

The documented evidence indicates that intelligence has provided the various levels within Al Qaeda a significant measure of operational control and certainty. For the Al Qaeda leadership, it has provided command and control capabilities that have allowed it to invest in and pursue operations most likely to promote its strategic and symbolic objectives. For the Al Qaeda operative, the collection and accumulation of intelligence has provided a measure of predictability through its capacity to describe the target and target environment in advance of the attack.

Intelligence's capacity to help Al Qaeda achieve control extends beyond its ability to exert a favorable influence over the outcome of individual operations. Intelligence is also central to Al Qaeda's use of violence to achieve specific symbolic ends. If it is accepted that Al Qaeda's use of violence has a utility beyond the strategic, and that the organization also pursues symbolic ends intended to draw attention to what Juergensmeyer describes as, "... a struggle more awesome than meets the eye,"<sup>119</sup> it becomes evident that intelligence is fundamental to this process. Insofar as Al Qaeda's dramatic and savage acts of violence are designed to invoke images of battle between the forces of good and evil, so too are intelligence and counterintelligence employed to reinforce these notions of the existence of war. Al Qaeda's repeated references to intelligence as integral to the successful outcome of battle place intelligence at the center of the organization's struggle between the forces of belief and unbelief. Indeed, consistent with definitions that portray intelligence as a tool to be used within an adversarial context, intelligence has become part of the language or rhetoric of war, routinely described by Al Qaeda as a weapon or instrument of conflict.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, Al Qaeda's placement of intelligence within a religious context, by demonstrating the Prophet Mohammed's extensive use of intelligence, and its central importance as a weapon of *jihad*, has resulted in a powerful fusion of intelligence, war, and religion. Take, for example, the following introductory comments to *The Encyclopedia's* extensive volume on intelligence and security:

One of the most powerful weapons of our Jihad against the enemies of God, no matter what their type, is security and intelligence. . . . One of the most important weapons for any Islamic group, after having belief in God and His Prophet, is the weapon of security and intelligence. . . . This is because the struggle between us and our enemy is a struggle of beliefs first and foremost, and then a struggle of security and intelligence.<sup>121</sup>

Al Qaeda's frequent appeals for intelligence from supporters and sympathizers, along with its repeated references to the centrality of intelligence to the conduct of *jihad*, also helps to maintain the focus and involvement of such individuals by imbuing them with a sense of an ongoing, and even an indefinite, struggle. Moreover, the collection of intelligence serves to

remind Al Qaeda's enemies that they are in fact in a state of war, despite the infrequency of actual attacks. Al Qaeda's constant intelligence collection activities, usually within the targeted country, are a powerful reminder of the ongoing terrorist threat and the grievances, both religious and political, that serve to motivate the organization.

Furthermore, intelligence collection can be an impressive display of Al Qaeda's power by demonstrating and exploiting the vulnerabilities and limitations of its enemies. Indeed, the intelligence and security struggle between Al Qaeda and its enemies is one of the few arenas in which these opposing forces are engaged in direct confrontation. Intelligence successes, therefore, can act as credible displays of Al Qaeda's power, capable of creating perceptions of an organization with a level of control over its environment that allows it to operate at will, all the while outwitting and out-maneuvering the intelligence services of its foes. The potency of such displays are given particular meaning because of the perception within Al Qaeda that intelligence services are central to its enemies' capacity to retain and project power. For instance, it is a commonly held view within *jihadi* circles that one of the most effective weapons in protecting corrupt governments throughout the Muslim world are these regimes' intelligence services.<sup>122</sup> As discussed earlier, Al Qaeda's intelligence philosophy emphasizes a detailed knowledge of the enemy not only to allow for the exploitation of enemy vulnerabilities, but also to demonstrate that its enemies can be defeated. Publications such as *The Declaration*, and al-Hakaymah's, *The Myth of Delusion*, with their detailed descriptions of the enemies' security capabilities, methods of operation, and vulnerabilities, are intended to provide the *jihadi* a sense of empowerment. This psychological dimension to intelligence is consistent with, and supplementary to, Al Qaeda's other attempts to broadcast its own omnipotence, especially in the face of what seem to be overwhelming forces and odds. Such displays of power, in contrast to its enemies' apparent impotence, are central to Al Qaeda's attempts to create a vision of a world at war in which victory is not only possible, but also offers an understanding of how such a victory can be achieved.<sup>123</sup>

Moreover, intelligence is central to Al Qaeda's ability to project images of power and control by allowing the organization to engage in carefully orchestrated acts of violence. Although Al Qaeda is less interested than groups such as the IRA in controlling its violence so as not to alienate, it must nevertheless engage in carefully crafted acts. Just because these acts are particularly savage, and seek to maximize destruction, does not mean to say that they are without control or purpose.<sup>124</sup> Indeed, the very nature and motivation of groups such as Al Qaeda suggests the opposite is true. Not only does the immediate aim of maximizing casualties imply a need for efficiency and thoroughness, but that the symbolism to its attacks requires orchestrated violence capable of conveying messages to multiple audiences. To this extent, Juergensmeyer is correct when he describes these acts as "performance violence."<sup>125</sup> These performances, however, need to be carefully choreographed so as to achieve the type of outcome that will maximize the symbolic value of the act. The level of detail typical of Al Qaeda's casing reports, and the thoroughness of its intelligence preparations, suggest a desire not only to maximize the likelihood of operational success, but also to ensure that events unfold according to a precise script in which the messages contained within the act are not diluted or obscured by outcomes that can be interpreted as weakness, incompetence, or powerlessness. The capacity for such outcomes to dilute the symbolic power of Al Qaeda's acts of violence was made evident with the events on 9/11. Although these attacks were undoubtedly a major success for Al Qaeda, the failure of the hijackers of United Airlines Flight 93 to crash their aircraft into their intended target diluted the symbolic power of the organization's message, instead allowing many to focus on the heroism and defiance of the aircraft's passengers. Indeed, Flight 93

became a powerful counter-symbol in its own right, serving to challenge and subvert the very image Al Qaeda hoped to convey through the attacks.<sup>126</sup> All of this because of the operation's planners' failure to anticipate that passengers might learn of the other attacks after establishing communication with people on the ground through the use of mobile telephones.

Ultimately, intelligence provides Al Qaeda the capacity to engage in carefully crafted acts of violence. The high levels of certainty engendered through its use allows Al Qaeda to construct operations and engage in activity in which risk, in its many forms, can be mitigated and the likelihood of achieving preferred outcomes maximized. Minimizing the probability of encountering unanticipated circumstances has proven central to Al Qaeda's attempts to avoid conditions that could lead to operational failure or blunt the impact of its political or ideological message. The successful collection, scrutiny, and dissemination of operational intelligence, therefore, go to the heart of Al Qaeda's capacity to remain an effective and credible terrorist organization.

## Notes

1. Al Qaeda, *Declaration of Jihad against the Country's Tyrants, Military Series*, n.d., p. 80. This 180-page training manual was recovered in the home of Al Qaeda member Anas al-Liby in Manchester, England, in May 2000. Full copy in author's possession.

2. Instruction manual found in Al Qaeda safe house, cited in Susan B. Glasser, "A Terrorist's Guide to Infiltrate West," *Washington Post*, 9 December 2001.

3. Abdulaziz Al-Moqrin, "Secret Work Group," *Al-Battar Training Camp*, no. 6, 17 March 2004.

4. The debate over the existence of an "old" and "new" terrorism is far from resolved. See, for example, Walter Laqueur, "Postmodern Terrorism," *Foreign Affairs* 75(5) (1996); Martha Crenshaw, "The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century," *Political Psychology* 21(2) (June 2000), pp. 411–415; Thomas Copeland, "Is the 'New Terrorism' Really New? An Analysis of the New Paradigm for Terrorism," *The Journal of Conflict Studies* 21(2) (2001).

5. Abu Bakr Naji, *The Management of Savagery. The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass*, n.d., available at [http://www.ctc.usma.edu/Management\\_of\\_Savagery.pdf](http://www.ctc.usma.edu/Management_of_Savagery.pdf) (accessed 12 December 2006), p. 29; Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2003), pp. 16–17. Indeed, for Jenkins, the importance of this objective forms the essence of Al Qaeda. He observes that Al Qaeda is not just an organization, but also a process, a reference to its ability to identify and generate new recruits. According to Jenkins, the ability of the organization to achieve operational success is, therefore, central to its capacity to draw new recruits to the cause. Brian Jenkins, *Countering al Qaeda: An appreciation of the Situation and Suggestions for Strategy* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2002), pp. 5–6.

6. The importance of not engaging in uncalibrated acts of violence, for fear that this could alienate actual or potential supporters, appears in the writings of Al Qaeda's ideologues. For instance, in *Knight's Under the Prophet's Banner*, Zawahiri recounts an attempted assassination in the early 1990s on Egyptian Prime Minister Atif Sidqi. Using a car bomb, members of Islamic Jihad failed to kill the prime minister, instead killing a child named Shayma in a near-by school. Zawahiri recalls that the Egyptian government subsequently portrayed this incident as an attack against Shayma, not Prime Minister Sidqi. Zawahiri clearly viewed the death of Shayma as having the potential to damage the *ihadists'* cause by turning public opinion against them. Following this incident and in an obvious attempt to placate the *ihadists'* Muslim constituency, Zawahiri adopted the opinion of the eighth-century Islamic scholar, Imam al-Shafi'i, which called for a payment to the relatives of Muslims unintentionally killed in similar operations. Significantly, Zawahiri also implies that the death of Shayma stemmed from a failure in intelligence, observing, "[o]ur brothers who carried out the attack had surveyed the area and noticed that there was a school under construction. They thought the school

had no students in it. It transpired later that only the external part of the school was being renovated but the rest of the school was operating normally.” Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, as printed in *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), 2 December 2001 (FBIS-NES-2002-0108), Part Six. Zawahiri again stressed the importance of popular support in his July 2005 letter to Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi. Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Letter to Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi dated 9 July 2005*, available at [http://ensign.senate.gov/static\\_media/101105\\_zarkawi\\_letter.pdf](http://ensign.senate.gov/static_media/101105_zarkawi_letter.pdf) (accessed 12 December 2006). In this letter, Zawahiri explains to Zarqawi the vital importance of “popular support from the Muslim masses in Iraq,” at one stage describing this as the *mujahidin's* “strongest weapon.” Indeed, the majority of the thirteen-page letter is devoted to the issue of maintaining popular support, leading Zawahiri to caution Zarqawi to limit his violence against the Shi'a and refrain from committing further beheadings. In reference to these beheadings, Zawahiri explains, “[y]ou shouldn't be deceived by the praise of some of the zealous young men . . . they do not express the general view of the admirer and supporter of the resistance in Iraq . . . we should spare the people from the effect of questions about the usefulness of our actions in the hearts and minds of the general opinion that is essentially sympathetic to us.”

7. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 121–249.

8. For instance, one Al Qaeda manual, *Al-Battar Training Camp*, has a regular feature entitled “Military Science,” which dispenses operational advice, including how to conduct operations such as kidnappings and assassinations.

9. Sayf Al-Adl (1960 or 1963–) is a former Egyptian Special Forces officer who became a senior Al Qaeda trainer and is currently suspected of being its Chief of Security. His involvement with Al Qaeda, and some of its key figures, can be traced to the earliest stages of the organization's development, and as early as 1992 may have been on its military committee. One of Al Qaeda's most active and long-term members, he has been involved in the planning of the organization's main operations, including in more recent times, those in Iraq. Jack Roche confirmed with the author that Al-Adl was present at planning meetings with other senior members of Al Qaeda, playing a key role in Roche's tasking and operational preparations. Jack Roche, interview with author, 26 August 2005. Al-Adl's current whereabouts are unknown, although there is evidence to suggest that he is in Iran.

10. Sayf Al-Adl, “Planning Special Operations,” *Al-Battar Training Camp*, no. 18, 13 September 2004. Emphasis added.

11. *The Encyclopedia of the Afghan Jihad*, n.d., p. 25. An eleven-volume manual totaling approximately 8,000 pages, it covers a range of topics, including tactics, the manufacture of explosives, and security and intelligence. Although the identity of the author or authors of this manual cannot be stated with certainty, evidence indicates that it was compiled by the Afghan Service Bureau (*Mekhtab al-Khidemat* or MAK), a body created by bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam to organize the increasing number of foreign *mujahidin* entering Afghanistan in the mid-1980s. Indeed, the first two dedications in the manual are to Azzam and bin Laden. It is also believed that the manual was compiled some time between 1991 and 1993. Full Arabic version of manual in author's possession.

12. Al Qaeda, Declaration of Jihad against the Country's Tyrants, p. 76.

13. The evidence indicates that Al Qaeda is a poor improviser unable to cope with dynamic circumstances, reinforcing its need for meticulous planning and high levels of operational certainty. Contingency planning appears to play little part in the organization's preparatory phase and training documents. If events do not unfold almost precisely as anticipated, the terrorist is left with next to no opportunity to reassess his position in light of the changed circumstances. The revision of plans increases the likelihood for error and operational failure. Al Qaeda in particular has exposed itself to the dangers inherent in the emergence of unforeseen circumstances. Al Qaeda, perhaps more than any other terrorist organization, has demonstrated a remarkable consistency of conduct, this being evident in the manner in which it recruits its members to the way it conducts its operations. This consistency in behavior can find its roots in the method of instruction used by Al Qaeda (and Islamic extremists in general). This method of instruction, which has a strong emphasis on repetition, is apparent throughout all Al Qaeda training manuals and documents. The net result is that Al Qaeda operations are consistently methodical, even mechanistic.

14. Sayf Al-Adl, "The Principles of Security," *Al-Battar Training Camp*, no. 3, 2 February 2004.
15. Al Qaeda, *Declaration of Jihad against the Country's Tyrants*, pp. 21–42, 51–67, and 75–115.
16. Michael Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 2.
17. Sayf Al-Adl, "Transportation Security," *Al-Battar Training Camp*, no. 6, 17 March 2004.
18. Sayf Al-Adl, "Communications Security," *Al-Battar Training Camp*, no. 5, 28 February 2004.
19. Al Qaeda, *Declaration of Jihad against the Country's Tyrants*, pp. 47–50.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
21. Cited in Yosri Fouda and Nick Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2003), p. 153.
22. Osama bin Laden, *A Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places*, available at <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa.1996.html>, August 1996 (accessed 24 April 2005).
23. Jason Burke, "Think Again: Al Qaeda," *Foreign Policy* 142 (May/June 2004), p. 19. This is also reflected in the language of individuals such as bin Laden, who have referred to the Zionist-Crusader alliance for many years now. In February 1998 bin Laden also announced the formation of the umbrella group of radical movements from across the Muslim world known as the World Islamic Front for the Jihad Against the Jews and the Crusaders.
24. Kepel, *Jihad*, pp. 219–220.
25. Max Taylor and John Horgan, "The Psychological and Behavioural Bases of Islamic Fundamentalism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 13(4) (2001), p. 37.
26. Al Qaeda, *Declaration of Jihad against the Country's Tyrants*, p. 76.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Aside from the use of intelligence by the Prophet and other significant religious figures, intelligence also occupies a prominent position in the historical conduct of Muslims within the secular sphere. Intelligence was used extensively by successive caliphs shortly after the rise of the Arabs in the sixth century and subsequent emergence of Islam. For centuries, it played a critical role in the affairs of state and the defense of Islam from a range of enemies, including the Byzantines and the Crusaders. During this period, vast spy networks were established by successive caliphs to monitor internal threats. Extensive communication routes permitted the rapid dissemination of intelligence from all corners of the Arab Muslim empire. In a treatise on the art of government, an eleventh-century government official employed in the services of a Turkish (Seljuk) sultan stressed the necessity for an intelligence service in the following terms:

It is indispensable for a sovereign to obtain information on his subjects and his soldiers, on all which happens near him or in distant regions, and to know about everything which is occurring, be it of small or great importance. If he does not do so, this will prove a disgrace, a proof of his negligence and neglect of justice. . . . Therefore, the appointment of a master of state posts is absolutely necessary. During the age of paganism and during the reign of Islam, the sovereigns used to obtain from this functionary the most recent information. . . . Officers who were well informed about all that was happening . . . were posted everywhere. (Cited in Francis Dvornik, *Origins of Intelligence Services* [New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1974], p. 224)

29. Al Qaeda, *Declaration of Jihad against the Country's Tyrants*, p. 76.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
31. The Encyclopedia of the Afghan Jihad, pp. 1–16.
32. Abu M'uadh Al-Makki, "The Islamic Verdict on Spies and Those Who Perform Espionage Against the Muslims," available at <http://www.ci-ce-ct.com/main.asp> (accessed 31 October 2003).

33. Bakri Muhammad, "Being Part of the Intelligence is a Sin and a Crime," available at <http://www.ci-ce-ct.com/main.asp>, 6 June 2001 (accessed 31 October 2003).

34. Al Qaeda, *Declaration of Jihad against the Country's Tyrants*, p. 80.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 79–80.

36. Abdulaziz Al-Moqrin (1973–2004) was a former Al Qaeda leader in Saudi Arabia, where it is believed he was responsible for the kidnapping and beheading of American engineer, Paul Johnson. Al-Moqrin was killed in a shootout with Saudi security forces in June 2004.

37. Al-Moqrin, "The Group or Crew of Execution," *Al-Battar Training Camp*, no. 8, 14 April 2004.

38. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Osama bin Laden et al*, 21 February 2001, p. 1146.

39. Al-Moqrin, "The Group or Crew of Execution."

40. *Ibid.*

41. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Mokhtar Haouari. Southern District of New York*, 3 July 2001, p. 568.

42. Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War, Inc. Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), p. 112.

43. Similar intelligence phases have also been identified by Al-Adl. In chronological order, these phases of an "intelligence operation" are (1) identifying the target; (2) assessing the preliminary situation; (3) research and analysis; (4) evaluating the final situation. Sayf Al-Adl, "Concealment," *Al-Battar Training Camp*, no. 11, 1 June 2004.

44. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Osama bin Laden et al*, 27 February 2001, p. 1532.

45. The receipt of intelligence from sympathizers capable of identifying targets is apparent in the operations of other Islamist groups, including those involving assassinations or kidnappings. This was apparent with the abduction of U.S. citizen Paul Marshall Johnson in Iraq in 2004. An article that subsequently appeared in the Al Qaeda journal *Sawt al-Jihad* confirmed that local *mujahidin* received, "... accurate information on the presence of an American who could be a good target for a kidnapping operation." Abdulaziz Al-Moqrin, "The Story of the American POW: Apache Engineer Paul Marshall: "From POW to Being Killed," *Sawt al-Jihad*, no. 19, 19 June 2004. The article goes on to observe that the local *mujahidin* then undertook the next phase of the operation, which entailed "confirmation and follow-up." Consistent with Al Qaeda methods, it is also interesting to note that video reconnaissance was performed on Johnson in the lead-up to his abduction. These images captured Johnson walking to and entering his vehicle, and also noted his route and destination. These images were viewed by the author at available at <http://www.homelandsecurityus.com>.

46. A transcript of Jack Thomas's description of his experiences can be found in Sally Neighbour, "The Transcript: What Thomas told Four Corners," *The Australian*, available at <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,20199530-601,00.html>, 21 August 2006 (accessed 29 November 2006).

47. Stephen Moynihan, "Jihad Jack to Face Trial over al-Qaeda," *The Age*, available at <http://www.theage.com.au/news/War-on-Terror/Jihad-Jack-to-face-trial-over-al-Qaeda/2005/04/01/1112302237924.html>, 2 April 2005 (accessed 14 May 2005).

48. Cited in Alan Cullison, "Inside al-Qaeda's Hard Drive," *The Atlantic Monthly* (September 2004), p. 68.

49. Jack Roche, interview with author, 26 August 2005.

50. This receives additional support from the testimony of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed before his Guantanamo Bay Tribunal hearing in March 2007. It is evident from this testimony that Khalid had organized surveillance on many potential targets throughout the world, only a few of which appear to have been selected for actual attack. Khalid explained that he organized surveillance on targets that included the Panama Canal, several former U.S. presidents, including Jimmy Carter, suspension bridges in New York, Heathrow Airport, Big Ben, night clubs frequented by U.S. and British nationals in Thailand, the New York Stock Exchange, U.S. embassies in Indonesia, Australia, and Japan,

Israeli embassies in India, Azerbaijan, the Philippines, and Australia, and U.S. targets in South Korea. *Combatant Status Review Tribunal for Khalid Sheikh Muhammad conducted on 10 March 2007 at U.S. Naval Base Guantanamo Bay, Cuba*, available at [http://www.defenselink.mil/news/transcript\\_ISN10024.pdf](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/transcript_ISN10024.pdf) (accessed 26 March 2007).

51. "Al-Qa'idah Suspect Denies Targeting French Cultural Centre in Sanaa," *Yemen Observer*, 29 March 2005.

52. Yoni Figchel, "Treason and Espionage in the Name of Jihad," *The Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, available at <http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articledet.cfm?articleid=463>, 2 March 2003 (accessed 12 November 2003).

53. N. A. N. Al-Bahri, "Interview with Osama Bin Laden's Former Bodyguard," *The Middle East Media Research Institute*. Special Dispatch Series No. 767, available at <http://www.memri.org/bin/opener/cgi?Page=archives&ID=SP76704>, 20 August 2004 (accessed 11 January 2005).

54. Ali Mohammed (1952–) is a former Egyptian military intelligence officer who held senior positions within Al Qaeda, including that of trainer, intelligence officer, and bin Laden bodyguard. See also Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.*, pp. 127–133 for a detailed discussion on Mohammed.

55. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Ali Mohamed*. *Southern District of New York*, 20 Oct. 2000, p. 27.

56. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Osama bin Laden et al*, 21 February 2001, pp. 1197–1198.

57. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Ali Mohamed* (see also *ibid.*), p. 28.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 27; 9/11 Commission Report. Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), p. 68.

59. It is the case that Al Qaeda members also draw on sources other than intelligence to satisfy their need for confidence and certainty. Their strong religious convictions serve as a potent source of inspiration and confidence. The sincere and powerful belief that they are performing God's work, even being guided by the hand of God, is known to instill in the Islamic militant a strong sense of self-assurance. The co-ordinator of the 9/11 attacks, Ramzi Binalshibh, in commenting on a message sent by Mohammad Atta, said, "[t]he message also included reassurances that everything was going according to plan and that there were good signs and encouraging ideas—meaning visions and dreams of the brothers which filled them with confidence." Cited in Fouda and Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror*, p. 139.

60. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Mokhtar Haouari*, pp. 572–573. The importance of environmental familiarity in determining the attractiveness of a target was also revealed in the 2006 Canadian terror plot to attack high profile targets in that country. One plan to attack the Houses of Parliament in Ottawa and behead Prime Minister Stephen Harper was reportedly abandoned because none of the plotters was familiar with Ottawa. "The Plot Against Canada," *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, 12 July 2006.

61. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Osama bin Laden et al*, p. 1146.

62. Sayf Al-Adl, "Writing Intelligence Reports," *Al-Battar Training Camp*, no. 22, 22 November 2004.

63. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Osama bin Laden et al*, p. 1144.

64. Glasser, "A Terrorist's Guide to Infiltrate West."

65. Al-Moqrin, "Secret Work Group."

66. Indian-born Dhiren Barot (1971–), also known as Issa al-Hindi and Issa al-Britani, has been described by the head of the London Metropolitan Police's Anti-Terrorist Branch as a "very important figure" within Al Qaeda. "Muslim convert who plotted terror," *BBC News*, available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/6121084.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6121084.stm), 7 November 2006 (accessed 17 November 2006). Moving to the United Kingdom with his parents at the age of two, Barot, several years after converting to Islam, traveled to Pakistan in 1995, taking part in military action against Indian forces in Kashmir. Barot even wrote of his experiences, releasing a book entitled, *The Army of Madinah in Kashmir* (Birmingham: Maktabah Al Ansaar, 1999), under the name Esa Al-Hindi. From the late 1990s, he

formed a strong association with Al Qaeda. At this time, for instance, he was dispatched by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed to Malaysia to meet with Hambali, from whom he was to learn about the *jihad* in Southeast Asia. In early 2001, he was also sent to the United States by bin Laden, where he was to conduct surveillance on Jewish and economic targets in New York. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 150; Michael Isikoff and Mark Hosenball, "Bin Laden's Mystery Man," *Newsweek*, available at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5738292/site/newsweek/>, 20 August 2004 (accessed 30 November 2004). Barot was arrested in the United Kingdom in August 2004 and charged with planning attacks there, including, it was alleged, one involving the use of a radioactive "dirty bomb." He was sentenced to life imprisonment in November 2006.

67. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Dhiren Barot, Nadeem Tarmohammad and Qaisar Shaffi (Criminal Indictment)*, Southern District Court of New York, 2005. The intelligence activities of Barot and his associates may provide further evidence of Al Qaeda's structured approach to the collection and development of intelligence. According to the U.S. indictment of Barot, he traveled to the United States on at least two occasions. His first trip, lasting three months in late 2000, saw him travel to New York and Washington, DC. He returned again in March 2001, where he remained for almost one month. Although speculative, it is feasible that the first trip served to identify potential targets, and the second to assess the feasibility of an attack through detailed intelligence collection after consulting either directly or indirectly with the Al Qaeda leadership. Indeed, it is known that during his second trip, he undertook extensive video surveillance, including that of the New York World Trade Center. David Stringer, "Man to Be Sentenced in British Bomb Plot," *Washington Post*, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/06/AR2006110600168.html>, 6 November 2006 (accessed 7 November 2006).

68. "Al Qaeda Planning Attack Against U.S. Financial Institutions," *CBS Evening News with John Roberts* (Transcript), 1 August 2004.

69. Dan Eggen, "Indictment Cites Plans to Target Financial Hubs," *Washington Post*, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A46550-2005Apr12.html>, 13 April 2005 (accessed 18 April 2005).

70. The intelligence activities of Barot and his associates are important for another reason. They reveal something of the role of intelligence in maintaining Al Qaeda's operational capability and flexibility by providing a list of potential targets from which the leadership can draw when the need arises. At the time of Barot's intelligence activities in the United States, the preparations for the 9/11 attack were well underway. Indeed, it is likely that Barot was engaged in intelligence collection in New York at the same time the "musclemen" for the 9/11 operation were entering the United States. As the precursor to action, Barot's surveillance work gave the Al Qaeda leadership the option to mount an attack in the event of the failure of the 9/11 operation (it is significant to note that Barot conducted intelligence work in New York and Washington, DC) or to launch another strike on the United States some time in the future. The options provided by Barot's intelligence activities were important enough for bin Laden to accept the operational risk of having Al Qaeda members operating in areas that would soon become the scenes of the organization's most ambitious and successful attacks.

71. Stringer, "Man to Be Sentenced in British Bomb Plot."

72. Adam Zagorin, "Al-Qaeda in America: The Terror Plot," *Time* 164(7), 16 August 2004, p. 32.

73. "Manhunt for Heathrow Terror Suspects," *Daily Mail*, available at [http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in\\_article\\_id=313047&in\\_page\\_id=1770](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in_article_id=313047&in_page_id=1770), 6 August 2004 (accessed 10 October 2005).

74. Zagorin, "Al-Qaeda in America," p. 32.

75. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Iyman Faris (Statement of Facts)*, Eastern District of Virginia (Alexandria Division), June 2003, pp. 3–4. Ayman al-Zawahiri also recounts an incident in the early 1980s in which plans to bomb the U.S. embassy in Pakistan were abandoned after, "intensive and detailed surveillance [revealed] that the bombing . . . was beyond our capability." Al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, Part Two.

76. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 245. Of course, not all targets need to be identified through on the ground surveillance. Targets may also be identified through open source documents on places like the Internet. In early 2002, a report from the U.S. Government Accounting Office was found on an Al Qaeda computer in Afghanistan. This report detailed shortcomings in security in and around Washington, DC, describing how undercover agents easily penetrated security at two airports and 19 Federal buildings including CIA headquarters and the Pentagon. Eric Lichtblau, "Terrorists Noted Flaws In Security, Report Says," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 February 2002. The discovery of this report in the possession of Al Qaeda suggests that the organization collected and stored intelligence from a wide range of sources and could draw on this information to identify new targets when the time was right.

77. Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer, "FFI explains al-Qaida document," *Forsvarets forskningsinstitutt*, available at <http://www.mil.no/felles/ffi/start/article.jhtml?articleID=71589>, 19 March 2004 (accessed 15 February 2005).

78. Cited in Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer, "Jihadi Strategic Studies: The Alleged Al Qaida Policy Study Preceding the Madrid Bombings," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27(5) (2004), p. 360. One observer subsequently reported that this document, "...suggested that a new intelligence was at work, a rationality not seen in *Al Qaeda* documents before." Lawrence Wright, "The Terror Web. A Reporter at Large," *The New Yorker*, available at [http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/040802fa\\_fact](http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/040802fa_fact), 2 August 2004 (accessed 15 November 2004).

79. In describing the knowledge required to attain empathy, a commentator observed that one, "...must know the target's political and cultural history, including its religion and its traditions. And they must know the weaknesses and strengths of the people, and their leaders in particular—their values, inhibitions, expectations, frustrations, fears, anxieties, habit patterns, perceptions." In Ralph K. White, "Empathy as an Intelligence Tool," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 1(1) (1986), p. 58. Al Qaeda's assessment of those countries most vulnerable to attack in, *Jihadi Iraq, Hopes and Dangers*, revealed a level of understanding of similar sophistication and complexity.

80. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Mokhtar Haouari*, p. 551.

81. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 245; John Miller, Michael Stone, and Chris Mitchell, *The Cell: Inside the 9/11 Plot, and Why the FBI and CIA Failed to Stop it* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2002), pp. 295–296; Joel Mowbray, "How They Did It: An 'Evil One' Confesses, and Boasts," *National Review* 54(24) (2002), p. 37.

82. Anonymous U.S. intelligence officer, personal communication, 17 September 2002.

83. The question of who was responsible for the Khobar Towers attack remains contentious. Although some believe it to be the sole responsibility of Saudi Hizballah (Daniel Benjamin and Steve Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror* [New York: Random House, 2003], pp. 224–225; Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda. The True Story of Radical Islam* [New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004], p. 155), there is evidence to indicate Al Qaeda involvement in the attack. "Sept. 11 Plotters Initially Planned Broader Attacks," *Wall Street Journal*, 17 June 2004; *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 60; George J. Tenet, "Unclassified Version of Director of Central Intelligence George J. Tenet's Testimony before the Joint Inquiry into Terrorist Attacks Against the United States," available at [http://www.cia.gov/cia/public\\_affairs/speeches/2002/dci\\_testimony\\_06182002.html](http://www.cia.gov/cia/public_affairs/speeches/2002/dci_testimony_06182002.html), 18 June 2002 (accessed 17 February 2005).

84. U.S. House National Security Committee, "The Khobar Towers Bombing Incident. Staff Report," 14 August 1996, p. 6.

85. At this time, the Khobar Towers housed a multinational force responsible for enforcing the "no-fly" zone in southern Iraq. This multinational force consisted of French and U.S. personnel. The compound also housed Saudi military and civilian personnel. Reconnaissance, and possibly other intelligence collection methods, would have been necessary to identify the location of U.S. personnel.

86. On 1 August, reconnaissance was conducted by Harun Fazil, one of the leaders of Al Qaeda's Kenya cell. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Haroun Fazil. Southern District Court of New York*. Sealed Complaint, 28 August 1998, p. 2. On 4 August, reconnaissance

was also conducted by Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah (aka Ali Saleh). Saleh is believed to have been the “mastermind” of both the Nairobi and Dar es Salaam attacks. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Osama bin Laden et al*, 8 March 2001, p. 2089.

87. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Osama bin Laden et al*, p. 2089.
88. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 157.
89. Jack Roche, interview with author, 25 and 26 August 2005.
90. Al Qaeda, *Declaration of Jihad against the Country's Tyrants*, p. 73.
91. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 245.
92. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Mokhtar Haouari*, pp. 573–574.
93. Al-Moqrin, “The Group or Crew of Execution.”
94. Sam Knight, “July 7 Bombers Rehearsed Suicide Attacks,” *Times* (London), available at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,22989-1788862,00.html>, 20 September 2005 (accessed 21 September 2005).
95. David Stout and Mark Mazzetti, “Dry Run was Planned in Bomb Plot, Officials Say,” *The New York Times*, 10 August 2006.
96. Al Qaeda, *Declaration of Jihad against the Country's Tyrants*, p. 73.
97. The author has inspected an Al Qaeda document found in Afghanistan in which a simple formula was used to calculate the conditions the operative was most likely to encounter during the execution of the operation. Expressed as  $a + b \div 2 = c$ , it was used to calculate the number of security personnel likely to be encountered on the day of the operation (“c”) based on the number of personnel observed during the initial intelligence run (“a”) and the number observed during the final reconnaissance mission (“b”) divided by 2.
98. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Osama bin Laden et al*, 1 May 2001, pp. 5228–5229; *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 69.
99. Fawwaz bin Muhammad Al-Nashami, “Commander of the Khobar Terrorist Squad Tells the Story of the Operation,” *The Middle East Media Research Institute*, Special Dispatch Series No.731, available at <http://www.memri.org/bin/opener.cgi?Page=archives&ID=SP73104>, 15 June 2004 (accessed 11 January 2005).
100. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Osama bin Laden et al*, pp. 1190–1197. Also present for this visit, and basing themselves out of this apartment, was an intelligence cell consisting of Ali Mohammed (Mohammed Amriki), Anas al-Liby, and Hamza al-Liby, all of whom had been conducting extensive surveillance in Nairobi at the time. *Ibid.*, pp. 1188–1193.
101. *9/11 Commission Report*, p. 157.
102. Burke, *Al-Qaeda*, p. 13.
103. *The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism*, Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs, Republic of Singapore, 7 January 2003, pp. 28–29. The Al Qaeda leadership’s reliance on intelligence conducted by other groups to assess the merits in providing logistical support has been apparent in other instances too. A plot devised by a group operating in Jordan in the late 1990s to attack four targets in that country received Al Qaeda approval and support after casing reports on the targets were sent by the plotters to Abu Zubaydah. *9/11 Commission Report*, pp. 174–175.
104. Cullison, “Inside al-Qaeda’s Hard Drive,” p. 56.
105. Burke, *Al-Qaeda*, pp. 198–212.
106. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Mokhtar Haouari*, p. 606.
107. Brian Ross, “Preparing for Terror? 1997 Al Qaeda Tape Shows World Trade Center and Other Landmarks,” *ABC News*, available at [http://abcnews.go.com/sections/wnt/US/alqaeda.tape.030303\\_preview.html](http://abcnews.go.com/sections/wnt/US/alqaeda.tape.030303_preview.html), 3 March 2004 (accessed 10 March 2004).
108. Jack Roche, interview with author, 26 August 2005.
109. *Ibid.*
110. K. Johnson and J. Diamond, “Huge Net Cast in Terrorist Search,” *USA Today*, available at <http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2004-08-03-terror-search.x.htm>, 3 August 2004 (accessed 3 November 2004).
111. See, for example, Maxwell Taylor and Ethel Quayle, *Terrorist Lives* (London: Brassey’s, 1994), p. 12; Martha Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” *Comparative Politics* 13(1) (1981), p.

385; Andrew Silke, "Beyond Horror: Terrorist Atrocity and the Search for Understanding—The Case of the Shankill Bombing," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26(1) (2003); Robert A. Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *American Political Science Review* 97(3) (2003).

112. United States District Court, *United States of America v. Mokhtar Haouari*, pp. 572–573.

113. David Stringer, "Man to Be Sentenced in British Bomb Plot," *Washington Post*, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/06/AR2006110600168.html>, 6 November 2006 (accessed 7 November 2006). Also revealing the use of basic counterintelligence tradecraft, this surveillance footage was spliced into a videotape copy of a movie, appropriately titled, "Die Hard With a Vengeance."

114. This observation receives some support from research into the relationship between information and decision making. These studies have examined the subjective value of information and its capacity to influence confidence levels during decision making. Some of these have shown that although the value of additional information (often measured in the form of increased accuracy or in terms of its instrumental value) is limited, confidence levels may increase dramatically through its ability to reduce perceptions of uncertainty. A. Tversky and E. Shafir, "The Disjunction Effect in Choice Under Uncertainty," *Psychological Science* 3(5) (1992), p. 309. Indeed, the correlation between information, uncertainty, and confidence is well documented across a number of fields, including the economic, psychological, and medical. C. Heath and A. Tversky, "Preference and Belief: Ambiguity and Competence in Choice under Uncertainty," *Journal of Risk and Uncertainty* 4 (1991); X. Freixas and R. E. Kihlstrom, "Risk Aversion and Information Demand," in M. Boyer and R. E. Kihlstrom (eds.), *Bayesian Models in Economic Theory* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science Publishers, 1984). Earlier studies have also shown how subjects tended to become overconfident as the amount of information made available to them increased. S. Oskamp, "Overconfidence in Case-Study Judgments," *Journal of Consulting Psychology* 29 (1965).

115. It is possible to argue that the collection of intelligence under these circumstances is indicative of irrational behavior. Exposing oneself to the risks involved in the collection of intelligence that ultimately will not affect the outcome of an operation is inconsistent with behavior meant to align means with desired ends. If, however, such activity can elevate confidence levels, and thereby increase the likelihood of an attack actually occurring, then the collection of intelligence with limited or no operational utility can still be said to have a practical, even instrumental utility.

116. Sayf Al-Adl, "The Principles of Security," *Al-Battar Training Camp*, no. 3, 2 February 2004.

117. Al Qaeda, *Declaration of Jihad against the Country's Tyrants*, p. 80.

118. Sayf Al-Adl, "The Principles of Security," *Al-Battar Training Camp*, no. 2, 15 January 2004.

119. Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, p. 125.

120. This notion of intelligence as an instrument of war receives support through the view that within the Islamic caliphate intelligence would perform a very narrow function. *The Encyclopedia of the Afghan Jihad*, p. 6. It is in the realm of war (*dar-al-Harb*), as distinct from the land of Islam (*dar-al-Islam*), that intelligence can be used without restriction.

121. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

122. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

123. Burke, *Al-Qaeda*, p. 26.

124. The importance in engaging in carefully crafted operations based on sound military principles, rather than reckless or random acts of violence, was revealed by Al Qaeda ideologue, Abu Bakr Naji. According to Naji, some *jihadi* groups have failed to adopt what he refers to as the "time-tested principles of military conduct," for reasons that include,

...random behavior and rigidity, along with the desire of the praiseworthy youths to attain unto the station of martyrdom as soon as possible. And that which orients those groups towards the benefit of acting in accordance with intellectual principles will make, through any military action great or small, a major step toward achieving the goals. Following the time-tested principles of military combat will shorten for us the long

years in which we might suffer the corrupting influences of rigidity and random behavior. Truly, abandoning random behavior and adopting intellectual, academic methods and experimental military principles and actually implementing them and applying military science will facilitate our achievement of the goals without complication and enable us to develop and improve the execution of our plans. . . (Naji, *The Management of Savagery*, p. 28)

125. Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, p. 126.

126. In a statement released in May 2005, which addressed Al Qaeda's main objectives in conducting the 9/11 attacks, Sayf Al-Adl explained that it was intended as an act of retaliation against the United States for its aggression against the Islamic world. In likely reference to Flight 93, however, Al-Adl also observed that it was the opinion of the Al Qaeda leadership that while the operation's overall objective was "partially achieved," "other strikes" would have had a greater impact had they been successful (cited in Christopher M. Blanchard, *Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology*, Congressional Research Service, available at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/RL32759.pdf>, 26 January 2006) (accessed 19 January 2007).