



# ***STRATEGIC CULTURE, AL-QAIDA, AND WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION***

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# Strategic Culture, Al-Qaida, and Weapons of Mass Destruction

Jerry Mark Long<sup>1</sup>

An analyst writing for a prominent counterterrorism think tank recently offered a “primer” on the world’s most feared terrorist network and the potential employment of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Saying that an al-Qaida attack using these weapons is “inevitable,” the analyst held that such employment “would serve all the traditional purposes of terrorism: symbolism, propaganda, and psychological impact, irrespective of the failure or success of the mission.” Then, in a sweeping conclusion, the analyst averred, “What matters is to cause mass casualties.... In this context discussions about motives to deploy WMD are irrelevant. No matter how complex the deep principles or incentives behind WMD terrorism, the *only reliable motive is an unflinching desire to slay blindly.*”<sup>2</sup> (emphasis added)

“Irrespective of success or failure.” “Slay blindly.” Unfortunately, the analyst’s views seem to be as common as they are categorical and reductionistic. Al-Qaida’s true aim, despite the spectacular assault on the World Trade Center, has never been simply indiscriminate slaughter. Indeed, its long-term goals have been articulated in a multitude of venues and with remarkable consistency. Although its ideologues have vigorously debated methods of achieving them, blind slaying has not numbered among them, whether as means or end. In studying al-Qaida documents, something else emerges: a view of the world and a strategic code more richly textured, nuanced, calculating, even deadly. Al-Qaida may indeed someday use WMD, but it will do so having calibrated its aims, and—despite our author’s assertion—success *will* count.

But the account given above falls short in another way, and it is this: we can no longer speak of a single al-Qaida, a vertical organization with a *shura* council rigorously controlling a top-down structure. It is better viewed as an ideology metastasizing through multiple “al-Qaidas,” franchises that import the original message of the proto-al-Qaida and adapt it to local

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<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank Dr. James Smith, Director of the Institute for National Security Studies, for making possible participation in the “Violent Non-State Actors, Strategic Culture, and WMD: The al-Qaida Case” conference, held in McLean, VA, 26-27 June 2006. Many of the ideas presented here reflect the vigorous and open dialogue of the conferees. More especially, the author is grateful to the Institute and its host organization, the United States Air Force Academy, for providing a home during sabbatic leave from Baylor University, fall 2005. Additionally, the author gladly acknowledges the close reading and numerous critical suggestions of Ms. Amanda Mitchell, a very perceptive student of international relations and Middle East politics at Baylor University. As generally happens with academic papers, any merits this study possesses must be attributed, at least in part, to the suggestions, encouragement, and critique of others; any flaws, to the author himself.

<sup>2</sup> Tiina Tarvainen, “Al-Qaeda and WMD: A Primer,” *Terrorism Monitor*, 2 June, 2005.

and national exigencies. Increasingly, “al-Qaida” must be taken as a political metonymy, an expression to indicate an array of global Islamic organizations, operating with varying levels of autonomy, but generally subscribed to a salafist religious narrative that stipulates a political order which will be achieved through the use of controlled violence. The original al-Qaida remains, but it is no longer simply the hierarchical structure developed in the 1990s following the mujahideen triumph in Afghanistan. “Al-Qaida” is now an idea spread throughout the blogosphere, and that is where the greater threat lies.

The question of jihadist use of WMD must therefore be put in a double context. First, one must examine al-Qaida as a violent non-state, *non-national* actor (VNSNNA) whose ideology posits a nexus of strategic principles and suggests an operational code. Then, one must examine particular “al-Qaidas,” violent non-state *national* actors (VNSNA), which may import that ideology, tailor it to local exigencies, and develop specific national operational codes. In taking this two-tiered approach, we are not discounting that Osama and the original al-Qaida may attempt to acquire and use WMD, but we are asserting that multiple jihadist groups are now deliberating possible use in their respective national settings. Thus, the question Western analysts face is considerably more complex than simply, “What is the likelihood al-Qaida will employ WMD?”

This paper will take only an initial step in the complex task of trying to determine whether and under what circumstances al-Qaida and its affiliates may use WMD. It will confine itself to examining the ideology, approached as narrative, of the *original* al-Qaida, not particular franchises. It will ask what its views are with respect to the acquisition and employment of WMD, and it will do so by using strategic culture as an analytic concept. What emerges is a contested ideology, but also one of substantial nuance, and—as we shall see—something considerably advanced beyond a simple desire to employ WMD to slay blindly.

#### **AL-QAIDA AND STRATEGIC CULTURE AS ANALYTIC TOOL**

As an analytic concept, strategic culture studies developed in the 1970s, following the earlier idea of a political culture among elites, a “culture” amenable to critical analysis. Once the culture was understood, analysts could then make predictions about political behavior. As the idea developed, analysts applied the idea of strategic culture to the Soviet Union. In its usual formulation, the Soviets were seen as developing specific operational codes based on a long-

developing culture that stemmed from centuries of Russian history and the wars that swept across Eastern Europe to the Russian heartland. Thus, analysts ascribed operational doctrines like “defense in depth” and “correlation of forces” to facets of a deeper strategic culture, a set of factors that made for a kind of historically-imposed inertia on present actions.<sup>3</sup>

Analysts of violent non state actors have recently revived the concept, looking for a more insightful way of describing (and, where possible, predicting) strategic behaviors than simply positing them to a given actor’s forward-looking calculation of maximum utility. That is especially important when looking at al-Qaida, for game theory is unable to take adequate account of suicide bombing. In such a case, of course, the actor does nothing to maximize his utility, but quite the opposite. And yet the rationality of the bombers seems intact, from a psychological point of view,<sup>4</sup> and when examined within a religious and historical context—the very thing strategic culture analysis compels us to do—the sacrifice the bombers make is both explicable and consistent. To use Hedrick Smith’s apt phrase from another context (that of Soviet political behavior), what one confronts in the Middle East today is the weight of the salafist past upon the Islamist present. Strategic culture helps us read al-Qaida’s past and offers an interpretation of present actions.

At the outset, one must acknowledge a special consideration in seeking to use strategic culture as a tool to examine al-Qaida. Heretofore, it has been used with respect to *state* actors. Al-Qaida, despite its dreams of a renewed caliphate, is not a state. Moreover, in the parlance of international relations, it isn’t even a nation. It is transnational. But the ostensible weakness of strategic culture as a tool may be its very strength, if prudently applied. “Nation” is a protean concept. One way of approaching it is to see a nation as a group of people who strongly identify with an overarching, shared cultural narrative, a key focus in strategic culture analysis. Indeed a state has effective political cohesion to the degree it is coterminous with that nation and its narrative.

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<sup>3</sup> An earlier and useful overview of this analytic approach may be found in Colin Gray, “Comparative Strategic Culture,” *Parameters* (Winter 1984): 26-33. A recent attempt to assess the current status of the field of strategic studies is found in “Comparative Strategic Culture: Conference Report” issued by the Center for Contemporary Conflict and available at [http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/events/recent/ComparativeStrategicCultureSep05\\_rpt.asp](http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/events/recent/ComparativeStrategicCultureSep05_rpt.asp). An exceptionally vigorous critique of the approach is that of Alastair Johnston, “Thinking About Strategic Culture,” *International Security* (Spring 1995): 33-64. While not discounting the concept as an analytic tool, Johnston does look to specify the term and to suggest ways of making its methodology more rigorous and its hypotheses falsifiable. My approach here is indebted to his discussion, as will be readily apparent.

<sup>4</sup> The intact psychology of al-Qaida members is a key conclusion of the work of Marc Sageman. See particularly his *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004).

Thus, in many ways the nation is the unit more susceptible of strategic culture analysis, an analysis appropriate to the state only to that degree the state comprises those who share a national narrative. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the Tamil Tigers, the Basque separatists, the Chechen rebels, and Hamas would be amenable to this analysis, for while they are violent non-state actors, they are yet national actors within a state setting. The same could be said for particular “al-Qaidas” within a local setting, whether in Bali, Morocco, or “Londonistan.” This conceptualization would seem especially pertinent to national groups in Iraq. Rather than attempt to analyze violence in the Iraqi state as a whole, a more fruitful approach would see Iraq as an artificial state that comprises three nations. With respect to its creation after World War I, Sir Anthony Parsons, long a British diplomat in the Middle East, observed, “Woodrow Wilson had disappeared by then, and there wasn’t much rubbish about self-determination. We, the British, cobbled Iraq together. It was always an artificial state; it had nothing to do with the people who lived there.”<sup>5</sup> Strategic culture takes account of that crucial historical dimension. It would approach the Iraqi Sunni and Shia militants, not merely as combatants in a *state’s* civil war, but as two *nations* who battle each other. Each side has its own deep cultural narrative, and each side has its account about The Other and the threat the other poses to its own values and very existence. Strategic culture, in approaching the state of Iraq, must analyze multiple narratives—just as it must for any non-homogenous state. And to the degree that a state is markedly pluralistic (i.e., differing national groups vying for advantage within a given government structure), strategic culture loses focus as an analytic tool, unless it allows for multiple narratives.

Which brings us to the question of whether al-Qaida, transnational as it is, would be amenable to such analysis. The answer is a qualified “yes.” Religion can serve as a powerful ethnic marker, a critical element constitutive of identity.<sup>6</sup> In the case of Islam, the appeal that salafi jihadists make is that the bond of religion trumps state identification. This replicates the pattern of early Islam, wherein the forefathers claimed that loyalty to the *ummah*, the Islamic community, was to supersede *asabiyya*, loyalty to the kinship group. In support, jihadists

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<sup>5</sup> A number of sources may be cited for this background on Iraq’s creation. To cite only two, Glenn Frankel gives a concise account in his “Lines in the Sand” in Micah Sifry and Christopher Cerf, eds., *The Gulf War Reader* (New York: Random House, 1991), 16-20. David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace* (New York: Holt, 1989) gives a superb review, focusing especially on Churchill, passim, but particularly 191-92. On the orchestration of Feisal’s “popular” selection and reception, see Fromkin, 506-08. The Parsons quote is in Frankel, 18.

<sup>6</sup> On the concept of ethnic markers, see Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People, and the State* (New York: Tauris, 1993).

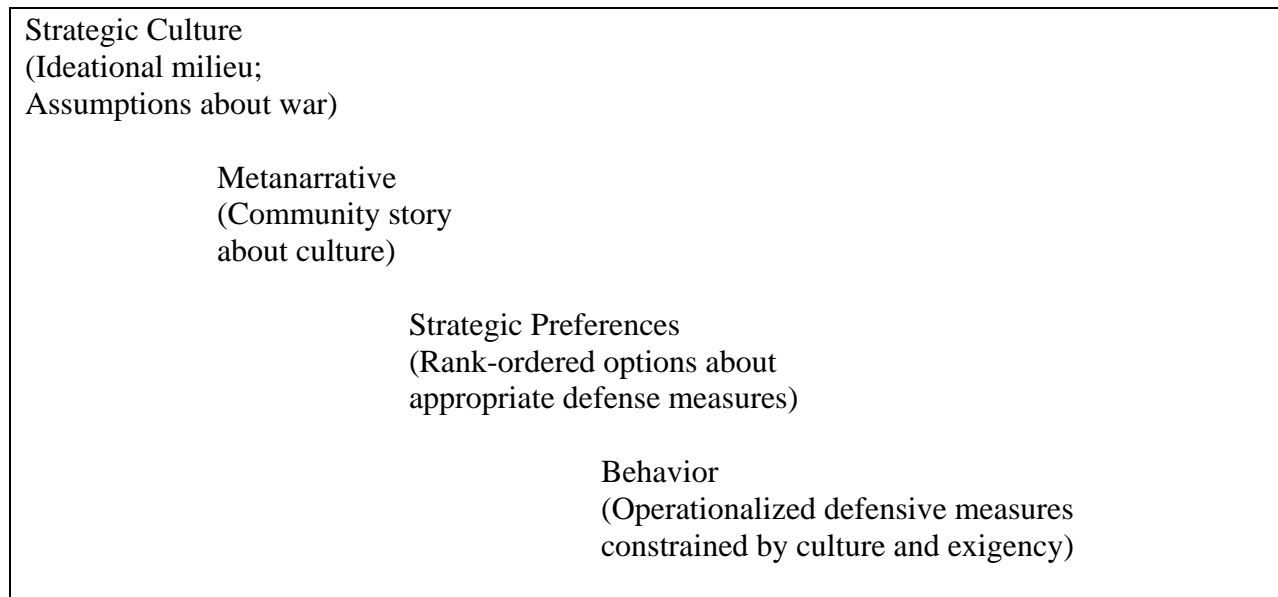
frequently cite Q 2:143, “Thus we have made of you/an Ummat justly balanced/that ye might be witnesses/over the nations [al-nas, lit., “the people” or “the multitudes”].” For al-Qaida, the organization is simply a tangible expression of this larger *ummah*.<sup>7</sup> And the *ummah* is not so much transnational as it is the nation which is trans-global. In contradistinction, say, to the Tamil Tigers who see themselves as a nation operating within the state context of Sri Lanka, al-Qaida members view their imagined *ummah* as that nation which is larger than any state. From the Western perspective, those from other countries who travel to Iraq as suicide bombers represent *different nationalities* that have converged on a failed state. From the Islamist perspective, these are members of the *one nation* who have traveled to the region to defend their religion *bi amwal wa anfusihim*, with their possessions and their lives. The brilliance of Osama and others is in the crafting of a religious narrative that gives a thick account of this nation, the *ummah*, and thus makes it a cultural reality for which men and women are willing to die. It is that nation and its narrative that we analyze here using the tools of strategic culture.

In this approach, we will take “strategic culture” to indicate an ideational milieu, one that makes important assumptions about the fundamental values of the community, the nature of the enemy that threatens those values, and the role of war in defending the same.<sup>8</sup> These fundamental values coalesce in what we will term a meta-narrative, the overarching story that situates individuals in a distinct community, provides a cognitive roadmap by which they are to live, and that motivates members to protect the community against its enemies, even in the face of death. Within this larger narrative, elites rank order strategic options about how best to defend and promote the community through warfare. Then, in the messy details of contingent circumstances, decision makers act to achieve those valued ends. We may diagram it as shown in Figure 1:

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<sup>7</sup> An important self-description that salafists use is “vanguard,” a term made popular by Sayyid Qutb in his major work, *Milestones*. The idea here is that Islam has fallen into moral decay, and a committed group of true believers (the vanguard, *tali'a*) will restore it to its early purity.

<sup>8</sup> Again I note my debt, especially in terminology, to Johnston. The idea of narrative as cognitive roadmap I develop more fully in “From Gilgamesh to Fatwas,” *War, Literature, and the Arts* (forthcoming, 2007). At the same time, I acknowledge an implicit debt to Harvard researcher Steven Pinker, especially in his *The Blank Slate*, and the idea that cultures are epiphenomena and that what is truly universal is the psychological unity of the race.



**Figure 1: Real Life Decision Making**

The remainder of this paper will focus especially on the second step of this diagram, the meta-narrative of al-Qaida and its concomitant preferences. Following that, it will then suggest what behaviors may arise within that “national” and trans-global entity.

### **THE CLASSICAL NARRATIVE**

The classical view in Islam about the world and the role of jihad arose during the Abbasid caliphate. This doctrine developed following a series of stunning and quite rapid victories over rival tribes in the Arabian peninsula, and the larger but effete empires of the Byzantines and Persians.<sup>9</sup> The story was retrospective, providing a justification for warfare, an explanation for its victories, and a justification for the ethical dimension of Islam’s actions. This narration rendered the world thus:

<i>dar al-Islam</i>	<i>ahl al-kitab</i>	<i>dar al-harb</i>
(house of Islam)	(people of the book)	(house of war)

In this formulation, there was a categorical divide between the believers and the unbelievers, yet it provided an intermediate space for *ahl al-kitab*, people of the book, generally

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<sup>9</sup> An older but still useful exposition of the classical doctrine is Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1955). For a discussion of the origins and nuances of jihad, see Jerry M. Long, “Jihad,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religious Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 2003).



Christians, Jews, and other monotheists. Between the two houses there is perennial war. There may be occasional periods of *sulh*, a cessation of hostilities, or a *hudna*, a truce, but not *salaam*, true peace. Eventually, Islam will triumph, despite whatever setbacks it may suffer in the meantime. And that is a key point, for this inevitable victory requires faith, calculation, and long-term patience.

Despite representations in modern art, as Islam spread geographically, the aim was not forced conversions, but insuring that conquered peoples recognized the supremacy of Islam. Moreover, Islamist jurists formulated rules of warfare that parallel the West's ideas about *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*: what constitutes a threat against Islam, who should be considered combatants, the permissibility of collateral damage, and what intentional damage might be inflicted on an enemy's territory.<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that this was not a monolithic formulation; there was a great deal of debate among Muslim scholars about how these questions ought to be answered.<sup>11</sup> It was also true of the principle of *da'wa*, the appeal that Muslims were to make to non-Muslims to embrace Islam. Scholars debated ways in which *da'wa* ought to be promulgated. They also debated who could live in tributary status: no one at all, monotheists only, or polytheists as well.

### **Refashioning the Narrative**

Al-Qaida's formulation draws from this classical doctrine, as well as from a number of medieval and modern thinkers and movements (Ibn-Taymiyya, wahhabism, Maududi, Qutb, Abdullah Azzam, and many others). In this reformulation, Osama functions as a kind of lay mujtahid, one who gives independent interpretation to Islamic texts. But it is critical to understand that Osama is not free to give just any interpretation, or else he would have no legitimacy. Rather he functions within an historical and religious tradition that has set the parameters within which he must move. Moreover, he is clearly influenced by his mentors and by those other ideologues in al-Qaida with whom he interacts. In this regard, it is better to see Osama as a kind of Homer who does not invent his story but must refashion what has come to him in his cultural context. And it is equally important to see that al-Qaida is not monolithic.

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<sup>10</sup> For a good overview of the topic, see John Kelsay, *Islam and War* (Louisville: Westminster, 1993). Also valuable is Ann Elizabeth Mayer, "War and Peace in the Islamic Tradition and International Law" in *Just War and Jihad*, eds. John Kelsay and James T. Johnson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991): 195-226.

<sup>11</sup> For an indication of the scope of that discussion among Islamic scholars, see the primary documents collected in Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam* (Princeton: Marcus Wiener, 1993).

Osama is iconic and even something of a *batil*, an Islamic hero, but he is not *imperator* whose ideas alone carry weight. Within al-Qaida, as is true of Islam more generally, there is sharp contestation, and those who read the primary materials will see the degree to which that is true. And a critical corollary merges here. A single *fatwa* does not constitute the definitive al-Qaida position on an issue, nor is al-Qaida's doctrine frozen in ahistorical time. It is dynamic.<sup>12</sup>

Yet one may describe al-Qaida thinking in *broad* terms with relative accuracy. It begins with the dichotomy of the house of war and the house of Islam. Osama and others have appealed to this division on countless occasions. Osama's statement several weeks after 9/11 is typical. "These events have divided the whole world into two camps, the camp of the faithful and the camp of the infidels. May God shield us and you [i.e., other Muslims] from them."<sup>13</sup> But al-Qaida's use significantly attenuates the intermediate space for people of the book, and Jews are almost never offered any consideration for this category. On the other hand, the category *dar al-harb*, pretty much an undifferentiated mass in classical thinking, is particularized in contemporary thinking. It posits a trifecta of enemies: The West; The Jews; and Traitorous Arab leaders.

Each of those may be further differentiated, using either secular or religious terms. For instance, the West may become either the "crusaders" or the "imperialists." Often it is simply "America." A particularly important term in their lexicon for the west is *kafirun*, unbelievers, and President Bush is designated "head of the unbelievers." The Jews generally are "Zionists" or the "Zionist entity." And the traitors among Arab leaders (usually heads of state in the Gulf Cooperation Council and virtually all senior members of the Saudi royal family) are "agents," intermediaries who do the bidding of the West and who fail to implement Islamic law, the *shari'a*.<sup>14</sup> More significantly, al-Qaida terms them *murtadun*, apostates. That is significant, for

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<sup>12</sup> This is especially important to note in connection with the *fatwa* issued by Nasir al-Fahd in May 2003 on the permissibility of WMD. The lengthy and carefully constructed *fatwa* follows the traditional pattern of posing and answering objections, drawing on the Quran, the hadith, and the writings of other scholars. But the claims of some Western analysts notwithstanding (to include the writer quoted at the start of this article), Fahd's pronouncement does not settle all. On an issue of this magnitude, several prominent and respected scholars would have to concur if the community were to have consensus. But that hasn't happened, and there is a curious lack of reference among other leading Islamists to Fahd on this point. To see the degree of contestation there may be on critical issues, see Yvonne Haddad, "Operation Desert Storm and the War of the Fatwas" in *Islamic Legal Interpretations: Muftis and their Fatwas*, ed. Muhammad Khalid Masud, et. al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996): 297-309.

<sup>13</sup> The full text is in "The Sword Fell," *New York Times*, 8 Oct 01.

<sup>14</sup> Zawahiri forwarded this theme again in late July 2006. After discussing the "Zionist-Crusader War" against Lebanon and Hezbollah, he concluded, "My Muslim nation, without a doubt it is clear to you now that the governments of the Arabic and Islamic countries are inefficient and conniving.... You are all alone in the field."

classical Islam stipulated harsher treatment for those who had left the faith than for simple unbelievers. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is a “layman” who “bartered away the true religion.” And among non-Arab, Muslim leaders lumped in that category is President Musharraf of Pakistan, the “traitor” of Islam. Moreover, these categories sometimes get blended. Israel, for instance, is frequently accused of having formed a “crusader-Zionist alliance” with the West. Great Britain and the United States have formed “armies of unbelief” and “the Crusader West.”<sup>15</sup> The interim prime minister of Iraq, Ibrahim al-Ja’fari, is the “servant of the cross” who has declared war on his Muslim co-religionists. And so on, in seemingly endless permutations.

### **Key Dates**

Al-Qaida’s contemporary doctrinal reformulation has, of course, taken place within a specific historical context, and several dates are critical to the Islamists. Apart from the obvious deeper history that al-Qaida often cites (the loss of the Iberian peninsula, the crusades, etc), several more recent events of the last century stand out, and al-Qaida ideologues frequently reference them. Here are five of those key dates.

#### 1916—Sykes-Picot

Radicals (and indeed most Arabs) view this as the date of the great betrayal, when Britain secretly pursued its imperialist aims in the region, at the expense of the Arabs.<sup>16</sup> It is a strongly evocative date and seen as contributing to the end of the caliphate (1923) and the implementation of an “imperialist” mandate system. Immediately after 9/11, Osama released an audio tape in

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Cited in “In Zawahiri’s Words: ‘We Will Unite,’” *New York Times*, 28 July 2006. Several weeks later, on the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, Zawahiri continued the theme, accusing Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan of supporting Israeli hostility against Lebanon. Cairo, he said, had made a “graveyard” of the Arab’s joint defense pact. *Al-Jazeera* on-line (Arabic), 12 September 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Notably, on the first anniversary of the London train bombing, al-Qaida released a new tape with commentary and voiceover, which included the martyr statement of Shehzad Tanweer recorded prior to the attack. In his voiceover, Zawahiri pointed out, “The names of the station [sic] that were targeted have significance, both symbolically and in terms of morale, for the Crusader West,” apparently referring to the bombing of the King’s Cross—Tavistock line. The statement is in MEMRI, 11 July 2006.

<sup>16</sup> An obvious example is the 1996 “Ladenese Epistle,” in which the assault of the West on Islam is made the foundation of the argument that follows for defensive war. It is even more explicit in Osama’s declaration in October 2001 in which he argued that 9/11 was simply retaliation for “80 years of humiliation” (see “The Sword Fell,” cited supra). Zawahiri and others share that analysis. What lacks, however, is the sort of capacity for critical self-reflection that one finds in the writings of, say, Qutb and Mawdudi, who offer Muslim jeremiads. Self-reflection seems to have returned in Abu Mus’ab al-Suri, however, whose “Observations Concerning the Jihadi Experience in Syria” is remarkable on this account. See the summary available in Brachman and McCants, *Stealing al-Qaida’s Playbook*, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/Stealing%20Al-Qai%27da%27s%20Playbook%20--%20CTC.pdf>.

which he claimed that the attack on the WTC was retaliation for a series of Western assaults on the region, beginning with the critical era in World War I.

### 1948—Establishment of Israel

May 1948 is seen as part of a Western plot to establish a beachhead on Muslim lands, and most Muslims and Arabs generally call this *al-nakba*, the disaster. Al-Qaida is more specific. This “loss of Palestine” is not merely loss of territory. It represents the loss of Jerusalem, the third holiest site in Islam and the first *qibla* (direction of prayer). Even Saddam, in his Machiavellian way, sought to leverage the religious aspect of Jerusalem as legitimation for his invasion of Kuwait. Many al-Qaida pronouncements, as with the 1998 *fatwa*, list the recovery of Palestine and the first *qibla* as a key war aim.

### 1967—The June War

Often referred to in the region as another *nakba*, Islamists highlight it as the failure of secular Arab nationalism and, indeed, the judgment of God. From this point, Islamists propounded their own alternative, what they have termed *al-Hal al-islami*, the Islamic solution. That has proved a paradigm, of sorts. Hezbollah, Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, and al-Qaida have seized on any sort of disaster as an opportunity to show—by rhetoric and practice—the superiority of the Islamic solution, mobilizing the aid that feckless Arab governments cannot, then exploiting the public relations moment.<sup>17</sup>

### 1973—The Ramadan/Yom Kippur War

Arabs view this as the war that restored the nation’s honor (after the debacle of 1967) and demonstrated the vulnerability of the Zionist enemy.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, it made possible—at least in Sadat’s view—a trip to Jerusalem to address the Knesset and participate in the Camp David

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<sup>17</sup> Zawahiri writes of the impact of the 1967 defeat in his *Knights Under the Banner of the Prophet*. “The jihad movement realized that the woodworm had begun to eat the idol [Nasser, as leader of secular Arab nationalism] until he became weak because of the effects of the setback and he fell to the ground amid the bewilderment of his priests and the horror of his worshippers.... The death of [Nasser] was not the death of one person but also the death of his principles, which proved their failure on the ground of reality, and the death of a popular myth that was broken on the sands of Sinai.” *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, 4 December 2001. Thereafter, Zawahiri writes, an invigorated militant Islam developed in the void.

<sup>18</sup> It is significant, in this context, that the Egyptian military’s successful plan to breach the Bar Lev defensive barrier and cross into the Sinai was code-named Operation Badr, explicitly referencing an early Muslim victory over the Makkans in 624 C.E.

talks. But it is important with respect to the history of al-Qaida. Osama has pointed to this as the beginning of his return to Islam. Because of the massive U.S. airlift to reinforce Israel after its initial setbacks in the Sinai, the war indicated to Osama the unalterable commitment of the West to support the Zionist entity, a formative event in the development of al-Qaida's view of the real nature and structure of the house of war. Not incidentally, this was underscored again in July 2006 when the United States resupplied Israel in its war with Hezbollah.

### 1990—The Gulf War

It is difficult to overstate the importance of this period. Osama, flush from victory in Afghanistan, offered to employ his *mujahideen* to repel Saddam. The Saudis turned instead to the West. But more important than United States intervention was the continued U.S. *presence* in the peninsula, a “defilement” that radicals compared to that of a woman ritually unclean during her monthly cycle.<sup>19</sup> This was the final validation, to Osama and others, of the West's intent to overrun the house of Islam, and provocation (*jus ad bellum*) to launch a “defensive” war, on their view.<sup>20</sup>

### **DOCTRINES OF WAR AND WMD**

It is this meta-narrative, selectively derived from classical doctrine and reshaped through historical contingency, that forms the basis for al-Qaida's strategic preferences and operational code. Al-Qaida, in fact, has made no secret of its strategic views, even if it practices reasonably good security with respect to operational employment. It is possible to “read al-Qaida's playbook,” as a recent publication of the Combating Terrorism Center at the United States Military Academy puts it.<sup>21</sup> And to read it, is to be immediately struck by how thorough

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<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, the striking use of this imagery in the al-Qaida attack on western compounds in Saudi Arabia in May 2004, dubbed the “Khobar Operation.” The text describing the assault is available at <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=subjects&Area=jihad&ID=SP73104>.

<sup>20</sup> This post war period, I will argue, is the single most important precursor to Osama's attack on 9/11. His reading was that the house of war had overrun the house of peace. His fatwa in 1998 can only be understood against this backdrop. For more background on Osama's appeal to the Saudi royal family, see Yossef Bodansky, *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America* (New York: Random House, 2001): 28-31; and reporting in *The Jordan Times*, 8 November 2001. For a coolly-reasoned and powerfully stated Arab view on the U.S. presence and how provocative it might be, see Mohamed Heikal, *Illusions of Triumph: An Arab View of the Gulf War* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), 333-34.

<sup>21</sup> I am indebted here and in much of the discussion that follows to Brachman and McCants' *Stealing al-Qa'ida's Playbook*, and to the collection of primary materials in the “Harmony” database on the Combating Terrorism Center's website, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/>.

al-Qaida ideologues have been in deliberating warfighting doctrine in light of the larger worldview of radical, salafist Islam. The reductionistic approach of reading al-Qaida as simply an undifferentiated group of terrorists seeking spectacular effects by indiscriminately killing massive numbers of Americans is a serious misreading indeed. Here, then, are three key points of doctrine.

## A Long War

The war al-Qaida fights will be a long war, requiring patience and careful calculation. The authoritative source here is the writing of Sayyid Qutb, and he merits quoting at length on this critical point.

[T]he growing bankruptcy of western civilization makes it necessary to revive Islam. The distance between the revival of Islam and the attainment of world leadership *may be vast*...but the first step must be taken.... The Muslim community [i.e., the umma] today is neither capable of nor is required to present before mankind great genius in material inventions, such as would make the world bow its head before its supremacy and thus re-establish once more its world leadership. Europe's creative mind is far ahead in this area, and *for a few centuries* to come we cannot expect to compete with Europe.... How to initiate the revival of Islam? A vanguard must set out with this determination and then keep going, marching through the vast ocean of *jahiliyyah* [ignorance of the true faith] which encompasses the entire world.... The Muslims in this vanguard must know the landmarks and the milestones on the road to this goal so that they would know the starting point as well as the nature, the responsibilities, and the ultimate purpose of *this long journey*.<sup>22</sup>

In his statement the month after the attack on the World Trade Center, Osama used precisely this term—"vanguard"—which Qutb had used, claiming that it was they who had struck a blow against America. He finished his statement claiming, "The wind of change is blowing to remove evil from the peninsula of Muhammad."<sup>23</sup> In the ideological trajectory of his doctrinal mentor, Osama was stating the vanguard had set out on its long journey with this major blow against the *dar al harb*, and that winds of change had begun to stir, *not* that the task was completed nor even near completion. And al-Qaida understands that the fight is lengthy precisely because its fight is asymmetric, despite the dramatic success on 9/11. In fact, in a moment of candor after his "period of solitude," al-Qaida ideologue Abu Mus<sup>c</sup>ab al-Suri

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<sup>22</sup> *Milestones*, 7, 8, 9. Emphasis added.

<sup>23</sup> "The Sword Fell."

declared, “It is inconceivable to imagine the defeat and destruction of America, with all the military and economic power that it has reached, except through natural disasters.”<sup>24</sup> Hence the comment of al-Qaida on its al-Nidaa web site about the necessity of unconventional warfare in 2003: “We expected that the method of defense of regular or semi-regular [Iraqi forces] would collapse.... [Thus] we have focused on the modus operandi of guerilla warfare. This is the most powerful method Muslims have...[for] there is no chance that in the years to come we will be allowed to possess the elements of strength.”<sup>25</sup>

This is not to indicate despair on the part of the Islamists but the realization that theirs is a long battle to gain the supremacy of Islam. In fact, the al-Nidaa statement emphasizes that guerilla warfare proved successful against the Americans in Vietnam and the Russians in Afghanistan. While it will occasionally be able to launch major operations, increasingly much of its focus must be on what Abu Bakr Naji calls “vexation and exhaustion operations” in his *Management of Savagery*.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, al-Qaida understands it must constantly evaluate and recalibrate its plans, based on careful study of jihads, past and present, and their relative success. Al-Suri is especially pertinent here as an al-Qaida intellectual who has produced a critical study on earlier experiences of jihads that failed, especially in Syria and the Hama Uprising in 1982.<sup>27</sup>

## **A Defensive War**

The war al-Qaida fights will generally be couched as a defensive war, and therefore morally legitimate. That was clearly the case after 9/11 when al-Qaida pronouncements repeatedly described the attack as a justified retaliation for Western aggression against Muslims. The point is important, for it shows al-Qaida sensitivity to international condemnations. Describing it as defensive has an additional benefit with respect to Islamic jurisprudence. Classical thinking differentiated jihad as *fard kifayah* or *fard ayn*, a collective obligation or an individual obligation. In the former case, the community was responsible for mustering a contingent who could conduct an offensive jihad. But the latter obtained when the Islamic community came under attack, and every individual must come to its defense.

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<sup>24</sup> *Al-sharq al-Awsat*, 23 January 2005.

<sup>25</sup> Cited in MEMRI, 11 April 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Available on the Combating Terrorism Center’s website, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/>.

<sup>27</sup> His *Observations Concerning the Jihadi Experience in Syria* is excerpted in CTC’s *Stealing al-Qaida’s Playbook*, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/>.

Bin Laden's famous February 1998 *fatwa* used exactly this approach. The Arabian peninsula, with its sanctities, had come under attack. All Muslims, therefore, must come to its defense. Some months later, Osama gave an interview with al-Jazeera in which he commented on the jihadists who had carried out attacks against Riyadh (1995), Khobar (1996), and the U.S. embassies in Africa (1998). "I look at these men with much admiration and respect, for they have removed the shame from the forehead of our umma."<sup>28</sup> Osama's comment reflects both Arab culture, as well as Islamist conviction. In his view, Arab honor had been besmirched by the colonialist West, and a reprisal attack, after the pattern of *ghazw*, was necessary to restore the honor and remove the shame. But Osama also cast this in Islamic terms: shame had come to the Islamic nation, and God had given authorization to defend the community:

To those against whom  
War is made, permission  
is given to fight,  
because they are wronged—and verily,  
God is most powerful  
For their aid. Q 22:39

This same pairing of culture and religion may be found in *Military Studies in the Jihad against the Tyrants*, captured by British authorities in Manchester, England, in May 2000. Note that the title itself implies that this is defensive; this is preparation to turn back tyranny. The book opens with a "pledge" to "the sister believer whose clothes have been stripped off...whose hair the oppressors have shaved...whose body has been abused by the human dogs."<sup>29</sup> The imagery is striking, for it depicts violation of a woman's *‘irdh*, honor. The humiliation that takes place (stripping, shaving) is indicative of violating a major cultural taboo, and the reference to dogs, generally seen as unclean in Arab culture, compounds the sense of previous violation. This violation mandates a response. For the Islamists, therefore, jihad is morally warranted, both culturally and religiously.

Abu Bakr Naji gives a much more nuanced analysis. In *The Management of Savagery*, Naji presents jihad as necessary to reverse moral entropy. On his view, jihad is a merciful gift from heaven:

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<sup>28</sup> Cited in *Messages to the World*, ed. Bruce Lawrence (New York: Verso, 2005), 74.

<sup>29</sup> Jerrold Post, ed., *Military Studies in the Jihad against the Tyrants* (Maxwell AFB, AL: USAF Counterproliferation Center, n.d.), 15. The *Encyclopedia of Jihad* is even more direct: "Islam permits the killing and assassination of those who have wronged Allah, his Prophet, or Muslims, from among his worst enemies, without dispute." 514. Unfortunately, the *Encyclopedia* is no longer available on the CTC website.



Before God sent down the law of jihad, He wanted to show humanity what would happen without jihad so that they would see the complete wisdom of the Lawgiver, praised and exalted be He. The result was terrible: stupid, stubborn opposition from most of the people and the followers of Satan.... [T]he generations become corrupt upon the earth and spread unbelief and corruption among humans. They even work to create a fitna [chaos, dissension] for the believing few, either by direct pressure or by the fitna of exalting unbelief and its people in the eyes of the weak few among the believers.... [In the gift of jihad, God shows the] completeness of [his] mercy to humanity, for this restores justice and averts eternal punishment for those who believe.<sup>30</sup>

This idea of jihad as a moral reprisal because of infidel attacks has been publicly articulated on numerous occasions. Abu Gheith, for instance, used it to describe 9/11. “Why were millions of people astounded by what happened to America on September 11?” Gheith asked. “America is the reason for all oppression, injustice, licentiousness, or suppression that is the Muslims’ lot.” It was therefore appropriate to “punish a Harbi infidel in the same way he treated a Muslim.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Islamists depicted the London bombings in July 2005 as reprisal for earlier attacks against Muslims. On the first anniversary of the bombings, Al-Qaida released a martyr video of Shehzad Tanweer, one of the London bombers. The British govt had “declared war on Islam,” he said, attacking without cause “mothers, children, brothers and sisters...in Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Chechnya.” Non-Muslim British were guilty, by extension, for they had voted in the government which was responsible for those depredations. Zawahiri added a voiceover, saying these men were motivated by love of God and of his prophet.<sup>32</sup> And later in the month, Zawahiri released another tape after Israel invaded Lebanon. In this, Zawahiri justified Hezbollah, calling for retaliation against the “Zionist-Crusader war [that] is without conscience” and which had torn “Muslim bodies in Gaza and Lebanon,” as well as in Chechnya, Kashmir, Afghanistan, and Iraq.<sup>33</sup> The pattern is consistent: Al-Qaida’s view of war is one in which it is taking morally defensible action against Western assaults against Muslims worldwide.

### **An Intelligent War**

The war al-Qaida fights will be an intelligent war, predicated on their own strategic culture analysis. This has two components. The first is that al-Qaida has and will continue to

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<sup>30</sup> *Management*, 242-43.

<sup>31</sup> MEMRI, 12 June 2002.

<sup>32</sup> MEMRI, 11 July 2006.

<sup>33</sup> “We Will Unite to Fight,” *New York Times*, 28 July 2006.

study Western history, institutions, management principles, military doctrine, and so on. Moreover, it has also studied Western open-source counter-terrorism doctrine. Captured al-Qaida documents, as well as al-Qaida pronouncements, have show a remarkable knowledge of everything from the American political process and economic concerns, to the U.S. military's pre-positioning of supplies in the lower Persian Gulf and its disposition of forces. The second component is al-Qaida's ability to show flexibility with respect to its own methods, doing a fairly rigorous analysis of its failures and adapting new approaches. One such is al-Suri's *Observations Concerning the Jihadi Experience in Syria*. Another is *The Story of the Arab Afghans From the Entry to Afghanistan until the Final Departure with the Taliban*, serialized in *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* in December 2004. Among other observations, (putative author) Abu Walid al-Masri recalls Osama's false assumption that the United States could withstand only two or three decisive blows and that 9/11 should prove decisive.<sup>34</sup>

Of particular interest is al-Qaida ideologue Abu Bakr Naji, especially in light of his clear commitment to a strategic culture analysis of the West. He merits quoting at length.

We urge that most of the leaders of the Islamic movement be military leaders or have the ability to fight in the ranks, at the very least. Likewise, we also urge that those leaders work to master political science just as they would work to master military science.... Political action is very important and dangerous, such that one of them said: "A single political mistake (leads to) a result that is worse than one hundred military mistakes." Despite the hyperbole in this statement, it is true to the extent that it clarifies the seriousness of a political mistake.... *The interest in understanding the rules of the political game and the political reality of the enemies and their fellow travelers* and then mastering disciplined political action through sharia politics and opposing this reality is not less than the importance of military action, especially if we consider that the moment of gathering the fruit—a moment which is considered the recompense for the sacrifices offered by the mujahids during long decades—is a moment resulting from a political strike and a decisive political decision. Thus, the most important of their political principles is the principle of (self) interest. Their principle absolutely does not submit to any moral value; rather, all the other principles are subordinate to it—friendship or enmity, peace or war—and are all determined according to (self) interest. The politicians of the West summarize that in a slogan which says, "There is no eternal enmity in politics and no eternal friendship; rather, there are eternal interests."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, 8 December 2006.

<sup>35</sup> Naji, *Management of Barbarism*, 85-88, passim. Emphasis added.

Naji's closing paraphrase of Lord Palmerston's dictum from the middle Nineteenth Century should come as no surprise. Al-Qaida, it seems, is determined to follow Sun Tzu's non-negotiable principle of victory through knowledge, and it has done its homework rather thoroughly, to include reading primers of international relations.

On some level, al-Qaida has sought to formalize strategic analysis, as the *Encyclopedia of Jihad* makes clear. "The mission of [al-Qaida's strategic intelligence unit] is gathering, organizing, and distributing military information on the strategic level of the [target] country. Its goal is to know the country's military, political, economical and social capabilities and to predict its intentions, in order to work confronting all possibilities."<sup>36</sup> In application, the knowledge so gained can have implementation at the strategic or tactical level, and may be used in lethal or non-lethal ways. One example that reflects multiple applications of strategic intelligence is al-Qaida's tracking of the Bush administration's awarding of Iraqi reconstruction contracts, announced in December 2003.<sup>37</sup> Within a day, one publication, *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, editorialized

When we warned that US aggression against Iraq was aimed at achieving two important goals, to loot Iraq's economy and wealth and to serve Israeli interests and remove any real Arab threats to the racist Jewish state, there were those who accused us of exaggeration.... Yesterday the US president, George Bush, announced that bids for contracts in Iraqi reconstruction will first be given to US companies, then other companies affiliated to allied countries which sent their forces to Iraq, risked the lives of their people, and served in the US project.... The US decision will...increase the world's hatred for the current arrogant US administration.<sup>38</sup>

Osama noted how the issue of the contract awards could be exploited, and he responded to the wedge moment with non-lethal propaganda: "This war makes millions of dollars for big corporations, either weapons manufacturers or those working in the reconstruction [of Iraq], such as Halliburton and its sister companies.... It is crystal clear who benefits from igniting the fire of this war and this bloodshed: They are the merchants of war, the bloodsuckers who run the policy of the world from behind the scenes."<sup>39</sup> And an al-Qaida unit in Saudi Arabia, the al-Quds Brigade, formed quite lethal plans. It spent some months reconnoitering a Western housing compound where Halliburton employees lived, then attacked it in May 2004 with a small team,

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<sup>36</sup> *Jihad*, 120.

<sup>37</sup> The Bush administration's decision to award contracts to key members of the "coalition of the willing" is described in "Bush Defends Barring Nations from Iraq Deals," *New York Times*, 12 December 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Cited in the BBC on-line, 12 December 2003.

<sup>39</sup> MEMRI, 15 April 2004.

killing 22 persons. The next month, the leader of the mission, Fawwaz al-Nashami, described the “Battle of Khobar” in an interview with Sawt al-Jihad [Voice of Jihad]. The battle was, Fawwaz said, part of the larger plan to purge the Arabian peninsula of ritual impurities by attacking Western contractors. It also provided the occasion to appeal to Muslims working in the compound to embrace a salafist vision of Islam.<sup>40</sup>

As part of this intelligent war, al-Qaida understands its words and actions have multiple audiences. Its methods in war will be guided, to some degree, by an appreciation for and an adherence to classical Islamic strictures about *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. As we note above, al-Qaida routinely positions itself as fighting a defensive war. But even if one considers all such elaborations as tendentious, al-Qaida is keenly aware of its public image. In an undated letter to Mullah Omar, Osama averred that gaining the upper hand in the “information war” (al-Harb al-ilmiah) represents 90 percent of the preparation for battle.<sup>41</sup> And Abu Mus<sup>c</sup>ab al-Suri has underscored the importance of propagandists to articulate the movement’s objectives and legitimate use of violence.<sup>42</sup>

Much of al-Qaida literature is, therefore, quite taken with examining the reactions of various Muslim publics. For instance, al-Qaida attacks in Saudi Arabia that caused extensive casualties among Muslims (the Battle of Khobar did not) proved counter-productive, and after a year of harrowing attacks, they suddenly ceased. Al-Qaida clearly noted the negative public reaction, one which the Saudi royal family was quick to exploit, and it curtailed its attacks. Another example is the November 2005 hotel attacks that killed over 50, to include members of a wedding party. Zarqawi offered an extensive apology, saying that the hotels were a den of crusaders and Zionists, and that members of the wedding party were emphatically not the target. He then added,

The obscenity and corruption spread [by the Jordanian government] have turned Jordan into a quagmire of utter profanity and debauchery, and anyone who has seen the hotels, the houses of entertainment, the dance parties, the wine bars, and the tourist resorts in Aqaba, in the Dead Sea [region], and in other places is wrenched with sorrow over what this family [i.e. the Jordanian royal family]—both its men and its women—has done to this country, whose people are good.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> The story is reported in MEMRI, 15 June 2004.

<sup>41</sup> The Arabic original is at <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/aq/AFGP-2002-600321-Orig.pdf>. Interestingly, the anonymous author of *The Story of the Arab Afghans* considered Osama to be “maniacally obsessed with the international media,” a disaster for the Taliban. *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, 10 December 2004.

<sup>42</sup> *Stealing al-Qaida’s Playbook*, 17.

<sup>43</sup> MEMRI, 8 December 2005.

In part, the concern about the violence is doctrinally driven. Naji has written, “One should note that violence and coarseness must not transgress the limits of the Sharia and that one must pay heed to the benefit and harm (that results from) it, which the Sharia considers to be, in the rules of jihad, as one of the most important subjects for the guidance of creation, if not the most important subject.”<sup>44</sup> But al-Qaida is also intelligent and pragmatic. It wants to avoid what Jarret Brachman and William McCants term the “Shayma effect” after the botched assassination attempt on Egyptian Prime Minister, Atif Sidqi. In the event, a young school girl (Shayma) was killed, and—as Zawahiri later noted—caused a propaganda debacle for Egyptian Islamists. In brief, al-Qaida is not blinded by zeal. It will formulate plans carefully calibrated to exploit perceived weaknesses of the enemy *and* which will play well with Islamic audiences.

#### **AL-QAIDA STRATEGIC CULTURE AND WMD**

When we turn to al-Qaida’s doctrine of WMD, the most salient factor is that there is none. This is not to say there are not *references* to acquisition and use. There certainly are a number of adversions. Typical are comments like these from Suleiman abu Gheith, al-Qaida spokesman, in June 2002: “It is our right to fight them [the Americans] with chemical and biological weapons, so as to afflict them with the fatal maladies that have afflicted the Muslims because of [their] chemical and biological weapons.”<sup>45</sup> Or this from Abu ‘Abdullah Al-Kuwaiti: “If the American people are ready to die as we are ready to die, then our combat groups along with our military, nuclear, and biological equipment will kill hundreds of thousands of people we don’t wish to fight.”<sup>46</sup> But measured against the very large output of al-Qaida pronouncements, references are comparatively infrequent, as Reuven Paz points out, and when they do occur, it is

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<sup>44</sup> *Management*, 76.

<sup>45</sup> MEMRI, 12 June 2002.

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/aq/AFGP-2002-001120-Trans.pdf>. The Center for Nonproliferation Studies has done a commendable yeoman’s task in compiling an extensive list of references to WMD, the preponderance being to CBW. It is available at [http://cns.miis.edu/pubs/other/sjm\\_cht.htm](http://cns.miis.edu/pubs/other/sjm_cht.htm). The difficulty, of course, is verifying the reliability of the sources and many prove simply chimerical—as with the allegation in al-Majalla in 2002 that Osama had purchased 48 “suitcase nukes” from the Russian mafia. After the successful U.S. attack on al-Qaida strongholds in Afghanistan, the number of reported attempts to obtain nuclear or radiologic materials for a dirty bomb dropped precipitously. See the chart referenced just above.

most often to chemical munitions.<sup>47</sup> Significantly, manuals like *Military Studies in the Jihad against the Tyrants* fail to mention them at all.

There has also been vigorous deliberation within the al-Qaida shura about the utility of WMD. Perhaps the most important source is Abu Walid al-Masri, putative author of “The Story of the Arab Afghans from the Time of Arrival in Afghanistan until their Departure with the Taliban.”<sup>48</sup> By his account, hawks within al-Qaida’s shura have pushed for authorization. Most prominent among them was Abu Hafs al-Masri, until he was killed in a U.S. airstrike in November 2001. Abu Hafs had served as the organization’s minister of defense and potential successor to Osama. He and others in al-Qaida argued they should try to obtain whatever they could of WMD for defense in a kind of Islamic MAD doctrine.<sup>49</sup> But others were deeply concerned about what they termed the “genii in the bottle,” and they urged against acquisition. They feared pulling heaven down upon their heads in a retaliatory strike by the West. And thus what followed was extensive debate about rules of engagement, targets, and jurisprudential questions concerning collateral damage. Also notable is that even the hawks described use in terms of deterrence, not first strike. Moreover, according to Abu Walid, the majority agreed that use of WMD is a sensitive and very dangerous issue. And in any event, he reported, al-Qaida could likely obtain only quite primitive weapons.<sup>50</sup>

Osama’s own position seems ambiguous. On the one hand, Abu Walid reported that the al-Qaida leader had wanted to obtain dirty bombs from the Russian arsenal. Yet he also describes Osama as having blocked Abu Hafs from pursuing a WMD program.<sup>51</sup> When asked directly about chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons in an al-Jazeera interview in December 1998, Osama temporized, saying Israel and Christians had nuclear weapons capability. He then added, “America knows today that Muslims [i.e., Pakistan] are in possession of such a

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<sup>47</sup> See Reuven Paz, “Global Jihad and WMD,” in *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 2 (September 2005), pub. by The Hudson Institute in Washington D.C., eds. Hillel Fradkin, Husain Haqqani, and Eric Brown.

<sup>48</sup> *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* serialized “The Story” beginning 8 December 2004. Authorship is not certain, but I will refer to the author as “Abu Walid,” with that caveat. For an important examination of conflict within al-Qaida leadership more generally, see Montasser al-Zayyat, *The Road to al-Qaida*, trans. Ahmed Fekry and ed. Sara Nimis (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

<sup>49</sup> *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 8 December 2004. In his 2003 fatwa authorizing use of WMD, al-Fahd makes something of the same point: “If the infidels can be repelled from the Muslims only by using such weapons, their use is permissible, even if you kill them without exception and destroy their tillage and stock.” More recently, Abu Mus’ab al-Suri has averred that WMD would offer “strategic symmetry.” Cited in Paz, “Global Jihad and WMD,” 83. The author wishes to express gratitude to Dr. Jarrett Brachman and the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point for supplying a copy of the full *fatwa* of al-Fahd.

<sup>50</sup> *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 9 December 2004

<sup>51</sup> *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 8 December 2004

weapon.”<sup>52</sup> Osama responded similarly in an interview that *Time* published the following month. Asked about chemical and nuclear weapons, he replied, “Acquiring weapons for the defense of Muslims is a religious duty. If I have indeed acquired these weapons, then I thank God for enabling me to do so. And if I seek to acquire these weapons, I am carrying out a duty. It would be a sin for Muslims not to try to possess the weapons that would prevent the infidels from inflicting harm on Muslims.”<sup>53</sup>

Clearly, Osama did make some attempt to acquire such weapons. One especially notable testimony about Osama and al-Qaida’s interest in nuclear (or radiologic) weapons in particular is that of Jamal Ahmad al-Fadl, the Sudanese national who defected from the organization in 1996 and now lives under protective custody in the United States. Al-Fadl had served as the money man in al-Qaida’s 1993 attempt to purchase uranium in Sudan. In the end, however, this deal, like others, proved unsuccessful.<sup>54</sup> It is also important to note that in February 2002, after swift defeat of Taliban, U.S. officials searched military camps that Osama and al-Qaida had used. They found no WMD.<sup>55</sup>

What should be apparent is that, despite its deliberations and even its attempts to obtain weapons materiel, al-Qaida has not elaborated a consistent doctrine with respect to the use of WMD and nuclear weapons in particular. Instead, where western analysts do find discussions about WMD, they discover contestation on the issues of acquisition and employment, a contestation that is carried on within the parameters of a salafist Islamic narrative. Moreover, al-Qaida discussions also proceed within a framework of certain perceptions about the character and operational code of the West. None of this argues that al-Qaida will not again seek to acquire and employ WMD. Unlike Fahd’s 2003 *fatwa* authorizing use, there has been no counter *fatwa* among al-Qaida leaders or clerics proscribing use. Use is clearly permissible. But indiscriminate employment, merely for spectacular effect, is highly unlikely. Al-Qaida’s aim is not operational effect. It is to secure victory, and a victory with a legitimacy understood in religious terms. Because it is fighting an intelligent war, al-Qaida does consider the attitude continuum among fellow Muslims. Indiscriminate slaughter would multiply the “Shayma effect” among their co-religionists. That is true even when the victims are non-Muslim, for jurists have

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<sup>52</sup> The interview is available in *Messages to the World*, 65-94. This comment is @ 72.

<sup>53</sup> 11 January 1999. Accessed on-line.

<sup>54</sup> A useful catalog of several attempts is found at <http://cns.miis.edu/pubs/reports/binladen.htm>.

<sup>55</sup> “U.S. Analysts Find no Sign bin Laden Had Nuclear Arms,” *NYT*, 26 February 2002.

long argued against the deliberate targeting of non-combatants. And there is scant evidence that al-Qaida's argument that non-combatants are responsible for state actions, simply on the basis of having voted, has found traction among Islamic publics.

Additionally, al-Qaida has shown a pragmatic side. On the one hand, al-Qaida has authorized suicide attacks, for it can justify them as "martyrdom operations." But it realizes that indiscriminate use of WMD would likely bring devastating retaliation, and Afghanistan is a case in point. On the other hand, U.S. successes in physically attacking the Taliban and al-Qaida bases and in information warfare assaults on al-Qaida communications networks, as well as freezing al-Qaida financial assets—all have limited the panoply of weapons the organization can acquire or develop. Thus, al-Qaida is existentially limited in what it can acquire or develop, and jurisprudentially limited in what it would use and in what manner, if acquired. A jihadist attack, like politics, is the art of the possible.

## CONCLUSION

Based, then, on al-Qaida's history and strategic doctrine, and in view of pragmatic limits on what may be acquired and/or weaponized, the following summary of al-Qaida's WMD use seems warranted:

Limited employment of radiologic or chemical weapons, outside Muslim countries, is clearly possible and, if acquired, may even be probable. Employment within Muslim countries is much less likely. Use of weapons that could be characterized as causing indiscriminate mass slaughter seems implausible, both for pragmatic and jurisprudential reasons.

But the debate about al-Qaida and WMD cannot end there. What "al-Qaida prime" may do and what al-Qaida franchises may do are separate questions. The threat from the former, in many ways, is decreasing; threats from the latter, increasing. In the future, we should expect al-Qaida's function to move more toward providing ideology, encouragement, and a kind of perverse legitimacy to field units which are operating with increasing autonomy. We ought, then, to be speaking of the WMD threat from al-Qaidas. It is they, far away from the destruction of the mountainous hideaways of Afghanistan, who will be importing both a salafist ideology and new weapons to confront their enemies. Yet that was the original vision inspired by Shaykh Abdullah Azzam, in any event. Al-Qaida would be only a base. He never intended that the jihadists remain there. Today, his vision is being fulfilled. Al-Qaida is no longer the chief



threat. Al-Qaidas are. It is they, in their local contexts, that could more easily threaten the West with WMD, and it is their own adapted narratives the West must more rigorously study.

## SUGGESTED READING

There is very little available that specifically employs a strategic culture to understanding al-Qaida, on any level. This bibliography, therefore, is suggestive of critical readings that will aid in such an approach.

### Primary materials

The best site for reading (in English) statements of radical organizations, to include those of al-Qaida is <http://www.memri.org/index.html> See especially “jihad and terrorism studies project” under “Subjects.”

Another excellent resource is the Combating Terrorism Center at the United States Military Academy. Their site is <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/> They have recently declassified documents that have been captured by U.S. forces, as well as major studies available on-line.

Lawrence, Bruce, editor, *Messages to the World. The Statements of Osama bin Laden*. 2005. A very useful, chronological selection that offers informed commentary.

### Arab and Muslim Attitudes

Several organizations continue to do major studies of attitudes across the Arab and Islamic worlds, to include Gallup, Pew, and Zogby.

Gallup            <http://www.gallupworldpoll.com/>  
Pew                <http://people-press.org/>  
Zogby             <http://www.zogby.com/index.cfm>

### Secondary materials

#### *Books*

al-Zayyat, Montasser, Sara Nimis, and Ahmed Fekry, *The Road to al Qaeda: The Story of bin Laden's Right Hand Man* (Pluto Press, 2004)

Almond, Gabriel, et al. *Strong Religion*. 2003. This study by academics in political science, religion, and history offers a comparative analysis of violent fundamentalisms among adherents of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Bergen, Peter, *Holy War Inc.: The Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (Free Press, 2002)

\_\_\_\_\_, *The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of al Qaeda's Leader* (Free Press, 2006)

Burke, Jason, *Al Qaeda: A True Story of Radical Islam* (I.B. Tauris & Company, 2004)

Coll, Steve, *Ghost Wars: the Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden from the Soviet Invasion to Sept. 10, 2001* (Penguin Reprint Edition, 2004)

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