



**VICTIM AND REBEL
AL-QAIDA'S SALAFIST RHETORIC AND
THE PITFALLS OF ANTI-TERRORISM**

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Abstract

Following the July 2005 London terrorist attacks the focus of anti-terrorism efforts has moved towards radicalisation within European societies and away from the conflicts in the Middle East and South Asia. This report argues that this shift in focus is based on a misconstrual of al-Qaida as it mistakes effect for cause. Based on an examination of the communication strategy of al-Qaida and the political rhetoric of Salafism the need for an analysis of militant Salafism in its political and societal context is demonstrated. The radicalisation theory is criticised and it is argued that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the increased focus on efforts to counter radicalisation within European societies more or less have failed because al-Qaida has been able to exploit this strategy and reorganise itself around an operational centre in Pakistan. The report concludes that only politically viable solutions in South Asia and the Middle East can effectively suppress al-Qaida and militant Salafism.

Introduction

When al-Qaida's media production company *As-Sahab* delivers an audio or video tape featuring a speech by Osama Bin Laden or Ayman al-Zawahiri to *al-Jazeera* the procedure is almost invariably the same: the satellite network picks out certain passages which are broadcast on the news channel and posted on its website. Immediately clips appear on the major Western satellite networks. Simultaneously, or shortly thereafter, the entire speech is posted on the internet where it can be found on a number of websites, and can be read all over the globe by the great number of people interested in such information. This is a professional media strategy which utilises both Arab and Western news networks to efficiently alert anyone interested in the fact that a new speech from the al-Qaida leaders is available on the internet.

Whilst in the mainstream media these speeches are soon absorbed into the grey mass of 'yesterday's news', for numerous internet users across the global village they become the subject of intense scrutiny. These speeches constitute essential sources for understanding the worldview and the analysis of current conflicts that Osama Bin Laden is constantly working to propagate, and which is received and studied by those many people worldwide who may sympathise with his stance. In context, then, the speeches not only communicate analyses of and commentaries on concrete events, as well as threats against the infidels; they also present an overall picture of how al-Qaida leaders construe the world. This is equally true of a particular Bin Laden speech published by the media company *As-Sahab* in late April 2006.¹ It was a direct reaction to the Danish Muhammad cartoon controversy.² In this speech Bin Laden calls the publication of the drawings a worse crime than, for example, the bombings of civilians in Afghanistan. He argues that the West is at war against Islam on three levels: Firstly, through military warfare in Iraq, Afghanistan, etc. Secondly, through economic warfare whereby, for instance, Middle Eastern oil is purchased much too cheaply by the West, which amounts to de facto exploitation of the region. Thirdly, in a cultural war of which the caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad constitute the worst example. His surprising conclusion is that the cultural war is by far the worst of the three.

¹ Video featuring the image of Osama Bin Laden, and soundtrack of the speech subtitled in English, published by *As-Sahab*, 26 April 2006. Bin Laden's speech was first broadcast on *al-Jazeera* on 23 April 2006. Actually, only about five minutes worth of excerpts were broadcast, while the entire speech on *As-Sahab* lasted for more than 50 minutes.

² On 30 September 2005, *Jyllands-Posten* published 12 cartoons featuring the Prophet Muhammad. This triggered vehement reactions among Muslims and plunged Denmark into what the Danish prime minister termed the worst foreign policy crisis since WWII. See Lars Erslev Andersen: *Freedom of Speech, Battle over Values and the Political Symbolism of the Muhammad Drawings*, DIIS Report 2008:6, Danish Institute for International Relations, Copenhagen, for a description of the course of events.

For Bin Laden there exists only one Islam which applies to all Muslims, and this must be re-established throughout the Muslim world as a common ground for the faithful. It consists of one single interpretation, revealed in the holy scripture of the Koran. Together with the canonised accounts of the life of the Prophet Muhammad and the expoundings of a few Islamic scholars, this constitutes the one true basis for the submission of man to God's law, as well as for worldly life. Differing interpretations, including religious dialogue with infidels, alter the true and authentic foundation, are sacrilegious and punishable. Only when the one true and immaculate Islam has been re-established as the basis for Muslim life and belief throughout the Islamic world will the Islamic community (which comprises at least the territories seized by the great Caliphates of the Middle Ages) be restored. This is what al-Qaida's struggle is about. In his speech, which bears all the hallmarks of a political essay based on a strict interpretation of the holy scripture, Bin Laden emphasises that the basic, worldwide conflict revolves around this struggle, in which the infidels systematically employing military force, economic exploitation, cultural arrogance and moral slander battle the true Muslim faith. This struggle leaves no room for compromise.

Although the speech does begin in true Salafist fashion with quotes from the Koran and references to those early forefathers who presented the superior exegesis of the relevant sacred passages, analyses of current political issues in fact make up most of the speech.³ The policies of the West in Palestine and Sudan as well as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; the lack of Western support for the protection of Muslims suffering in Kashmir and Chechnya, are all seen as manifest expressions of the hypocrisy which, in

³ Salafism is a controversial concept. Central to Salafism is the concept of the unity of God (*Tawhid*), which means that there are no gods besides Allah, and that it therefore amounts to sacrilege to worship anything other than Allah. Allah is the absolute sovereign and only legislator of the universe. Thus for the Salafist only one law may be obeyed; God's law, as laid out by the Koran and the religious ways of life (*sunna*) of the prophet Muhammad. It constitutes a rebellion against God if man himself makes laws or obeys man-made laws. Salafism thus rejects any form of secularism. The ways of the prophet Muhammad epitomised faithful living, and he must therefore be imitated. Examples are also Muhammad's disciples, contemporaries who were his followers in faith. These are called *salafi*, hence the name Salafism. There are no other ways to a true life of divine worship, and it is also the duty of the believer to worship God, meaning to subject himself to God's law, in the manner advocated by the Koran, the sunna of the prophet, and his contemporary disciples. Guidance of any kind must, for the 21st century Salafist, be found by analogy to truths revealed by the study of the Koran, the sunna of the prophet, or Islamic scholars who in their ways adhered strictly to this same method. This is exactly what Bin Laden does in his analysis of the Danish Muhammad cartoons. The scholar of Islam Quintan Wiktorowicz, who has studied Salafism for a number of years, points out that modern Salafists can be divided into three groups: puritans, politicals and jihadists. The objective of the puritans is to propagate the true faith through the puritan way of life, mission (*dawa*), and education, while abstaining from politics and violence. In opposition to this, the aim for the political Salafists is that politics should be controlled exclusively by the true faith, with social justice and the abolition of man-made laws as the ultimate objective. This is also true for the jihadists who, in addition, want to realise the project by means of revolution and violence. The present report refers to the latter as militant Salafists, and its understanding of Salafism is to a great extent based on Quintan Wiktorowicz: "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 29: 207–239, 2006. See also Wiktorowicz: "The New Global Threat: Transnational Salafis", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. VIII, no. 4, December 2001.

the name of freedom, serves as a pretext for the basic objective of battling Islam. The UN is viewed solely as an instrument of the United States and the West: “The UN is an infidel organisation, and whomever accepts its ruling is also an infidel and a mere tool used to execute the Zionists’ and Crusaders’ resolutions, including declarations of war against us and the division and occupation of our lands.” Each analysis leads to the same conclusion: that what is afoot is “the Zionists’ and Crusaders’ war against the Muslims”.

Consequently Osama Bin Laden wholly approves of the economic boycott of Denmark which was implemented in Muslim communities across the world in reaction to the cartoons, and he demands that it be extended to include the US and Europe, but emphasises that the boycott does not nearly suffice. To any reader or listener aware of the context of the speech, it is clear that jihad in the form of armed action – terrorism – is not only an option but a duty weighing on all true Muslims who seek to defend Islam against infidel cultural attacks on their faith. The Muhammad cartoons are thus placed in a global context, which towards the end of the speech is furthermore construed in a metaphysical perspective. The cartoons, together with other abuses suffered by Islam, are seen as a sign of the *tribulation*, the end times before the Day of Judgment, when the final confrontation between the faithful and the infidels will take place. In parallel with extremist right-wing Christian fundamentalist beliefs in the US, this is understood as a time of conflict, tribulations, clashes, wars, as well as of a deluge of signs of the approaching end of time. Since Bin Laden’s speech the Muhammad caricatures have been a popular and recurring topic for discussion on al-Qaida related websites. While they faded from the moderate Islamist debate along with the loss of media attention to the cartoon controversy, demand that they be avenged only grew on jihadist websites. The reprinting of the drawings in Danish newspapers in February 2008 following the uncovering of a plot to assassinate the cartoonist, Kurt Westergaard, further enraged the discussion on these sites, reaching its peak with the terrorist attack on the Danish embassy in Islamabad in June 2008. With Bin Laden’s speech Denmark was considerably upgraded as a target for al-Qaida terrorism and is identified as a terrorist target on jihadist websites.

Victim and Rebel

Bin Laden's central message is received by militant Salafists and jihadists who, not satisfied with the excerpts broadcast by the global media, read or listen to the speech in its entirety.⁴ A message which, while loaded with metaphysics and apocalypticism, draws upon immediate political reality in terms of its rhetoric, analysis and argumentation, be this located on the battlefields of the Middle East, within the UN, or in the efforts of Western societies to universalise liberal civil rights.

The true Muslim is both a victim and a rebel; a victim of infidel oppression and exploitation against which it is his duty to rebel. The speech, then, comes across as more of a revolutionary manifesto not unlike the Marxist-Leninist inspired anti-imperialist rebel ideology of the past, than as a religious rant against blasphemy and offences against that which is held sacred.⁵ While peppered with references to canonised Islamic scripture, the numerous manifestos, speeches, pamphlets and videos issued by al-Qaida leaders and posted on the so-called jihadist discussion fora communicate, as a rule, a call for revolutionary rebellion and political activism via political analyses and argumentation.⁶ Reading the publications of Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri one gets the impression that the victim-rebel figure is a much more prominent theme than subtle religious exegesis. Faith may be the stated issue but the message and the substance are political: it is about power and order based on a political construal of Islam and Islam's significance in terms of how worldly communities are structured.

⁴ Al-Qaida is a Salafist organisation. The ideological focus of the present report is therefore primarily on Salafism, and not Islamism in a broader sense. As mentioned, Salafists may have a political agenda and the most active movements and organisations certainly do. These groups in this manner resemble (the political and the jihadist) Islamists, who are defined by the way the interpretation of Islam has become a political ideology and a political agenda. What separates Salafists and Islamists is that many of the latter do not profess the Salafist faith. Thus some, but not all, Salafists are also Islamists, and some, but not all, Islamists are also Salafists.

⁵ On Salafism and, more generally, the inspiration drawn from the modern European history of ideas by political Islam, see e.g. John Gray: *Al Qaeda and What it Means to be Modern* (London: 2003); Albert Hourani: *Europe and the Middle East* (London: The MacMillan Press 1980); Ian Buruma & Avishai Margalit: *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* (New York: The Penguin Press 2004)

⁶ Jihadist discussion fora are websites where material (videos, speeches, reviews, publications) from jihadist groups as well as from al-Qaida leaders is made available. Discussion is facilitated in chat rooms. Among the most prominent sites are *al-Ekblaas*, *al-Hesbab*, *al-Boraq*, as well as *al-Firdaws*, which is in English. American scholar Will McCants of the Institute for Defense Analysis, Washington DC, (previously with the Harmony project at West Point which publishes al-Qaida texts in Arabic as well as in English translation) has monitored the websites closely, and written about them on the blog: www.jihadica.com. He has also published the impressive report: *The Militant Ideology Atlas* (Combating Terrorism Center, U.S. Military Academy at West Point, November 2006)

Dawa or jihad – reform or revolution. A historical outline

The worldview subscribed to by Bin Laden and Zawahiri draws on two separate discourses. Firstly a strict interpretation of Islam, which constitutes a continuation and radicalisation of the ideology of the Islamic reform movements known collectively as the Salafiya movement,⁷ which emerged at the transition of the 19th to the 20th Century. Secondly, it also draws on *tiersmondism*, a third world anti-imperialist rebel ideology.⁸

Strictly speaking this is a revolutionary ideology. Jihadism draws on basic Islamic scripture where revolutionary communism drew on the Marxist philosophy of history which also, in its most dogmatic form, might well be construed as a tale of religious redemption with apocalyptic overtones, offering a path which is supposed to lead humanity on to a world in which “the individual receives according to need, and contributes according to ability”⁹ – a historical philosophical construct whereby revelation is followed by a tale of suffering and, ultimately, deliverance. The analogies between the rhetoric and worldviews of the jihadists and the communist revolutionaries are striking, although the frames of reference – the historical and societal contexts as well as the intellectual background – are indeed hugely different. And yet even here analogies can be found. The communist revolutionary romanticism rose on the shoulders of European Enlightenment thinking, industrialisation and capitalism. At the same time, pietistic revival movements synthesised Christian fundamentalism, puritan ethics, and an enthusiasm bordering on rapture for modern technological progress, which represented a superior work ethic as well as great wealth.¹⁰ The Islamic

⁷ On the Salafiya movement, see Wiktorowicz, op.cit.; Peter Mandaville: *Global Political Islam* (London: Routledge 2007); Vincenzo Oliveti: *Terror's Source. The Ideology of Wahhabi-Salafism and its Consequences* (Birmingham: Amadeus Books 2001). For a Saudi Arabian context, see Natana J. DeLong-Bas: *Wahhabi Islam. From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004); Madawi al-Rasheed: *Contesting the Saudi State. Islamic Voice from a New Generation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007) and Thomas Hegghammer: *Jihad in Saudi Arabia. Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010)

⁸ For a thorough account of Tiersmondism, see Uffe Østergård: *Akropolis Persepolis Tur / Retur. Hellenismeforskningen mellem orientalisme, hellenisme, imperialisme og afkolonisering. Hellenismestudier 4* (Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag 1991) and Robert Malley: *The Call from Algeria. Third Worldism, Revolution and the Turn to Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1996). The classic text is of course Frantz Fanon: *Les Damnés de la Terre with an introduction by Jean-Paul Sartre* (Paris: Francois Maspero 1966)

⁹ Karl Löwith: *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen. Die theologische Voraussetzungen der Geschichtsphilosophie* (Stuttgart 2004)

¹⁰ See Max Weber: *Die protestantische Ethik. Eine Aufsatzsammlung*. Herausgegeben von Johannes Winckelmann. (München 1965).

reform or revival movements also developed alongside the advent of modernity in the Middle East, from the latter half of the 19th century onwards, in great part as a result of European expansion and colonialism which made the traditional Islamic institutions and their learning seem hopelessly antiquated, if not even decadent and degenerate.¹¹ Islamist reformist thinkers such as, for example, the Iranian Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839–1897) and the Egyptian Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905) were excited by the technological advances of the European Enlightenment, but the utilitarian technical sciences had to be adapted to the spiritual foundations of the Islamic world, based on the Koran, the life of the Prophet, as well as the strict exegeses of the forefathers. The Islamic Medieval theologian Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) served as their inspiration and he is still quoted by Osama Bin Laden today as one of the great authorities in the interpretation of true Islam. From the reformist perspective traditional Islam was viewed as revolving around the the antiquated tombs of the traditional centres of learning of an Islamic tradition which took the form of “a series of narratives of dubious authenticity” in the words of one of the leaders of the 1970s Egyptian jihadist groups, Shukri Ahmad Mustafa.¹²

The unmistakable modernist characteristics of the reform and revival movements did indeed constitute a head-on assault on traditional ways, and thereby also on the privileges of the Islamic scholars whose interpretation of Islamic law was based not only on scriptural sources, but also on inferences by analogy to these sources and on the consensus within their own ranks. It was this laborious tradition of learning which – along with the greed and acquisitiveness of the rulers and the decadent influence of the colonial powers – was largely responsible for the fact that the Islamic communities had strayed from the true, authentic foundation as revealed to the Prophet. For a true Islamic community to take root and develop, to be re-established or, even, reborn, it was necessary to push aside traditional, established Islamic learning and return to the ancient sources to discover the authentic foundation. This would form the basis for the contemporary, reborn Islamic community. The means were reforms, especially of the educational system, as well as mission or dawa. Through dawa, which taught the true way of life, true morality and the true basis of faith, the misguided Muslims of the age would be reborn as true Muslims whose lives would be controlled solely by the law of God as revealed to the Prophet. At a grassroots level dawa could be connected with charity

¹¹ For a good account, see Sami Zubaida: *Islam, the People and the State: Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris 1993), as well as Hourani op.cit.

¹² Shukri, quoted by scholar of Islam John Voll, “Islamic Fundamentalism”, in John L. Esposito (ed.): *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (New York/Oxford: Oxford U.P. 1995).

work and even today a large number of Islamic charitable organisations exist that base their aid policy on Salafist premises.

It is important to emphasise that the notion of reform held by the Islamic reform movements was aimed at *society*, not at Islam: religion was not expected to adapt to historical, societal developments, but rather the community and the state had to be adapted, reformed and structured in accordance with the true Islamic foundation. The criticism which was directed at the established Islamic tradition indeed made the exact point that it had reversed this relation, causing its own construal of Islam as well as of society to stray from the true foundation.

The criticism on which the Salafists built had already been formulated by Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703–1792), who built in turn on the expoundings of Ibn Taymiyya.¹³ Wahhab's interpretation formed the basis for the Saud family's founding of Saudi Arabia, making Salafism an integral part of the founding narrative and legitimising basis of the modern Saudi state. The declared, official interpretation of Islam on which the Saudi state bases its legitimacy was originally Wahhabism (after Wahhab), which is in the main just another name for Salafism – a name which Salafists reject however, because it constitutes an inappropriate aspect of the worship of a mere man, rather than solely of Allah.¹⁴

With the Salafist interpretation as an integral part of the self-professed identity of the Saudi government, the Saudi state would appear to constitute an ideal framework for the true Islamic community. But even at the inception of the Saudi state its leaders already had to compromise, as its borders were determined by pragmatism and realpolitik – most importantly the demands made by the infidel British state to secure its interests, as a condition for recognition of the new state.¹⁵ Thus even as the state was born, the Islamic doctrine had to yield to history and international politics. In Salafist terms this accommodation turned the relation between religion and society upside down – as Islam had been forced to adapt to temporal, worldly power relations, and not the reverse.

The demands made on the state by the revival movements and the Salafists, which from the onset emerged as criticism of traditional, established Islam, were thus

¹³ On Wahhab and Taymiyya, see DeLong-Bas op.cit. and al-Rasheed: *Contesting the State*, op.cit.

¹⁴ See, however, Wiktorowicz op.cit., Mandaville op.cit. and al-Rasheed: *Contesting the State* on the development and discussions of the differences between Salafism and Wahhabism.

¹⁵ Madawi al-Rasheed: *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002), pp. 65ff

reproduced as internal tension and conflict during the constitution of modern Saudi Arabia. It is this conflict which has continued to fuel the Islamic opposition in Saudi Arabia, and which has been strengthened as the state has increasingly allowed political and pragmatic considerations – including taking into account the interests of Western allies led by the US – to guide the management of the Islamic heritage.

The worldview of Osama Bin Laden is deeply rooted in this tension within the Saudi state, and is therefore marked by the Islamic opposition's criticism of the governance of the royal family, which is seen as an obvious departure from true Islam.¹⁶ The Arab regimes, including the Saudi rulers, are also criticised in the Muhammad cartoon speech; they do not only merely practice a misguided and erroneous construal of Islam, they are lapsed Muslims (apostates). The precarious issue of avoiding war amongst Muslims (*fitna*) is thus *de facto* solved: rulers of Muslim countries, like Islamic scholars who adapt the creed through dialogue with the infidels are, according to Bin Laden, by definition not Muslims and they not only may but also, in fact, *must* be fought.¹⁷ The Salafists thus monopolise the interpretation of Islam and denounce all other interpretations as misguided and erroneous.

The approach of the early Salafiya movements consisted of mission, education and political reform. Later however, especially with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in the late 1920s, a more activist political agenda emerged in the new revival movements. The founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna, was influential in merging mission and political activism into one agenda, where religion and politics were seen as two aspects of a unified cause – the battle against secularism. Not only would the state be for Muslims, it would be constitutionally Islamic meaning that the institutions and structure of the state would be based solely on God's law, *sharia*. In this case, *sharia* is understood to mean not precisely those sections of the Koran that speak specifically about *sharia*, but refers more widely to a comprehensive system regulating human life, and thereby also the order – the Islamic order – which must govern the Islamic state.

¹⁶ Madawi al-Rasheed: *Contesting the State*, op.cit.; Joshua Teitelbaum: *Holier Than Thou. Saudi Arabia's Islamic Opposition* (Washington DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy 2000)

¹⁷ This argument defining the Arab leaders as apostates is made even more severely by the Muslim Brotherhood, whose radicalisation deepened proportionally with the Nasser regime's suppression of the organisation. See e.g. Johannes J.G. Jansen: *The Neglected Duty. The Creed of Sadat's assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East* (New York: Macmillan 1986), in which Yusuf Qaradawi sums up the argument, p.p.152–154. See also Sayyid Qutb: *Milestones* (Kazi Publications 1993)

The Muslim Brotherhood soon became a political factor to be reckoned with, enjoying wide popular support in Egypt. In addition to its social, educational and missionary activities, in the early 1940s it formed a secret militant section which carried out operations such as the murder of Egyptian prime minister Nuqrashi Pasha.¹⁸ After the 1952 military coup the Muslim Brotherhood was outlawed as the so-called 'Free Officers' who seized power in the coup considered the organisation to be their main competition. This suppression caused Muslim Brothers to flee to countries such as Saudi Arabia where some of the movement's political ideologists joined mosques, Islamic institutions, and the centres of learning in Mecca and Medina. Here they contributed to an ideological merger of the political activism of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Saudi variety of Salafism based on Wahhabism.¹⁹ It was this environment that the so-called 'awakening sheikhs' of Saudi Arabia – Salman al-Hawali (born 1950) and Salman al-Auda (born 1955) – later entered into as students. Here they developed their syntheses of Wahhabism and the tenets of the Muslim Brotherhood in a number of books, articles and speeches recorded on audiotapes, which have been of crucial doctrinal import to the ideology that, since the 1980s, has underpinned the worldview of Osama Bin Laden and other jihadists.²⁰

The writings of one of the most significant ideologists belonging to the militant wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, Sayed Qutb, were penned in prison. Two of Qutb's reflections particularly influenced radicalised Islamists and jihadists. Firstly his designation of contemporary Egyptian society as *jahaliya*, which in Islamic tradition signifies the period in Mecca before Allah revealed himself to the Prophet. In doing this Qutb accused the Egyptian government – including herein the state-employed imams and directors of state-sponsored, established, Islamic institutions – of not being Muslim. Consequently, true Muslims must retire from and distance themselves from society and the state – as the Prophet did when upon receiving his revelations he retired to Medina. Like him, they must return as warriors, fighting the state and its institutions. Qutb thus altered and politicised the concept of jihad, construing it as a duty to rebel and also to take up arms against the infidels and this was his second contribution. Qutb saw Jihad as a duty to fight for the true Islamic society, weapon in hand – and those not receptive to this message were condemned either as infidels or lapsed

¹⁸ Gilles Kepel: *The Prophet and Pharaoh* (London: as-Saqi 1995)

¹⁹ Gilles Kepel: *The War for Muslim Minds. Islam and the West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P. 2004), chapter 5

²⁰ Kepel *ibid.* and Mamoun Fandy: *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent* (New York: St. Martin's Press 1999)

Muslims.²¹ Qutb's radical ideas and political activism against the Egyptian state resulted in his death sentence and hanging in 1966. Among his followers he hereby became a martyr in the battle for the true faith and his books became compulsory reading for jihadist groups.²²

²¹ This account of Qutb is common among Islamists as well as Western scholars. Yet it overlooks the differences between Qutb's reading of the Koran and the common al-Qaida interpretation, including the concept of martyrdom, which is far more activist according to al-Qaida than is the case in a more theological reading which maintains that God alone determines upon whom martyrdom is bestowed. This clearly undermines the understanding of many jihadists that they themselves can earn martyrdom through jihad. This important point is made by the Danish scholar Anne Kirstine Waage Bech in her Master's thesis: *The 'Letter of Muhammad 'Atta': A Text Influenced by the Ideas of Sayyid Qutb?* University of Copenhagen 2005.

²² Jansen op.cit.

Iranian revolution, Afghan jihad and Camp David

Three events in 1979 gave further momentum to radical Islamism. The first of these was the Iranian revolution, which brought about an Islamist assumption of power led by Ayatollah Khomeini. Although the new Islamist regime in Tehran was Shiite, the very fact that an Islamist movement had succeeded in defying the secular rule of the Shah and confronting the American superpower and its ally Israel served as a tremendous inspiration for Islamist groups throughout the Middle East and South Asia. While not directly linked, it was hardly entirely coincidental that this was closely followed by the following actions in quick succession: First, on 4 November 1979 Islamist Iranian students occupied the American embassy in Tehran; then on 20 November a group of Saudi Salafists occupied the Great Mosque at Mecca and lastly, on 21 November, Pakistani students attacked the American embassy in Islamabad which was destroyed by fire.²³ These are obvious indicators that an Islamist rebellion against the local Middle Eastern governments and their American allies was brewing in the region.

That same year, Israel and Egypt signed a peace treaty at Camp David following negotiations mediated by the American president Jimmy Carter. The Camp David treaty resulted not only in Egyptian recognition of the state of Israel, but also in peace between the Arab frontline state of Egypt and the Jewish state. Many in the Arab and Muslim Middle East considered this an act of treason on the part of the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, and this cost him his life when he was gunned down by militant Islamists during a military parade in Cairo in 1981. The Camp David treaty thus gave rise to extensive mobilisation among militant Islamists throughout the region.

The third and probably most important occurrence was the organisation of the Islamist resistance against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, which had been implemented in December 1979. Fearing that the true objective of the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan was to gain access to crucial ports and oilfields in the Persian Gulf, the United States promptly entered into collaboration with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to support Islamist rebel forces in Afghanistan – the mujahedin, whose

²³ Steve Coll: *Ghost War. The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: The Penguin Press 2004), p. 23. On the occupation of the Great Mosque at Mecca: Yaroslav Trofimov: *The Siege of Mecca: The Forgotten Uprising in Islam's Holiest Shrine and the Birth of Al Qaeda* (New York: Doubleday 2007)

leaders were closely connected to Salafist communities, particularly in Saudi Arabia. The Pakistani intelligence service (ISI) would take over full control of the support for the mujahedin, which primarily went to the Afghan Salafists. On the one hand the American support for the mujahedin was a success, as in 1988 the Soviet Union officially withdrew from Afghanistan, a process that was completed in 1989. The failed Soviet venture in Afghanistan also contributed to the process which would a few years later result in the dissolution of the Soviet Union. On the other hand the undertaking had greatly strengthened the jihadist, Islamist movement in the Middle East as well as in large parts of Asia.²⁴

Saudi Arabia contributed to the deployment of volunteers to the war in Afghanistan, and the state sanctioned militant jihad as a legitimate and necessary activity. As documented through the unique studies in Saudi Arabia of Norwegian scholar Thomas Hegghammer, this in time made jihad a socially acceptable, respectable pursuit in Saudi society, where having a son or nephew who had fought in Afghanistan became a matter of pride and honour, not shame.²⁵ The same kind of social acceptance of jihad against foreign, infidel occupation forces spread throughout Pakistan, which even today is a fertile recruiting ground for al-Qaida and the Taliban in their search for mujahedin to fight in the rebellion against the new Afghan government and the coalition of the willing under NATO.

While the Soviet Union was indeed successfully ejected, the support for the mujahedin left the region thoroughly Islamicised, with numerous groups for whom jihad was both legitimate and meaningful – and with an immense potential for the organising of and recruitment for jihad, both within and outside the region. Within this very context the best-organised and most influential network, al-Qaida, established itself, and from this vantage point the rebel/victim ideology, most perfectly expressed in the speeches of Osama Bin Laden, was successfully disseminated. During the 1990s veterans from the Afghan conflict were the ones to make their way to battlefields in the Caucasus, South and South East Asia, Central Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, as well as to Muslim immigrant communities in Europe and to Brooklyn in New York City.

²⁴ The significance of the US Afghan policy is documented in the collection of declassified sources in The National Security Archive at George Washington University, and brilliantly presented in Steve Coll's book, *Coll op.cit.*

²⁵ See Thomas Hegghammer: "Terrorist Recruitment and Radicalization in Saudi Arabia", in *Middle East Policy*, Vol. VIII, no. 4, Winter 2006; Thomas Hegghammer: *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, op.cit

To recapitulate: it is important to note that Islamism in a wider sense, and its militant aspect of Jihadism in a more narrow sense, arose out of specific historical processes and contexts originating in the modernisation of the Middle East which was in part brought about by European colonisation. And, also, that it was originally deeply influenced by developments in the European history of ideas, which were reconstituted in a new, politicised version of Islam – in direct opposition to large parts of Islamic tradition and Islamic institutions. The new interpretation – which accompanied the emergence of Salafism around the turn of the last century – is mainly motivated by social criticism. It thus constitutes a political ideology, in the form of a new reading of basic Islamic scripture, one that aims not at the reformation of Islam but rather at a radical transformation of the state and society in the Muslim world. With the Afghan wars of 1979–1992 the scope of the revolutionary uprising widened from being directed at local governments – the near enemy – to include the Western allies of these regimes, mainly the US but also in time some European countries – the far enemy. Global Jihadism thus reflects the internal conflict in Islamic countries about which order should be brought to bear because this is a conflict that has become global – especially in connection with the war in Afghanistan.²⁶

Roughly speaking, this means that Jihadism today fights on two fronts, namely on an internal front with the Middle Eastern governments, and on an external front with the United States and Europe. According to Ayman al-Zawahiris and Osama Bin Laden these two fronts are clearly linked because the Jordanian, Egyptian and Saudi, but most obviously the Afghan and Iraqi, governments are in power thanks solely to Western support, both economic as well as military. The objective of jihad/terrorism in the West is thus twofold: first, to force the West out of the Middle East and South Asia in order to make way for an Islamist revolution like that which succeeded in Iran; second, to inspire ‘the Muslim masses’ to rebel against the near enemy (‘Muslim masses’ is the term used by al-Zawahiri in his postscript to 9 /11 and, once again, brings to mind the terminology and strategies of Marxism /Leninism).²⁷

Based on this the French scholar of Islam Gilles Kepel has argued that the 9 /11 attacks were a failure, precisely because the Muslim masses in the Middle East did *not* rise up.²⁸ He is right about this. However, it is obvious that the 9/11 attacks – and not

²⁶ Fawaz A. Gerges: *The Far Enemy. Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005)

²⁷ Ayman al-Zawahiri's text *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner* is given in full in Laura Mansfield: *His Own Words. A Translation of the Writings of Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri* (TLG Publications 2006)

²⁸ Gilles Kepel: *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2004)

least the reaction of the West in the form of the war on terror – have indeed inspired networks with no discernable connections to al-Qaida, inside as well as outside Europe, to take part in global jihad. Cases in point are the two major terrorist attacks that took place in Bali in 2002 and Madrid in March 2004, as well as a number of failed/averted attempts at terrorism. All these actions were carried out, or attempted, without any operational guidance from the original al-Qaida leadership. Yet they were clearly inspired by the ideology as well as the strategy of al-Qaida. The same was initially thought of the terrorist bombings of July 2005 in London. But, as shall later be discussed, further investigation both indicates that in this case there was direct al-Qaida involvement, and supports the theory that the network remains active and is now reorganised and based in Pakistan. Kepel, then, is right about the fact that 9/11 did not lead to a transnational revolution in the Arab Middle East in which the Arab regimes, in an Islamist version of the domino theory, would crumble one by one. But he downplays the fact that the 2001 attacks on New York and the Pentagon did in fact cause a considerable increase in support for al-Qaida's jihad – not least, but not only, in Europe. With the events of 9/11 al-Qaida and Bin Laden became household names in the media and among potential militants across the world. The Bush administration's launching of the war on terror, including the Iraq war and the Guantanamo prison camps, have contributed greatly to the branding of al-Qaida. This has been craftily exploited in the media strategy of Bin Laden and his people, which has enabled al-Qaida to reorganise and attract followers to receive terrorist training, from Europe as well as elsewhere.

Al-Qaida: metaphor or operational centre?

Al-Qaida now controls a wide-reaching media network, including the as-Sahab production company, an internet hosting site, several websites of which five are highly popular and have many users, as well as an increasingly professional distribution strategy. It is generally agreed that in this way al-Qaida has succeeded in retaining global media attention, while at the same time developing an effective means of propagating its ideology and inciting jihad. There has been much speculation that the internet, in particular password-protected chat rooms on the websites, has been used for operational planning and organisation of terrorism, as well as for recruitment purposes.²⁹ But further research shows that no exchange of operational details takes place on the internet. Will McCants concludes that the websites and al-Qaida's grand media strategy primarily serve an ideological purpose; that of disseminating the al-Qaida view of the world as well as providing an online community where acolytes can have their ideology and jihadist identity affirmed. Operational skills, however, must be developed and honed elsewhere.³⁰

This is currently the major issue for discussion: how, and to what extent, has al-Qaida reorganised and developed since 11 September 2001? By the 1990s al-Qaida had established itself in the Afghan mountains with training camps and other facilities. In the late 1990s al-Qaida and Osama Bin Laden became close allies of the then Taliban regime led by Mullah Omar. In this period al-Qaida was able to run its training camps in Afghanistan on the condition that visiting jihadists would stay out of the Afghan civil war.³¹ They were not to be trained to fight in Afghanistan, but to carry out terrorist actions in Europe, against the United States, or to infiltrate militias in the conflict-ridden areas of Algeria, the Balkans, Kashmir, the Middle East and Chechnya. The division of tasks was clear: the Taliban fought for control of Afghanistan while al-Qaida's objective was to create, through revolution, Islamic states in the Arab Middle East. This was to be achieved partly by inciting rebellion in the Arab countries, and partly by means of terrorism against countries that supported the United States and

²⁹ Brynjar Lia: "Al-Qaida online: understanding jihadist Internet infrastructure", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 January 2006; Daniel Benjamin & Steven Simon: *The Next Attack. The Failure of the War on Terror and a Strategy for Getting it Right* (New York: Times Books 2005)

³⁰ Will McCants: Jihadi Discussion Forums. Talks at Dansk Institut for Internationale Studier, København, 1 September 2008 (<http://www.diis.dk/sw64659.asp>). See also www.jihadica.com

³¹ Lars Erslev Andersen & Jan Aagaard: *In the Name of God – The Afghan Connection and the U.S. War against Terrorism* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark: 2005); Lawrence Wright: *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 2006)

Middle Eastern regimes which al-Qaida condemned as treacherous and un-Islamic, mainly Saudi Arabia and Egypt. In other words the Taliban agenda was local whereas that of al-Qaida was global in the sense that the adversaries were to be fought outside as well as within the region. The fall of the Taliban regime and the bombing of the al-Qaida camps in the Tora Bora mountains thus dealt a hard blow to the organisation. They lost their bases, many were killed or forced to flee and the surviving leaders, including Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, were constantly pursued by the United States, Pakistan and various other intelligence services.

All of this considerably weakened al-Qaida up until 2005. However, a number of actions were attributed to the organisation, mainly in South East Asia, the Middle East and Turkey. Apart from Turkey, where terrorists bombed a British bank in Istanbul in 2003, the operative role of al-Qaida in these actions was unclear. The general theory was that the terrorists were people who had either received training in al-Qaida's camps or, inspired by al-Qaida, had organised their own networks and facilities. This was also the case with the devastating bombings in Madrid in March 2004. In that case there are no real indications that the al-Qaida leadership was involved in the actual operation but there is no doubt, however, that those involved had previously been in contact with al-Qaida operatives. Most terrorism scholars and intelligence services therefore considered al-Qaida to be extremely active in terms of propagating its ideology and inciting terrorism, but without much operational ability. Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri headed an effective media centre, which inspired local networks around the world to organise independent terrorist operations. But, according to these theories the old al-Qaida no longer existed.³²

³² Jason Burke: *Al-Qaida. Casting a Shadow of Terror* (London: I.B. Tauris 2003); *Harmony and Disharmony. Exploiting al-Qa'ida's Organizational Vulnerabilities*, Combating Terrorism Center. Department of Social Sciences, United States Military Academy (at West Point), February 2006

From terrorism research to radicalisation theory

The theories may have been correct at the time, and were sustained by the media descriptions of the London bombings in July 2005. According to these, three men detonated suicide bombs on the London Underground, while a fourth man detonated his bomb on board a bus. All four had been raised in Britain. Apart from one, who had been in trouble at school and involved in petty criminal activity, they had seemed to be well integrated in British society, with jobs and families. It was emphasised that they had no connections to radical Islamist groups, in Britain or elsewhere.³³ In 2004 an American scholar, Marc Sageman, developed a theory of ‘Leaderless Jihad,’ employing theories of group dynamics and local networks to explain how so-called homegrown cells could develop all by themselves within local communities in Western societies.³⁴ For scholars who agreed with Sageman’s theory, not least after the London bombings, al-Qaida was mainly about ideology and rhetoric, albeit well communicated via the increasingly skilful jihadist media groups, but operationally impotent. A genuinely operational al-Qaida centre no longer existed and the greatest terrorist threat was these autonomous groups emerging within Western societies.

This shifted the focus of the anti-terrorism strategies of Western nations as well as terrorism scholars from the study of al-Qaida onto homegrown, radicalised terrorist cells. Public research funds were shifted to the study of radicalisation processes among extremist groups in European societies and away from research into the role of militant Salafism in the political conflicts in the Middle East and South Asia.³⁵ This tendency also influenced legislation introduced in Britain and Denmark increasing surveillance and imposing Control Orders.³⁶ In this legislation and in many research initiatives

³³ Daniel Benjamin op.cit.

³⁴ Marc Sageman: *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2004); Marc Sageman: *Leaderless Jihad. Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2008)

³⁵ Nationally as well as at EU level, from 2005 a number of research projects were launched to describe processes of radicalisation, mainly within Muslim immigrant communities. In 2006 a state research grant for terrorism research, under DIIS, was earmarked for research into radicalisation in Europe. In the spring of 2008 Aarhus University opened a ‘Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation’, based on 10 million DKK in state grants: <http://www.cir.au.dk/>. The EU, among other initiatives, sponsors a consortium of research institutions studying radicalisation, see Transnational Terrorism, Security, and the Rule of Law (TTSRL), website: <http://www.transnationalterrorism.eu/>

³⁶ Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005: http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2005/ukpga_20050002_en_1#Legislation-Preamble. Analysis by Jean-Claude Paye: ‘The End Of Habeas Corpus in Great Britain’, *Monthly Review*, November 2005, Vol. 57, Number 6. *The Council of the Bars and Law Societies of Europe* (CCBE) in a resolution of 19/11/2005 expressed concerns about EU countries’ anti-terrorism legislation, see <https://www.advokatsamfundet.dk/Default.aspx?ID=11687&M=News&PID=0&NewsID=6831>

the root causes of terrorism were in turn located in Muslim immigrant communities and the culture and religion developing within these, rather than in Middle Eastern and South Asian political conflicts. Some saw Islam and Islamism as the primary cause of terrorism and violence; that this is not due to the political conflicts in which Muslims internationally are involved, but due to their religion, which certain scholars characterised as totalitarian, employing analogies to Stalinism and Nazism.³⁷

Research into the London bombings as well as a number of other cases in Britain has, however, proven this theory wrong. An individual's development from being an Islamist leaning towards the ideology of al-Qaida to becoming a jihadist does not take place within a small group, guided and inspired solely by the internet. Although it is true that such Islamist groups have been known to attempt terrorist acts, the outcome is generally botched and amateurish.³⁸ Most terrorists by far need training and practical direction. This training does not take place via the internet but in real life meetings with experienced instructors. It is, then, interesting to note that at least one of the four London bombers had been to Pakistan. Investigations have also documented that they had visited radical groups in London, and were also connected to several members of other cells dissolved by British police since 2004.³⁹ In Britain a picture is emerging of a militant subculture, connected internally as well as to activities in Pakistan.

Based on these developments scholars are claiming that since 2005 al-Qaida has reorganised and been actively involved in terrorist plots in Europe as well as in the US.⁴⁰ In fact, on 1 September, two months after the London bombings, al-Qaida issued a video in which one of the suicide bombers, Mohammad Sidiq Khan, justified his deed. Al-Qaida is thus, it is pointed out, more than a mere media hub

³⁷ Mehdi Mozaffari: "What is Islamism? History and definition of a concept", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 8, Number 1, March 2007; Mehdi Mozaffari: "Islamisme er totalitarisme", *Weekendavisen*, 2007

³⁸ A case in point is the Danish Vollsmose case, in which two men were given 12-year sentences on 10 April 2008. There is hardly any doubt that the two were planning to build a bomb, but the investigation and trial showed that due to incompetence they were far from achieving this goal. See for example Kaare Gotfredsen: *Terrorisagen fra Vollsmose* (Odense: TV2 2008)

³⁹ Bruce Hoffman, *Islam and the West: Searching for Common Ground. The Terrorist Threat and the Counter-Terrorism Effort*. Testimony presented to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, U.S. Congress, Washington DC, 18 July 2006; Bruce Hoffman: *Combating Al Qaeda and the Militant Islamic Threat*. Testimony presented to the House Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities, U.S. Congress, Washington DC, 16 February 2006; Bruce Hoffman: *Challenges for the U.S. Special Operations Command Posed by the Global Terrorist Threat. Al Qaeda on the run or on the march?* Written Testimony Submitted to The House Armed Services Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities, U.S. Congress, Washington DC, 14 February 2007, Bruce Riedel: *The Search for Al Qaeda. Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press 2008)

⁴⁰ Hoffman, *op.cit.*

spreading extremist messages. In fact al-Qaida has regrouped and is functioning much as it did before 9/11: by attracting followers, some of them from Europe, to training camps which are now located in Pakistan rather than Afghanistan. Thus al-Qaida has undergone a twofold development: firstly, its marketing skills have improved greatly through taking advantage of the 'branding' it achieved in connection with the 9/11 attacks – an image which is underpinned by the way the organisation was portrayed by the US and its Western allies in connection with the war on terror. Secondly, it has managed to find new locations for its bases and training camps, which attract volunteers who receive instruction with a view to executing terrorist operations upon their return to their home environments, which include Europe. This disproves the theory that al-Qaida ceased active operations after the war in Afghanistan. On the contrary, the most severe terrorist threat against Western interests seems to emanate from a reorganised al-Qaida, based in the tribal regions of Pakistan.

The new al-Qaida

Several things made this reorganisation possible, the most important probably being the Iraq war. It diverted the focus of the Western coalition forces from Afghanistan, which was left instead to unreliable local warlords and to Pakistan, while al-Qaida used the opportunity to mount an insurgency in Iraq.⁴¹ The US strategy of waging war in Iraq by means of a small military force, limited international backing and, without concrete planning or knowledge of local conditions enabled al-Qaida to operate in Iraq, mobilising locals for the insurgency. This provided al-Qaida with renewed strength and publicity that facilitated recruitment to the organisation. While al-Qaida created new bases in Iraq a younger generation was trained in warfare; skills which some of them brought back with them to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan also played a dual role allowing both the Taliban and al-Qaida to take control of the tribal regions on the border with Afghanistan. While Pakistan joined the US in the war on terror, it also needed the Islamist militias due to tensions with neighbouring India, both with regard to Kashmir and more generally in connection with issues relating to the disputed borders of Pakistan. We have therefore witnessed Pakistan siding with the US while at the same time cynically providing the Taliban with access to the war in Afghanistan, where the organisation mobilises the insurgency against US and NATO forces.

The problem for Pakistan is that its support of Islamist groups poses a threat from within. Until 2004 Pakistan was at best hesitant to confront al-Qaida. But following assassination attempts against the then president Musharraf, Pakistani security forces began to pursue al-Qaida. But they met with great resistance in the tribal areas, which the militias were not about to let the Pakistani army gain control of. Militant Islamist groups were thus mobilised to fight the Pakistani army directly as well as to support terrorism deep inside Pakistan. This movement is reflected at an ideological level. When Pakistan attacks the Islamists in the tribal areas large parts of the population accuse the government of being a handmaiden to the US, which raises more support for the Islamists providing them with more recruits for their militias and terrorist groups. The Pakistani state is thus in an awkward position, caught between threats against its exterior borders and the threat of terrorism and unrest from within.

⁴¹ Ahmed Rashid: *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (New York: Penguin 2008); Barnett R. Rubin: "Saving Afghanistan", *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2007

Attempts to defend itself against external threats cause an increase in the internal ones and *vice versa*. The Taliban and al-Qaida have used this situation to reinforce their bases in the tribal areas.⁴²

Two other developments appear to have benefitted the reorganisation of al-Qaida. Since 2002, when India and Pakistan teetered on the brink of war over Kashmir, a dialogue has been initiated between the two countries which seems to have alleviated the conflict. This has caused several prominent operatives to leave Kashmir for the tribal areas where, with their combat experience and expertise, they contribute to the reorganisation of the Taliban and al-Qaida.⁴³ The same pattern has been seen in Iraq where al-Qaida has become increasingly unpopular, something the American army has taken advantage of by forming alliances with local Sunni tribal leaders. This has led to a period of relative calm in violence-torn regions, while also forcing out al-Qaida jihadists, many of who have wound up in Pakistan.⁴⁴ A new Taliban has emerged, one which approaches the battle against the NATO coalition in a much more modern fashion, using recent technology in their partisan warfare and, like al-Qaida, they now use the internet for communication and propaganda – in sharp contrast to the old Taliban, which banned modern media.⁴⁵ Al-Qaida in Pakistan has likewise been strengthened, being able to bring in fresh but battle-honed forces from Iraq.

All this serves to better enable al-Qaida to organise in a manner similar to that of the late 1990s, this time in Pakistan. It has been supplied with fresh, well trained recruits from Kashmir and Iraq and it operates in an area uncontrolled by a central power or by the Pakistani government, where they are able to recruit from a local population terrorised by the struggle for power between militias and warlords, as well as by clashes between the Taliban and Pakistan.

It is remarkable that a strengthened and reorganised al-Qaida has been unable to carry out terrorist attacks in Europe since the London bombings in 2005. This indicates

⁴² Hassan Abbas: *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism. Allah, the Army, and America's War on Terror* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press 2005); Rashid op.cit.; Barnett R. Rubin & Ahmed Rashid: "From Great Game to Grand Bargain", *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2008; Rohan Gunaratna & Anders Nielsen: *Al Qaeda in the Tribal Areas of Pakistan and Beyond*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 31, 2008; *Pakistan's Tribal Areas: Appeasing the Militants*. Asia Report Number 125, 11 December 2006, International Crisis Group, www.icg.org

⁴³ Syed Saleem Shahzad: "Afghanistan: the neo-taliban campaign", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, # 10, October 2008

⁴⁴ Seth Jones & Martin C. Libicki: *How Terrorist Groups End. Lessons for Countering al-Qaeda* (Washington DC: RAND Corporation 2008); Neil Smith & Sean MacFarland: "Anbar awakens: The tipping point", *Military Review*, March–April 2008

⁴⁵ Patrick Porter: "Exotic Enemy? America, the Taliban and the fog of Culture", in Patrick Porter: *Military Orientalism. Eastern War Through Western Eyes* (London: Hurst & Company 2009)

that al-Qaida remains vulnerable and weakened. This is in fact confirmed by their numerous videos and discussions on the aforementioned jihadist discussion fora. The organisation is having a hard time explaining away the fact that it has suffered what must be seen as a most shameful defeat in Iraq. Neither has it managed to successfully establish itself within its key area, the Arab Middle East. In 2003 and 2004 al-Qaida attempted to mobilise in Saudi Arabia but the Saudi Arabians launched a major campaign which all but eradicated al-Qaida's presence in the kingdom.⁴⁶ Neither has it managed to become truly established in any of the other Arab countries. Only in Yemen does al-Qaida hold a strong position. Here there is good potential for recruitment, due among other things to the presence of many veterans from the war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Al-Qaida is involved in the conflicts in Algeria and here, as in Yemen, al-Qaeda operatives participate in terrorist activities. Finally, there is an al-Qaida presence in Somalia where it has strong ideological ties to al-Shabaab which was created after the US and Ethiopian suppression of the Islamic Courts in December 2006 and which continues to grow in strength in Somalia.⁴⁷ But the Iraqi failure so far, as well as the absence of success in the Arab Middle East, not least in Palestine, have provoked a great deal of frustrated criticism and is forcing the al-Qaida leaders to come up with explanations and spin. It does not satisfy globally oriented al-Qaida sympathisers that the organisation is able to execute operations in Pakistan, Yemen, Algeria, Somalia and Afghanistan. Most al-Qaida acolytes demand success in Iraq, in Palestine, as well as in the Arabian Peninsula. These are the key areas and the supposed cradle of liberation, according to these followers.

Al-Qaida, then, is vulnerable to its own rhetoric and its many boisterous promises to level powerful attacks against the arch enemies – the United States and Israel. As long as attacks fail to take place the rhetoric will unavoidably seem increasingly empty. This conclusion is indeed borne out by the video celebrating the anniversary of 9/11 which al-Qaida succeeded in issuing on 19 September 2008. The video is well made. Inspired by American news networks it presents a mixture of interviews and documentation. Yet the content does not quite match the technology, as an al-Qaida leader attempts to cover up al-Qaida's failure in Iraq. The rhetorical approach consists of portraying everyone else as failures and cowards, in order to make their own organisation appear brave, righteous and successful, and of following up promises of new, powerful actions by conjuring up the final victory as Allah's reward for the true believers.

⁴⁶ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, op.cit.

⁴⁷ Isaac Kfir: "Islamic Radicalism in East Africa: Is There a Cause for Concern?", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 31, 2008

Al-Qaida the parasite, and new anti-terrorism perspectives

In terms of the war on terror the West thus finds itself back at the beginning, if we understand this to mean 11 September 2001. The greatest threat from militant Islamism can be traced to a reorganised al-Qaida based in the tribal region of Pakistan just as, prior to 9/11, it could be traced to the Afghan mountains. The most important strategy will be to remove al-Qaida's ability to further consolidate itself in the tribal areas and, ultimately, to force them out. This cannot be achieved by fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan, nor by pressuring Pakistan to deploy its army in a hopeless struggle in the ungovernable tribal areas nor, even less, by targeting the Muslim diaspora in England. It can succeed by bringing about viable political solutions which enable the integration of these areas in Pakistan. In order to make this possible it would be more expedient to guarantee Pakistani sovereignty than to threaten it. This requires regional negotiations between Iran, India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and Russia, as well as the United States and the UN, to solve the issues of establishing the Afghan–Pakistani border and solving the Kashmir dispute.⁴⁸ It has often been claimed that a solution to the conflicts in the Middle East cannot be reached until the Palestinian issue has been solved. In a similar way, a solution to the Kashmir dispute should be a more pressing concern in the war on terror than the suppression of the Taliban in Afghanistan and civil rights in Western Democracies. Al-Qaida is, as an organisation, largely a parasite feeding off the conflicts of others, be they the Taliban, Hamas, or Iraqi insurgents. If al-Qaida were to be cut off from this parasitic activity by the creation of expedient and viable solutions to the conflicts on which it feeds, al-Qaida would likely soon become the stuff of legend. Viable political solutions based on diplomatic efforts in South Asia and the Middle East would therefore make for a better strategy in the fight against militant Salafism than surveillance and government-implemented anti-radicalisation planning in Western societies. The first strategy aims at reducing the causes of terrorism, while the other focuses solely on their effects, which only runs the risk of aggravating the threat posed by militant Salafism.

⁴⁸ Barnett & Rashid *op.cit.*

