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## 31 Virtual Sanctuary Enables Global Insurgency

Richard Shultz

In the aftermath of 9/11 the United States went to war with al Qaeda and the Taliban. By 7 December 2001, the Taliban regime had been overthrown and al Qaeda's infrastructure in Afghanistan largely disrupted. The loss of that sanctuary was a major setback—a strategic defeat—for the vanguard of the Salafi Jihad movement and the embryonic global insurgency it was facilitating from that Afghan base. It now faced the challenge of having to adapt and innovate to recover what it had lost. Could it find new ways to replicate what had been established in Afghanistan in 1996–2001? This was the challenge al Qaeda and its Salafi affiliates faced. Could they reinvent themselves in the aftermath of Operation Enduring Freedom and continue to carry out the global insurgency they had initiated?

This chapter seeks to identify how al Qaeda and the Salafi Jihadists have attempted to reorganize to continue to execute a global fight. They appear to have done so through *two strategic adaptations*. The degree to which they have been able to accomplish each of these strategic adaptations and, as a result, the extent to which they are able to fight the “long Jihad”—a protracted irregular war on several fronts—cannot be answered here. That requires much further research. Here we will focus on describing what each of these strategic adaptations entails.

- *One*, the al Qaeda vanguard and its affiliates have employed the Internet to establish in cyberspace a virtual sanctuary from which to carry out many of the activities they had initiated from their Afghan base in 1996–2001. These activities include propagating the Salafi Jihad ideology to the *ummah*; recruiting, inspiring, and training *Jihadis*; providing operational information and materials; networking dispersed elements of the Salafi Jihad movement; irregular warfare training; and planning and executing operations.

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- *Two*, al Qaeda has continued to encourage and promote the global Salafi Jihad movement, which appears to function at the local level within nine regional areas. In these locations, activities carried out by groups and cells that see themselves as a part of this movement have continued to take place since 9/11, with some regions, to include Europe, experiencing major terrorist strikes.

Below, the focus will mainly be on the first adaptation. How has the al Qaeda vanguard and its affiliates employed the Internet? To what extent do they seek to establish in cyberspace a virtual sanctuary from which to carry out many of the activities that had taken place on the ground during 1996–2001 in the Afghan base? The second strategic adaptation—continuing the fights against near or national-level enemies by local armed groups—will receive less comprehensive attention.

## VIRTUAL SANCTUARY

Since 9/11, growing attention has been paid in both the news media and more scholarly publications to how al Qaeda and other associated Salafi Jihad groups have made use of the Internet. For example, Steve Coll and Susan Glasser suggested in the *Washington Post* that “al Qaeda has become the first guerrilla movement in history to migrate from physical space to cyberspace. With laptops and DVDs, in secret hideouts and at neighborhood Internet cafes, young code-writing Jihadists have sought to replicate the . . . facilities they lost in Afghanistan with countless new locations on the Internet.”<sup>1</sup>

Gabriel Weimann, in a 2004 study, provided the following insights into the expanding use of the Internet by Jihad groups. “In 1998, around half of the thirty organizations designated [by the United States] as Foreign Terrorist Organizations . . . maintained Websites; by 2000, virtually all terrorist groups had established their presence on the Internet. Our scan of the Internet in 2003–2004 revealed hundreds of Websites serving terrorists and their supporters.” He goes on to add: “Terrorism on the Internet . . . is a very dynamic phenomenon: Websites suddenly emerge, frequently modify their formats, and then swiftly disappear—or seem to disappear by changing their online address but retain much the same content.”<sup>2</sup> Since 2004, what Weimann described has continued to burgeon.

Weimann and other specialists have conceptualized frameworks for categorizing the different ways in which the Internet has been utilized, describing the functions these activities hope to serve. Extrapolating from these studies and using extensive data mining of a primary-source database compiled by the SITE Institute, one can observe these attempts to replicate in cyberspace many of the activities that took place on the ground in Afghanistan in 1996–2001.<sup>3</sup> Here we divide those activities into the following seven categories:

- Propagating the Salafi ideology of Jihad
- Inspiring and mobilizing the *ummah* to join the Jihad
- Engaging in psychological warfare to demoralize enemies
- Networking the global Salafi Jihad insurgency
- Sharing operational information—manuals and handbooks
- Sharing operational information—training videos and courses
- Collecting for targeting.

If effective, these virtual activities will provide al Qaeda and associated movements (AQAM) with the capacity to reach like-minded individuals and groups in various regions

of the world who are willing to join the cause and take action. Through AQAM Web sites these individuals and groups will have the opportunity to attain the operational skills and capacity to execute violent strikes locally and on an independent basis. This is a new form of power projection no radical movement has had in the past.

What follows is a description of each of the categories and how they fit together. It is based on an assessment of examples of the ways in which al Qaeda and associated Salafi Jihad groups have carried out each activity on their Internet Web sites. However, before proceeding, it is also important to briefly note the role and contribution that satellite television plays in this process. For Muslim populations in the Arab world and elsewhere satellite channels such as al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya are often the first way in which they are engaged with the issues and themes, described below, that are found on the Web sites of al Qaeda and associated Jihad groups. In other words, there is a synergy—albeit an unintended one—between them. Indeed, it may well be that al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya, among others, are the precipitants—provide an awakening—that take the individual to the Internet for further information. Here is what the individual will find.

**1. Propagating the Salafi Ideology of Jihad.** The first requirement the Salafi Jihadists have to satisfy to be in a position to initiate a global insurgency is to transmit a transnational ideology to target audiences. They have to be able to successfully perform the same functions on the Internet as are carried out by national-level revolutionary movements. Through a large number of different Web-based activities, to include sophisticated media fronts, news shows, and online magazines, they seek to execute these functions across the globe. By doing so, they are able to disseminate a series of ideological frames and messages that describe in global and local terms the social and political conditions requiring immediate and drastic Jihad action. Salafi ideology offers a comprehensive critique of the existing local and global social/political situations as immoral and inhuman and seeks to instill in the *ummah* a powerful sense of moral outrage and commitment to holy war.

The Global Islamic Media Front, one of the main voices of al Qaeda on the Web, is illustrative. This site, formerly known as Alneda, is heavily focused on ideological-type information. It not only posts all of the doctrinal speeches and statements of bin Laden and Zawahiri, among others, but also provides analysis of these items for the *ummah*. An example—“Reading and Analysis of the Hero Tapes of Usama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi”—was posted on 1 May 2006 and subsequently distributed across several other Jihad forums.

Another example that focuses, at least in part, on the broader ideological themes found in Salafi Jihad doctrine is the *Voice of the Caliphate*, a weekly news program issued by the Global Islamic Media Front. First appearing in 2005, it ties theory and practice together by providing examples of how the global holy war is being carried out by different elements of the *ummah*.

Electronic Internet magazines serve a similar function. A recent example is *The Echo of Jihad*, a 45-page periodical that began appearing in 2006. Its April edition features discussion of the importance of Jihad; the relative importance of Islamic scholars versus mujahideen leaders like bin Laden; and recent operations by mujahideen in Chechnya,

Afghanistan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere. A second example, *Ja'ami* (which means “mosque”), is produced by the Media Office of the Islamic Front of the Iraqi Resistance.

Finally, in this category of ideological and doctrinal materials one must include broad strategy documents such as al Qaeda's seven-stage plan for the next 20 years. Since it was first posted, this “strategy” document has been given a prominent and permanent status atop many of the most frequently visited Jihadist forums on the Internet. Western experts tend to characterize it as very naive. They do so for the following reasons. First, there is no way the scenario depicted in the plan can be followed step-by-step. It is simply unworkable. Second, the idea that al-Qaeda could establish a caliphate in the Islamic world is absurd. The 20-year plan has nothing to do with reality. It is far out of reach.

However, these materials are not aimed at convincing Western experts. They are directed at those many members of the *ummah* who read these materials at *Jihadi* forums on the Internet. What impact do they have on them? Do the readers envision a coming major transformation of society and return to an idealized past? And if they agree with it, are they ready, as one three-part series run by the Global Islamic Media Front asks, to “gear up” and prepare to join the Jihad?

**2. *Inspiring and Mobilizing the Ummah to Join the Jihad.*** It is one thing to nod in agreement with broad ideological statements. Al Qaeda and the Salafi Jihadists seek to leverage a plethora of Internet methods to energize sympathizers into action. Here we will examine one important way they do so by celebrating the achievements and sacrifices of those on the front lines of the global fight.

Consider the biographies of martyrs that are posted on the Web with a high degree of regularity. Al Qaeda in Iraq, for example, publishes on a periodic basis a document titled *From the Biographies of Prominent Martyrs*. The eighth issue of it, dated January 2006, tells the story of the “Knights Group” of three mujahideen. In great detail the reader learns why and how each joined the Jihad and traveled to Iraq to fight. An account of their courageous demise follows. The three were pinned down in a house they were using as a base. The author glorifies their deaths, noting the unwillingness of each to try to escape or surrender. And one of the Jihad fighters, referred to as the lion Abu-Umar, is said to have “carried in his hands a mortar shell that he had prepared for this situation.” He surprised the Americans attacking the house and “pulled the ring out, throwing four of the criminals to hell, while he went up to Paradise.”

This is but one example. Many others are contained in the SITE Institute database. And it only maintains a sample of them. There are also other formats for these biographies, such as the videoed “last will and testament” of suicide bombers. One example is the “Will of the Martyr, Abu al-Zobeir al-Mohajir,” with video footage of his operation in July 2005. It depicts a celebration in which he enthusiastically describes the operation he is about to carry out and why he intends to do so: “Allah ordered us to make Jihad . . . to defend his religion. I urge all young Muslim men to follow us in Jihad and give their lives for the sake of Allah's religion.” He is then shown being embraced by his comrades, before the film cuts to the scene of his suicide car bombing—a “crusaders' checkpoint” east of Fallujah. Again, this is one of many examples found at Jihad Web sites.

Other means employed to inspire and mobilize are videos of the preparation for and successful conduct of operations against U.S. forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. These

appear on a daily basis on *Jibadi* forums and Web sites. One example, issued by the Global Islamic Media Front on 22 January 2006, is a 28-minute video titled “Jihad Academy,” which is described as but a “single day for those who struggle in Allah’s cause.” It highlights a number of attacks executed by Iraqi insurgent groups, to include al Qaeda in Iraq, the Mujahideen Army, and the Islamic Army in Iraq. The attacks are shown in the dawn hours and in the dark of night. They include sniper operations, detonation of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) against a variety of targets, and rocket and mortar fire.

There also are many publications posted on these Web sites that fall into the category of inspiring, motivating, and mobilizing the *ummah* to join the fight. These guides are advocacy and motivational pieces. The extent to which the message is being received and acted upon remains to be determined.

Paralleling these are other videos with *Jibadi* field commanders who provide the same kind of inspirational message. Of course, the most prominent was Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi. An example, titled “A Message to the People,” was issued by the Mujahideen Shura Council, which claims to be composed of six insurgency groups in Iraq.<sup>4</sup> In this 34-minute video, Zarqawi is seen planning operations in a war room, meeting with local leaders of al-Anbar province, and leading mujahideen in training exercises and on the battlefield. In another part of the film Zarqawi is seen firing an automatic weapon and stating, “America will go out of Iraq, humiliated, defeated.”

Finally, scores of items on these Web sites go the next step and include guides describing how to prepare for and then join the fight in Iraq and elsewhere. One example, “This Is the Road to Iraq,” provides instructions for prospective *Jihadis* intent on entering the war. The first half concentrates on mental and physical preparation for Jihad, while the second half furnishes guidance for successfully entering Iraq and cultivating contacts with an insurgent group.

In addition to celebrating the achievements and sacrifices of those on the front lines of the global fight, there are other ways AQAM and the Salafi Jihadists employ the Internet to inspire and mobilize the *ummah* to join the fight. They use the same Web sites, for example, to recount the suffering and carnage they assert is being inflicted on Muslims by the United States and other Western powers, Israel, and apostate regimes in Islamic countries.

**3. *Engaging in Psychological Warfare to Demoralize Enemies.*** The flip side of inspiring and mobilizing the *ummah* to join the Salafi Jihad movement and fight is the demoralizing of the near and far enemies of that movement, convincing them to give up the fight. Here we will use the insurgency in Iraq, the central front in the global Jihad, as illustrative.

A number of Internet-based tactics are employed by the Salafi insurgent groups to demoralize their enemies in Iraq. Of these, the most terrifying and intimidating have been the beheadings. This tactic has been used against both Iraqis and foreigners working in Iraq. The message to each group is unambiguous. The nightmare videos of those captured being decapitated by their captors is anything but a random act of terrorism—it is carefully designed for specific audiences.

With respect to members of the Iraqi government, and those contemplating joining it, the threat of beheading was explicitly made through numerous Internet-posted

warnings. For example, on 20 April 2006 the Shari'a Commission of the Mujahideen Shura Council in Iraq issued the threat of "the sword and slaughter to he who joins the police and the army." The council stated that all Muslims who join the Iraqi security forces to serve those who "worship the devils, those who disbelieve and fight in the cause of Taghut [Satan]," shall be considered "converters who fight against Allah." What awaits them?—"sharp swords!" And in a similar message posted in December 2005, insurgent groups in Iraq were encouraged to "start cutting throats in the Islamic way. . . . Slaughter three every day to show them that you do not hesitate in implementing Allah's orders." To Western eyes this is immoral and savage behavior. But for Salafi Jihadists it is characterized as religious duty. The blood-dripping sword has a powerful Salafi meaning.

In addition to the beheading videos, the insurgents in Iraq also post a large number of videos and reports of other kinds of executions. These include putting captives to death by firing squad, as well as pulling police out of vehicles, off of street corners, and so on to gun them down on the spot.



Blood drips from the sword of a *Jibadi* fighter, evoking both the literal violence inherent in the *Jibadi* struggle and the possibilities of military victory. Blood dripping from a sword has strong Salafi connotations.<sup>5</sup>

Members of the leadership in Iraq are often singled out by name. For example, in November 2005 an al Qaeda–affiliated Jihad forum posted the photographs of the "Twenty Most Wanted People in the [L]and of the Two Rivers." Various assassinations of senior-level officials since 2003 have demonstrated such threats are often backed up. The "devil" Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani was designated as number one—the most wanted. The text concluded, "We ask Allah that the Mujahideen will be able to remove their heads."

With respect to the United States, the most frequent tactic employed is the previously mentioned daily reports on all the Jihad forums and Web sites of alleged successful operations carried out against American forces in Iraq. Those that stand out among a large number reviewed are the "Top Ten" videos of insurgent attacks that began to appear in 2005. Released by both the Global Islamic Media Front and a group calling itself the Muslim Lions, they are widely distributed across Jihad forums today. Each includes ten attacks perpetrated by groups such as Ansar al-Sunnah Army, Islamic Army in Iraq, and al Qaeda in Iraq. They are impressive productions. These attacks also frequently appear the day after they occur in various Western print and electronic news outlets.

Reports of attacks on the United States are not confined to Iraq. The message from these Web sites is that America is under assault in all the places it has entered in the Muslim world. Next to Iraq, operations against U.S. forces in Afghanistan receive the greatest attention. And individual spectacular strikes like that on the U.S. consulate in Jidda by al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia are featured widely. Taken in total the psychological-warfare message is clear—the United States is exposed and vulnerable to effective and continuous mujahideen attacks across the Muslim world.

Finally, the leaders of the global Jihad use the Internet to mock failed U.S. attempts to capture or kill them. One example that received wide attention (to include being broadcast on al-Jazeera) was a speech by Zawahiri following the January 2006 air strike on the village of Damadola in Peshawar, where al Qaeda's number two was supposed to be hiding. He taunted President Bush—the “Butcher of Washington”—asserting “that his death will only come at the time of Allah's decree, and until that time, he remains amid the Muslim masses, rejoicing in their support, their attention, their generosity, their protection and their participation in Jihad until we conquer you with the help and power of Allah.”

The above items all aimed at influencing and undermining one of America's centers of gravity—the U.S. home front. It is not unlike what the Vietcong successfully targeted over 30 years ago. Then, as now, the objective was to follow Clausewitz's advice. Attack the enemy's center of gravity—his strategic pressure points—and you will weaken his capacity to fight war.

**4. *Networking the Global Salafi Jihad Insurgency.*** In the latter 1990s, al Qaeda's use of the Internet concentrated on the first category of this framework—propagating the Salafi ideology of Jihad to incite and unify the *ummah* for a common purpose. Since 9/11, al Qaeda and associated members of the Salafi Jihad movement (a number of which are fighting at the national level) have broadened their use of the Web to include, as highlighted above, the second and third categories—inspiring and mobilizing the *ummah* to join the Jihad and engaging in psychological warfare to demoralize enemies.

However, the loss of the Afghan sanctuary resulted in a further expansion. It now includes the use of the Internet for tactical purposes, such as training, and for operational objectives, to include how to organize virtual cells.

Each of these functions requires secure communications to avoid the disruptive tactics that U.S. intelligence has been able to employ against certain kinds of *Jihadi* Internet activity—e.g., closing down fixed Web sites. Thus, al Qaeda and other groups began to employ new methods, to include protected bulletin boards, free upload services by Internet providers, and the creation of proxy servers, among others. Up-to-date instruction on how to employ these techniques is likewise made available. Consider the following examples.

The first has to do with how to use third-party-hosting services. This technique exploits these servers, paid for primarily by advertising agencies, to transmit operationally related information and secret communications. These servers, available across the Internet, provide relatively anonymous hosting that a visitor can easily manipulate.<sup>6</sup> A second way of transmitting operationally related information and secret communications is through posted messages on discussion boards at password-protected forums. And a third technique entails creating and employing Internet proxy servers. Guides and manuals on how to utilize each of these methods are available at the Global Islamic Media Front site, among others.

These methods can be used to circulate a wide range of materials, like training videos, operational manuals, and guides for producing weapons such as improvised explosive

devices. Along with other virtual techniques they can also be exploited by operational cells to secretly communicate and organize.

One way of communicating secretly, reported by Coll and Glasser, is through public e-mail services such as Hotmail. Here is how it works. An operative opens an account on Hotmail, “writes a message in draft form, saves it as a draft, and then transmits the e-mail account name and password during chatter on a relatively secure message board.” Another operative “opens the e-mail account and reads the draft—since no e-mail message was sent, there was a reduced risk of interception.” This process has been characterized as a dead drop in cyberspace.<sup>7</sup>

Virtual methods such as these and others also provide the means to establish operational cells in cyberspace. Discussion of how to do so began to appear on different al Qaeda-affiliated Web sites in 2004, according to sources collected by the SITE Institute. These items go into the details of how to do so, suggesting that once formed members can both exchange “work plans, strategies, and educational materials” and eventually “meet in reality and execute operations in the field.”

An example of this kind of cell was reported in the spring of 2004. On 29 March, “Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers burst into the Ottawa home of Mohammed . . . Khawaja, a 24-year-old computer programmer . . . arresting him for alleged complicity in what Canadian and British authorities described as a transatlantic plot to bomb targets in London and Canada.” Khawaja, who “met his . . . British counterparts online[,] came to the attention of authorities . . . when he traveled to Britain and walked into a surveillance operation being conducted by British Police.” He had gone there to “me[e]t with his on-line acquaintances.” During the meeting he “told them how to detonate bombs using cell phones.” He had learned to do so from the Internet.<sup>8</sup>

The plot involved seven men from four countries (United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Pakistan) who through the Internet formed a virtual cell. During the time the cell was developing and moving toward taking action there appears to have been training provided to a member of it in Pakistan. Whether an al Qaeda linkage was established to provide posttraining guidance or direction is unclear from open sources. When arrested the cell was in the process of going operational. This was the kind of cell—mainly homegrown members who met both locally and in cyberspace—most feared in Europe. As we shall see below, through these new Web-based methods al Qaeda and other Salafi Jihad groups seek to provide the means by which prospective holy warriors at the local level can find like-minded associates and receive the knowledge and training via the Internet that is necessary to join the fight. The head of Britain’s domestic intelligence service (MI5) stated publicly in November 2006 that she “knew of 30 [such] conspiracies” and that “future attacks could be chemical, biological or even involve some kind of nuclear device.”<sup>9</sup>

##### **5. *Sharing Operational Information—Manuals and Handbooks.***

Al Qaeda has established an extensive online compilation of operational manuals and handbooks for irregular warfare. These range from documents not unlike the doctrinal manuals of conventional military forces to more narrowly focused instructional guides on how to carry out a particular tactic or produce and employ a specific weapon. The number of these items is now quite large. Here we will only highlight a few examples.



Broader military and intelligence materials provide the means whereby training can begin in virtually any location, simply by going online. We now know that al Qaeda is producing such manuals well before 9/11 because of what was found on computers and disks left behind in Afghanistan. Perhaps the best known of these items is what in the West came to be referred to as “The Encyclopedia of Jihad.” An al Qaeda production of thousands of pages, it is a guide for how to establish an underground organization. The manual has circulated across the Internet.

Perhaps the most widely circulated doctrinal manual is a 1,600-page document titled “The Call for a Global Islamic Resistance.” It was written by Mustafa Setmariam Nasar, a Syrian native who fought against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. In the manual he highlights how small and independent groups of mujahideen can conduct operations against the West. In the aftermath of 9/11, Nasar called for a “third generation” of Salafi Jihadists to plan and execute operations on their own but as part of the broader movement and in solidarity with al Qaeda’s ideology. In some cases members of these cells made contact with al Qaeda and received training and operational support. Those who carried out the July 2005 bombings in London are an example.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond these broader manuals, a plethora of more narrowly focused handbooks and guides are also readily available. Perhaps the tactic/specific weapon receiving the widest attention on *Jihadi* Web addresses since 2003 is the IED. Many of these are based on lessons being drawn from Iraq. Often these reports and handbooks include diagrams and other visual depictions, such as one distributed to a password-protected al Qaeda-affiliated forum in December 2005. The author illustrates the construction of a charge, the distance from which it is placed from its target, and the amount of explosive to be used to achieve a desired result against different kinds of targets. There is even a discussion of physical principles such as blast waves.

This is but one example of the serious attention that is being given to IEDs. And it should not be surprising in light of the effectiveness of the weapon in Iraq, and the efforts the Pentagon has undertaken to find an answer to it. Indeed, the *Jihadis* are busy learning about DoD efforts at countermeasures. Consider a report posted in April 2006 to a password-protected Jihadist forum discussing a study produced by the U.S. think tank CSIS on innovations in the use of IEDs in Iraq and the U.S. response to these new insurgent tactics. The author discusses the findings in the study and announces it will be translated into Arabic. He then chides the authors, stating that they should not be surprised at the innovativeness of the mujahideen in responding to new U.S. tactics. After all, he points out, “they have Allah on their side and you have nobody on yours.”

Earlier in 2006, a similar item focused on the U.S. Army’s plan to deploy the Joint IED Neutralizer in Iraq as a means to reduce the risk posed by roadside improvised explosive devices. The author highlights the specifications of the Neutralizer, where it “seems less reinforced,” and discusses a series of methods that the mujahideen can use to defeat it.

Beyond IEDs, there are handbooks and related materials on many other kinds of weapons. These range from how to build a biological weapon and dirty bombs to information warfare tactics to how to service an AK-47.

**6. *Sharing Operational Information—Training Videos and Courses.*** It should not be surprising that new Internet developments in information management since 9/11 are quickly being adopted and adapted by the Salafi Jihadists. A case in point is the use of videos and slide shows as the basis for online training programs. Over the last three years professionally produced training videos have been generated by al Qaeda to replicate on the Web what it had been able to provide prospective holy warriors on the ground in Afghanistan in the latter 1990s. The SITE Institute has compiled a large quantity of these materials in its database.

Recent examples include training courses produced by Labik, an al Qaeda media organization operating in Afghanistan. In March 2006, it issued and posted a series of films of mujahideen training for combat and practicing tactical operations, to include conducting raids on houses, blowing up a bridge, attacking a target with rocket-propelled grenades, and taking hostages, among other actions.

Other video productions concentrate on how to execute a specific tactic or employ a particular weapon. An example is booby-trapping. In this presentation the trainee learns that this technique for attacking an enemy can be implemented in many ways that require different levels of expertise and equipment. It also explains how many of these techniques were developed by “infidel states,” such as England, Russia, Germany, Italy, and the United States. The narrator suggests to the viewer that these techniques should be studied. This particular instructional exercise, which appeared in an al Qaeda forum in 2005, concentrates on four specific types of booby-trapping. Similar video presentations can be found for almost every irregular warfare tactic and on each of the weapons employed in this form of combat. These include how to operate against U.S. soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, how to infiltrate into those countries, and how to fight in different rural and urban environments in each location.

These developments have led the Israeli specialist Reuven Paz to propose that this vast and wide-ranging body of instructional/training videos and slide shows posted on the Web over the last few years by Jihad groups constitutes nothing short of an Internet-based “Open University for Jihad.” Paz asserts that the Salafi Jihad movement has turned the Internet into a cyber university for recruiting, indoctrinating, and training future generations of holy warriors from the Arab and Muslim worlds.<sup>11</sup>

Al Qaeda’s Global Islamic Media Front sees eye to eye with Paz’s assessment. Indeed, it made this claim before Paz. In a 2005 article titled “Al Qaeda University for Jihad Subjects,” the front described these activities as constituting a global institution in cyberspace, providing instruction and training in psychological, electronic, and physical warfare for the mujahideen of tomorrow. The bottom line—budding holy warriors now have the means available to begin to undertake an irregular-warfare-training program in cyberspace, complete with discussion boards and chat rooms.

In conjunction with the previous functions of the virtual sanctuary, the use of new information-management tools highlighted in this section facilitate the development of homegrown cells discussed earlier. These cells can emerge in any location and on their own and develop the means to prepare for and carry out operations. There are now examples of this homegrown pattern that have taken place since 9/11. As noted above, in some cases the local cell has made contact with and received assistance from al Qaeda,

while in other instances this was not the case. The attack on the London subway, the train bombings in Madrid, the series of suicide operations in Casablanca, and the actions of the Hofstad group in the Netherlands, to name the most prominent cases, reflect both these homegrown variations.

**7. *Collecting for Targeting.*** Finally, the Internet provides Salafi operational units with a significant amount of data about potential targets, particularly ones in the West. The extent to which they have mined the Web for this kind of information was first uncovered on al Qaeda computers left behind in Afghanistan. Based on open sources readily available on the Internet, al Qaeda had built target folders/files prior to 9/11 on public utilities, transportation systems, government buildings, airports, major harbors, and nuclear power plants. They also collected U.S. government and private-sector studies of the vulnerabilities of these and other facilities to different types of terrorist operations.

Additionally, they have access to overhead imagery and related structural information of many potential targets. This allows them not only to access the target in terms of its most vulnerable points but to observe security measures that have been taken to protect it.

According to Dan Verton, a specialist in cyberterrorism, since 9/11, “al Qaeda cells now operate with the assistance of large databases containing details of potential targets in the U.S. They use the Internet to collect intelligence on those targets, especially critical economic nodes, and modern software enables them to study structural weaknesses in facilities as well as predict the cascading failure effect of attacking certain systems.”<sup>12</sup>

Since 9/11 the U.S. government has undertaken measures to protect such information, particularly where it concerns critical facilities and infrastructure. Information that used to be publicly available is now secured. However, in this game of cat and mouse the *Jihadis* are teaching one another how to penetrate secure Web sites. For example, recently the Global Islamic Media Front began circulating a 74-page guide on how to identify their vulnerabilities and penetrate—hack—into them. The guide highlights software that can be used to do so.

### **FOSTERING THE GLOBAL SALAFI JIHAD MOVEMENT<sup>13</sup>**

Al Qaeda’s second adaptation appears to have focused on reestablishing its self-assigned role as the vanguard of the Salafi Jihad movement, a role that was set back as a result of Operation Enduring Freedom. How has al Qaeda sought to do so? To answer the question, developing a detailed mosaic of what is now referred to as al Qaeda and associated movements (AQAM) is needed. Below we will identify two efforts that address elements of it and highlight the broader contours of AQAM as well as identify key questions that remain to be addressed.

Bruce Hoffman portrays al Qaeda “as both an inspiration and an organization.” With respect to the former, al Qaeda’s founders saw as one of the central missions of their organization the realization of the vanguard party concept advocated by Sayyid Qutb.<sup>14</sup> And so, to that end they sought to “summon a broad universe of like-minded extremists” to become part of a global Jihad movement.<sup>15</sup> In the 1990s, in Afghanistan, al Qaeda was able to begin to carry out this mission by establishing a network of linkages

with a score of national-level Islamist groups, who were employing guerrilla violence and terrorism against their governments. Many authors, to include Hoffman, have chronicled these pre-9/11 developments.

Al Qaeda from its Afghan sanctuary provided national-level Jihad organizations with financial assistance, training, weapons, and spiritual guidance. In return, these entities were to see themselves as part of al Qaeda's global struggle. Recipients included radical Islamist armed groups from Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Uzbekistan, Chechnya, Kashmir, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Bosnia, among a number of other places.

The capacity of al Qaeda to continue to play this vanguard role and to maintain connections with the groups that constituted this network of associations was set back considerably with the loss of its Afghan sanctuary. What has al Qaeda done to adapt in order to reestablish linkages with its old Salafi Jihad affiliates and add new ones? What are the constituent parts of AQAM? How do local Jihad groups view their place in AQAM and relationship to al Qaeda? How many local affiliates exist? These questions highlight what needs to be discovered about al Qaeda's post-9/11 efforts to reestablish a network of linkages with national-level Islamist groups.

As late as 2005, four years after 9/11, U.S. officials were still struggling to understand the relationship between al Qaeda and its affiliates, and the extent to which those linkages had been reestablished. In 2006, key U.S. national security documents began to use the term AQAM to refer to this rejuvenated relationship. U.S. Central Command's (CENTCOM's) posture statement for fighting the war in 2006 is illustrative. It assessed al Qaeda through the "near enemy—far enemy" lens. AQAM was described as a global movement having a strong presence in the CENTCOM region through several local Salafi Jihad affiliates.<sup>16</sup>

These affiliates were described as fighting against local apostate regimes (who are partners of the United States)—"near enemies"—in the CENTCOM area. According to the posture statement, the relationship between al Qaeda and local Jihad groups since 9/11 has been facilitated by the Internet:

This enemy is linked by modern communications, expertly using the virtual world for indoctrination and proselytizing. The Internet empowers these extremists in a way that would have been impossible a decade ago. It enables them to have global reach. . . . And this safe haven of websites and the Internet is proliferating rapidly, spreading al Qaeda's ideology well beyond its birthplace in the Middle East.<sup>17</sup>

To be sure, an important way al Qaeda has sought to reestablish linkages with local Salafi Jihad groups is through its virtual sanctuary. Indeed, as was described earlier, al Qaeda uses the Internet to propagate its Salafi Jihad ideology to instill in the *ummah* a powerful sense of moral outrage and commitment to holy war. Through a large number of different Web-based activities al Qaeda seeks to propagate its message to individuals and groups across the globe. In doing so, it disseminates a series of ideological frames and messages that describe in global and local terms the social and political conditions requiring immediate and drastic Jihad action.

That this is taking place is evident. Through this virtual sanctuary al Qaeda seeks to reestablish its vanguard role and attempts to inspire and encourage a global movement of

radicalized Muslim groups to fight locally against “near enemies,” while seeing themselves as a part of a larger global struggle against the United States, the “far enemy.”

But how organized are these efforts and whom do they reach? A recent study by Rita Katz and Josh Devon of the SITE Institute describes this Internet activity as “very structured. . . . [A] handful of primary source jihadist websites distribute the media [activities] of the leaders of al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups. Through this small number of specific, password-protected online forums, the leading jihadist groups, like al-Qaeda, post their communiqués and propaganda. By keeping the number of primary source jihadist websites small . . . [they] can provide a transparent mechanism to authenticate communiqués.”<sup>18</sup>

Although these primary Web sites are relatively few in number, Katz and Devon note that members of them disseminate official communiqués, doctrinal treatises, strategic and operational documents, special messages, and other materials through a much broader and far-reaching network of other Web sites, message boards, e-groups, blogs, and instant-messaging services available through the Internet. Here is one way they say this process functions:

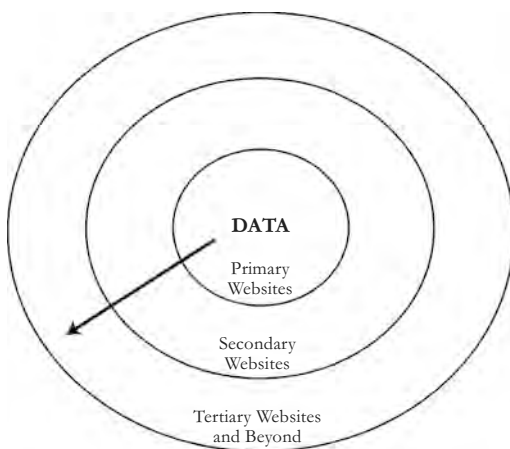
Once an official message from a jihadist group is posted to a primary source message forum, members of the primary message forum will then disseminate that posting to other secondary messageboards. From these secondary messageboards, other peripheral individuals will then disseminate the information onto other messageboards.<sup>19</sup>

Katz and Devon propose the following network graphic to illustrate how this virtual capability seeks to be “at once decentralized but rigidly hierarchical.”

The primary Web sites at the center of the network graphic are composed of AQAM, to include insurgent groups in Iraq, the Taliban and other groups in Afghanistan, the Islamic Maghreb (formerly the GSPC), the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, Saudi Jihadist groups, and others. Since January 2006, report Katz and Devon, the Web-based activities of

these AQAM elements have been coordinated and distributed through a new virtual entity—the *Al-Fajr Center*—to the secondary and tertiary Web sites noted on the above graphic. What this portends is that individuals and groups across the globe may now easily acquire the kinds of information identified in each of the seven categories of the virtual sanctuary described earlier.

In sum, the activities carried out by the Al-Fajr Center provide the potential for “fostering a unified, global jihadist community.” Moreover, it can assist al Qaeda and key associates “coordinate, share information, and consolidate their power



Dissemination of Primary Source Jihad Data<sup>20</sup>

to continue to lead the [global] jihadist movement,” which is one of al Qaeda’s original and enduring missions.<sup>21</sup>

If this is a key way al Qaeda has sought to reestablish its self-assigned role as the vanguard of the global Salafi Jihad movement, then the follow-on question is how we know who constitutes the local affiliates of AQAM and on what basis they view themselves as parts of AQAM. One recent study has sought to identify criteria for membership in AQAM. The author, Assaf Moghadam, proposes that to be a member of AQAM a Salafi Jihad entity must be a Sunni Islamic group and meet one of the following four criteria.<sup>22</sup>

First, a group can be considered part of AQAM if “Al Qaeda is reflected in the group’s name” and its members adhere to al Qaeda’s agenda.<sup>23</sup> In this category he includes al Qaeda in Iraq, which prior to September 2004 was known as Jama’at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad. Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi, its founder, in October 2004 declared the allegiance of the group to bin Laden and al Qaeda’s strategy. This was followed by a change in the name of the group. A more recent example of the first criterion can be found in North Africa. The Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, known by its French initials GSPC, announced at the end of 2006 it was switching its name to Al Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb. Long associated with al Qaeda, it was chosen by bin Laden to forge links and coordinate the activities of like-minded groups in Morocco, Nigeria, Mauritania, Tunisia, and elsewhere.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the name change.

Second, a group may be considered part of AQAM if, according to Moghadam, there is evidence it has “internalized the worldview of Al Qaeda and global Jihad.” Several organizations fall into this category, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU); Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), both of whose base of operations is Pakistan; Indonesia’s Jemaah Islamiyya (JI); and the Moroccan group Assirat al Moustaquim (Direct Path). These groups and several others similar to them meet this second criterion established by Moghadam.<sup>25</sup>

A third criterion is that a “group is devoted to and actively practices violence to overthrow an existing Islamic regime or regimes with the aim to create a transnational Caliphate in its stead.”<sup>26</sup> Here, also, several groups fit into this category, including Ansar al Islam, a “radical Islamist group of Iraqi Kurds and Arabs who have vowed to establish an independent Islamic state in Iraq.” Established in December 2001, it has had a close affiliation with al Qaeda and was aligned with Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi when he led al Qaeda in Iraq.<sup>27</sup> Also in this category is a second Iraqi group, Ansar al Sunnah Army, as well as the Army of the Levant, Jamatul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB), and Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami, a radical Islamic political movement that seeks to implement pure Salafi Jihad doctrine and create an Islamic caliphate in central Asia.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, a group may be considered an al Qaeda affiliate and part of AQAM if it “has engaged in the practice of *takfir*.” In other words, it has labeled a Muslim regime or its leaders as apostates because they demonstrate disbelief. Several groups fit into this category. They label the local regimes they are fighting as apostate for having rejected Islamic sharia law as the key tenet by which they govern. This has been true, for example, of the Algerian GSPC and the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) from which it split in 1998 over a disagreement on whether civilians constitute legitimate targets. The same was said of Nasser’s regime in Egypt.

In sum, this chapter has sought to identify how al Qaeda and the Salafi Jihadists have attempted to reorganize to continue to execute a global fight through *two strategic adaptations*. The first is how al Qaeda and its affiliates have employed the Internet to establish in cyberspace a virtual sanctuary from which to carry out many of the activities they had initiated from their Afghan base in 1996–2001. The second is how al Qaeda has continued to encourage and promote the global Salafi Jihad movement. More attention needs to be focused on these adaptations in order to gain a deeper understanding of what has transpired in order to develop a detailed mosaic of al Qaeda and associated movements.

Finally, it is important to note that in addition to these two strategic adaptations, al Qaeda has undertaken two additional ones in the years since it lost its sanctuary in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. The first entails the creation of an increasingly robust sanctuary in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) along the rugged border of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Over the last five years the leaderships of al Qaeda, the Afghan Taliban, the Pakistan Taliban, and several other like-minded Jihadist groups have established bases in this ungoverned territory that is beyond the authority of the Pakistani government. And each of these armed groups has made use of this safe haven to establish secure bases for protecting itself, training, planning, and launching operations against local, regional, and global targets. The final strategic adaptation undertaken by al Qaeda and associated movements has been to exploit the opportunity provided to them by the U.S. intervention in Iraq. To this end, they are exploiting the conflict in Iraq as a major recruiting and training ground to help prepare a third generation of Salafi *Jihadis*. Iraq not only serves as a new front to engage the United States directly, but it also affords an opportunity to develop a new cadre of skilled fighters who can gain the kind of experience that after Iraq will allow them to more effectively fight in their native lands or elsewhere.

## NOTES

1. Steve Coll and Susan Glasser, "Terrorists Turn to the Web as Base of Operations," *Washington Post*, 7 August 2005, A1.
2. Gabriel Weimann, *How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet*, Special Report 116 (United States Institute of Peace, March 2004), 2.
3. Through continuous and intensive examination of extremist Web sites, the SITE Institute has developed an extensive database of materials on how various Jihad groups make use of the Internet. This database was employed as the primary source for this part of the study. The SITE Institute can be accessed at [www.siteinstitute.org](http://www.siteinstitute.org).
4. Al Qaeda in Iraq, Victorious Army Group, Ansar al-Tawhid Brigades, Islamic Jihad Brigades, the Strangers Brigades, and the Horrors Brigades.
5. The Combating Terrorism Center, *The Islamic Imagery Project: Visual Motifs in Jibadi Internet Propaganda* (United States Military Academy, March 2006), 100.
6. There appear to be at least two ways to find out which third-party sites are being used to distribute information and communications. One is through *Jibadi* Internet forums that provide links to index pages. These pages contain a list of sources from which the information can be deduced and downloaded.
7. Coll and Glasser, "Terrorists Turn to the Web as Base of Operations."
8. *Ibid.*
9. "Dark Days, Difficult Times," *The Economist*, 18 November 2006, 55.

10. Craig Whitlock, "Architect of the New War on the West," *Washington Post*, 23 May 2006, 1.
11. Reuven Paz, "Reading Their Lips: The Credibility of Jihadi Websites in Arabic as a Source for Information," Project for the Research of Islamist Movements, [www.e-prism.org](http://www.e-prism.org).
12. Weimann, *How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet*, 7.
13. In the 1950s, Salafi Jihad ideology began to take shape. Its key theorist was Sayyid Qutb. He believed nearly all of Islam was in *jabilyya*, having been polluted by Western decadence, materialism, and faithlessness. Islamic law and religious values were being subverted by apostate Muslim regimes. He called for Jihad to overthrow them. Qutb coupled a puritanical interpretation of Islam with a violent political ideology of revolt. Qutb saw the crisis in Muslim states within the context of a global ideological battle with the non-Muslim world, in particular, Western civilization. The West was pushing the Muslim world into *jabilyya*. He painted an extremely dehumanizing picture of the West as soulless, immoral, and depraved. Qutb proposed a transnational ideology to mobilize the *ummah* for Jihad against near enemies (apostate Muslim regimes) and for a global fight against the West. To lead the struggle he called for the creation of a Muslim vanguard. The first requirement to initiate a global Salafi Jihadist insurgency is conceptualizing a universal ideology that (1) describes the depraved condition requiring Jihad, (2) proposes an idealized system to replace it, and (3) identifies steps to be taken to bring it to fruition; Qutb provided this doctrinal foundation. See Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Paul Berman, "The Philosopher of Islamic Terror," *New York Times Magazine*, 23 March 2003; Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003); Barry Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 2003).
14. Berman, "The Philosopher of Islamic Terror."
15. Bruce Hoffman, "What Went Wrong? New Looks at the Bin Laden Network and the Panel That Tried to Explain Its Most Vicious Attack," *Washington Post*, 27 August 2006, BW6.
16. General John Abizaid, "2006 Posture of United States Central Command," U.S. Central Command, 8, available at [www.centcom.mil/sites/uscentcom1/Shared%20Documents/PostureStatement2006.htm](http://www.centcom.mil/sites/uscentcom1/Shared%20Documents/PostureStatement2006.htm).
17. *Ibid.*, 9–10, 47.
18. Rita Katz and Josh Devon, "The Online Jihadist Threat," testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, Terrorism and Unconventional Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee, 110th Cong., 1st sess., 14 February 2007, 4, available at [www.armedservices.house.gov/pdfs/TUTC021407/Katz\\_Testimony021407.pdf](http://www.armedservices.house.gov/pdfs/TUTC021407/Katz_Testimony021407.pdf).
19. *Ibid.*, 5.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, 7.
22. Assaf Moghadam, "The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi-Jihadism, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks" (PhD diss., Fletcher School of Law, Tufts University). See chapter 4 and appendix A.
23. *Ibid.*, 101.
24. Craig Smith, "North Africa Feared as Staging Ground for Terror," *New York Times*, 20 February 2007, 1.
25. Moghadam, "The Globalization of Martyrdom," 102 and app. A.
26. *Ibid.*, 102.
27. *Ibid.*, 368.
28. *Ibid.*, 370.