

Crushed in the Shadows: Why Al Qaeda Will Lose the War of Ideas

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As a network of affiliate groups, Al Qaeda's more diffuse structure, since the end of 2001, is described as one of its greatest strengths. Certainly, after losing its territorial base in Afghanistan, Al Qaeda as "network" has gained in tactical agility and global reach. This article argues, however, that Osama bin Laden's ceding of command-and-control to autonomous Al Qaeda "franchises" represents an important source of weakness in the battle for hearts and minds in the Muslim world. As Al Qaeda's global jihad is increasingly imported by its affiliates into local and sectarian conflicts, the death toll is largely Muslim and civilian. The targeting of Muslim civilians is exceptionally difficult to justify, morally, theologically, and by bin Laden's own standards of legitimate jihad. This article will show how the killing of Muslim civilians undermines the crucial lynchpins of bin Laden's ideology and alienates the popular support that "Al Qaeda central" see as indispensable to Al Qaeda's success.

In the absence of popular support, the Islamic *mujahid* movement would be crushed in the shadows.

—Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Letter to Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi*

The resistance has to be popular, meaning a complete participation of all sects of the population, inclusive of all its multiple diverse groups.

—Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*

Introduction

There is reason to believe that Osama bin Laden has been disturbed by the large-scale slaughter of Muslims committed in Al Qaeda's name. The indiscriminate killing of civilians alienates the Muslim masses and systematically undermines Al Qaeda's broad strategic objective of winning the war of ideas. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of Al Qaeda

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in Iraq, was told, before his death in 2006, to desist from his campaign of savagery in the country. In addition to beheading foreign workers and executing his rivals, al-Zawahiri denounced the Kurds as accomplices to the United States and labelled the Shi'a "the greatest demon of humanity."¹ Ayman al-Zawahiri wrote to him in 2005, recommending that he stop his attacks on the Shi'a and reminding him that scenes of slaughter do not help Al Qaeda's cause. "In the absence of popular support," al-Zawahiri cautioned the zealous Jordanian, "the Islamic *mujahid* movement would be crushed in the shadows."²

After largely ignoring al-Zawahiri's advice and continuing to foment chaos in Iraq, Al Qaeda's senior leadership sent a second letter ordering al-Zarqawi to remedy the deficiency in his approach. The premise of the letter is that "true conquest is the conquest of the hearts of the people," who are "the waters that our fish inhabits." Over and over again, al-Zarqawi is warned "against all acts that alienate," he is urged to "co-opt people and capture their hearts," and told "to keep your reputation and that of the *mujahidin* pure." The letter criticizes al-Zarqawi's irreverence toward religious scholars, in Iraq and throughout the region, and advises him that "the long and short of the matter is that the Islamic theologians are the keys to the Muslim community . . . this is the way it is, whether you like it or not." He is told, once more, that the *mujahidin* "have no alternative but to not squander any element of the foundations of strength, or any helper or supporter."

The author of the letter is Atiyeh Abd al-Rahman, a Libyan who fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s and then became a senior aide to bin Laden. Atiyeh commends al-Zarqawi for leading successful operations against coalition troops in Iraq. However, he underlines that such operations are only considered successful, in the long run, if they do not contradict Al Qaeda's larger strategic goals. Making this point, Atiyeh employs a Clausewitzian rationale:

Policy must be dominant over militarism. This is one of the pillars of war that is agreed upon by all nations, whether they are Muslims or unbelievers. That is to say, that military action is a servant to policy. We as people of Islam are people of policy, wisdom, reason Therefore, unless our military actions are servant to our judicious *sharia* policy, and unless our short-term goals and successes are servant to our ultimate goal and highest aims, then they will be akin to exhaustion, strain, and illusion. It will be a bit like the happiness of children over something at the beginning of the day, which wears out by the end of the day and its evening!

Alienating the people, Atiyeh concludes, goes against all of the fundamentals of politics and leadership.³

In parallel, then, to the Bush administration's recognition that, in its "War on Terror," "the larger war we face is a war of ideas,"⁴ Al Qaeda's leadership regards the battle for "hearts and minds"⁵ as crucial to the organization's success. In articulating Al Qaeda's combat doctrine, one bin Laden aide observed that "the *mujahidin* proved their superiority in fourth-generation warfare using only light weaponry. They are part of the people, and hide amongst the multitudes."⁶ Thumbing his nose at the Bush administration for failing to kill him with an air strike in 2006, Ayman al-Zawahiri declared: "do you want to know where I am? I am among the Muslim masses."⁷ Zawahiri's remark reflects the fact that the support of the Muslim masses is not only operationally important to Al Qaeda in terms of supply, intelligence, and safe passage, but that the *umma*, the global community of Muslims, is of symbolic importance to Al Qaeda's case for war. We shall see that Al Qaeda's leadership purports to defend and represent the *umma*. However, as Muslims have

increasingly become the targets of Al Qaeda–related violence, Al Qaeda’s moral case for war becomes problematic, and many of its key ideological assertions are considerably weakened.

In calling for nuance in Marc Sageman’s theory of the “leaderless *jihad*”—which suggests that the terrorist threat issues mainly from a new wave of home-grown, self-trained and self-radicalized terrorist wannabes⁸—Bruce Hoffman has rightly underscored the importance of “al-Qaeda central’s top-down direction” of operations such as the 7 July 2005 suicide bombings in London and the (foiled) plot to explode airplanes over the Atlantic in 2006.⁹ Lashkar-e-Taiba’s assaults, last November, on Mumbai were additionally invoked by Hoffman as evidence of professionally trained terrorist teams “functioning under a command and control apparatus that orchestrated their deployment and coordinated their assaults.”¹⁰ Hoffman’s abiding argument is that “the group’s capacity to survive is . . . a direct reflection of both its resilience and the continued resonance of its ideology.”¹¹ However, the picture looks arguably different when attacks against non-Western targets are factored in (i.e., the majority of “Al Qaeda” activity). Such operations call into question the extent of Al Qaeda central’s operational reach, just as they work to impede the resonance of its ideology in the larger Muslim world.

Indeed, the aim here is to suggest that, by instigating situations of mass Muslim casualties and civil strife, Al Qaeda’s affiliates cause revulsion among its public constituency and render the movement increasingly vulnerable in the war of ideas. This article will explore the ways in which bin Laden legitimizes his *jihad* with reference to mainstream values such as freedom and security and it will examine the problems, for his ideological framework, presented by the killing of Muslim civilians.

A Moral Project

After the 11 September attacks, some important analyses of Al Qaeda appeared notably incomplete. It was often suggested that bin Laden’s organization had embarked on an offensive war against “freedom,” with the objective of converting “infidels” to Islam, resurrecting the caliphate, and imposing a strict interpretation of the *Sharia*. Members of the Bush administration explained to the American people that Al Qaeda was “engaged in a war on freedom and they will target all people living in freedom” (Rice),¹² and that “they want to impose their way of life on the rest of us, and in pursuit of this goal, they are prepared to slaughter anyone who stands in their way” (Cheney).¹³ In publishing its complete account of the circumstances surrounding the 11 September attacks, the 9/11 Commission stated that Al Qaeda’s purpose is “to rid the world of religious and political pluralism, the plebiscite, and equal rights for women.”¹⁴ The president’s own diagnosis to the Congress in the immediate aftermath of the attacks was that Al Qaeda “hate our freedoms”¹⁵ and, later, that their “only goal is death.”¹⁶

In academic fora, a series of eloquent commentaries focused on the non-rational and apolitical nature of the hijackers’ sacrifice. In a powerful, but arguably flawed exposition, Navid Kermani, for example, moved beyond religious-fundamentalist explanations for 9/11 by invoking Nietzsche’s “will to nothingness” thesis. Writing six months after the attacks, he compared Al Qaeda to the Una-bomber, the Aum sect, and Timothy McVeigh, and concluded that

All these acts of terror bear witness to a generalised, pathological hatred which—unlike the hatred fuelling the attacks of the Red Army Faction, ETA or the Palestinian Hamas—is no longer accompanied by a concrete, identifiable

motive. Terror, the aims of which are undeclared, is directed against an enemy which has become an abstraction, against a superior power which could be termed metaphysical.¹⁷

This focus on “active nihilism,” however, itself abstracted away from the hijackers’ stated political aims and particular grievances with a specific enemy: the United States. President Bush, himself, adopted a refrain which similarly stripped the attackers of any political context, explaining to the Armed Forces that Al Qaeda had “no country, no ideology; they’re motivated by hate.”¹⁸

Although Bush was certainly correct to point out that Al Qaeda is a transnational terrorist network, his claims about its lack of ideology and its purely hateful intentionality were more open to question. Al Qaeda’s leaders may well be religious fanatics who believe in aggressive warfare against unbelief, but they had in fact elaborated an ideology, and they made their case for war using moderate and moralistic principles. Bin Laden, still, endeavors to maximize his appeal beyond the few thousand professional *jihadis* training in desert camps to the millions of moderate Muslims across the globe. To that end, he emphasizes that Al Qaeda has a consummately moral project of its own. He justifies Al Qaeda’s decision to resort to violence, the targeting of civilians and the widespread use of suicide bombings—yet, in the setting out of these moral standards, an important source of vulnerability is created.

Defensive Jihad

Bin Laden presents his *jihad* against the United States and its allies as entirely defensive. He is quite clear that “he who commences hostilities is the unjust one.”¹⁹ Bin Laden stresses, in his 1998 Declaration of Jihad, that the command to “kill the Americans and their allies—civilian and military” is “in accordance with the word of God Almighty: fight the idolaters at any time if they first fight you.”²⁰ In a letter addressed to the American public he states plainly that “as for the question why are we fighting and opposing you, the answer is very simple: because you attacked us and continue to attack us.”²¹ Ayman al-Zawahiri, too, gives a message to the American people in the run-up to the 2004 U.S. presidential elections: “Elect whoever you want, Bush, Kerry or Satan himself. We don’t care. We only care about purifying our country of the aggressors and resisting anyone who attacks us.”²²

In maintaining that Al Qaeda is merely responding to unprovoked aggression, bin Laden is not, then, attempting to revive the expansionary holy war of the classical era. Instead he appeals to the more modern and moderate tradition in Islam that limits justified warfare to resisting aggression. Moreover, bin Laden underlines that the right to self-defense is common to all cultures. Under pressure from an Al-Jazeera journalist, he wondered: “what is wrong with resisting those who attack you? All religious communities have such a principle, for example these Buddhists, both the North Koreans and the Vietnamese who fought America. This is a legal right . . . this is reassurance that we are fighting for the sake of God.”²³ Indeed, on another occasion he directly invokes the legitimacy of the Hitler case, exclaiming in an interview: “Did not the Europeans resist the German occupation in World War Two?”²⁴

However, given that America had not launched any invasion of bin Laden’s country before 11 September, be it Saudi Arabia, Sudan, or Afghanistan, the theory of bin Laden’s defensive war did not sit easily with the reality of the international situation. As a result, it

was incumbent on bin Laden to qualify “aggression” in two critical ways. First, he employed an expansive conception of the territorial entity that was being attacked (the entire Islamic *umma*). Second, he resorted to religious idioms when defining America’s aggressive actions (symbolic attacks on the sanctity of Islam and its holy sites). Prior to the war on Iraq in 2003, bin Laden had little to work with in suggesting that the United States had launched an unprovoked assault. By throwing together a host of international injustices framed in Islamic terms (ranging from the occupation of Palestine, to the sanctions regime against Iraq in the 1990s, to Western backing for tyrannical governments that harm Muslims), bin Laden avoided having to pin down any single act of aggression, and could instead claim that there was an overall offensive campaign against Islam: “Bush has declared in his own words ‘Crusade attack’. The odd thing about this is that he has taken the words right out of our mouth.”²⁵

Al-Qaeda’s moral project, then, is rooted in the ideal of freedom for the *umma*:

Free men do not underestimate the value of their security, despite Bush’s claim that we hate freedom. Perhaps he can tell us why we did not attack Sweden, for example. . . . We have been fighting you because we are free men who cannot acquiesce in injustice. We want to restore security to our *umma*.²⁶

Bin Laden lambastes “these arrogant people who think that freedom only has meaning for the white race”²⁷ and portrays President Bush as “the butcher of freedom in the world.”²⁸ Al Qaeda’s mission is described as “spreading the message of God, not killing people.”²⁹ Because Muslims are being murdered, Al Qaeda’s sword has been forced.

Former Vice President Dick Cheney often asserted that “the basic proposition for our adversaries . . . [is that] they want to re-create the old caliphate.”³⁰ However, although the caliphate and the implementation of the *Sharia* are presented as the means by which Muslims can secure their freedom, security, and human rights, the basic proposition of Al Qaeda’s senior leadership is, in fact, the defense of the *umma*. Al Qaeda’s public case for war against the west is consistently communicated with a narrative about attaining freedom from its meddling in the Islamic world (freedom from aggression as well as freedom from interference in domestic political affairs). There can be no doubt that bin Laden hopes to eventually “establish the righteous caliphate of our *umma*, which has been prophesied by our Prophet,”³¹ but the establishment of the caliphate is not his *casus belli*. As we have seen, his is “a defensive *jihād* to protect our land and people.”³²

Since 2004, however, Al Qaeda–linked groups have proliferated. Given that many of these affiliates possess local and/or sectarian objectives, the vast majority of their victims are Muslim civilians. As Al Qaeda attacks increasingly targeted Muslims, bin Laden’s self-appointed role as custodian of the *umma* becomes problematic.

In a severe way, his claim of self-defense is undermined. It is difficult to maintain that Al Qaeda is the vanguard group acting in defense of the entire *umma* when the victims of Al Qaeda bombings are the people who comprise the *umma*. The *umma* is an essential referent object in bin Laden’s case for war, as he maintains that the *umma* is the “self” that is under attack by a foreign enemy: “I write these lines to you at a time when every single inch of our *umma*’s body is being stabbed by a spear, struck by a sword, or pierced by an arrow.”³³ However, when Muslims are both killing and being killed, the identity of the aggressor and the victim, under bin Laden’s logic, are collapsed. In the end, the claim of self-defense rings hollow.

Targeting Civilians

In addition to conceptualizing Al Qaeda's resort to violence as "a defensive *jihad* against the American enemy,"³⁴ bin Laden tries to morally justify the deliberate targeting of American and Western civilians. Over the years, he has repeatedly boasted that civilians are not legitimate targets in Islam and that, unlike the Soviets and the Americans, "our religion forbids us from killing innocent people such as women and children."³⁵ Certainly, the Quran and Islamic law provide strict protections for civilians in war. However, given that Al Qaeda's suicide operations systematically target civilians, bin Laden must endeavor to overturn the immunity of the intended victims. Generally, he puts forward three types of argument.

The first argument seeks to deny the innocence of U.S. civilians based on the inclusiveness of the democratic political system. Because of taxation and popular participation and representation, American civilians are engaged in harming the *umma*. Throughout the 1990s he warned the people of the west that they should seek to elect governments that are truly representative of their interests. Bin Laden felt this argument was particularly vindicated by the 2004 U.S. presidential elections, because the American people could have ousted Bush but instead he was given a clear mandate "with your full knowledge and consent, to continue to murder our people in Iraq and Afghanistan."³⁶

The second argument invokes the principle of reciprocity. Because the United States is attacking Muslim civilians, Al Qaeda is permitted to attack U.S. civilians: "so we kill the kings of disbelief and the kings of the Crusaders, and the civilians among the disbelievers, in response to the amount of our sons they kill—this is correct in both religion and logic."³⁷ Bin Laden maintains that the United States has always targeted civilians in war, as exemplified by the use of the atomic bomb in World War II. And, in this day and age, Muslims from Palestine, to Iraq, to Afghanistan are the victims of indiscriminate U.S. attacks: "the oppression and intentional murder of innocent women and children is a deliberate American policy."³⁸ The reciprocity idea is applied straightforwardly, because "we treat others like they treat us. Those who kill our women and our innocent, we kill their women and innocent, until they stop doing so."³⁹

A third argument relies on a version of what is known in Western philosophy as the "doctrine of double effect." The doctrine upholds that it can be permissible to cause harm while intending to bring about a good end if that harm is not itself intended. While the harm is foreseen, it is not intended: only the good end is intended. This moral distinction—between intended outcomes, on the one hand, and foreseen but unintended outcomes, on the other—was applied to killing civilians in war as early as the seventh century, by Islamic jurists such as Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi and Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Shaybani. The distinction was invoked by bin Laden in justification for the large civilian death toll on 9/11. He argued that the "the targets of September 11 were not women and children. The main targets were the symbol of the United States: their economic and military power. Our Prophet Muhammad was against the killing of women and children."⁴⁰ A pamphlet attributed to bin Laden's deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, also appealed to this distinction, upholding that only the *intentional* killing of women and children is prohibited in Islam and, so, it can sometimes be permissible to bombard the enemy in areas where there is reason to believe that civilians are also present. Al-Zawahiri makes clear, however, that such a course of action is only allowable as a last resort, when no other means of attacking the enemy is available.⁴¹ Al Qaeda's claim of last resort is repeatedly made by pointing to the "massacres" against civilians committed all over the Islamic world, confronting Muslims with an existential crisis.

The weakness of his arguments notwithstanding, at no point, then, does bin Laden maintain that civilians are not ordinarily immune from being targeted in war. Instead, he puts forward three sorts of arguments that imply either that harm against U.S. civilians is not deliberately intended, or that U.S. civilians forfeited their right to immunity from attack by permitting their governments to massacre Muslims. In this way, bin Laden makes the safety of Americans contingent on the safety of Muslims, allowing him to emphasize Al Qaeda's role as guardian of the *umma*.

However, none of his arguments overturning the principle of civilian immunity retains its force when Muslims are the victims of Al Qaeda's attacks. First, the argument that democracy negates innocence does not apply, because the average Iraqi, Saudi, or Pakistani, for example, does not directly vote for and pay taxes to a government that commits massacres against the *umma*. In fact, many Muslims live under the sorts of regimes that bin Laden himself decries for being corrupt, unrepresentative, and illegitimate. Second, the argument about reciprocity—because the United States attacks Muslim civilians, Al Qaeda is permitted to attack U.S. civilians—is premised entirely on the actions of the United States and becomes meaningless when it is extended to cover Muslim-versus-Muslim violence (i.e., because the United States attacks Muslim civilians, Al Qaeda is permitted to attack Muslim civilians). As such, bin Laden's abiding notion of achieving a “balance of terror”⁴² between Muslims and non-Muslims is left empty.

The third argument, which states that the *mujahidin* do not directly intend to kill civilians with their attacks, is the one that Al Qaeda's leaders rely on most in justifying specifically Muslim casualties. Bin Laden has declared that:

We do not anathematize people in general, nor do we permit the shedding of Muslim blood. If some Muslims have been killed during the operations of the *mujahidin* then we pray to God to take mercy on them; this is a case of accidental manslaughter, and we beg God's forgiveness for it and we take responsibility for it.⁴³

Despite repeatedly planting bombs in crowded areas populated solely by Iraqi and Jordanian civilians (hotels, mosques, and marketplaces, for example), Abu Musab al-Zarqawi similarly “sw[ore] that they [Muslim civilians] were not the chosen targets.”⁴⁴ The Algerian leader of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Abdelmalek Droukdal, has also insisted that “we are not insane to target our Muslim brothers. . . . Mistakes may occur in the war but they are unintentional.”⁴⁵

This notion of “accidental manslaughter” is also elaborated, on other occasions, by declaring that Muslim civilians are being used by their occupiers as human shields. Bin Laden says his understanding of Islamic jurisprudence indicates that “if the enemy occupies an Islamic land and uses its people as human shields, a person has the right to attack the enemy.”⁴⁶ In 1998 he determined that the Americans had attacked the Islamic world and were using “the children of Osama bin Laden” as shields.⁴⁷ But, he continued, “if we abstain from firing on the Americans lest we should kill these Muslims (used by them as shields),”⁴⁸ it would be impossible to repel the invaders. Zawahiri quotes the thirteenth-century Maliki scholar Mohammad ibn Ahmad al-Qurtubi to the effect that “it is permissible to slay the human shield. . . . Allah willing, if the advantage gained is imperative, universal and certain.”⁴⁹

The claim that Muslims are only killed unintentionally in lawful operations conducted against the invader is difficult to defend, however, when bombs are planted in crowded areas populated solely by Muslim civilians (in an Iraqi marketplace, for example, or a Pakistani

mosque). In such cases, the necessary condition for the status of “shield” is absent: there is no invader positioned directly behind the Muslim. These operations, therefore, can not only kill Muslims “accidentally” or “unintentionally” as “collateral damage.” The Muslim appears to be the direct object of attack precisely because he is the *only* object of attack.

Suicide Bombing

Al Qaeda’s *modus operandi*, suicide bombing, must be justified on an additional level. The Islamic controversy over suicide bombing arises as much from the suicide of the bomber as from the fact that the targets are often civilian. Suicide is banned by the Quran and it is considered an egregious sin in Islamic culture and tradition. “Martyrdom,” by contrast, is a valiant Islamic aspiration. To justify suicide bombing, Al Qaeda seeks to re-cast the bomber’s seemingly suicidal action as martyrdom. This is done in two ways.

First, the intention of the martyr is emphasised as entirely distinct from the intention of the suicider. Whereas suicide is motivated by desperation and despair, martyrdom is driven by self-sacrifice for a higher cause. Yusuf al-Ayiri, an important and prolific Al Qaeda ideologist, underlines that suiciders kill themselves on account of a lack of faith—martyrs, by contrast, are inspired by the strength of their faith.⁵⁰ Moreover, the martyr does not, through his own actions, intend his own death: he intends to attack the enemy and to defend the community.

Second, there is said to be plenty of Islamic precedent for suicidal behavior in war. Hundreds of Islamic traditions dating back to the time of the Prophet glorify the Muslims for their death-defying spirit in battle. Warriors are revered for their bravery in plunging into the ranks of the enemy with a very high chance of dying. Many of these fighters were considered by the Prophet and the classical Islamic jurists to be “martyrs,” despite knowingly walking into their own deaths. By extension, the suicide bomber who commits to death before an operation is also a “martyr.” Ayiri, himself leader of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula until he was killed by Saudi security forces in 2003, reasoned that “plunging into the enemy ranks without hope of escape is the greatest means by which a *mujahid* contributes to his death, and contributing to one’s death is just like killing oneself.”⁵¹

Yet, intuitively, it seems problematic to maintain that the Muslim who dies indiscriminately killing Muslim women and children is in fact a “martyr” who gains certain entrance into heaven and whose heroism is to be celebrated on earth. More specifically, neither of the efforts to re-cast the bomber’s suicide as “martyrdom” seems to take hold when his victims are Muslim civilians. The argument about the martyr’s “Islamic” intentions comes apart when the targets are vast swathes of the Muslim innocents that he is supposed to be sacrificing his life to protect: “the one who contributes his life to the cause of Allah, Islam and Muslims, his doing is sacrificial; he gives his life away for Islam and Muslims, which is the highest sacrifice.”⁵² According to al-Zawahiri, “the deciding factor is the intention—is it service to Islam, martyrdom, or is out of depression and despair,”⁵³ but the proposition that Islam is served by the large-scale massacre of Muslims is open to doubt. Of course, Al Qaeda’s leaders would continue to uphold that, in the long-run, Islam will be greatly served by these suicide bombings, but this article will later show how Al Qaeda is criticized by other radicals precisely because they cannot see any long-term Islamic benefit from Al Qaeda’s actions.

The appeal to the classical Islamic precedent of the “fighting martyr” is similarly fraught. These martyrs tended to die in battle against non-Muslims, killing non-Muslims. In his treatise on martyrdom in Islam, David Cook points out that “quite a number of traditions detail the idea that when a Muslim kills another Muslim, both are said to be in

hell.”⁵⁴ An unresolved dilemma in Islam continues to exist regarding “sectarian martyrs,” as one group’s “martyrs” are frequently demonized or defamed by other groups. However, this debate often revolves around the question of whether the *victim* can be considered to be a martyr, and the assumption is that he is not considered to be a “real” Muslim by his killer. Yet many Al Qaeda–related suicide bombings target ordinary Muslims, including helpless women and children. The fourth Caliph Uthman was murdered by a band of aggrieved Muslims from Iraq and Egypt, who stabbed the eighty-year-old ruler nine times while he was reading the Quran. Although Uthman was not especially popular, Sunnis have deplored the manner of his murder, denounced his murderers, and compared his martyrdom to that of Jesus.⁵⁵ Muslims who indiscriminately slaughter the elderly, women, and children *en masse* would seem to invite the same, if not more, moral approbation. In sum, the fighting martyr is not an appropriate precedent because he did not die killing Muslims.

Takfir

In important ways, then, almost all of Al Qaeda’s arguments presuppose the existence of an invading “other.” Without this precondition, the key propositions unravel. There is, however, one means by which a Muslim can in fact target and kill another ostensible Muslim: he can declare that his target is not, in fact, a real Muslim but, as suggested earlier, an apostate. This practice, known as *takfir*, is a highly divisive issue in Islam. This is due to the inherent danger of shedding Muslim blood. Because of its sensitivity, the doctrine of *takfir* is held to be the sole prerogative of the religious establishment that has, for the most part, shielded away from using it. Ibn Taymiyyah famously pronounced the Mongols *kuffar*, arguing that it was permissible to fight them, despite the Tatar dynasty’s conversion to Islam, because they were not truly Muslim. *Takfir* was revived by Sayyid Qutb during Nasser’s crackdown on the Muslim Brothers in the 1950s, but until then it was seldom used in Islamic history and heresy trials were extremely rare. Qutb’s invocation of *takfir* marked a departure from the Muslim Brotherhood mainstream and it became a key issue in the formation of more fanatical movements during the course of the twentieth century, including the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, which was responsible for the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981, and the *Groupe Islamique Armé* (GIA) in Algeria.

In order to become apostate, a Muslim must commit an action that shows him to have knowingly abandoned Islam. For Ibn Taymiyyah, this was the Mongols’s refusal to strictly apply the *Sharia* (they favored Genghis Khan’s Yasa Code). For bin Laden, who draws on the doctrine of *takfir* in calling for the overthrow of the House of Saud, this is the regime’s refusal to strictly enforce the *Sharia* as well as its alliance with the United States. There is no sign, however, that bin Laden would presume to use the charge of *takfir* with reference to ordinary Muslims. Al Qaeda’s leadership was highly critical of the GIA’s massacring of the Algerian people in the 1990s—the group had declared the entire Algerian population was *kuffar*—and bin Laden supported the rise of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat against it (later re-named Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb).⁵⁶ Moreover, it has been shown that bin Laden actively courts the support and good favor of the Muslim population at large, seeking, as he does, to both defend and unite the *umma* against “the enemy aggressor.”⁵⁷

Indeed, the unity of the *umma* is integral to Al Qaeda’s moral project. Bin Laden celebrates “the unity of Islam, which neither recognises race nor colour, nor does it pay any heed to borders and walls”⁵⁸ and seeks to appeal across the sectarian divide. In the 2006 “summer war” between Israel and the Lebanese Hizballah, al-Zawahiri urged Sunnis to support the Shi’a group against Israel.⁵⁹ Further, as considered earlier, the anti-Shi’a violence spearheaded by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq was denounced firmly by the

central Al Qaeda leadership. Ayman al-Zawahiri made clear to al-Zarqawi that there was no love lost between him and “the rejectionist Shia sect,” but that killing “ordinary Shia [who] are forgiven because of their ignorance” will not be “acceptable to the Muslim populace, however much you have tried to explain it, and aversion to this will continue.” Ultimately, Al Qaeda’s strategists realize that “the Muslims masses—for many reasons, and this is not the place to discuss it—do not rally except against an outside occupying enemy, especially if that enemy is firstly Jewish and secondly American. . . . The sectarian factor is secondary in importance to outside aggression.”⁶⁰

Certainly, Al Qaeda’s leaders tend to adhere to a puritanical version of Sunnism that vilifies the Shi’a, and they intend to fight their doctrinal enemies sometime in the future. But while figures like Abu Yahya al-Libi do not disguise their vitriol (he denounces “the shrines and edifices of non-belief” and lampoons them for their “long centuries spent in waiting, wailing, hitting their faces and tearing their clothes”),⁶¹ leaders like bin Laden and al-Zawahiri realize that most Sunnis abhor sectarian violence and aim to stave off Sunni–Shi’a conflict. Dividing the *umma*, at this stage, would be a non-starter for Al Qaeda, which seeks to depict itself as the last bulwark between ordinary Muslims and the “neo-Crusader-Jewish campaign.”⁶²

Among its more extreme affiliate groups, however, shedding Shi’a blood is part and parcel of the pure *jihad*. In Iraq, the action that is said to have demonstrated the Shi’as’ *kufr* is their collaboration with the U.S.-led occupation. Hence, the declaration of *takfir* is directed at the Shi’a in Iraq as a collectivity. The Islamic legal committee of Al Qaeda in Iraq, headed by al-Zarqawi’s replacement, Abu Hamza al-Baghdadi,⁶³ issued a clarification of its objectives in 2005. The document, “Why Do We Fight, and With Whom Do We Fight?” insisted that the Iraqi Shi’a had provided the United States “with an easy path into the land [just as they] supported the Tatars against the Muslims, which was a direct cause of the Abbasid Caliphate’s overthrow.”⁶⁴ This reference to a seminal moment in the thirteenth century indicates that, alongside the charge of apostatic collusion with foreign oppressors, there are clear doctrinal and historical forces at work: indeed, it is believed that the Mongols were able to sack Baghdad with the help of the Abbasid caliph’s vizier, a Shi’a by the name of Ibn al-Alqami. Commonly derided as Sabians, hypocrites and *rafidis* (rejectors of the truth), the Shi’a are demonized, by some extremist Sunnis, as belonging to a heretical sect that is both doctrinally fallacious and politically dangerous to other (real) Muslims. Thus, one Saudi cleric described al-Zarqawi’s objective as attacking the “symbol and heresy of the sons of al-Alqami.”⁶⁵ In this way, the depiction of the Shi’a as aiding and abetting the occupation of Iraq both draws on and contributes to a reading of Islamic history that casts the Shi’a as a greater threat to “true Islam” than any outside enemy. Of course, the argument about helping foreign usurpers is not only applicable in a Shi’a context—indeed, Sunnis taking jobs linked to the (infidel) state apparatus or even participating in the (infidel) electoral process were similarly said to have forfeited the right to life.

Yet bin Laden and his closer cohorts recognize that scenes of carnage among Muslims damage Al Qaeda’s cause. The Amman hotel bombings, for example, which killed sixty civilians, caused uproar around the Muslim world and prompted thousands of Jordanians to take to the streets crying “Death to Zarqawi.” The mastermind’s family took out advertisements in newspapers declaring that “a Jordanian doesn’t stab himself with his own spear . . . we sever links with him until doomsday.”⁶⁶ Subsequently, al-Zarqawi was berated in Atiyeh’s epistle on behalf of “the brothers” (bin Laden et al.), for conducting the operation without consulting the leadership “who supercede you in knowledge, grace and experience.”⁶⁷

In fact, in a remarkably candid audiotape aired on Al-Jazeera in October 2007, bin Laden admitted that mistakes had been made in the Iraqi *jihad*. He advised “myself, Muslims in general and brothers in al-Qaeda everywhere” not to succumb to extremism, and he urged allegiance to the *umma* above that of tribe, party, and sect. The point of his message was to denounce sectarianism and to encourage a united front for—inevitably, we may argue—resistance against foreign occupation.⁶⁸

In his 1994 treatise, *The Failure of Political Islam*, Olivier Roy argued that:

Generally, the appearance of political Islamism often masks a recomposition of *Asabiyya*, solidarity groups, in a manner that is different from peasant tribalism. . . . Islamism has been unable to move beyond either nationalism or even ethnicity, and this inability has also been blamed on a Western plot. In Sudan . . . behind the politics of Islamization, an age-old hostility between Arabs and blacks is also resurfacing. In Algeria, the Arabization extolled by the FIS is to the detriment of the Kabyles. In Malaysia, Islamism is also the expression of ethnic tensions with the Chinese. In Afghanistan, the old oppositions between Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns is dominating politics.⁶⁹ . . . The myth of unity [in Islamism] prohibits thinking about conflict and differentiation, which thus resurfaces in often uncontrolled violence. . . .⁷⁰

Roy’s analysis seems transferable to the realities of the *radical* Islamist project. For it is no coincidence that, in his public acknowledgment of the “mistakes” in Iraq, bin Laden openly berated his followers for their *ta’assub*—a variant of *asabiyya*, a fanaticism that involves bigotry and extremism in allegiance to a parochial group. Thus, it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that the senior Al Qaeda leadership viewed al-Zarqawi’s *takfiri* line in Iraq as something of a strategic emergency. Certainly, the eventual revolt by Sunni tribes in Iraq and the expulsion of hundreds of militants, owed, ultimately, to a rejection of the type of *ta’assub* that translated into *takfir* and, in turn, mass murder.

Again, the Algerian experience, in this regard, is worth brief attention. The GIA’s declaration of *takfir* on all Algerians who had not joined its ranks is seen by Gilles Kepel as one of the two events that spelled the end of organized *jihad* in Algeria (the second being the truce declared by the *Armée Islamique du Salut*).⁷¹ It was for condemning the Algerian population in its entirety that the editors of the GIA’s supporting publication, *Nashrat Al-Ansar*, joined Egypt’s Gama’at Islamiyya in denouncing the GIA, printed a highly critical *fatwa* and then shut up shop in September 1997. The weekly bulletin had been penned and published in London, by none other than Abu Qatada al-Filastini, Abu Hamza al-Masri, and the prolific and hugely influential Al Qaeda strategist known as Abu Mus’ab al-Suri. Until the descent into massacre, al-Suri had staunchly supported the GIA, after having formed a close bond with its founder, Qari Said, in Peshawar during the Afghan war against the Soviets. A Syrian national who had settled in Spain, al-Suri lobbied tirelessly on the GIA’s behalf throughout the 1990s, making trips from Bosnia to the Sudan, and even planning to fight in the Algerian *jihad* himself.⁷² He boasted, too, of having drawn the renowned picture of the Eiffel tower exploding on the front of one *Al-Ansar* edition in 1994, at the time of the Air France Hijacking.⁷³

Yet it comes as little surprise that al-Suri eventually deplored the GIA’s brutal excesses and distanced himself from the group. Described by his biographer as “a dissident, a critic and an intellectual,”⁷⁴ al-Suri was, throughout his twenty-five-year tenure in the *jihad*, famously outspoken. Generally wary of Saudi fighters, whom he saw as adventure-seekers aiming to atone for having “spent time with a whore in Bangkok,” al-Suri also had numerous

fallings-out with bin Laden, reportedly describing him as “a Pharaoh.”⁷⁵ He was, moreover, a harsh critic of hard-line Salafism. He described the “Salafi trend” as a sect at war with “nearly every other revivalist school,” whose disputes over doctrine created “internal strife among Muslims and within the Resistance movement itself at a time when we are being invaded by the American and Zionist Mongols and their war machines.”⁷⁶ Just as extremist Salafis made impossible alliances with other Islamic militants, they were responsible for the spread of *takfiri* ideas at a time when, as indicated in the quotation at the start of this article, the resistance must be meaningfully popular. Al-Suri was captured in Quetta, Pakistan in November 2005. Given his opposition to the GIA’s barbarism, and his well-documented aversion to Salafi hard-liners, it is likely that al-Suri, and those Al Qaeda fighters of his more Marxist bent, would stand with bin Laden in condemning the recent killings of ordinary Muslims as both Islamically unlawful and strategically foolish.

In the end, the mass killing of Muslims strips bin Laden’s *jihad* ideology of its moral, theological, and political legitimacy. The central arguments defending the justice of Al Qaeda’s cause and the use of suicide bombings that target civilians are dependent on a non-Muslim aggressor. Operations that involve mass Muslim casualties create a stark inconsistency between Al Qaeda’s means and its stated ends: the massacre of Muslim civilians contradicts the broad moral project of protecting the *umma*.

Reality is the Greatest Witness

No less than in the Western just war tradition, the Islamic *jihad* tradition contains within it a pragmatic or consequentialist element, which focuses on the outcomes of acts of war in determining their moral legitimacy. The classical jurists articulated a principle of proportionality, for example, whereby the destruction allowable to a Muslim army had to be proportional to its limited military objectives. Muslims were also urged to refrain from engaging in wars in which there was little hope of success. Both Sunni and Shi’a jurists decided that the maximum number of enemies against which a Muslim is obliged to stand his ground is double his own troops, and the Muslims were permitted to make peace with non-Muslims “provided the Imam has considered the situation and has found that the inhabitants of the territory of war are too strong for the Muslims to prevail against them and it would be better for the Muslims to make peace with them.”⁷⁷ To avoid risking a defeat for Allah’s cause, Muslims were advised to be scrupulous in picking their fights.

The consequences, or outcomes, of a *jihad*, then, are very important in forming judgments about its overall moral value. As such, those who are otherwise sympathetic to bin Laden’s stated cause and objectives have focused on the consequences of his *jihad* in their opposition to Al Qaeda. Bin Laden tries to maintain that “I have brought happiness to Muslims in the Islamic world, and anyone who follows global media will see the extent of the sympathy in the Islamic world for strikes against Americans.”⁷⁸ Other radicals, however, refer to the reality on the ground, the scores of maimed or murdered Muslims and the rising Islamophobia in the West, to call into question the legitimacy of Al Qaeda’s *jihad*.

Salman ibn Fahd al-Odah, for example, a puritanical Saudi preacher who was jailed for his opposition to U.S. forces in the Kingdom during the 1990s, asked bin Laden last year, in a televised address: “How much blood has been spilled? How many innocent children, women, and old people have been killed, maimed and expelled from their homes in the name of ‘al-Qaeda’?” Al-Odah, who supported *jihad* against American troops in Iraq and is said to have once been a mentor to bin Laden, pointed out that Islam’s image has been tarnished by Al Qaeda’s activities. He laid blame on bin Laden for promoting a culture of excommunication and for filling the prisons of the Muslim world with its youth. He

wondered, what is to be gained from the destruction of entire nations, who stands to benefit from turning countries into battlefields, and “What have all these long years of suffering, tragedy, tears and sacrifice actually achieved?”⁷⁹

One of the principle ideologues of *jihadism*, Sayyed Imam al-Sharif, published a treatise at the end of 2007 that similarly focused on the negative outcomes of waging *jihad*. Writing from prison, Imam made most of his arguments against attacking the West and fighting regimes in Muslim countries based on pragmatic considerations: the imbalance in forces, the incapacity of the *mujahidin*, and the general inability of popular movements to bring about regime change throughout Egypt’s history. *Jihad*, under such conditions, entails “more damage than benefit.” The preconditions for success do not exist, victory is not likely, it is impossible to differentiate between combatants and non-combatants, thus pursuing armed struggle creates “vast harms . . . while not achieving the hoped for benefit.”⁸⁰

Sayyed Imam had previously served alongside Ayman al-Zawahiri in the Egyptian Islamic Jihad group, where he authored a series of *Sharia* guides on *jihad* that were used in Al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan. So concerned was Al Qaeda’s leadership about the impact of Sayyed Imam’s book (said to represent a “tsunami” in *jihadi* thought, by one former leader of the Al-Jihad group in Egypt)⁸¹ that Ayman al-Zawahiri wrote a 188-page response, critiquing the book’s methodology, disputing its definitions, and upholding, in the end, that it was written by the Egyptian security services.⁸²

Before his death in 2006, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi had also fallen foul of his former leader and teacher. Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi, once revered by his co-national, repeatedly criticized the brutality of the *jihad* in Iraq. Much to al-Zarqawi’s chagrin, he stated on several occasions that arbitrary operations being carried out in Iraq and in other Muslim countries “harm the image of jihad” and that the *mujahidin* must not “aim their weapons and explosives at Muslims.” He upheld that killing civilians was not only forbidden in Islam, but that blowing up Churches is not in the interest of Islam and shedding the blood of the Shi’a is a mistake that sows the *fitna* (internal strife) “for which the occupier has yearned.”⁸³ Abu Basir al-Tartousi, an important theoretician of the contemporary *jihad* movement, has likewise made clear that “I, and other preachers like me, cannot approve, justify, or support the unlawful spilling of [Muslim] blood—no matter what pretexts, motives, or excuses are presented.” The *mujahidin*, he counselled, must not make enemies for themselves with their own hands, thus enlarging the camp of the enemy’s supporters.⁸⁴

The importance of outcomes and the implication that Al Qaeda-related savagery is, ultimately, counterproductive, must surely be a source of grave concern for Osama bin Laden, who is bent on winning the battle for hearts and minds in the Muslim world. The commander of Al Qaeda in Northern Iraq, in fact, admitted to a Qatari newspaper that the indiscriminate murdering of civilians had been a mistake that can account for the decrease in Al Qaeda’s popularity. Abu Turab al-Jaza’iri, whose Algerian nationality is indicated by his *kunya*, criticized the bombing in Algiers in December 2007, claimed by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, arguing that scenes of blood flowing knee-deep harmed Al Qaeda’s good name and damaged the entire movement. Such bombings are, he concluded, “sheer idiocy.”⁸⁵ Strikingly, on this issue al-Jaza’iri sees eye-to-eye with the Saudi liberal, Hussein Shobokshi: “the movement’s emotional appeal, which once played a major role, has lost its shine as a result of the enormous damage caused by the movement that eventually led to its loss in supporters due to the assassination of scores of innocent people.”⁸⁶

Abu Musab al-Suri argued in *The Global Islamic Resistance Call* that reality is the greatest witness to the value of a method of war. The Syrian, who developed the theory of guerrilla warfare by autonomous cells, underlined that “I look upon the methods as a means,

and not as idols. We should use those methods that have given us a proven benefit, and leave behind those methods that have been surpassed by time. Otherwise, we will also be surpassed by time.”⁸⁷ The mounting Muslim death toll from Al Qaeda–related suicide bombings is proven to alienate bin Laden’s cherished *umma* and harm the Al Qaeda movement. Osama bin Laden appears unwilling, but more likely unable, to control his local offspring. In the absence of that restraint, as al-Zawahiri recognized, the shadows will close in.

Conclusion

The author has argued elsewhere that the Bush administration re-enforced Al Qaeda’s claim of self-defense by launching its controversial invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003.⁸⁸ We have seen here, however, that “Al Qaeda” is increasingly subverting its own arguments for justified war and damaging its own chances of winning the battle of ideas in the Muslim world. Ultimately, it seems that Al Qaeda runs the risk of losing the struggle for hearts and minds, not because it is a culture of death that kills for the sake of killing, but because it has failed to live up to its own moral standards. Every bombing that spills Muslim blood explodes the credibility of bin Laden’s claim to be protecting the *umma*, just as it makes hypocrisy of his denunciations of Western armies for their barbarism against Muslims. As bin Laden himself has pointed out, “history knows that one who kills children, even if rarely, is a follower of Pharaoh.”⁸⁹

In significant ways, bin Laden’s hydra is borne of the globalization of his *jihad*. As Al Qaeda “franchises” spring up in Muslim countries, imported in service of local and sectarian ends in places such as Iraq and Pakistan, bin Laden’s authority is at once far-reaching and fragmented. “Let us not merely be people of killing, slaughter, blood, cursing, insult and harshness,” Atiyeh Abd al-Rahman entreated Abu Musab al-Zarqawi—in the end, to little effect. After its headquarters were destroyed in Afghanistan, Al Qaeda fractured into a moving target, a global cadre of autonomous cells (conceptualized by al-Suri), which enabled it to continue to both elude and fight its enemies. However, by muddying the concept of the enemy and confusing his movement’s *raison d’être*, bin Laden’s more reckless progeny have jeopardized his larger war.

After successful attacks against the west, it is common for bin Laden to deny direct responsibility and admit only to “inciting our *umma*.”⁹⁰ As Michael Scheuer has pointed out, bin Laden prefers “incitement to command-and-control, and general guidance to strict doctrinal obedience.”⁹¹ However, while Al Qaeda’s evolution, or devolution, into a diffuse network of affiliates groups has entailed temporary tactical agility, it has simultaneously represented a source of significant weakness for the battle of hearts and minds. The “operational durability” and “malleable resiliency”⁹² so often posited by Bruce Hoffman have guaranteed the survival of Al Qaeda, certainly, but at the cost of consigning the group to the more radical margins of the *umma*.

At the time of writing, Al Qaeda is showing signs of having reconstituted its physical base in Northern Pakistan and re-implanting itself alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan. In meeting that threat, the United States and its allies have the opportunity to seize the moral high-ground so spectacularly surrendered by Al Qaeda. For if civilian casualties have presented Al Qaeda with a legitimacy crisis, pleas of collateral damage notwithstanding, it follows that a potential source of legitimacy for the United States and its allies would come from keeping civilian harm, collateral or otherwise, to an absolute minimum (through the strictest possible interpretation of the principles of proportionality, discrimination and military necessity). Western and allied forces must come to be regarded as protectors of the population—a staple of counterinsurgency doctrine, a foundational aspect of the Western

just war tradition, and a strategic imperative when confronting an enemy that insists that Muslim life has only instrumental value in Western eyes; that Muslims blood counts “as no more than water.”⁹³ The way in which violence is used, and misused, surely publicizes the values, intentions, and objectives of its user. As Saudi Arabia’s top cleric argued recently with regard to Al Qaeda, “bad deeds alert one to the presence of bad beliefs and unsound thinking.”⁹⁴

As for bin Laden, it remains to be seen if he will be able to exert sufficient operational influence on burgeoning Al Qaeda offshoots to prevent widespread Muslim bloodshed. His task appears especially daunting when it is considered that the militant groups hunkering down in Pakistan and Afghanistan have often hitched their revolutionary message to a vilification of the Shi’a and a distinctively intolerant reading of the Islamic call. If bin Laden fails, and if his global *jihad* in defense of the *umma* continues to turn inward, he could be left with little, as the GIA eventually was, by way of an answer to his former mentor’s question: “Have your means become the ends themselves?”⁹⁵

Notes

1. Jean-Charles Brisard, *Zarqawi: The New Face of Al-Qaeda* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), p. 146.
2. Letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, 11 October 2005, reprinted in Laura Mansfield, *In His Own Words: A Translation of the Writings of Dr. Ayman Al-Zawahiri* (Old Tappan, NJ: TLG Publications, 2006), p. 258.
3. Letter from Atiyeh to al-Zarqawi, 11 December 2005. Available at www.ctc.usma.edu/harmony/CTC-AtiyahLetter.pdf (accessed 12 February 2008).
4. Paul Wolfowitz, “Building a Better World: One Path from Crisis to Opportunity,” 5 September 2001. Available at <http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=277> (accessed 12 October 2004).
5. Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi, p. 272.
6. Abu Ubeid Al-Qurashi in “Bin Laden Lieutenant Admits to September 11 and Explains Al-Qa’ida’s Combat Doctrine,” MEMRI, 10 February 2002. Available at <http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Area=jihad&ID=SP34402> (accessed 12 March 2004).
7. “Zawahiri Video Blasts US Strike,” BBC, 30 January 2006. Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4663748.stm (accessed 30 January 2006).
8. See Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).
9. Marc Sageman and Bruce Hoffman, “Does Osama Still Call the Shots?” *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2008).
10. Bruce Hoffman, “Lessons from Mumbai,” *The National Interest*, 1 December 2008. See also Hoffman, “Innovative, Ruthless, Disciplined Terrorism Stalks Us Again,” *The Sunday Times*, 30 November 2008.
11. Bruce Hoffman, “The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism,” *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2008).
12. “National Security Advisor Rice Remarks to Veterans of Foreign Wars,” 25 August 2003. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/08/20030825-1.html> (accessed 12 October 2004).
13. “Vice President’s Remarks at a Rally for the Troops,” 27 July 2004. Available at <http://63.161.169.137/news/releases/2004/07/20040727-3.html> (accessed 12 October 2004).
14. “Public Report of National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States,” 22 July 2004, p. 13. Available at <http://www.9-11commission.gov> (accessed 12 September 2004).
15. “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” 20 September 2001. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html> (accessed 14 January 2008).

16. "President to Send Secretary Powell to the Middle East," 4 April 2002. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/04/20020404-1.html> (accessed 4 March 2007).

17. Navid Kermani, "A Dynamite of the Spirit: Why Nietzsche, Not the Koran, Is the Key to Understanding the Suicide Bombers," *TLS*, 29 March 2002, pp. 13–15. See also Faisal Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity* (London: Hurst, 2005).

18. "President Rallies Troops at Travis Air Force Base," 17 October 2001. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/10/20011017-20.html> (accessed 21 March 2008).

19. Address to "our neighbours north of the Mediterranean" (the people of Europe), broadcast on Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiyya, 15 April 2004, reprinted in Bruce Lawrence, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden* (London; New York: Verso, 2005), p. 234.

20. World Islamic Front *fatwa*, 23 February 1998, in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, p. 61.

21. Letter to the Americans, 6 October 2002, in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, p. 162.

22. Videotape message, 29 November 2004, in Mansfield, *In His Own Words*, p. 236.

23. Interview with Al-Jazeera, December 1998, in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, p. 76.

24. Interview with Robert Fisk, "Why We Reject the West," *Independent*, 10 July 1996, p. 14.

25. Interview with Taysir Alluni, 21 October 2001, in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, p. 121. Talking to reporters on the White House lawn on 16 September 2001, Bush veered off script and stated that "this Crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while."

26. Videotape address of 29 October 2004, p. 238.

27. Statement of 26 December 2001, in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, p. 150.

28. "Text: Bin Laden Tape," BBC, 19 January 2006. Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4628932.stm, (accessed 19 January 2006).

29. Interview with Hamid Mir, 12 November 2001, in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, p. 141.

30. Meet the Press, 10 September 2006. Transcript available at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14720480/> (accessed 11 September 2006).

31. Interview with Alluni, p. 121.

32. Interview with Mir, p. 141.

33. Audiotape address to the International Conference of Deobandis, 9 April 2001, p. 96. This is surely an implicit reference to the *hadith*, which describes "the believers, in their love, mutual kindness, and close ties [as] like one body; when any part complains, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness and fever."

34. Audiotape address to the People of Iraq, 11 February 2003, in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, p. 181.

35. Interview with John Miller, May 1998. Available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/binladen/who/interview.html> (accessed 6 March 2006).

36. "Excerpts from bin Laden Video," BBC, 8 September 2007. Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6984560.stm (accessed 8 September 2007).

37. Interview with Alluni, p. 118.

38. Videotape address of 29 October 2004, in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, p. 240.

39. Interview with Alluni, p. 119.

40. Interview with Mir, p. 140.

41. "Jihad and the Superiority of Martyrdom," reprinted in Raymond Ibrahim, *The Al-Qaeda Reader* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), pp. 141–171.

42. Interview with Alluni, p. 114.

43. Statement of 16 December 2004, in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, p. 262.

44. See "Audio Message from Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi—Commander of Al-Qaeda's Jihad Committee in Mesopotamia," 18 November 2005. Available at www.globalterroralert.com

45. "An Interview with Abdulmalek Droukdal," *New York Times*, 1 July 2008.

46. Interview with Mir, p. 140.

47. Yusuf al-Ayiri applied exactly this argument to excuse the killing of Muslims in operations conducted in Western countries. Because the Muslims are living among legitimate targets, they are effectively serving as human shields for the enemy.

48. Rahimullah Yousafzai interview with Osama bin Laden, 22 December 1998. Available at <http://www.jihadunspun.com/BinLadensNetwork/interviews/abc01-1998.html> (accessed 6 March 2006).
49. "Jihad and the Superiority of Martyrdom," reprinted in Raymond Ibrahim, *The Al-Qaeda Reader* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), p. 163.
50. Yusuf al-Ayiri, "The Islamic Ruling on the Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations: Did Hawa Barayev Commit Suicide or Achieve Martyrdom?" Available at <http://journal.maine.com/pdf/martyrdom.pdf> (accessed 2 August 2006).
51. Ayiri, "The Islamic Ruling."
52. Abu Ruqiyah, "The Islamic Legitimacy of the 'Martyrdom Operations,'" *Nida'ul Islam*, December 1996–January 1997. Available at <http://contenderministries.org/islam/jihadlegitimate.php> (accessed 4 June 2006).
53. Al-Zawahiri, "Jihad and the Superiority of Martyrdom," p. 157.
54. David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 46.
55. See Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, pp. 47–50.
56. See Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 137–139.
57. Bin Laden statement of 14 February 2003, in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, p. 202.
58. Audiotape address, 9 April 2001, in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, p. 96.
59. See "Al-Qaeda Call on Muslims to Fight Israel," CNN, 28 July 2006. Available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/07/27/zawahiri.tape/index.html> (accessed 1 April 2008). Hizballah's leadership made it clear, however, that Al Qaeda's support was not wanted.
60. Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi, p. 259.
61. See Michael Scheuer, "Abu Yahya al-Libi: Al-Qaeda's Theological Enforcer—Part 2," *Terrorism Focus* 4(27) (14 August 2007). Available at <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2373619> (accessed 2 December 2007).
62. Statement faxed to Al-Jazeera, 24 September 2001, in Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, p. 101.
63. This mysterious leader of the *jihadi* umbrella group "The Islamic State of Iraq" is also known as Abu Omar al-Baghdadi.
64. Mohammed M. Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press [2007]), p. 73.
65. Abu Abdullah Ahmad al-Imran in Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: W. W. Norton [2007]), p. 246.
66. Michael Howard, "Zarqawi's Family Disown Him after Bombings," the *Guardian*, 21 November 2005. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/nov/21/iraq.michaelhoward> (accessed 2 April 2008).
67. Letter from Atiyeh to al-Zarqawi.
68. "Bin Laden Issues Iraq Message," Al-Jazeera, 23 October 2007.
69. Although Roy was writing in 1994, this observation is striking for its applicability to Afghan politics today.
70. Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994), pp. 200–201.
71. "By pronouncing *takfir* against the whole of society... Zouabri gave his blessing to a sectarian tendency within the group that gradually cut it off from any possible base within Algerian society, and even within the ranks of the young urban poor from whom its support had originally come." Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), p. 273.
72. Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus'ab Al-Suri* (London: Hurst, 2007), pp. 122–125.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
75. Brynjar Lia, "Dissidents in al-Qaida: Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's Critique of bin Laden and the Salafi-Jihadi Current," lecture at Princeton University, 3 December 2007.

76. Ibid.
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