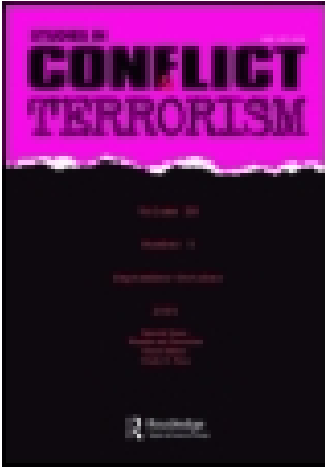


This article was downloaded by: [Washburn University]

On: 19 October 2014, At: 11:12

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Studies in Conflict & Terrorism

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/uter20>

The Contours of Al Qaeda's Media Strategy

Carl J. Ciovacco ^a

^a John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University ,
Cambridge, MA, USA

Published online: 08 Sep 2009.

To cite this article: Carl J. Ciovacco (2009) The Contours of Al Qaeda's Media Strategy, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 32:10, 853-875, DOI: [10.1080/10576100903182377](https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100903182377)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10576100903182377>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

The Contours of Al Qaeda's Media Strategy

CARL J. CIOVACCO

John F. Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University
Cambridge, MA, USA

Al Qaeda has crafted a successful media strategy that is adeptly suited for the war of ideas against the United States. Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri have demonstrated a great ability to lead plural groups and exploit innovation with the use of technology. This article explores how they have connected with diverse audiences around the world with a constant message. The repetition of their platform themes and use of "message projection opportunities" demonstrate a great understanding of human nature, marketing strategy, global media, and world politics. In line with Prospect Theory, bin Laden and Zawahiri's messaging strategy emphasizes stemming losses over solidifying gains. Only through a better understanding of Al Qaeda's media strategy and all of its strengths, weaknesses, and idiosyncrasies can the United States truly recognize what it is up against and begin to construct an effective and comprehensive counter strategy.

Since its inception in 1988, Al Qaeda has transitioned from a militarily ineffective *jihadi* group focused on martyrdom, to a terrorist cell with its sights set on apostate Muslim governments, to the ideological, media-centric militant umbrella organization of today.¹ With its former protector, the Taliban, in shambles and with Coalition troops in constant search of its bureaucratic remnants, Al Qaeda has morphed into a godfather-type organization and mobile media outlet to the world. From the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan, its core leadership, otherwise known as Al Qaeda Central, currently leads a networked alliance of Al Qaeda affiliates or "regional franchises" around the globe.² Al Qaeda Central employs a cogent media strategy to communicate with its affiliates, win over mainstream Muslims, and inspire the "true believers" into action against the perceived enemies of Islam.

Al Qaeda has crafted this media strategy in the midst of a global marketing campaign against the United States. Unlike other terrorist actors, Al Qaeda has formed a highly mobile media wing called al-Sahab with the specific goal of connecting with the world. An apt analogy would be a marketing battle between Anheuser-Busch and a small micro-brewery.³ With differing levels of infrastructure and resources, both adversaries play to their strengths in order to solidify current support from within their base while simultaneously attracting customers away from their competitor's base. While Muslims around the world are clearly not part of America's base, their loyalty is critical in the war of ideas. This competition between the United States and Al Qaeda has emerged since 9/11 with both sides competing for the loyalty of mainstream Muslims in the marketplace of ideas. During

Received 28 April 2008; accepted 5 January 2009.

Address correspondence to Carl J. Ciovacco, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Box 451, 79 JFK Street, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA. E-mail: carl_ciovacco@ksg08.harvard.edu

this time, Al Qaeda has been clearly ahead of the United States in its use of the media.⁴ In 2006, then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld noted this Al Qaeda advantage, by stating that “our enemies have skillfully adapted to fighting wars in today’s media age, but for the most part we—our country, our government—have not adapted.”⁵

In this marketing-focused war of ideas, Al Qaeda’s media strategy is the linchpin to unlocking its organizational DNA and deciphering its next moves. Similar to how contour lines on a topographic map shape geographical features, the contours of Al Qaeda’s media strategy discussed here will help to shape the terrorist organization’s priorities and intent in this war. Only through a better understanding of Al Qaeda’s media strategy and all of its strengths, patterns, and idiosyncrasies can the United States truly recognize what it is up against and begin to construct an effective and comprehensive counter media strategy.

Methodology

The methodology for this article placed a premium on in-depth analysis of all primary source communiqués from Al Qaeda’s top leadership from 11 September 2001 until early 2008. For purposes of manageability, Al Qaeda’s top leadership was limited to Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. A total of 64 media releases were examined—22 from bin Laden and 42 from Zawahiri—and their mediums include original videos, original audio recordings played over old video footage or photo stills, Internet plain text messages, and leaflets. While the original releases appear in multiple formats and languages, this study utilizes translations conducted by the government’s Open Source.gov division and consolidated by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point.

It is worth noting that while there are additional actors that espouse Al Qaeda’s media zeal and message—some legitimately tied to Al Qaeda Central and others on the periphery—one can look to bin Laden and Zawahiri’s releases as the basis for this media strategy. While Al Qaeda’s number three man, Abu Yahya al-Libi, has had an increased media role and has not always agreed with bin Laden and Zawahiri’s treatment of Shi’ites, it should be viewed more as a unified strategy and less as an incoherent messaging stream.

After receiving these translated media releases, the author created a comprehensive database shell with the following areas of interest: release date, speaker, medium, production source, dissemination means, title, audience targeted, topics discussed, and whether the release was reactive or proactive in nature. The author populated these fields under careful and individual review of each media release. Once this database was complete, several interesting findings prompted further evaluation, namely the repetition of several themes in the majority of transmissions. Upon a second review of the materials, the author noted the frequency of these “platform” themes in the media responses. The resulting database is the foundation for all observed characteristics and trends of Al Qaeda’s media strategy. (An extract of this database regarding dates, authors, and message topics can be found in Appendix A: Timeline.)

Background

It would be a disservice to discuss the contours of Al Qaeda’s media strategy without first providing some background information on the two authors of this strategy. Osama bin Laden is the head of Al Qaeda and Ayman al-Zawahiri is his deputy. While bin Laden is the figurehead and ideological leader, Zawahiri serves as the operational commander with strong ties to Egyptian militants. Their early relationship was complementary in nature

with bin Laden providing the funding and Zawahiri the maturity and *jihad* experience in Egypt.⁶

In the early 1990s, their strategic visions for Al Qaeda differed with bin Laden's focus on the Saudi government and Zawahiri's on the leaders of Egypt. Their similar desires to overthrow apostate Muslim regimes in the Middle East united them. Beginning in 1996, with "The Declaration of Jihad on the Americans Occupying the Country of the Two Sacred Places," and their 1998 establishment of the World Islamic Front, justifying attacks on American civilians, Al Qaeda shifted its attention from the Middle East to the United States.⁷ Its leaders believed that American foreign policy undergirds the corrupt regimes in the Middle East. Attacking the "far enemy" of America, therefore, in order to ultimately defeat the "near enemy" in the Middle East was a strategic change of monumental importance for Al Qaeda.⁸ An assumption that must be made for this study is that since 9/11, both bin Laden and Zawahiri have shared this common strategic objective of applying pressure on the far enemy in order to achieve victory over the near enemy. A coordinated view of how the media should aid their common cause is the base assumption for drawing conclusions from multiple authors about a singular media strategy.

It is also important to note that bin Laden and Zawahiri have a penchant for the media. Since bin Laden first tasted victory and global exposure during the Afghan resistance in the late 1980s, he has transformed from a reticent man to a publicity hound.⁹ In 1998, he was known to have made payments to selected journalists in Pakistan to increase coverage of his statements and activities.¹⁰ From early on, bin Laden was very conscious of how he was portrayed in the media. On one occasion, while reciting a poem that he wrote about the U.S.S. *Cole* attack at his son's wedding, he had the cameraman re-tape the event because he was worried about his image in the world media.¹¹ Zawahiri similarly holds the media in great esteem as he said in July 2005, "we are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media."¹²

For the very reason that Al Qaeda Central today has lost much of its bureaucracy, funding, and base of operations, it must rely on what remains: its message. Bin Laden and Zawahiri have gone to painstaking lengths to ensure the sanctity of this message. To aid them in this endeavor, they founded their mobile production entity, al-Sahab. The addition of a relatively high tech and mobile media unit demonstrates the importance of media releases to Al Qaeda's global connectivity.¹³ While the remoteness of the Northwest Frontier Province in Pakistan has been the saving grace for Al Qaeda Central's ability to elude capture, it has also been the potential kiss of death for an organization whose survival is based on inspiring new recruits from mainstream Muslim communities around the world. A lack of connectivity to the East and West could result in Al Qaeda withering on the vine.

Not only must Al Qaeda's message have the technical capacity to reach Muslims worldwide, but it must also have the substance necessary to resonate. One of bin Laden and Zawahiri's strengths has been their perceptiveness in understanding what Muslims want to hear and when they want to hear it. In addition to attempting to win support, this strategy has also provided a proactive, offensive element to its repertoire. This offensive element may have signaled attacks throughout the world in such a manner that only a discerning eye could understand. A pre-9/11 example of this acumen is bin Laden's wearing of a *jambiya* Yemini dagger—the only time he has done this—in a video release prior to Al Qaeda's attack on the U.S.S. *Cole*.¹⁴ While this hint of force with the dagger may or may not have been planned, the substance and themes addressed in the media releases intend to elicit a response.

The balance of this article discusses the characteristics of Al Qaeda's media strategy as discerned from the 64 bin Laden and Zawahiri media releases from 9/11 until February

2008. While some of the characteristics are strengths, others are merely observations that may shed light on how bin Laden and Zawahiri see the world and hence how they are fighting the war.

Strategy Characteristics

*1. Al Qaeda's Top Leadership Exploits Local Sensitivities With Tailored Statements for Specific Audiences Around the World*¹⁵

The media releases, whether in video, audio, or text format, are extremely specific in identifying with whom bin Laden and Zawahiri are attempting to communicate. The releases have almost a bifurcate intent of resonating with specific audiences while simultaneously appealing to the wider, global audience. From the actual titles of media releases such as, "A Speech to the People of Pakistan," or "Message to the Iraqi People," to the references within transmissions that say, "My Muslim brothers in Somalia," Al Qaeda explicitly identifies the intended recipient of the message. The frequencies that specific audiences are addressed in the 64 transmissions are: Muslims (57), Americans (14), and Europeans (6)—multiple audiences are occasionally addressed in the same media release. This realization that Muslims are addressed in the highest frequency is almost a tautology. However, it is not insignificant that Americans and Europeans were addressed a combined 20 times. This point will be explored further when discussing bin Laden and Zawahiri's attempts at critical moments in history to influence American foreign policy.

Once bin Laden and Zawahiri identify their target audience, they then use tailored statements to emphasize the point to their customers. In Zawahiri's 2007 message to Somali Muslims, he states: "do not be terrified by America's power as you have defeated it before [Mogadishu, 1993], thanks to God and His grace."¹⁶ This calling out by name of a specific group helps to build rapport between top Al Qaeda leadership and the people to whom they are talking. Plus, the recipients sense that bin Laden and Zawahiri acknowledge their position, value their struggle, and wish to help.

Bin Laden and Zawahiri adeptly play on regional sensitivities of different Muslim populations around the world to demonstrate empathy with the local interests. For example, when speaking to Muslims in the Middle East, they are likely to address Palestine and the "American ally" Israel. However, when addressing Pakistanis or Afghans, they point out Kashmiri woes and the "American ally" India. Zawahiri describes a robust Indian-American conspiracy when he says,

We should not be surprised, if this policy [of Musharraf] continues, to see the Pakistani Army tomorrow surrendering to the Indian Army in Islamabad, as it had in Dacca. Musharraf wants Pakistan without Islam. Thus, he destroys religious schools and invents a new religion that has been formulated for him in the United States.¹⁷

He further paints the United States and India with the same brush by saying, "this is the government [of Musharraf] that is carrying out a US plan to divide Pakistan and turn it into a humiliated state subservient to India."¹⁸ Zawahiri masterfully points out to the Pakistani Army in particular that President Musharraf is "strangulating jihad in Kashmir and gradually giving up demanding Kashmir's right to achieve independence from India."¹⁹ This statement is especially germane to the Pakistani Army because much of the Army trains the Muslim militants in Kashmir. The statements also use fear tactics by saying that

Musharraf's incompetence has put them in danger from India. All of these well-targeted jabs attempt to communicate with specific groups about their local problems and bring them on board to the larger movement against "apostate" Muslim regimes and the United States.

2. Anniversaries Serve as "Message Projection Opportunities" for Al Qaeda's Cause

Anniversaries of relevant, major events in the war between Al Qaeda and the United States tend to be accompanied by significant media attention. Anticipation, a plethora of documentaries, and an all-around elevated level of attention normally abounds several days before and after a significant anniversary. Capitalizing on this heightened interest and exposure, bin Laden and Zawahiri have released multiple-year anniversary messages for the following events: 9/11, Battle of Tora Bora, Iraq invasion, and the opening of Guantanamo Prison. These anniversaries provide the perfect backdrop for bin Laden and Zawahiri to spread their message when they have a captivated world. After all, global media will seldom fail to run a story on an Al Qaeda media release on the fifth anniversary of 9/11 or the third anniversary of the Iraq invasion.

While bin Laden and Zawahiri normally address the anniversary as the reason for their media release, they routinely use the global stage to raise other critical issues. For example, both used the spotlight of the second anniversary of 9/11 to speak about a call to *jihad*, an Israeli conspiracy, a clash of civilizations, a weakening United States, and Muslim unity.²⁰ Thus, Al Qaeda's leaders enjoy the opportunity that anniversaries afford them to project their complete message around the world.

3. Top Al Qaeda Leadership Emphasizes Koranic and Historical Justification to Provide Legitimacy for Its Actions

Bin Laden and Zawahiri utilize verses from the Koran in almost every media release to demonstrate that their movement follows the "true" Islam. At a time of genuine struggle within Islam regarding who is adhering to the true interpretation of the Koran, it is immensely important to appear more pious than the competition. Accordingly, the constant allusions to Muhammad and continuous Koran recitations by bin Laden and Zawahiri can be interpreted as either two devout Muslims merely praying on a global stage or a well-calculated plan to appear more religious than other Islamic organizations. The latter seems more accurate. While Al Qaeda is competing against the United States in the war of ideas for moderate Muslims, it is also competing against moderacy from within Islam and other militant Islamic organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah for recruits and designation as the true standard-bearer of Islam.

Readily apparent in the media releases is an effort to demonstrate that Muslims are at a critical juncture in history when the waging of eleventh-century Crusades continues and no less than the future of the Islamic Caliphate hangs in the balance. Supporting this outlook, they refer to Americans as Crusaders and Iraq as the "seat of the Caliphate."²¹ Bin Laden believes either that Iraq should be the center of the new Caliphate for historical reasons or that because it is the center of gravity in the struggle against the West, it is the current seat in the fight for the Caliphate. The latter interpretation would appear more relevant because of his transitory experiences with *jihad* and the struggle for Islam. Wherever *jihad* is most pronounced—from Afghanistan to Pakistan to Iraq—he tries to make it the contemporary seat on which to form the new Caliphate. Further demonstrating the evidence

for a reestablished Caliphate, bin Laden and Zawahiri routinely use Islamic dates such as Rabi' al-Aakhir 1428 instead of Western dates.²²

4. Seven Platform Themes Are Reinforced in Nearly All Media Releases by bin Laden and Zawahiri (Figure 1)

In descending order of frequency, and thus importance, the themes present in the media releases are: call to *jihad* (53), clash of civilizations (51), apostate Muslim leaders are betraying Islam (42), the United States–Israel connection (38), Muslim unity (32), the United States is weakening (29), the United States is stealing Muslim oil (20).²³ These observations show that bin Laden and Zawahiri concentrate their efforts in all of their releases on reinforcing these platform themes. While their media releases do impart new information that address current events, their main intent appears to be the repetition of their platform issues. Although this is a simple tactic in their overall media strategy, it has a profound effect on ensuring that their ideas are heard, if not the first time, then the second, third, or fourth. The intentional nature of this thematic repetition could be the crux of the entire strategy.

The seven platform themes observed in the media releases augment Mark Lynch's "Al-Jazeera narrative." Lynch says that bin Laden has tapped into the lightning rod issues for Muslims, namely the themes of Israel/Palestine, Iraq, and corruption of existing Muslim regimes.²⁴ Zawahiri corroborates this tactic in his 2001 book, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, where he says, "the one slogan that has been well understood by the [Muslim] nation and to which it has been responding for the past fifty years is the call for jihad against Israel. In addition to this slogan, the nation in this decade is geared against the U.S. presence. It has responded favorably to the call for the jihad against the Americans."²⁵ This "Al-Jazeera narrative" is not, however, exhaustive in its description of bin Laden and Zawahiri's platform issues. Bin Laden and Zawahiri have skillfully added supplementary themes—Muslim unity, clash of civilizations, and a declining United States—that resonate

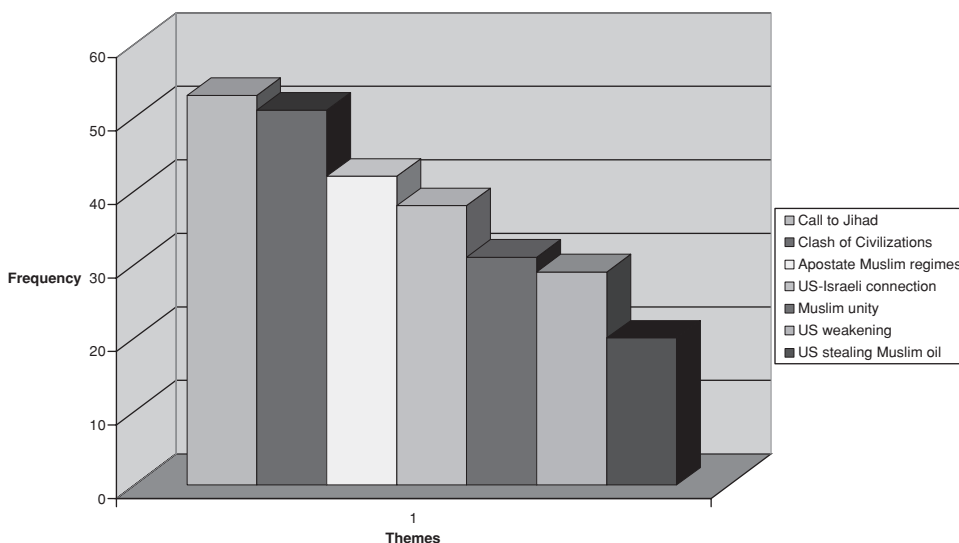


Figure 1. Frequency of Al Qaeda's platform themes.

well in the Muslim community. This in turn has added a dimension of robustness to their overall media strategy.

It is worth making a comparison of bin Laden and Zawahiri to politicians in a campaign. Regardless of the question that politicians are asked in debates, they usually answer with several of their preconceived platform points. Similarly, when bin Laden and Zawahiri are faced with responding to key geopolitical events, they usually take the opportunity in their media releases to reinforce their main themes first and then, sometime only tangentially, address the matter at hand. For an organization that, at least since 9/11, has had to keep its "head down" and whose survival is based on mainstream Muslim opinion, it has been critical for Al Qaeda to make the most of its message when it was afforded the opportunity. The reinforcement of platform issues appears more critical to their objectives than responding to the proximate issue at hand.

The question of impact of these thematic messages versus its authors' intent is important to understanding the effectiveness of this strategy. While it is fairly clear that bin Laden and Zawahiri intend to broadcast these themes, the question of whether their message is heard by the targeted audience and elicits the anticipated response is a little more difficult to ascertain. One data point that would suggest that Al Qaeda's message is resonating with Muslims comes from Pew polls from 2007. In these polls, while only 27 percent of Pakistanis had heard international news stories about Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo abuses, an overwhelming majority believed that America's motives were to control Mideast Oil (54 percent), dominate the world (55 percent), and target unfriendly Muslim governments (51 percent).²⁶ This adoption of Al Qaeda's platform themes even with limited outside connectivity suggests that public opinion has been buoyed by forces other than international news stories. The commingling of traditional views and Al Qaeda's messaging could be the impetus shaping Muslim views in the war of ideas.

Furthermore, at a time when suicide bombings reaped destruction in Afghanistan and Pakistan and posed the biggest threat to Al Qaeda support in 2007, conventional wisdom would have provided for a precipitous decrease in Al Qaeda support. However, a Terror Free Tomorrow poll showed that nearly 46 percent of Pakistanis supported bin Laden compared to only a 38 percent approval rating for their President Musharraf in 2007.²⁷ The poll further illustrated that half of Pakistanis wanted their government to negotiate with Al Qaeda instead of fight it.²⁸ The fact that bin Laden's approval was so high indicates a receptiveness to his platform themes of *jihad* and opposing the United States. Indeed, the 2008 Annual Arab Public Opinion Poll, conducted in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, showed that nearly a third of Muslims sympathized with Al Qaeda precisely because it confronts the United States.²⁹ Over the last several years, it appears that Al Qaeda's platform themes have both mirrored prevalent thought among Muslims and worked to reinforce these ideas.

5. Release Timing Trends Show That the Time Interval Between a Geopolitical Event of Significance and Subsequent Media Release is Shorter Following an Al Qaeda "Loss" Than an Al Qaeda "Win"

Following geopolitical events that tend to hurt Al Qaeda's cause (loss), bin Laden and Zawahiri release transmissions sooner than after geopolitical events that tend to favor Al Qaeda's cause (win) (Figure 2). Analysis of geopolitical events and their subsequent media releases have shown that bin Laden and Zawahiri appear to respond more rapidly after a geopolitical event that subverts their cause. With the increasing likelihood of their detection associated with the release of new videos, bin Laden and Zawahiri must have

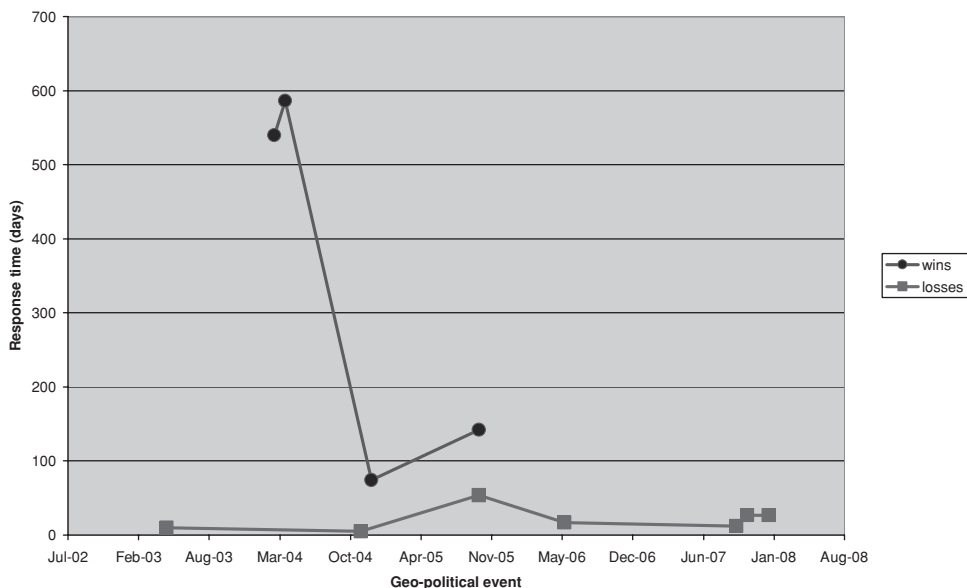


Figure 2. Al Qaeda release timing trends.

given considerable attention to the scope and frequency of their releases.³⁰ With this in mind, it appears that they have had to make a conscious decision to emphasize media releases directly following an event that subverts their organization rather than those that help their cause.

This assertion requires an explanation for how geopolitical events were coded as either a win or a loss for Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda's ultimate "cause" should be defined as the removal of the far enemy from Muslim lands and the establishment of the Caliphate under *Sharia* law. Intermediate goals would be the strengthening of Al Qaeda to achieve this end and the weakening of Americans and Middle Eastern regimes not in line with this goal. The perspective of Al Qaeda must be taken into account when classifying geopolitical events as either wins or losses for the organization. Events that support both their internal organizational interests and their external "clash of civilizations" interests help in defeating the far and near enemies. Operationally, Al Qaeda would need a strong base and a world where this clash exists, in order to rally Muslims and achieve its goals of restoring the Caliphate. A melding of these two criteria helped to identify eleven geopolitical events ranging from May 2003 to February 2008. (see Appendix B).

The events classified as losses for Al Qaeda were: Iraq's defeat [May 2003]; Battle of Fallujah "won" by the United States and effectively neutralizing insurgents in area [November 2004]; successful Iraq vote on constitution [October 2005]; Abu Musab al-Zarqawi killed [June 2006]; rival Shi'ite clerics Abdul-Aziz al Hakim and Muqtada al-Sadr unite and Iraq violence down 70 percent as Al Qaeda marginalized [October 2007]; Dr. Fadl (ideological godfather of Al Qaeda) renounces violence directed at civilians³¹ [November 2007]; Abu Laith al Libi killed [Jan 2008].

The events classified as wins for Al Qaeda were: Madrid bombing [March 2004]; Abu Ghraib abuse scandal story breaks by *60 Minutes* photos [April 2004]; detainee abuse at Guantanamo story breaks [December 2004]; first demonstration against Jyllands-Posten for Muhammad Cartoons [October 2005]. The wins are considered a boon for Al Qaeda

because they positively impact recruitment and/or hurt perceptions of Al Qaeda's enemy. The losses are considered to damage Al Qaeda's prospects for recruitment, are significant blows to their infrastructure, or weaken the forecast for the Caliphate.

An explanation is also useful for how the major geopolitical events were selected. While this list is not an exhaustive set of events that have impacted the war of ideas, they are all important because of how they have influenced the tide of public opinion. The defeat of Saddam began the insurgency in Iraq, while the Battle of Fallujah was the first large-scale pitched battle in post-Saddam Iraq. The Iraqi Constitution was a major political shift, while the death of Zarqawi and Abu Laith, cooperation of Hakim and al-Sadr, and reversal of Dr. Fadl all demonstrate shifts at the operational and ideological levels. The Madrid bombings are important because it was Al Qaeda's first attack on Europe, while the events of Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, and the Muhammad Cartoons all served to detract from Muslim support of the West. While this is not the definitive list for major geopolitical events in the post 9/11 war of ideas, it serves as a set of events that Al Qaeda's media responses can be benchmarked against.

Following these eleven geopolitical events, bin Laden and Zawahiri responded to each with a message specifically addressing the event. After comparing the time that Al Qaeda took in responding to these geopolitical events, it is apparent that response times are significantly shorter following events that hurt Al Qaeda's position (losses). This response time ranged from only 5 to 54 days.

These results can be interpreted as bin Laden and Zawahiri placing a greater emphasis on damage control and demonstrating reluctance to let global media handle their negative events. This is in line with Prospect Theory in that it appears bin Laden and Zawahiri care more about stemming losses than solidifying gains.³² Perhaps the best example of their swift damage control following a loss was directly after Dr. Fadl's reversal regarding violent *jihad* in late 2007. Less than a month after Fadl's book entitled *Revisions to Jihad in Egypt and the World* was published, Zawahiri had already offered his audiotape rebuke and commenced upon writing a full-length book rebuttal. Furthermore, when news of Fadl's forthcoming book surfaced in the summer of 2007, bin Laden is said to have convened meetings to proactively deal with the repercussions of Fadl's book.³³

After a positive event (win) for Al Qaeda, however, there appears to be less urgency to respond. The response time interval was significantly longer and ranged from 74 to 586 days. It would seem that bin Laden and Zawahiri are content with allowing the global media to take the lead in educating Al Qaeda's target populations with "good" news for their organization. This line of thought would emphasize the so-called media bias. This bias assumes that "many media organizations and journalists are inherently against government, especially the defense establishment."³⁴

The resulting Al Qaeda strategy would rely on global media to disseminate the prison abuse stories of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo and the Muhammad Cartoon fiasco in a timely and comprehensive manner. It would also assume that the Madrid bombing—the taking of the fight to the "far enemy" on a foreign battlefield—would be broadcast by independent news agencies around the world. On all counts, this is precisely what happened. Their informed perceptions of world media, world politics, and human nature seem to play a large role in when to produce a global message.

A caveat to this analysis is that interpretations of data could be skewed by lag times caused by their remoteness, specifically regarding (1) how soon bin Laden and Zawahiri hear of a geopolitical event, (2) how quickly they can link up with their mobile production entity al-Sahab after acknowledging the geopolitical event, and (3) how fast they transfer the video to the publisher for world dissemination.³⁵ In the last year or so, however, with the

advent of al-Sahab's more sophisticated production and Web-based techniques, the third step in this process has been obviated by self-posting videos to the Internet. Thus, recent technological innovations by al-Sahab would make it easier to study the turn-around time for Al Qaeda's media response to geopolitical events today.

6. *Top Al Qaeda Leadership Attempts to Prompt Local Al Qaeda Affiliates Into Action by Providing Specific Guidance in Their Media Releases*

The efficacy of these "calls to arms" has been fairly high with a strong correlation between initial guidance and a resulting attack. Since Al Qaeda has transformed from a terrorist organization carrying out its own attacks to an "ideological umbrella" organization encouraging local attacks, there is an increasing level of delegation.³⁶ Al Qaeda provides these local movements with encouragement, tactical support, financing, and intelligence for specific operations.³⁷ While delegation has increased, guidance still appears to originate from Al Qaeda Central. Incredibly important for *jihadists* carrying out attacks in the name of Islam is for them to receive tacit approval from bin Laden or Zawahiri for their work. By committing an act that has previously been "sanctioned" by bin Laden or Zawahiri through a media release, the would-be martyrdom seeker avoids the rigorous, almost bureaucratic, process of traveling to see bin Laden or Zawahiri personally to receive permission for their pre-conceived plan.³⁸ This interplay of media releases and attacks has streamlined the approval process for Al Qaeda-sanctioned attacks. Consequently, media releases have been outlets for spreading Al Qaeda Central's intent, and local affiliates have then executed this intent with varying levels of support.

Six prompts by bin Laden and Zawahiri, and their follow-on attacks, between 2003 and 2007, have been analyzed here (Table 1). It is important to note that the prompt is not a direct order for an attack on a certain day, but instead appears to be guidance for how Al Qaeda's faithful can further their cause in a sanctioned manner.

The time between a "prompt" by bin Laden or Zawahiri and the actual attack ranged from 2 days to 13 months. On these six occasions, an "order" by bin Laden or Zawahiri was given and an attack executed shortly thereafter. While counterfactuals are always difficult to construct, it would appear that the likelihood of these attacks on Saudi Arabia and Musharraf would have been lower if the prompts were never given.

A problem with this tactic of decentralized "orders" is that they can be executed with varying levels of professionalism and success. For example, unsuccessful "Al Qaeda-inspired" efforts, such as the June 2007 bombing at Glasgow International Airport that caused no death and relatively little damage can be embarrassing to Al Qaeda's cause. Equally harmful to Al Qaeda's cause, however, were the immensely successful terrorist attacks employed by Al Qaeda's former leader in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. While Zarqawi's beheading of Westerners and incitement of sectarian violence demonstrate a level of expertise, it also shows a rogue nature that can cripple an organization that espouses a platform tenet of, among others, Muslim unity.

7. *Al Qaeda's Top Leadership Attempts to Influence American Foreign Policy With Targeted Messages Directed Toward Americans at Critical Moments in Time*

If one were to look at American foreign policy relating to the Global War on Terror (GWOT), there are several pivotal moments in time that greatly impacted its strategy development. Four of these junctions are the 2004 Presidential Election, the 2006 Congressional Election, the announcement of the Iraq troop surge [January 2007], and the Congressional bill to

Table 1
Prompt chart

Date	Media release/Attack
2003 May 11	OBL: AQ will strike at those Arab nations that engaged in guilty silence
2003 May 13	Riyadh bombings
2003 May 16	Casablanca bombings
2003 August 8	Jordanian embassy (Iraq) bombed
2003 September 28	AZ: calls for attacks on Musharraf
2003 December 14, 25	Two suicide attempts on Musharraf by Islamic militant groups
2003 October 18	OBL: "let the unjust ones know that we maintain our right to reply . . . to all states that are taking part in this unjust war, particularly . . . Spain"
2004 March 11	191 people killed in Madrid train bombings
2004 April 15	OBL: offers truce with Europeans, 3 month deadline
2005 July 5	London attacks
2004 December 16	OBL: "prevent them from reaching oil" in Saudi
2006 February 24	Attack on Abqaiq oil plant in Saudi
2007 September 20	OBL: <i>jihad</i> against Musharraf
2007 October 30	Attack on Pakistani Army HQ and Musharraf's office

Legend: AQ = Al Qaeda; OBL = Osama bin Laden; AZ = Ayman al-Zawahiri.

limit the war's funding and set a timetable for withdrawal [May 2007]. Like clockwork, both bin Laden and Zawahiri attempted each time to influence the results of these events by releasing messages specifically to Americans before the events transpired. Their messages attempted to create dissention between Americans by playing on bipartisanship and racial tensions, exacerbating Americans' worst fears about Iraq and, not surprisingly, painting a poor picture of the president. The messages preach to Americans about being lied to by their president. They normally impart a theme similar to: "O American people . . . you are being enslaved by those who have the most money . . . particularly the Jews."³⁹ At a time when the Israeli policy and corporate beneficiaries of the GWOT are tinderbox issues in American politics, these jabs are well targeted for eliciting a response.

While it has been suggested that Al Qaeda's staged messages were intended to help President Bush by increasing the threat awareness against the United States and allow Republicans to capitalize on this fear, the significant number of attacks on the president and their timing indicate differently. Al Qaeda's threat tactic of stating that Americans could only be safe if they ended President Bush's policies suggest that bin Laden and Zawahiri were more concerned with hurting Bush than helping his cause. Moreover, the Republicans at the time were more likely to prevent Al Qaeda's stated goal of forcing all Americans out of the Middle East.

2004 Presidential Election. In 2004, just one day before the American Presidential Elections, bin Laden released a tape specifically addressed to the "People of America" that said: "this talk of mine is for you and concerns the ideal way to prevent another Manhattan."⁴⁰ His message appeared twofold: undercut the incumbent and convince the American people

that its own foreign policy decisions would dictate future Al Qaeda attacks. Bin Laden attacked Bush by saying:

So he took dictatorship and suppression of freedoms . . . [in] the Patriot Act, under the pretense of fighting terrorism. In addition, Bush . . . didn't forget to import expertise in election fraud from the region's presidents to Florida to be made use of in moments of difficulty.⁴¹

Bin Laden also attempted to apply domestic pressure on the American government in the following threat.

Your [American people] security is in your own hands. And every state that doesn't play with our security has automatically guaranteed its own security.⁴²

2006 Congressional Election. In 2006, about a month before the Congressional Elections, Zawahiri released a video that spoke disparagingly about Bush's honesty regarding America's losses in Iraq and Afghanistan and questioned the president's intent for initially going to war and for its future. His own words demonstrate the psychological extent of this plea to Americans to change their Congressional leadership in the following month's elections:

You lying failure [Bush]. Why can't you be brave at least once in your life and inform your nation of the disasters, which your forces are facing in Afghanistan and Iraq? Why don't you tell them how many million citizens of America and its allies you intend to kill in search of the imaginary victory and in breathless pursuit of the mirage towards which you are driving your people's sons in order to increase your profits? Can't you be honest at least once in your life, and admit that you are a deceitful liar, who intentionally deceived your nation, when you drove them to war in Iraq under the pretext of the presence of nuclear weapons there and under the pretext of Al-Qa'ida's connections with Saddam Husayn.⁴³

2007 Troop Surge Announcement. Zawahiri again attempted to influence Americans at the critical time in early 2007, when Americans were debating the prospects for success of a troop increase in Iraq. After President Bush announced the troop surge plan on 10 January, Zawahiri followed 12 days later with his response: "send your entire army to be annihilated by the hands of the Mujahideen."⁴⁴ This confidence from Al Qaeda, whether false bravado or not, would make Americans question whether the surge was the correct policy decision. He also extended the time horizon of the Iraq War by stating that "if you [Americans] continue with the policy of Bush and his gang, you will never dream of peace."⁴⁵ Zawahiri demonstrated his political shrewdness by attempting to increase bipartisanship. In February 2007, he specifically spoke to Democrats by saying, "as for the Democrats in America, I tell them, the people chose you due to your opposition to Bush's policy in Iraq, but it appears that you are marching with him to the same abyss."⁴⁶ These releases helped to fuel the fires of debate which climaxed with Congressional action in the form of a war funding bill with a withdrawal timetable.

2007 War Funding Bill. In the intervening period between Congressional approval for the war funding bill and Bush's eventual veto, Zawahiri again released a tape that voiced his mocking disapproval by stating that the bill would "deprive us [Al Qaeda] of the opportunity to destroy the American forces which we have caught in a historic trap."⁴⁷ He also threw in the incendiary remark to the American people that the only one profiting from this war was Halliburton.⁴⁸ He augmented the domestic beneficiary flash point of the Iraq War by exploiting sensitive social issues in the United States. He tried to enflame racial tensions and attract a particular demographic to his cause by stating:

I am hurt when I find a black American fighting the Muslims under the American flag. Why is he fighting us when the racist Crusader regime in America is persecuting him like it persecutes us, and oppressing him like it oppresses us? And perhaps his slave ancestors whom America kidnapped from Africa were Muslims like us. The racist American Crusader regime is using him and the other weak and oppressed to die so that the criminals in the White House can amass their fortunes and add to their millions, whereas he receives scraps after his blood is spilled or he comes out of the war a cripple.⁴⁹

Zawahiri attempted to enlarge social and political schisms in the American populace and build popular support behind the bill before Bush was afforded the opportunity to veto it.

8. Video Releases Are Normally of Greater Significance Than Audio Recordings, Although This Disparity is Decreasing With al-Sahab's Direct Posting of Videos to the Internet

Bin Laden has released significantly more audio recordings than videos since 9/11. This can be partly attributed to al-Sahab only recently gaining the technical capacity necessary to upload videos directly to the Internet. Another reason for the early sparsity of videos could be the conscious decision to limit video messages in order to highlight their importance when they are released. Simply put, if bin Laden had released videos every week, the worldwide anticipation associated with a video release would not have been as great.

Because videos generally take longer to plan and produce than audio messages, their early importance over audio releases is evident. Video releases provide visual evidence that bin Laden and Zawahiri are still alive. A new image of them also helps the charisma factor of bin Laden and Zawahiri. In fact, there is something to be said for videos and the ability to inspire people all over the globe to join the *jihād*. Anecdotal evidence may best support this assertion. Abdessater Dahmane, a Tunisian living in Belgium, saw a bin Laden video on the Belgium news and was inspired to carry out a suicide bombing because of it.⁵⁰ Demonstrating the connective power of the video, Dahmane's wife said that her husband was "scared of dying without having made the supreme effort on the path of God: Jihad. And he had the impression that it was to himself in particular that Osama was delivering a message."⁵¹

The scarcity of early videos, as compared to audiotapes, can be seen in bin Laden's failure to release any videos in 2005.⁵² Bin Laden and Zawahiri concentrated on audio releases that were either aired over a still photo of them or old video footage. Audio messages recorded over a "montage" of old video clips were common in many releases.⁵³ This trend has since changed with both the founding of al-Sahab in June 2001, and its increased technological dexterity.⁵⁴ Al-Sahab has begun to publish its videos directly to the Internet and thereby effectively cutting out the middlemen such as Al-Jazeera.⁵⁵ Its

technological advances and bandwidth expansion have allowed it to expand from 15 videos in 2005, to 60 videos in 2007, with markedly better quality, multiple language subtitles, and even 3D animation.⁵⁶ Thus, with a better infrastructure and increased video capabilities, the significance of different mediums has diminished in as far as an elevated meaning of the message content.

The additional capabilities of al-Sahab and its ability to post videos directly to the Internet have made quite a difference in stemming dissemination source variance. Dissemination source variances are the unforeseen changes that occur to the media releases after bin Laden and Zawahiri provide the publisher with the product for global dissemination. This problem was fairly common in the years after 9/11. Even as late as 24 June 2006, al-Sahab would plead for its publisher not to air messages with music—a violation when played in conjunction with Koranic verses.⁵⁷ Another form of dissemination source variance was when publishers failed to publish a time-sensitive tape from Al Qaeda such as the declaration of forthcoming violence. One such example was with the publisher Algiers Le Matin. Although it received the tape on 11 May 2003, outlining Al Qaeda's imminent attacks, it did not publish it until 18 May 2003.⁵⁸ In the intervening time, Al Qaeda attacked Riyadh and Casablanca; however, their telegraphing of the events was never published ex ante. One final source of variance is proactive action by news publishers to limit Al Qaeda's message monopoly. This type of variation runs contrary to bin Laden and Zawahiri's intent by changing the format of their release. Al-Jazeera is one such perpetrator and has not been a "willing propagandist" for Al Qaeda.⁵⁹ On one occasion, it spliced pieces of a June 2006 Zawahiri diatribe on Egypt's *Kefaya* with the opposing view of an Islamic lawyer, and bin Laden critic, Montasser al-Zayat.⁶⁰ Zawahiri's militant speech was transformed into a diversity of views in the form of a debate.⁶¹

9. The Degree of Top Al Qaeda Involvement in an Attack and the Actual Results of the Attack Itself Figure Prominently in Whether bin Laden or Zawahiri Ultimately Claim Responsibility

Bin Laden and Zawahiri have taken ex post responsibility for 9/11, London, Istanbul, and ex ante responsibility for Riyadh and Casablanca. The general guidelines for their claiming of responsibility appear to be their level of involvement in the attack and the consequences of the act itself. In the 9/11 and London cases, their involvement was significant and the successful execution was a boon to Al Qaeda's recruitment and efficacy. However, in other instances, they allowed Al Qaeda affiliates to assume responsibility for successful attacks. One such example of this phenomenon is the Madrid bombing where the head of Al Qaeda Europe claimed responsibility on behalf of Al Qaeda instead of bin Laden. These disparate results are peculiar because Madrid was more effective, on a scale of death and disaster, than London and it was personally telegraphed by bin Laden five months beforehand in a media release that specifically threatened Spain.⁶² Also unusual, bin Laden personally took ex post credit for the bombings of two Jewish synagogues in Istanbul on 16 November 2003, but said that the Martyr Abu-Hafs al-Misri Brigades carried out the action. Demonstrating that the affiliate operated under his guidance, he threatened further attacks "everywhere in the world."⁶³ This claim of responsibility for Istanbul, but not Madrid, begs the question: How much involvement does Al Qaeda Central need to have to claim a successful attack? Even if Madrid was a nearly autonomous operation carried out by Al Qaeda Europe, bin Laden could have claimed the attack because it would have been a windfall to the greater organization.⁶⁴ Furthermore, bin Laden may have claimed it because it is not abnormal for leaders to take credit for subordinates' successes.

The process that optimizes the impact of Al Qaeda's terrorism would be: (1) an initial threat via the media, (2) the act itself, (3) and then a claim of responsibility and threat for future actions if changes are not made. While 9/11 and London appear to be cast from this mold, an outlier of Al Qaeda's modus operandi took place in the summer of 2003. Bin Laden's 11 May 2003 tape illuminates problems in this process.⁶⁵ In this message to the Algerian Khalifa News Channel, bin Laden states: "I shall soon strike the traitrous [sic] regime of King Fahd, who has submitted to the American aggressor (against Iraq) as well as King Abdallah (of Jordan), who is guilty of complicity in this unjust war and all the Arab powers that have engaged in a guilty silence and will soon pay the price for their betrayal"⁶⁶

On 12 May, suicide bombers struck Riyadh, killing 35 people, and on 16 May, suicide bombers hit Casablanca, killing 41 people.⁶⁷ (Morocco certainly fits the bill of a "guilty complicitor" because it is a moderate Arab state and U.S. ally.) Later that summer, on 8 August 2003, a suicide bomber detonated a vehicle at the Jordanian embassy in Iraq, killing 17 Iraqis.

While the 11 May threat message and attacks partially followed the three-step process, glaringly absent in all three attacks was a claim of responsibility from top Al Qaeda leadership. Although Saif al Adel, a former bin Laden bodyguard and Al Qaeda's military commander, is believed to have been behind the Riyadh bombings, no claim of responsibility has been made by bin Laden or Zawahiri.⁶⁸ Furthermore, no credit has been taken for Casablanca or the Jordanian embassy—although Moroccan and American authorities believe the Al Qaeda affiliates Salafia Jihadia and Ansar al-Islam, respectively, to be the perpetrators.⁶⁹ Could bin Laden or Zawahiri's lack of credit claiming for Riyadh, Casablanca, and the Jordanian embassy be a reflection of how the attacks actually played out? Several problems would have been that the threat message of 11 May was not published until after two of the attacks took place, or that mostly Muslims were killed, or that affiliates were primarily responsible and Al Qaeda Central did not want to steal their glory.

This area of affiliate relationships with Al Qaeda Central and resulting credit claiming "authority" for attacks is a subject in which additional research would be immensely helpful. This research could help illuminate how rigid and encompassing the "umbrella" is in its umbrella structure. The more we understand Al Qaeda today, the more it appears beholden to its affiliates. It relies on a "web of informal relations with groups" to gain operational collaborators and executors of missions in both Pakistan and around the world.⁷⁰ Some experts have even forecasted that Al Qaeda's position at the top of the Islamic militant movement is eroding and that the new system of militancy is governed by the "virtual hand" of global *jihad*.⁷¹ This forecast appears too pessimistic for Al Qaeda because many militant groups seem to be allying with Al Qaeda Central and benefiting from its extensive networks, legitimacy, and ideological reach.

Recent research by Daniel Kimmage has bifurcate implications for Al Qaeda Central's position of prominence. He provides evidence for both the decentralized nature of online "guerilla" media networks and their allied terrorist groups and the centralized nature in which they pursue common goals and media coordination.⁷² In his "al-Qaeda media nexus," much of the global *jihadist* movement has attempted to maximize synergies, guarantee credibility, and lessen vulnerabilities.⁷³ Since the facilitation of message control and branding has increased in importance, it would appear that bin Laden and Zawahiri extend an exorbitant level of control over this virtual hand of global *jihad*.⁷⁴

The claiming of responsibility by Al Qaeda's top leadership for attacks deemed "self-propagated" instead of merely inspired would most likely be a function of how extensive the funding, provision of intelligence, and guidance was for the attack. After all, bin Laden and Zawahiri would not want to claim responsibility for an attack executed by one of

their affiliates if it had not been instrumental in the act—nor would the affiliate want to relinquish credit for an attack that it planned and executed. Indeed the line between willing affiliate and competitor can be blurred as seen with Al Qaeda’s relationship with Hezbollah and Hamas. A look at when Al Qaeda Central claims responsibility as opposed to its affiliates would be invaluable to understanding the scope of Al Qaeda’s ability to directly influence affiliates and its operational capacity to conduct its own attacks. If bin Laden and Zawahiri only claim responsibility for attacks in which they have provided perhaps half of the funding, intelligence, and labor, their claim of responsibility, or lack thereof, can outline their organizational reach in the greater Islamic terrorist movement.

In addition to the turf-war aspects of credit claiming, there could be an element of ex post calculus of an attack based on whether the actual results would benefit or hinder Al Qaeda’s cause. In other words, if the intent of an Al Qaeda “inspired” or “planned” attack was to kill U.S. service members in Iraq and only Muslim women and children were killed, then bin Laden and Zawahiri could retreat ex post from claiming responsibility. This ex post benefit calculation by bin Laden and Zawahiri could make it more difficult to truly understand when Al Qaeda Central is involved in attacks. Nonetheless, if top Al Qaeda leadership could be implicated in the planning and resourcing of attacks that they do not claim, then this data could be valuable in understanding the parameters of their global message.

Final Thoughts

Understanding the constraints of their Northwest Frontier Province base of operations, bin Laden and Zawahiri have adeptly transformed Al Qaeda into an ideological umbrella organization connected to the outside world by the Internet and global media. They have demonstrated a great ability to lead plural groups and exploit innovation with the use of technology.⁷⁵ Harnessing their media shrewdness, they have connected with diverse audiences around the world with a constant message. The repetition of their platform themes and use of “message projection opportunities” demonstrate a great understanding of human nature, marketing strategy, global media, and world politics. The timing of their messages offers a rare glimpse into the psyche of bin Laden and Zawahiri and what they believe is important. With the majority of their fight now confined to the media, a greater understanding of their media strategy is invaluable to getting inside their heads.

As Sun Tzu advised to know the enemy, the United States must learn everything possible about its current enemy through its regular communiqués with the world. By truly understanding Al Qaeda’s media strategy, the United States can begin to understand the global reach of its bureaucracy and relationships with its affiliates. It can also allow the United States to proactively deal with threats and anticipate psychological tactics on the eve of key geopolitical events in America. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it will allow America to move forward in constructing a counter marketing strategy to Al Qaeda’s successful media campaign.

Conclusion

1. Al Qaeda’s top leadership exploits local sensitivities with tailored statements for specific audiences around the world. (Top Al Qaeda leadership refers to Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri.)
2. Anniversaries serve as “message projection opportunities” for Al Qaeda’s cause.

3. Al Qaeda's top leadership emphasizes Koranic and historical justification to provide legitimacy for its actions.
4. Seven platform themes are reinforced in nearly all media releases. In descending order of frequency as observed in media releases, these themes are: call to *jihad*, clash of civilizations, United States–Israel connection, Muslim unity, United States is weakening, apostate Muslim leaders are betraying Islam, United States is stealing Muslim oil.
5. Release timing trends show that the time interval between a geopolitical event of significance and subsequent media release is shorter following an Al Qaeda "loss" than an Al Qaeda "win." Following geopolitical events that tend to hurt Al Qaeda's cause (loss), bin Laden and Zawahiri release transmissions sooner than after geopolitical events that tend to favor Al Qaeda's cause (win).
6. Al Qaeda's top leadership attempts to prompt local Al Qaeda affiliates into action by providing specific guidance in their media releases. The efficacy of these "calls to arms" is fairly high with a strong correlation between initial guidance and a resulting attack.
7. Al Qaeda's top leadership attempts to influence American foreign policy with targeted messages directed toward Americans at critical moments in time.
8. Video releases are normally of greater significance than audio recordings, although this disparity is decreasing with al-Sahab's direct posting of videos to the Internet.
9. The degree of top Al Qaeda involvement in an attack and the actual results of the attack itself figure prominently in whether bin Laden or Zawahiri ultimately claim responsibility.

Notes

1. *Cracks in the Foundation—Leadership Schisms in Al-Qaeda from 1989–2006*, Combating Terrorism Center, West Point (2007), p. 2.
2. Daniel Kimmage, "The Al-Qaeda Media Nexus," Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty (February 2008), p. 2.
3. Graham Allison, Interview conducted on 29 October 2007, at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. Prof. Allison framed the struggle between Al Qaeda and the United States using this beer analogy.
4. Steve Coll, Lecture on 11 March 2008, Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.
5. Rohan Gunaratna, "Strategic Counter-Terrorism: Getting Ahead of Terrorism, Part III, Mass Media Response to Terrorism," *The Jebson Center for Counter-Terrorism Studies* (January 2008), p. 1.
6. Peter Bergen, Lecture on 7 February 2008, Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.
7. Peter Bergen, *Holy War, Inc: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (New York: Touchstone, 2002), pp. 96–99.
8. Bergen, Lecture on 7 February 2008.
9. Peter Bergen, Lecture on 14 February 2008, Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.
10. Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: Casting a Shadow of Terror* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003), p. 158.
11. Steve Coll, Lecture on 11 March 2008, Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.
12. Marc Lynch, "Al Qaeda's Media Strategies," *The National Interest* (Summer, 2006), p. 50.

13. Hassam M. Fatah, "Al Qaeda Increasingly Reliant on Media," *New York Times*, 30 September 2006, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/30/world/30jordan.html> (accessed 15 February 2008).
14. Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.*, p. 27.
15. Burke, *Al-Qaeda*, p. 158. Burke describes bin Laden's ability to use "every local sensitivity with some precision."
16. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Transmission from 5 January 2007.
17. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Transmission from 7 December 2005.
18. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Transmission from 21 February 2006.
19. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Transmission from 25 March 2004.
20. Osama bin Laden, Transmission from 10 September 2003.
21. Osama bin Laden, Transmission from 1 July 2006.
22. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Transmission from 5 May 2007.
23. It should be noted that the 42 references to "apostate" Muslim regimes is an aggregate of all Muslim governments addressed by bin Laden and Zawahiri. The recipients of the criticism, however, were Pervez Musharraf (22) and the House of al-Saud (20).
24. Lynch, "Al Qaeda's Media Strategies," p. 52.
25. *Ibid.*
26. "America's Image in the World: Findings from the Pew Global Attitudes Project," Remarks of Andrew Kohut to the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs; Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight, 14 March 2007.
27. CNN Anderson Cooper Show *AC 360*, Transcript, 11 September 2007, participants were Peter Bergen and Ken Ballen from *Terror Free Tomorrow*.
28. Terror Free Tomorrow and New America Foundation, "Results of a New Nationwide Public Opinion Survey of Pakistan before the June 2008 Pakistani By-Elections."
29. 2008 Annual Arab Public Opinion Poll, Survey of the Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland, Professor Shibley Tehlhami (Principal Investigator).
30. Peter Bergen, Lecture on 21 February 2008, Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. Bergen stated that bin Laden can be caught three ways: tipped off, satellite phone use, or in the process of sending videos to publishers or uploading to the Internet. With extremely loyal followers and the fact that he has not used a phone in years, the publishing of videos is the only way that he could be triangulated. Thus, with each additional video release, the mathematical chance of capture increases.
31. Dr. Fadl, the nickname for Sayyid Imam al Sharif, is currently being held in an Egyptian prison. A discussion of Dr. Fadl's recantation of violence toward civilians and Zawahiri's audiotape response can be found in Peter Bergen's forthcoming "The Beginning of the End of al Qaeda?"
32. Richard Rosecrance, Lecture on 11 October 2007, Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.
33. Laura Mansfield, "Zawahiri's Mentor Changes His Mind," *The New Media Journal*, 4 December 2007, available at http://www.therant.us/staff/l_mansfield/12042007.htm (accessed 20 April 2008).
34. Rohan Gunaratna, "Strategic Counter-Terrorism," p. 6.
35. Fatah, "Al Qaeda Increasingly Reliant on Media."
36. *Ibid.*
37. David J. Kilcullen, "Counting Global Insurgency," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 28(4) (August 2005), p. 601.
38. Burke, *Al-Qaeda*, p. 207.
39. Osama bin Laden, Transmission from 18 October 2003.
40. Osama bin Laden, Transmission from 1 November 2004.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*
43. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Transmission from 29 September 2006.
44. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Transmission from 22 January 2007.

45. Ibid.
46. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Transmission from 13 February 2007.
47. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Transmission from 5 May 2007.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Peter Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of al Qaeda's Leader* (New York: Free Press, 2006), p. 258–259.
51. Ibid., p. 259.
52. Transmission database supplied by the Combating Terrorism Center, West Point.
53. "Purported bin Laden Message to Europe: Quit Afghan War," CNN, 29 November 2007, available at <http://www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/meast/11/29/bin.laden.message/index.html> (accessed 15 February 2008).
54. Peter Bergen discussed the founding of al-Sahab at this point in Al Qaeda's development.
55. "The New Al Qaeda Central," *Washington Post*, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/08/AR2007090801845_5.html (accessed 15 February 2008).
56. Ibid.
57. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Transmission from 24 June 2006.
58. Osama bin Laden, Transmission from 11 May 2003.
59. Lynch, "Al Qaeda's Media Strategies," p. 52.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
62. Osama bin Laden, Transmission from 18 October 2003.
63. Osama bin Laden, Transmission from 16 November 2003, with Open Source.gov analysis.
64. Peter Bergen, discussion on 24 April 2008, regarding the independent nature of the Madrid bombings.
65. Osama bin Laden, Transmission from 18 May 2003, with Open Source.gov analysis.
66. Ibid.
67. "Major Attacks Blamed on Al-Qaeda" BBC, available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3234214.stm (accessed 15 February 2008).
68. Douglas Frantz et al., "The New Face of Al-Qaeda: Al Qaeda seen as a Wider Threat," *LA Times*, available at <http://www.globalissues.org/Geopolitics/WarOnTerror/NewFace.asp> (accessed 15 February 2008).
69. "Major Attacks Blamed on Al-Qaeda" BBC, available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3234214.stm (accessed 15 February 2008); and "Jordan Embassy Blast Inquiry," available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3134145.stm (accessed 15 February 2008).
70. C. Christine Fair, "Militant Recruitment in Pakistan: Implications for Al Qaeda and Other Organizations," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27(6) (November/December 2004), p. 490.
71. Scott Atran, "A Failure of Imagination (Intelligence, WMDs, and 'Virtual Hand')," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29(3) (April–May 2006), pp. 292–293.
72. Kimmage, "The Al-Qaeda Media Nexus," p. 17.
73. Ibid., p. 16.
74. Ibid., p. 1.
75. Coll, Lecture on 11 March 2008.

Appendix A

Timeline of relevant geopolitical events and Al Qaeda media releases, 2001–2007

2001 September 11	Attacks on United States
2001 October 7	Ω Muslim humiliation, negative effects of U.S. foreign policy on Muslims
2001 October 7	U.S. Invasion of Afghanistan
2001 December	Battle of Tora Bora
2002 October 12	Bombings in Bali
2002 October 17	Ω credit for Bali bombings
2002 November	U.S. Elections
2003 January 19	Ω unite radical Muslims against infidels
2003 February 11	Ω message to Iraq, urge Muslims to overthrow corrupt regimes
2003 March 1	Ω revolt against Saudis, <i>jihad</i> against Americans and Jews
2003 March 20	U.S. Invasion of Iraq
2003 April 9	Ω <i>jihad</i> in Pakistan and other corrupt Muslim regimes
2003 May 1	End of “hostilities” in Iraq
2003 May 13	Bombings in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
2003 May 18	Ω threat against Muslims nations helping the U.S. regarding Iraq
2003 May 21	♦ appeal to Muslims to take 9/11 attackers as “models” for <i>jihad</i>
2003 September 10	Ω / ♦ praise 9/11 anniversary and reiterate <i>jihad</i>
2003 September 28	♦ attack Musharraf and Karzai, U.S. wants to end the printing of the Koran
2003 October 18	Ω U.S. in quagmire in Iraq
2003 November 16	Ω credit for Istanbul bombings (Jewish synagogues)
2003 December 13	Saddam Hussein captured
2003 December 19	♦ signs of U.S. collapse everywhere in Iraq and Afghanistan
2004 January 4	Ω warns of “grand plot” against Arabs, criticizes Gulf rulers
2004 February 24	♦ criticizes U.S. State of the Union and French ban on headscarves
2004 March 11	Bombings in Madrid
2004 March 25	♦ attacks Musharraf and urges Pakistani Army to topple him
2004 April	Abu Ghraib Prison scandal
2004 April 14	Ω threatens Israel and U.S., offers Europeans a truce
2004 June 11	♦ criticizes U.S. Democratic reform plan in Mideast, U.S. humiliates Muslims
2004 September 9	♦ U.S. could not survive in Afghanistan without Pakistani support
2004 October 17	Zarqawi pledges allegiance to OBL
2004 October 29	Ω addresses Americans on causes of 9/11, takes credit for 9/11
2004 November 1	Ω tells Americans they will be safe if they do not “trample” Muslim security
2004 November 2	U.S. Presidential Elections
2004 November 8–16	Battle of Fallujah
2004 November 29	♦ U.S. elections of no concern, only cleansing Muslim lands of infidels

(Continued on next page)

Appendix A

Timeline of relevant geopolitical events and Al Qaeda media releases, 2001–2007
(Continued)

2004 December 16	Ω contests legality of Saudi rulers, praises U.S. Consulate attacks
2004 December 27	Ω recognizes Zarqawi as Iraqi AQ leader, boycott Iraq elections
2004 December 28	Ω message of support to Muslims in Iraq, salutes <i>mujahidin</i> in Fallujah
2004 December 26	Tsunami in Indonesia
2005 January 30	◆ argues for Caliphate, calls for <i>jihād</i> against “Crusaders” and Jews
2005 February 20	◆ Gitmo reveals the type of reform that Americans offer
2005 June 20	◆ Muslim countries must be free to rule themselves, <i>Sharia</i> law necessary
2005 July 7	Bombings in London
2005 August 4	◆ threatens British, U.S. Sec. State desecrates Koran, Iraq same as Vietnam
2005 September 1	◆ causal link between London bombings and rejection of truce with OBL
2005 September 19	◆ downplays U.S. success in Afghanistan, takes credit for London bombings
2005 October 23	◆ urges Muslims to aid Pakistani earthquake victims, U.S. delaying aid
2005 October 8	Earthquake in Pakistan
2005 October 15	Iraqi Referendum on Constitution
2005 December 7	◆ predicts failure of U.S. “Crusade,” calls for overthrowing Musharraf
2005 December 11	◆ Muslim victory imminent, Muslim unity necessary, call to <i>jihād</i>
2006 January 6	◆ aid necessary to earthquake victims, U.S. losing in Iraq and Afghanistan
2006 February 4	Violence stemming from Muhammad Cartoons
2006 February 21	◆ response to failed U.S. missile strike against him, threat to Musharraf
2006 March 5	◆ response to Muhammad cartoons
2006 April 13	◆ predicts “complete defeat” of West, U.S. continues eleventh-century crusades
2006 April 27	Ω U.S. is weakening, <i>jihād</i> or monetary support to the Muslim cause
2006 April 29	◆ praises Al Qaeda in Iraq, urges Pakistani soldiers to disobey orders
2006 May 17	Ω calls for assassination of Musharraf
2006 June 7	Abu Musab al-Zarqawi killed
2006 June 11	◆ American reform is hurting Muslims, Palestinians must be supported
2006 June 22	◆ speaks on cartoons and U.S. prison torture, contempt for honoring Rushdie

(Continued on next page)

Appendix A

Timeline of relevant geopolitical events and Al Qaeda media releases, 2001–2007
(Continued)

2006 June 24	◆ eulogizes Zarqawi and vows revenge, calls Maliki a traitor
2006 June 30	Ω mourns death of Zarqawi
2006 July 1	Ω support for <i>mujahidin</i> in Somalia and Iraq
2006 July 12–August 14	Israeli–Lebanon War
2006 July 27	◆ criticizes war in Lebanon, Muslims must target Jewish/American interests
2006 August 5	◆ announces Egypt’s Islamic group leaders join Al Qaeda
2006 September 2	◆ Azzam the American invites Americans to Islam
2006 September 11	◆ calls Muslims to <i>jihad</i> and to reject UN resolutions
2006 September 29	◆ reacts to Pope’s comments on Islam, urges Muslim support of <i>mujahidin</i>
2006 November	U.S. Elections
2006 December 21	◆ UN is the international false witness, praises Turkey for rejecting the Pope
2006 December 30	Saddam Hussein executed
2006 December 30	◆ congratulates Muslims on defeat of Americans and their corrupt allies
2007 January 5	◆ urges Somalis and Muslims to fight Ethiopian forces
2007 January 22	◆ urges Bush to send entire Army to Iraq
2007 February 13	◆ says Bush is addicted to drinking, lying, and gambling
2007 March 12	◆ chastises Hamas leadership, criticizes UN for having a double standard
2007 May 5	◆ U.S. nearly defeated, <i>jihad</i> for all oppressed (black/Hispanic Americans)
2007 May 13	Taliban Commander Mullah Dadollah killed
2007 May 23	◆ eulogizes Dadollah, urges continued <i>jihad</i>
2007 June 25	◆ Hamas must work with other <i>jihadist</i> groups
2007 July	U.S. troop surge in Iraq
2007 July 10	◆ criticizes Rushdie knighting, tells Hamas not to accept Mecca agreement
2007 July 11	◆ criticizes Musharraf’s killing of militants in the Red Mosque conflict
2007 September 20	Ω <i>jihad</i> against Musharraf
2007 October 22	Ω Al Qaeda and other militant groups in Iraq must unify effort
2007 November 18	Dr. Fadl (ideological godfather of Al Qaeda) discounts violent <i>jihad</i>
2007 December 14	◆ criticizes Dr. Fadl (his former mentor) for reversal

Ω = Bin Laden media releases.

◆ = Zawahiri media releases.

Appendix B
Response time chart

Date	Event/response	Interval (days)
Losses		
2003 May 1	Iraq defeated	
2003 May 11	OBL: threatens Arab states engaged in "guilty silence" re: Iraq	10
2004 November 23	Battle of Fallujah "won" by U.S.; insurgents neutralized	—
2004 December 28	OBL: Fallujah "standing firm" in the face of falsehood	5
2005 October 15	Iraqi vote on Constitution	
2005 December 7	AZ: "comical elections boycotted by half of population"	54
2006 June 7	Abu Musab al-Zarqawi killed	
2006 June 24	AZ mourns Zarqawi	17
2007 October 10	Rival Shi'ite clerics Abdul-Aziz al Hakim and Muqtada al-Sadr unite, oppose AQ and thus divide Shi'ite and Sunni (Hakim backed by U.S.)	—
2007 October 22	OBL: Muslim unity more important than internal conflicts	12
2007 November 18	Dr. Fadl (provider of foundation for modern <i>jihad</i>) discounts <i>jihad</i>	
2007 December 14	AZ: criticizes Dr. Fadl (his former mentor) for reversal	27
2008 January 31	Abu Laith al Libi killed	—
2008 February 27	AZ: promises revenge for Libi's death	27
Wins		
2004 March 11	Madrid bombing	
2005 September 1	AZ: "Madrid . . . has moved the battle to the land of the enemy"	540
2004 April 28	Abu Ghraib abuse scandal story breaks by 60 Minutes photos	—
2005 December 7	AZ: AQ and Taliban prisoners "being detained and tortured"	586
2004 December 8	Detainee abuse at Guantanamo story breaks	—
2005 February 20	AZ: Gitmo reveals the type of reform Americans bring	74
2005 October 14	First demonstration against Jyllands-Posten for Muhammad Cartoons	—
2006 March 5	AZ: "injustices against the Prophet"	142

Legend: AQ = Al Qaeda; OBL = Osama bin Laden; AZ = Ayman al-Zawahiri.

All media release information in this chart is derived directly from the bin Laden or Zawahiri transmission.