Al-Qaeda—terrorists, hypocrites, fundamentalists? The view from within

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ABSTRACT *This article investigates the ideology of Al-Qaeda as perceived from within the network. Particular attention is paid to the ideological background of Al-Qaeda's intellectual leadership, its sociopolitical context and the nature of its recruits. The inner logic of the Al-Qaeda organisation advances an intellectual concept that is not based on the main schools of Islamic theology, but on a new ideological starting point that results from the application of Islamic principles to sociopolitical change. With its political goals reinforced by the teachings of the Quran, exemplified by the content and rhetoric of a recently discovered training manual, the organisation creates powerful imagery embedded in the collective consciousness of the Muslim community. Thus, the message provided by Al-Qaeda inspires its followers to commit violent acts of destruction while being fully convinced that they are fulfilling the ordained will of Allah.*

Al Qaeda not driven by ideology[1]

Ideology of Al-Qaeda to be traced back to the origins of Wahhabism[2]

Al-Qaeda corrupts, misrepresents and misinterprets the Koranic text[3]

Al Qaeda, the first multinational terrorist group of the 21st century, embodies the new enigmatic face of terrorism. By organising and perpetrating the world's greatest terrorist outrage on 11 September 2001, the organisation demonstrated the sophistication of its methods and the magnitude of its threat. In the weeks and months that followed, few other issues—if any—have received more public attention than Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Ladin. Yet, despite the ongoing discussion in the media, academic and policy circles, few contributions have usefully explained the phenomenon. An initial search of the term 'Al-Qaeda' on Google generates over 12 900 links to articles, interviews, books and commentaries in multiple languages. However, speculation about the strength and extent of Al-Qaeda, bewildering descriptions of a shadowy network, undercover terrorist cells, new arrests

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and imminent dangers create alarm but not much clarity. Adding the term 'ideology' to the search does not produce more satisfying results: 'Al-Qaeda not driven by ideology' is the conclusion reached by a Pentagon intelligence team,[4] while, according to Stephen Schwartz, among others, 'Osama bin Ladin and his followers belong to a puritanical variant of Islam known as Wahhabism, an extreme and intolerant Islamo-Fascist sect that became the official cult of Saudi Arabia'.[5]

The voices heard most loudly are those presenting Al-Qaeda as a group of religious fanatics, lunatics mad mullahs or even fascists—embodiments of 'pure evil'. In the words of terrorism expert Rohan Gunaratna, 'aiming to galvanise the spirit of its supporters, Al-Qaeda corrupts, misrepresents or misinterprets the Koranic text'. The deliberate use of such terminology generates the widespread image of bin Ladin and his followers as a group of extremists who intentionally utilise Islam as a tool to rally popular support and legitimise terrorism in the pursuit of their purely political goals. However, in direct contrast to this popular perception, anthropological research shows that religious fundamentalists throughout the world, including the followers of Al-Qaeda, act and consider themselves as the true believers.[6]

A more pertinent line of inquiry into the ideology behind bin Ladin's and Al-Qaeda's politics of violence would be to focus on questions about its inner logic, those related to ideology as seen from within. What is the connection between religious and political parameters blurred by the rhetoric of bin Ladin? What lies behind the espousal of Islam, anti-Americanism and the resort to violence? Is bin Ladin, as the existing literature suggests, abusing Islam to pursue his purely political goals and legitimise terror? How do the followers and supporters of bin Ladin's and Al-Qaeda's ideology perceive themselves? The answers to these questions may shed a new light on the rationale of Al-Qaeda. They will also help clarify existing, or rather non-existing, limits to potential attacks in the future, which is critical in defining an effective counter-terrorism strategy.

The linking of religion and politics

An inquiry into the inner logic of Al-Qaeda and the connection between Islam and politics should begin with an analysis of the nature of religious fundamentalism. The term, which originally applied to an early 20th century American Protestant movement, has entered the vocabulary of the social sciences as a designation for conservative, revivalist religious orthodoxy. Yet it is the more recent rise of fundamentalist movements, specifically in a range of Islamic societies, calling for a literal reading of the holy text and characterised by the aim of intervening in the political system and mobilising the population that has generated a wide-ranging response.[7] The result of this increased attention is an often arbitrary use of terms such as 'Islam', 'Islamic fundamentalism', 'Islamism', and more recently 'Islamic extremism' or 'Islamic terrorism'.

In this paper the understanding of Islamic fundamentalism is based on a combination of two ways of looking at religion, namely as a source of

meaning and as incorporated into reality.[8] The underlying hypothesis is that religion consists of sociocultural symbols that convey a conception of reality and construe a plan for it. These symbols are related to reality, but not a reflection of it, as understood in the cultural anthropology of Clifford Geertz.[9] Important to note here is the distinction between 'models of reality' and 'models for reality'. The former relate to the representation of objects. They are both concrete, by displaying structural congruence with the depicted object, and abstract, as they are views, religious dogmas or doctrines prescribed to effect conditions with which they are not congruent.[10] On the other hand, whether metaphysically or rationally, models for reality relate to human perceptions of how reality ought to be designed. As such, they are normative and consequently can only be penetrated interpretatively.[11]

In Islam human conceptions of reality are not based on knowledge, but on the belief in the divine authority of Allah and the revelation of the Quran as the ultimate truth, immutable and universally valid for all people regardless of time and space.[12] Most discussions—and this holds for both Western and, to a significant extent, Muslim scholarship—of Islam and politics assume that Islam makes no distinction between the religious and political realms.[13] This view of inseparability finds support in over 40 references in the Quran, and the example of the Prophet, at once a spiritual leader and the head of a political community.[14] It is further shown in the creation of the 'Islamicate' as the creation of the Islamic *umma* and the caliphate, the political order of the Islamicate.[15] Yet a careful reading of the historical record indicates that politics and religion became separable not long after the death of the Prophet and the establishment of dynastic rule.[16]

This early historical background is strikingly different from the modern fundamentalist claim for an Islamic state and a corresponding *sharia*-bound (Islamic legal system) Islamic government. The call for a *dawla Islamiya* (Islamic state) made by all contemporary Islamic fundamentalists is based on the belief that a *nizam Islami* (Islamic system) forms the centre of Islam. Yet this assumption is held exclusively by Islamic fundamentalists, not the religion of Islam as revealed in the Quran and the *hadith* (collection of the traditions of the Prophet). These neo-Arabic terms used by contemporary Islamic fundamentalists do not exist in any classical Islamic source, which leads to the conclusion that the notion of an Islamic system exemplified by an Islamic state is an 'invention of tradition'.[17] In theoretical terms Islamic fundamentalism is the result of adapting Islamic concepts to social–political advocacy. In the words of Bassam Tibi, Islamic fundamentalism is an 'ideology, which stands in the context of the oscillation in Islam between culture and politics, and is related to the politicisation of Islamic cultural concepts and symbols'.[18]

Despite the fundamentalists' claim to recognise the universality of the revelation and their declared intention to retrieve its fundamental basics (*usul*)—the original foundations of Islam—the reality of what is taking place is remarkably different. The simultaneous denial of cognitive adaptation to reality, while effectively doing the exact same thing, is striking. This is obvious, for example, in Sayyid Qutb's well known political interpretation of

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the Quran.[19] In reading Qutb's Quran commentary, one is continually struck by the interplay between his own ideas and the Quranic text, which shows that he did not find the truth in the script itself, but rather found truth in what he believed to be its meaning.[20] The same process is evident when Bin Ladin calls upon his fellow Muslims to fight the enemies of Islam, primarily Americans and Jews. Rather than, in the words of Al-Qaeda expert Rohan Gunaratna, 'aiming to galvanise the spirit of his supporters by corrupting, misrepresenting or misinterpreting the Quranic text',[21] he has transferred the words of the holy text into the current political context and interpreted their meaning in the light of the new situation.

This brief investigation into the relationship of religion and politics contradicts the popular perception of Islamic fundamentalists as a limited number of religious extremists who intentionally abuse Islam to legitimise their political aspirations. Although it is not the aim of this paper to judge the underlying intentions of the individual, the paper does suggest that it would be misleading to assume that the role of religion in political conflicts is merely instrumental. It contests the popular view that in the case of Islamic fundamentalism religion serves as a mechanism for obtaining political legitimisation and is being abused for purely political ends. In contrast, fundamentalists throughout the world act and perceive themselves to be the true believers.[22] Although it may contradict an exclusively spiritual under-standing of religion, to comprehend the inner logic of Al-Qaeda it is crucial to acknowledge that Islamic fundamentalists advance a concept of Islam that sees no contradiction between belief and political action. As a direct consequence, many Muslims see those believers who equate their political interpretation of Islamic sources with Islamic religious belief as particularly keen and devout Muslims, persecuted by unjust bureaucracies. It is for this reason that many Muslims support Al-Qaeda and see a hero in Bin Ladin. In the words of a young Pakistani interviewed on Al-Jazeera, 'Bin Ladin is not a terrorist. That is American rhetoric. He is a good Muslim fighting for Islam. I named my son Osama—I want him to become a believer just like him.'

Al-Qaeda's ideology: influences, sources and appeal

While the process of adapting Islamic concepts to structural changes explains the origins of Al-Qaeda's ideology in theory, questions related to its appeal and impact on the audience, as well as to its ideological influences and sources, necessitate a closer look at the sociopolitical context, the intellectual leadership of Al-Qaeda and the nature of its recruits. In general the Muslim world has not been isolated from the processes of modernisation and the advent of mass education that, among other factors, have influenced the development of modern political societies and produced new identities, opportunities and inequalities. Two results of these social and political changes are particularly important for the advancement of Islamic fundamentalism. The first is the fragmentation of religious authority 'whereby the meaning of scripture no longer needs to be interpreted by a religious establishment but, rather, lies in the eyes of the beholder'.[23] The

second one is a process by which basic questions such as the actual meaning of Islam and how it affects—or rather should affect—the conduct of life come to the fore in the consciousness of believers. In other words, what does it mean to be a Muslim in a world that bears no resemblance to the glorious past of Islam? This development is also referred to as the objectification of Muslim consciousness.[24]

As it is becoming more and more difficult to say with reassuring finality what is Islamic and what is not, the issue of precisely who establishes the guidelines for 'proper' Islamic behaviour is of vital importance. The *imam*, for example, who traditionally occupied a position of religious authority, is no longer the only figure to whom believers can turn in their search for religious guidance. As individual Muslims take it upon themselves to interpret the classical sources of Islam, a broad spectrum of interpretations emerges. In the words of the Sorbonne-educated leader of the Muslim Brothers in Sudan: 'Because all knowledge is divine and religious, a chemist, and engineer, an economist or a jurist are all '*ulama*'.[25] Hence it is perfectly feasible that someone without religious training in the traditional sense, like Osama bin Ladin, may obtain the status of a religious authority in the eyes of his followers. By addressing timely issues of grave concern in the Muslim world and by formalising the return to the golden age tradition as a straightforward solution, he provides both a powerful indictment of the waywardness of Muslim societies and a blueprint for action. Thus, the turning towards the Islamic tradition and its interpretation becomes a way of legitimately criticising the existing status quo, providing religious guidance and facilitating revolutionary and incremental changes.[26]

Ideologically bin Ladin started off as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood—which, one might note, is not a Wahhabi-oriented organisation—joining forces with Abdullah Azzam, a legendary Arab fighter against the USSR in Afghanistan.[27] Upon setting up Al-Qaeda in the mid-1980s, the Muslim Brotherhood broke off its links with bin Ladin, who had gone his own way politically. As the name of the newly founded organisation suggests, the idea behind al-Qaeda was the establishment of a 'base' that would bring together different Islamic fundamentalist groups and co-ordinate their activities. Yet the organisation failed to attract the mainstream of the radical Islamic fundamentalist movement in Arab countries. When the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Jama'a al-Islamiyya refused to join Al-Qaeda in a meeting in Afghanistan in 1988, it became apparent that, while there were issues over relinquishing leadership to bin Ladin, the key disagreement lay in the scope of Islamist action. With few exceptions the view was maintained that action should be confined to each groups' nation-state. However, some of the key Islamist figures, including the leader of the Jihad movement Ayyman al-Zawahri, began to change their outlook to that of a more internationalist revolutionary movement. Al-Zawahri's decision to join Al-Qaeda was based on the belief that the Islamic fundamentalist groups within their individual states were prevented from achieving any significant change on the domestic front because of a common external enemy. Hence,

at the leadership level, Al-Qaeda brings together individuals with both strong religious sentiments and previous terrorist records who regard their actions as a much-needed act of defiance against the 'real enemy'—that enemy being the source of all the ills affecting the Muslim world—primarily the USA, because of its support for Israel and for the corrupt dictatorships of the Middle East.

Thus the key to the ideology of Al-Qaeda, as indicated above, lies in the political view of the situation in Muslim societies in general, and the Middle East in particular. The basis for its ideology of violence that has become the political world-view of Al-Qaeda can be found in al-Zawahri's treatise published in 1996, entitled *Shifa' Sudur al-Muminin* (The Cure for Believers' Hearts). The way he adapts Islamic principles to the present political situation and derives therefrom implications for proper Islamic conduct becomes evident in his analysis of three interrelated issues. The first is primarily of a political nature: By ranking Palestine as the primary problem, al-Zawahri concludes that all Arab and Muslim regimes have lost their credibility by the mere fact that they have accepted the authority of the UN and the legitimacy of Israel. Invoking the Palestinian issue allows him to declare these governments, especially Saudi Arabia, with its close ties to the USA, the main supporter of Israel, to be outside the fold of Islam. Furthermore, Saudi and US support for the *Mujahideen* movement in Afghanistan is seen as a ploy to divert attention from the real goal of change in the Muslim world. Boldly, he declares that the *Mujahideen* saw through this plot right from the beginning and established 'Al-Qaeda—the base' in Afghanistan to carry out their world-wide struggle against the outside enemy.

The second issue is that of personal consequences that arise in this particular political context for the individual believer, expressed in al-Zawahri's interpretations of personal responsibility in Islamic law. In essence, every Muslim who in any way supports these 'un-islamic' regimes places himself outside the fold of Islam. It is not possible to take refuge in the claim of merely following orders, as only God's orders are to be followed, and these include the acceptance of taking personal responsibility. For Al-Qaeda's internationalist struggle, this argument is expanded to Western governments. The inherent logic could be expressed as follows: as citizens of these countries, Muslims vote, and even if they don't vote, they pay taxes, and therefore support these governments. As such, they loose their status of innocent non-combatants in Islamic law, making themselves legitimate targets in the case of an attack.

A frequently encountered point of criticism to this logic is, for example, the mentioning of children, who are specifically exempted from being combatants in Islamic law. In response to the main corpus of Islamic theology, which clearly rejects the concept of collateral damage, Al-Zawahri propounds the ideas of the greater good and the need to react to exceptional circumstances. Clearly expressing his point of view, he states that an overpowering enemy and limited resources allow for a more lax interpretation of the law. It is precisely this logic that also allows him to handle the clear and absolute

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prohibition of suicide under Islamic law. Drawing on the idea of martyrdom in the Christian sense, he takes the examples of captured Muslims who were asked to recant on pain of death, and refused. Viewing this refusal as suicide for the glory of God that was not condemned by Islamic theologians, he concludes that committing suicide for the greater good is legal.

Another example of the interpretation of the political context and the concepts of the greater good and personal responsibility can be found in the *fatwa* (a legal opinion usually issued by trusted legal scholars about questions that arise in the Muslim community) issued by five leaders of Al-Qaida on 23 January 1998.

> The Arabian Peninsula has never—since God made it flat, created its desert, and encircled it with seas—been stormed by any forces like the crusader armies spreading in it like locusts ... for over seven years the United States has been occupying the lands of Islam, the holiest of places, the Arabian Peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors.

Following this assessment of the political interpretation, the *fatwa* calls on

> every Muslim who believes in God and hopes for reward to obey God's command to kill the Americans and plunder their possessions wherever he finds them and wherever he can.[28]

The essence of this adaptation of Islamic principles to the political situation is the complete separation between the 'true believers', ie the Islamic fundamentalists, and the 'enemy', now including all Muslims who are in anyway connected to non-Islamic regimes, rendering them legitimate targets in the fight for the glory of Islam. It is a theory that is not based on the main schools of Islamic theology, but a new ideological starting point that provides Al-Qaeda with a theoretical legitimisation for non-discriminatory, violent action.

Finally, a brief look at the nature of Al-Qaeda's recruits might offer a first insight into the appeal of the ideology. With an array of different nationalities, some of those who joined the network came as committed Muslims, while others needed basic instruction in Islamic dogma and practice. Thus, an essential component in the recruitment and training of new members of Al-Qaeda is the familiarisation—or maybe more appropriately— indoctrination with knowledge of Islamic law and practice as understood by bin Ladin and al-Zawahri. To understand how this ideology is perceived by the recruits and members of Al-Qaeda, in other words to gain an insight into the view from within, the overriding question for the following analysis of an Al-Qaeda training video clearly focuses on the potential impact of the presentation on the audience.

Communicating the ideology—paving the way for taking action

The following will analyse the ideology communicated by Osama bin Ladin in a recently discovered training manual.[29] The video chosen for this case

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study exemplifies the kind of address that legitimises the culturally constituted duty of *jihad* or 'struggle' by presenting religion and morality in a symbolic idiom and through the projection of the cultural archetype of the *mujahid* or 'fighter'. By establishing a religious base, interpreting its meaning in the present sociopolitical context and leading the audience into a moral endeavour—in other words, communicating the concept of personal responsibility, it motivates the audience into taking violent action against the declared enemy. Hence, what is communicated here represents the key aspects of Al-Qaeda's ideology discussed in the previous section, but also goes beyond that by providing a straightforward plan of action. To evaluate its potential effect on the audience, close attention will be paid to both the content and style of the address.

The video begins with a citation from the Quran addressing the Muslims' favoured position in the eyes of Allah and their obligation to follow his will at all times, placed against the background of a scenic, quiet mountain view. After a brief but meaningful pause, the scene switches to bin Ladin: standing in front of a blue world map and presenting himself to the audience in the traditional clothing of an Islamic preacher, he creates the image of a religious authority. Very diligently and in very low tone of voice, he speaks, repeating the same Quranic verses (shown below in italics).

> *You are the best community ever brought forth to mankind. The goodness is in you, it comes forth from your hands and from under your feet. You are the best nation ever brought forth to men, biding to honour and forbidding dishonour, and believing in Allah.* (3: 110)[30]

> Thus, forever, let there be one nation, calling for good, enjoining honour and fighting dishonour, those are the prosperous.

By complementing the quotation with his personal interpretation he establishes in embryo both the form and the content of all that is to follow. In terms of form the citations constitute a duality or complementarity, a stylistic device, which can be observed throughout his speech, in which the main points are advanced by means of categorical juxtapositions and mutual oppositions.[31] Furthermore, it should be noticed that from the very beginning citations from the Quran, establishing the religious facts, are immediately followed by bin Ladin's own interpretations of 'what reality ought to be'.

In terms of content, the pairing of the Quranic citation and bin Ladin's practical application firmly establishes two fundamental principles of Islam, as well as their direct consequences for the present, which can be summarised as follows. First, the *umma*—which includes all Muslims regardless of ethnic origin—is the community most favoured by God, which implies (at least according to bin Ladin) the need to act as one nation, as well as the pursuit of what is honourable, ie allowed, or rather expected, under Islamic law, and the prevention of that which is sinful. Second, it reinforces what might be regarded as the cardinal principle of Islam, the duty of every sincere Muslim to 'obey God and his Messenger'.

And obey Allah and the Messenger that you may obtain mercy. And march forth in the way (which leads to) forgiveness from your Lord, and for Paradise as wide as the heavens and the earth, prepared for the pious. (3: 132)

We testify that there is no God but Allah, He alone, and no associate with Him.

Having clearly established divine imperatives and the ideal model for reality, the audience is presented with the fact that the actual reality of the present situation is nothing like it ought to be. Pronounced in a highly dramatic tone which is hardly reflected in the following translation, bin Ladin declares that it is the duty of every sincere Muslim—note here the concept of personal responsibility—to correct a situation in which members of the *umma* are subjected to unacceptable levels of pain and corruption by an outside force. Interestingly, bin Ladin's observation of reality is now followed by a quotation from the Quran. Structuring his argument in this manner, he not only makes it impossible to question the Islamic integrity of his solution to the problem—not to ask for peace from the enemies of Islam (who are responsible for the absolutely outrageous abuse of the *umma)*—but also increases the credibility of the invoked threat of eternal hell and the promise of heavenly rewards if this path is followed.

> But what is happening to us? The world is on fire. Endless suffering, increasing corruption, horrendous abuse. Just look at Iraq. Look at Palestine. Look at Kashmir. Atrocities are committed against our brothers and sisters. Yet they are part of our community, and they deserve our sympathy and our support.

> *Oh you who believe. Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and render not vain your deeds. Verily, those who disbelieve and hinder from the path of Allah, they will die as disbelievers and Allah will not forgive them. So be not weak and ask not for peace from the enemies of Islam while you are having the upper hand. Allah is with you and will never decrease the reward of your good deed.* (47: 33–34)

It should not go unnoticed that what has happened here is the direct application of the Quranic message, carrying over its dictates to the present. The fact that the quotation from the Quran is taken out of its original context and used to legitimise a clearly action-oriented strategy indicates that bin Ladin, much like other fundamentalists before him, has found the meaning of this particular verse through applying it to the reality he experiences around him. In other words, the meaning is not actually derived from the source itself, but from its relevance to the surrounding political situation. However, it should be noted that neither the ideology bin Ladin proclaims nor the tropes he employs are by any means original to him. The issue of protecting the *umma* has been addressed in the classic polemical essays of such authors as Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad al-Ghazzali among others.[32] In other words, the arguments are old, and are being recycled in this new context.

Having established a core principle of Islam in a highly emotive manner, the video presents scenes of the current political situation, specifically showing suffering Muslims. In line with the image of a world on fire, headlines in the form of enflamed letters appear on the screen, indicating the localities to be shown—Palestine, Chechnya, Iraq and Kashmir. What

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follows are frequently repeated images of Israeli soldiers beating up Muslim women, Palestinian children throwing rocks at tanks and the destruction of Palestinian homes, to name but a few. Then the fiery headline changes the scene to Chechnya, presenting images of more destruction as well as scenes of freezing Muslims, dying outside in the snow at night. Turning to Iraq, the audience is confronted with the sight of severely disabled infants. Images of American soldiers and the 'ungodly' ruler Saddam Hussein complete the picture of a Muslim country suffering at the hands of the unbelievers. Finally, bloody images from Kashmir, such as beheaded toddlers and wounded teenagers conclude this display of world-wide Muslim suffering at the hands of 'unbelievers'.

Throughout this part of the video Islamic music of different styles is played, adding to the powerful emotional force of the images presented. The accusations are legitimised by the showing of a series of images that were previously shown on Arabic news broadcasts such as Al-Jazeera and LBC. Thus what is shown in the video is a selection of the most brutal scenes, creating a powerful and emotional image of the truly miserable state of the *umma*. A state that—according to the interpretations and message constructed by bin Ladin—urgently needs to be rectified by all members of the community both in support of their Muslim brothers and sisters and, maybe even more importantly, in defence of Islam itself. Following this highly emotional presentation of human suffering, bin Ladin makes it unambiguously clear what has to be done to change the situation:

> And the world is on fire. Our Muslim brothers and sisters in Palestine and Iraq are suffering under a Zionist–Crusader invasion. The crusader forces control the holy land, eating its riches and controlling its people. And this is happening while Muslims all over the world are attacked like people fighting over a piece of bread.

> *Oh you who believe! What is the matter with you, that when you are asked to march forth in the Cause of Allah/Jihad, you cling heavily to the earth? Are you pleased with the life of this world rather than the Hereafter? But little is in the enjoyment of the life of this world as compared to the hereafter.* (9: 38)

Backed by legitimacy derived from an appropriate Quranic citation, bin Ladin has created a situation that allows him to present a straightforward case. Having reinvoked the miserable state of the *umma*, he refers to the enemy in a symbolic phrase as the 'Zionist–Crusader invasion'. The image of the crusades creates a perception of the enemy as a threat not only to the *umma* but, even more importantly, to Islam itself. Using the familiar rhetorical devices identified in the previous sections, bin Ladin now communicates the need to wage *jihad*—the only acceptable response in the present situation—with characteristic fire and brimstone monitions. Plunging into an outright question—pronounced so empathetically that it might almost be regarded as an accusation, 'why do you cling so heavily to the earth?', he now changes to a new form of communication that directly engages each individual member of the audience. In a calm and empathetic

tone of voice he reaffirms the obligation of the individual to obey God in a decisive and all-embracing question:

> Oh Muslims, do you [plural] want to walk along the straight path and please God? Do you [singular] submit to the will of Allah?

The way in which this question is formalised reveals the significance of the moral endeavour that it creates for the individual in the audience. First, in terms of format, the initial part of the question addresses the audience as a homogeneous group, while the second part is directed specifically towards the individual. By changing from speaking to the audience as a whole to addressing the individual, bin Ladin engages every listener in a moral dilemma. Second, in terms of content, the question invokes a line from the opening *sura* of the Quran, which is recited several times during the prayer: 'do you want to walk along the straight path?' (*sirat al-mustaqim*). The answer of every Muslim to this inquiry can only be in the affirmative. The same holds true for the second part of the question, which is the condition for pleasing God and walking along the straight path: to submit to His will. The combination of style and content here is manipulative by virtue of the fact that it is simply not possible for the individual Muslim to answer any of these questions negatively. Thus the likely effect on the audience is at the very least that of an acknowledgement of the moral force of bin Ladin's analysis, and possibly an acceptance of his political interpretation as the true meaning of Islam in the present situation. Assuming the intention to communicate his message in the most effective manner, it is hardly surprising that the subsequent lines carry an almost apocalyptic tone:

> Oh Brothers, we all must fulfil the duties that He has placed upon us. We testify that there is no God but Allah, no associate with Him. He is the all-knowing, the most superior, and the ruler of all mankind. To Him we are held responsible on the day of resurrection. There will be no way to hide from God and His judgement.

The example illustrates an atmosphere of risk, opportunity and decision, which furthers the individual moral dilemma, a device that, as the following discussion will show, is used throughout the address.

Linking the moral obligation of the individual believer to the current political situation, which invites the urgent need for *jihad*, bin Ladin brings up the Palestinian theme in a rather interesting manner. By applying a Quranic citation from a different context directly to the Palestinian situation, he allows for the call for *jihad* to be seen as the only acceptable response.

> Oh believers, and the day will come that the Palestinian children will be resurrected and questioned for what sin they were killed. What will you [singular] say to them?

What is not directly obvious from the translation is that the incident in the Quran originally refers to the burying of female children alive: 'the day the female children will be resurrected and questioned for what sin they were

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killed'.[33] Again, it is possible to recognise how bin Ladin projects the message of the Quran to the present political situation and interprets its meaning. The way he describes the existing political reality makes it literally impossible for the individual listener not to acknowledge the legitimacy of the subsequent call for *jihad* against those who are responsible for the suffering of the *umma*, and for the Zionist – Crusader invasion.

To support his claim, he leaps from his rhetoric of almost confrontational bravura to stinging assertions of imminent realism:

> Nobody who dies and finds good from Allah in the Hereafter would wish to come back to this world, even if he were given the whole world and whatever is in it, except the martyr who, on seeing the superiority of martyrdom would like to come back to the world and get killed again in the cause of Allah.

But:

> *If you [singular] march not forth, He will punish you with a painful torment and will replace you by another people, and you cannot harm Him at all, and Allah is able to do all things.* (9: 39)

The apocalyptic tone and the use of the singular in 'if you march not forth' clearly places the emphasis on the individual's duty to wage *jihad*, which ultimately implies the need to fight. The seriousness that is communicated through this passage, although not directly obvious from the translation, is inherent in the chosen words that communicate the idea of utmost duty, *fard ayn*.

> Oh Brothers, we all must fulfil the duties that He has placed upon us. We testify that there is no God but Allah, no associate with Him.

Almost as if to remind the audience that they have already committed themselves to submitting to the will of Allah, the call to fulfil the duties that God has placed upon every believer is directly followed by a declaration of faith. Finally, addressing each member of the audience individually, bin Ladin asks the final, all-embracing question of why any member would refrain from submitting to the will of Allah and carrying out what he has prescribed for them. This question can only be regarded as a rhetorical inquiry to which the answer has already been provided. Clearly, there can be no reason to refrain from obeying the orders of Allah once the believer has made a declaration of faith, assuming that Muslims should submit to God in everything without demanding proof.

> *Why would you refrain from fighting, if fighting was prescribed for you? They said 'Why should we not fight in Allah's way while we have been driven out of our homes and our families have been taken as captives?' But when fighting was ordered for them, they turned away, all except a few of them. And Allah is all aware of the Zalimun.* (2: 37)

By now, bin Ladin has effectively established his authority and the legitimacy of his interpretation of some the most integral principles of Islam. As a result,

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his call on the believers to wage *jihad* appears to be bestowed with divine blessing. Thus, in the final part of the speech, while still furthering the cause of convincing the audience of the divine will to wage *jihad*, the primary objective seems to shift to the provision of an adequate assurance that God will be on the side of those who march forth faithfully, despite the risk of physical harm. The citing of the full story of how a small number of believers managed to overcome an overwhelming enemy with the help of Allah—the Quranic version of the biblical account of David and Goliath—exemplifies this intention. Throughout the early stages of the story it is possible for the individual listener to identify himself with those in the account. The final lines of the story clearly illustrate the overwhelming victory of those who have, against good reason, submitted to the will of Allah:

> *But those who knew with certainty that they were going to meet Allah, said, 'How often a small group overcame a mighty host by Allah's leave!' And Allah is with As-Sabirun. And when they advanced to meet Goliath and his forces, they invoked: 'Our Lord! Pour forth on us patience, and set firm our feet and make us victorious over the disbelieving people.' So they routed them by Allah's leave and David killed Goliath and Allah gave him the kingdom and taught him of that which He willed.* (2: 249–251)

The victory of David over Goliath provides a powerful confirmation that righteousness will triumph over evil, and as such can be seen as an incentive for the audience to have faith in Allah even under the most daunting circumstances. At this point, bin Ladin has delivered a straightforward message: It is the duty of every believer to obey God, which under the present circumstances means protecting his favoured community against the aggression of a foreign enemy. Furthermore, there can be no doubt that those who submit to the will of Allah will be victorious in the end. In other words, transferred into the present political context, a comparatively small number of determined fighters motivated by faith and assured that the hereafter is to be preferred over life in the present, is capable of overcoming even an overwhelming force such as the USA. Having established this, it is made abundantly clear that the call for *jihad* can only be understood as a call to take up arms to fight against the Zionist–Crusader invasion. In the following lines, the audience is told that they are expected to fight, as all of them are indeed soldiers of Allah. This time, the words of the Quran have been altered (see inserted lines in Roman type, added by bin Ladin, which is not part of the original Quranic text) for the purpose of calling on the believers to fight in the cause of Allah, again showing bin Ladin's own interpretation of the meaning of the Quran in the current political context:

> *And if Allah did not check one set of people by means of another, the earth would indeed be full of mischief.* Oh those of you who believe, go and fight in the cause of Allah. *But Allah is full of bounty to the Alamin.* (2: 251) Oh those of you [singular] who believe, you are soldiers of the party of Allah. *These are the Verses of Allah, we recite them to you in truth, and surely, you are one of the Messengers of Allah.* (2: 252)

Finally, bin Ladin's closing sentence expresses the central message of the address:

> When you fight those who disbelieve, smite their necks till you have killed and wounded many of them. (47:4) If you give up *jihad*, you give up Islam!

After a significant pause, the video begins to show images from Al-Qaeda training camps with the same music played at the beginning of the film. It finishes with the citation of the opening sura of the Quran, a declaration of faith, against the familiar mountain scene.

> In the name of Allah, the most gracious, the most merciful. All the praises and thanks be to Allah, the Lord of the 'alamin. The most gracious, the most merciful. The only owner of the day of recompense. You alone we worship and you alone we ask for help. Guide us to the straight way. The way you have bestowed your grace, not the way of those who earned your anger, nor of those who went astray. (1: 1–7)

It is obvious that bin Ladin has made every possible effort to convince the audience of the righteousness of his call to take up arms against the Zionist–Crusader invasion, the ultimate enemy of Islam. Having identified two vital Islamic principles and interpreted their meaning against the background of the larger political situation, he effectively becomes an objectifier for his audience. To his audience his words are an explanation of the meaning of Islam in the present political situation, as well as presenting a simple way to obtain salvation from Allah.

Conclusion

An attempt to analyse the impact of bin Ladin's address and ideology on the audience is methodologically difficult and arguably requires the tools of social psychology. Nevertheless, insights into the level of motivation that bin Ladin creates in his listeners can be gained by analysing the terminology that is used to communicate the central points, based on the assumption that 'the language of religion…is a symbolic language…a language which expresses meaning through images and symbols, the most excellent and exalted of all the languages men have ever evolved.'[34] In fact, anthropologists frequently remark that in any sociocultural context a number of key phrases and images representing central values have special importance as multivocal symbols. Very often, one of the most difficult tasks is '"to determine the meanings of a few key words, upon an understanding of which the success of the whole investigation depends'.[35]

As already indicated in the previous section, the call for *jihad* is invoked by terminology that is loaded with significant meaning, such as 'crusade', 'Zionist–Crusader invasion', 'duty' or '*jihad*'. Ignoring the symbolic dimension of each of these terms carries the risk of losing an important part of the full meaning and depth of the message.

This aspect is particularly interesting in the context of the ongoing war on terrorism, as both sides of the conflict employ words and symbols that evoke bitter memories of past conflicts and conjure up emotions long suppressed.

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For example, when US President George W Bush used the word 'crusade' to describe the US-led campaign against international terrorism, the conservative Muslims in the Middle East and South Asia responded immediately with a call for *jihad,* to the effect that both sides are currently locked in a painful and traumatic recollection of the 200-year-long confrontation between Christians and Muslims. As a result of the unfortunate—or possibly intentional—use of these terms, Muslims in different parts of the world have become agitated. To every metaphor or symbol that one camp has at its disposal, the other can respond immediately in kind. One side may be seen to be preparing for an air war with state-of-the-art aircraft and smart bombs, while the other proclaims its readiness through a bearded man on horseback wielding an assault rifle. This in itself is a compelling image, evoking the Muslim warriors during the Crusades defending Muslim land against the invading hordes from the West. Each word, symbol or concept used as part of the language of war is loaded with historical meaning and emotion that is hard to measure unless the protagonists' culture and history are thoroughly understood.

Carl Gustav Jung, the Swiss psychologist, called the deeply rooted and commonly shared feelings that are evoked as a result of this kind of rhetoric the 'collective consciousness'. 'Utilized towards specific goals, this can serve as a powerful instrument to drive a people to commendable activities or heroism, or move them to destructive behaviour at critical moments of human society or community.'[36] Once unleashed, these collective emotions are very difficult to contain and can possibly be directed along a destructive course. In the light of 11 September 2001 and other terrorist acts that followed it, it is all too evident that bin Ladin's rhetoric, with its appeal to powerful imagery embedded in the collective consciousness of the Muslim community, and its juxtaposition of political goals with the teachings of the Quran, inspires his followers to commit terrible acts of destruction while being fully convinced that they are fulfilling the ordained will of Allah.

Notes

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1   Finding of a Pentagon intelligence team, *Washington Times*, 5 June 2003.
2   S Schwartz, *The Two Faces of Islam*, New York: Random House, 2002.
3   R Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, p 14.
4   'Al-Qaeda not driven by ideology', *Washington Times*, 5 June 2003.
5   Schwartz, *The Two Faces of Islam*, p 1.
6   See, for example, W Beeman, 'Fighting the good fight: fundamentalism and religious revival', in J MacClancy, *Anthropology for the Real World*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001.
7   F Halliday, 'The politics of Islam —a second look', *British Journal of Political Science*, 25 (3), 1995, p 400.
8   N Luhmann, *Funktion der Religon*, Frankfurt: Piper Verlag, 1977, p 16; and B Tibi, *Islam between Culture and Politics*, New York: Palgrave, 2001, p 28.
9   C Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, pp 87–95.
10 Tibi , *Islam between Culture and Politics*, p 28.
11 *Ibid*, p 29.
12 *Ibid*, p 29; and J Baumann, *Gott und Mensch im Koran: Eine Strukturform religioeser Anthropologie anhand des Beispiels Allah und Muhammed*, Darmstadt: Piper Verlag, 1977, p 9.

[13] D Eickelman & J Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996, p 46.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] These are the terms used by MGS Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 vols, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1974.

[16] Several authors provide different dates for the separation of functions and institutions from Islam. See, for example, N Coulson, *A History of Islamic Law*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1964, pp 128 – 129; and B Lewis, 'Politics and war', in J Schacht & C Bosworth (eds), *The Legacy of Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979, pp 156 – 209.

[17] Tibi, *Islam between Culture and Politics*, p 2.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] S Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Quran* (In the Shade of the Quran), trans MA Salahi & AA Shamis, London: MHW Publishers, 1979. An interesting discussion of Qutb's interpretation is R Nettler's 'Guidelines for the Islamic community: Sayyid Qutb's political interpretation', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 1 (2), 1996, pp 183 – 196.

[20] Nettler, 'Guidelines for the Islamic community', p 196.

[21] Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda*, p 14.

[22] Tibi, *Islam between Culture and Politics*, p 17.

[23] J Piscatori, 'The turmoil within', *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2002, p. 2.

[24] Eickelmann & Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, p 38.

[25] Turabi, quoted in *ibid*, p 43.

[26] Eickelman & Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, p 35.

[27] For an excellent discussion of the misunderstood Wahhabi connection, see M Azzam, 'Al-Qaeda: the misunderstood Wahhabi connection and the ideology of violence, *Royal Institute of International Affairs Briefing Paper No 1*, London, February 2003.

[28] 'Review of 1998 Reports Concerning Threats by Osama bin Ladin to Conduct Terrorist Operations Against the United States and/or her Allies', available online at danmahony.com, p. 3.

[29] Access to this video and other Al-Qaeda propaganda material was provided by the Center for the study of Terrorism and Political Violence at St Andrews University, Scotland.

[30] The translations of Quranic citations are based on M Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali & M Mushin Khan, *Translation of the Meanings of The Noble Qur'an in the English Language*, Riyadh: King Fahd Complex for the printing of the Holy Quran, 1419 AH.

[31] By evoking symbols in a pure and abstract form, everything is graded as black and white without intervening shades. Whatever the basis of authority in any culture, the general tendency in ideology is to draw an absolute antithesis between the prevailing authority and the authority on which the ideology is based, between absolute evil and absolute good. For details, see R Nicholas, 'Social and political movements', in B Siegel (ed), *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews, 1973, p 80.

[32] M al-Ghazzali, *Our Beginning in Wisdom*, trans IR al-Faruqi, Washington, DC: American Counsel of Learned Societies, 1953; and *Worship in Islam: Being a Translation with Commentary and Introduction of al-Ghazzali's Book of the Ihya' on the Worship*, translation, commentary and introduction by Edwin Elliott Calverley, London: Luzac & Co, 1925; and Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Quran*. See Statement by Osama bin Laden, *International Herald Tribune*, 8 October 2001; and Statement by Abu Gaith (Osama bin Ladin's spokesman), *Financial Times*, 10 October 2001.

[33] Quran, 81: 7 – 8.

[34] Ali Shari'ati, quoted in Eickelman & Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, p 13.

[35] E Evans-Pitchard, *Social Anthropology and Other Essays*, New York: Free Press, 1962, p 80. Similarly, see also P Gaffney, *The Prophet's Pulpit: Islamic Preaching in Contemporary Egypt*, LA: University of California Press, 1994, p 124.

[36] CG Jung, cited in W Schulz, *Psychologie des Widerstandes*, Frankfurt: Westman Verlag, 2002, p 27. See also Jung, 'The archetypes and the collected unconsciousness', in *Collected Works*, ed H Read, M Fordham & G Adler, Vol 9, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1936. For an insightful discussion of the dynamics and contexts of social movement participation, see B Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, particularly the chapter on 'The transformation of discontent into action', pp 64 – 93. On group dynamics and the perception of justice, see, for example, M Wenzel, 'What is social about justice? Inclusive identity and group values as the basis of the justice motive', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 38, pp 205 – 208; and T Tyler & M Belliveau, 'Tradeoffs in justice principles: definitions of perceived fairness', in B Bunker & J Rubin (eds), *Conflict, Cooperation and Justice*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002, pp 291 – 314.