Contents

Illustrations

6

Lessons from the Past: The Historical Roots of Militant Islamic Ideology and its Influence on Contemporary Jihadist Movements

Anne Mahmoud Aly

Islamist movements in the Arab world were born in the age of imperialism with the aim of establishing an Islamic order. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire and subsequent westernization of the Arab world marked the beginnings of militant Islamism in Egypt as Islamic Jamaat (groups) began organizing themselves with the vision of overthrowing the government and establishing an Islamic state. Da'wa, or the Islamic tradition of spreading Islam through words and deeds, was the original path chosen in their endeavor. Gamal Abdul Nasser's program of modernization presented a barrier to the achievement of the Jamaats' aims, most notably those of Al Ikhwan al Muslimeen (Muslim Brotherhood). As public support for Nasser's aspirations for Egypt dwindled with events such as the loss of the June war in 1967 (resulting in the loss of the Sinai Peninsular to Israel), the Islamist movement gained popular support as a viable and attractive alternative to Nasserism among disgruntled Egyptian youth.

The death of Nasser in 1970 and the installation of Anwar al Sadat as his successor marked a shift in the political activity of the Islamist movement. Unlike Nasser, Sadat attempted to appease

the Jamaat and win their support by lightening the restrictions on their political activities put in place by his predecessor. In the more politically free environment during Sadat's leadership, a number of organizations and splinter groups developed with the aim of overthrowing the government and instilling sharia law and governance.

While terrorism is essentially a political tool, Islamic terrorism has evolved into an ideological quest for support for the Islamist cause aided by a powerful religious discourse designed to legitimize itself to the masses. Traditionally, counter-terrorism strategies have tended to focus on neutralizing threat and capability for terrorism and on crisis management. However, pressing questions remain about the history and origins of militant Islamism, the objectives and strategies of al Qaeda, and the globalization of the jihadist movement. This paper traces the history of and developments in the militant Islamist movement through an examination of Ayman al Zawahri's (al Qaeda's principal ideologue) jihadist discourse.

Rather than offer further analysis of the various explanations of the origins of militant Islamism in Egypt, this chapter examines the discursive construction of al Zawahiri's ideology in order to analyze the proliferation of militant Islamism in the contemporary context of global terrorism. In doing so this chapter proffers two arguments. The first argument is that Zawahiri's major contribution to the current jihadi movement, and in particular to the ideology espoused by al Qaeda, is discourse—a discourse which has gained legitimacy among the Muslim Ummah, galvanized mass support, and which has a regenerative capacity. Zawahiri's message, embodied in this discourse of jihad, has succeeded and continues to succeed because it has become ontogenetic such that the message has taken on a life, or indeed many lives, of its own. The ontogenetic power of this discourse resides in its core message that Islam is under attack and that Muslims are the victims of a conspiracy to undermine Islam as a global religion. It is a message that resonates with the personal and communal situations of Muslims of all ages, nationalities and backgrounds. Most importantly, it is a message that has permeated the identity construction of Muslim youth. For some, the victim identity is so entrenched that the allure of fighting Islam's opponents is almost impossible to resist. It is therefore no

longer enough to stop the messenger: attentions must also focus on diffusing the message.

The second argument this chapters offers, is that understanding the discursive construction of the jihadi discourse and its appeal offers a basis for developing a terrorist profiling model that moves beyond intelligence gathering and capability management to one that addresses intent and antecedent. The hazards of terrorist profiling are well established in the literature with a general agreement that there is no particular psychological or personality attribute that is distinctive of terrorists.

Russell and Miller profile terrorists as single males aged between twenty-two and twenty-four with some university education or, at the least, a college degree: "Whether having turned to terrorism as a university student or only later, most were provided an anarchist or Marxist world view, as well as recruited into terrorist operations while in the university."[1] Edgar O'Ballance's profile leans more towards psychological characteristics. These characteristics include: dedication—including unconditional obedience to the leader of the movement; personal bravery; the absence of any pity or remorse even though victims are likely to include innocent men, women, and children; above average intelligence, and a reasonably good educational background including a good grasp of general knowledge.[2] The ability to speak English as well as one other language and a university degree are also mandatory. The US Federal Research Division also suggests that terrorists are generally people who feel alienated from society and have a grievance or regard themselves as victims of an injustice. Many are dropouts, they are devoted to their political or religious cause and do not regard their violent actions as criminal. The sophistication of the terrorist will vary depending on the significance and context of the terrorist action.[3]

What is clear from the literature is that profiling terrorists on psychological, social or even religious and racial lines is inadequate. There may be some value in some established approaches to criminal profiling such as the model of antecedent, method and manner, body disposal and post-offensive behavior.[4] Certainly, body disposal and post-offensive behavior do not apply in the case of terrorism; particularly suicide terrorism. Method and manner are not constants

as ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan provide fertile ground for terrorists to learn and perfect new methods of attack. This leaves antecedent or intent. Traditionally counter-terrorism responses such as border control, intelligence, legislative amendments and crisis management tend to be primarily concerned with managing threat and capability rather than addressing motivation or intent. However, the global proliferation of al Qaeda's discourse of jihad indicates that counter-terrorism measures including profiling, policing and intelligence-gathering need to focus on signifiers of intent and on diffusing intent.

Ayman al Zawahiri: a brief history

Ayman al Zawahiri was born into an aristocratic family in 1951 in the upper middle class Cairo suburb of El Maadi. He was a serious and studious student who followed in the footsteps of his strict Muslim family. By some accounts Zawahiri led an unnamed clandestine cell in 1966 at the age of just fifteen, notably also the year that Sayyid Qutb, Zawahiri's primary ideological influence, was executed. By Zawahiri's own accounts, he was part of a group that established the cell but did not take over leadership of the cell until after 1974 when the cell consisted of eleven members. Their objective was to topple the government and instill Islamic rule in Egypt. Zawahiri's cell understood jihad to mean "removing the current government through resisting it and changing the current regime to establish an Islamic government…through a military coup."[5] Members of Zawahiri's group were arrested in connection with the assassination of President Sadat in 1981. At least one went on to establish jihadist training camps in Pakistan. Abdul Azeez, as he is known, along with Zawahiri established the first *Islamic Jihad* in Peshawar with Zawahiri eventually taking leadership in 1992. Zawahiri's greatest criticism of the early jihadist movement in Egypt was its ideological focus on the "far enemy" while neglecting the ruling regime. On this matter he was influenced by the writings of Sayyid Qutb who affirmed that the primary ideological issues for the Islamist movement were unification against the "enemies of Islam," and recognition of the ruling regime—the "internal enemy"—as a co-conspirator in the repression of Islam.[6]

Zawahiri graduated with a degree in medicine in 1974 and then went on to attain a Master's degree in surgery and a PhD in surgery while he was living in Peshawar. He was arrested in connection with the assassination of President Sadat on October 15 1981 (one week after the assassination on October 6) and sent to Turrah prison where he was allegedly tortured into confessing the whereabouts of certain individuals—among them Esam al-Qamari, an officer in the Egyptian Armed Forces who had joined Zawahiri's group.

After his acquittal and subsequent release from Turrah in 1984, Zawahiri traveled to Saudi Arabia in 1985 where he worked at a hospital in Jeddah before moving to Afghanistan in 1986. It was here that he first came into contact with Osama bin Laden. Between 1987 and 1990 he gained prominence among jihadi groups in Afghanistan where his efforts were focused on regrouping the jihadi movement, and on training and preparing foreign (Arab) fighters in the Afghan jihad against the Soviets. During this time he maintained links to Cairo and the jihadi movements there. In 1992, along with other Arab mujahideen leaders, he was forced out of Afghanistan having splintered from the Afghan mujahideen who had turned against them. Under the hospitality of bin Laden, Zawahiri fled to Sudan. He eventually returned to Afghanistan when the Taliban took control and welcomed back the Arab mujahideen. The Taliban enjoyed the support of the Islamic jihad and in turn offered protection to Arab jihadists fleeing intolerant regimes in countries like Egypt. This agreement allowed jihadi movements to flourish under the protection of the Taliban regime and Bin Laden.

Zawahiri was already familiar with Afghanistan having spent four months there in 1980 and another two months in 1981 at Al Sayiddah Zeinab clinic run by the Muslim Brotherhood. By his own account, this precipitous event, over a decade before he was to ally himself with bin Laden, marked the beginning of Zawahiri's connection with Afghanistan and opened his eyes to the opportunities for coordinating jihadi activities in Egypt from a remote base in Afghanistan. Zawahiri saw the Afghan arena as a model example for jihad; the victory over the Soviet superpower provided not just a blueprint but, more importantly, renewed hope and affirmation that the jihadi could emerge victorious from a battle with the world's other superpower, namely the United States:

> …I saw this as an opportunity to get to know one of the are-
> nas of jihad that might be a tributary and a base for jihad in
> Egypt and the Arab region, the heart of the Islamic world,
> where the basic battle of Islam was being fought.[7]

Although Zawahiri is cautious not to admit it, his efforts to co-
ordinate the Egyptian Islamic Jihad from abroad failed dismally.
Between 1988 and 1997 jihadi groups attempted a series of assas-
sinations that failed. During this volatile period clashes between
jihadi groups and police were increasingly common, resulting in
the imposition of curfews and mass arrests of Islamic group mem-
bers. In essence the campaign of continued confrontation with the
government went against the philosophy of Zawahiri who had
maintained that the core activity of his Islamic Jihad group should
be to recruit and train members in preparation for the overthrow of
the regime. However, his members argued that Jemaa Islamiya was
continually launching attacks against the government and winning
new recruits: for Islamic Jihad to gain support, it too would have to
put into practice the tactics learnt at the Afghan training camps.

The failed operations damaged the public opinion and
support for the Islamic groups particularly when two of the failed
assassinations resulted in the death of innocent bystanders, one a
young school girl. In 1998 Zawahiri joined bin Laden in forming
the International Islamic Front for Jihad on the Jews and Crusaders.
The principles and aims of the Front, it would seem, are markedly
different from those that Zawahiri had developed for Islamic Jihad.
Importantly, the Israel-Palestine issue (though a central issue of
ongoing concern in much of the Arab world) was never a focus for
Zawahiri. Zawahiri's focus had always been on the internal enemy:
the regime, and in particular on toppling the Egyptian regime as he
stated repeatedly with the catchcry "The way to Jerusalem passes
through Cairo."[8] The liberation of Palestine and enmity of the US
would come only after the battles in Egypt had been won and Cairo
opened. It is not completely clear why Zawahiri joined bin Laden in
forming the Front and apparently shifted his focus from the internal
to the external enemy. At least one analysis suggests that major
factors influencing his decision included waning public support for
Islamist movements in Egypt, dwindling financial funds, increasing

crackdowns on jihadi activities by the police (including the handing down of the death penalty in absentia for Zawahiri),and serious losses and internal fracturing of Islamic Jihad.[9]

In *Knights Under the Banner of the Prophet*, written three years after the formation of the alliance with bin Laden, Zawahiri continues to make clear his vision for the militant Islamist movement in Egypt. In reference to the jihadi movement in Egypt, Zawahiri issues this powerful caveat "the battle has not stopped in the past 36 years. The fundamentalist movement is either on the attack or in the process of preparing for attack."[10] Under the banner of al Qaeda and with the financial support of bin Laden, he could continue to coordinate the activities of Islamic Jihad to covertly recruit members in Egypt. Zawahiri makes further reference to the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in Egypt when he states:

> If God will it, such a state in Egypt, with all its weight in the heart of the Islamic world, could lead the Islamic world in a jihad against the West. It could also rally the world Muslims around it. Then history would make a new turn, Insha Allah, in the opposite direction against the empire of the US and the world's Jewish government.[11]

The emerging phenomenon of militant Islamism

Explanations about the emergence of the Islamist phenomenon in Egypt abound.[12] Some underscore the role of the state in motivating political orientations among youths (particularly on university campuses) that were ideologically aligned to annihilating leftist trends. Secularists tend to attribute the emergence of militant Islamism to increasing religiosity primarily fuelled by a rejection of Western dominance and secular influence. Social analysts argue that repression and poverty compelled disgruntled youth to seek ontological security in organized religion. However, like many of the members of jihadi groups in Egypt, Zawahiri and his confidantes were not poor. They were not economically disadvantaged. They were not uneducated. They were doctors, engineers, pharmacists, professionals—middle or upper middle class or, like Zawahiri,

from an aristocratic background. Militant Islamism flourished not among the poor, underprivileged, or the masses, but often among the elite. Many of those recruited by Zawahiri for his cell between 1967 and 1981 were students.

Despite their differences, the various (at times conflicting) explanations for the emergence of the militant Islamist phenomenon in Egypt share the view that militant Islamism is what Ansari calls an "alien and transient intruder in the body politic of Egypt."[13] Arguably, as Ansari asserts, this analysis prefers to deal with militant Islamism in Egypt as a passing phenomenon rather than confront it as widespread and deeply entrenched.

Ironically, Zawahiri's writings support the arguments espoused by secularists and liberal critics who trace Islamic militancy to the growing religiosity among disgruntled youth in response to the decline of modern secularism. Disenchanted by the promises of Nasserism which failed to provide viable solutions to social and economic repression, and galvanized by the demoralizing defeat of the June war in 1967, youth turned to the political ideologies of Islamism as an alternative. Zawahiri's own words support this analysis when he describes the 1967 defeat, known as the "naksa" or setback, as a galvanizing event for Muslim youth: "The direct influence of the 1967 defeat was that a large number of people, especially youths, returned to their original identity: that of members of an Islamic civilization."[14]

The potential to galvanize large numbers of people on the basis of a shared Islamic identity figured prominently in the development of Zawahiri's ideology and strategy. The apparent shift from the near to the far enemy in his strategy is therefore not all it appears to be. Zawahiri recognized the immense potential that focusing on the US and Israel had for achieving his highly desired goal of mass support for the Islamist movement and inspiring the Muslim Ummah in a global wave of resistance:

> The fruits of the jihad resistance go beyond inspiring hope in the hearts of the Muslim youth. The resistance is a weapon directed against the regime's henchmen, who are demoralized as they see their colleagues falling around them. Furthermore, stepping up the jihad action to harm the US

and Jewish interests creates a sense of resistance among the people, who consider the Jews and Americans a horrible symbol of arrogance and tyranny.[15]

The significance of this statement and the centrality of this notion to al Qaeda's ideology—an ideology created, disseminated and promoted through a discourse of jihad—cannot be underestimated. The transformation of al Qaeda from a "base" to what has repeatedly been described as "a global movement," an "ideology," and a "phenomenon," continues to be the subject of analysis and debate.[16] Al Qaeda's ideology of political Islam generates and regenerates itself through a discourse of jihad that offers a counter-hegemonic discourse for Muslims around the globe, collectively identified as the West's "other." Sayyid contends that it is through Khomeini's political thought that "Islamism makes the transition from an opposition and marginalized political project to a counter-hegemonic movement."[17] Through Zawahiri's discourse of jihad, al Qaeda makes a similar transition.

Al Qaeda's discourse of jihad

In a Foucauldian sense, discourse is conceptualized as the social construction of reality facilitated through language. Discourse then, imposes frameworks of understanding about reality through which people experience reality and construct meaning. Each discourse defines what can be said or done in relation to an experience. The central element of this notion of discourse is that reality can only ever be referential: discourses create effects of truth which are not necessarily true; realities that may not necessarily be reality. In its current usage, discourse refers to "socially and institutionally originating ideology, encoded in language."[18] Discourses attain dominance as truths because they are uncontested: they have achieved the status of "common sense," and are legitimized and naturalized as socially shared ideologies. One way that discourses do this is by configuring certain socially shared understandings or socially embedded categories into chains or narratives about reality.

Zawahiri's discourse of jihad has as its principal audience Muslim youth. Effectively, the discourse serves the ultimate purpose for

al Qaeda: that of galvanizing popular support for the Islamist movement and ultimately recruiting for violent jihad. The core elements of this discourse are delineated clearly in Zawahiri's own writings. In *Knights under the Banner of the Prophet*, Zawahiri sketches his vision for the future of jihadist movements both within Egypt and globally. His blueprint for terrorism draws not on Qur'anic teachings but on a political analysis of Middle Eastern politics. Notably, Zawahiri rarely quotes Qur'anic verses in his book. Rather he delivers a detailed historical narrative of political events and the historical evolution of the Islamist movement as a counter political force. The key messages embedded in his discourse are based on two key constructs: a shared Islamic identity of victimhood and self-efficacy. By constructing the Muslim Ummah as a monolithic nation bound in a global struggle and emphasizing that victory is achievable, Zawahiri employs a potent mix of messages that has mass appeal.

The battle is universal. It involves two opposing forces: the West (US, Israel and Russia) in alliance with the United Nations, Muslim states, multinational corporations, the media and relief agencies and the jihadist movement. The jihadist movement represents a growing alliance of Muslim youth prepared to defend Islam and seek retribution for various injustices against Muslims.

Jihad is the only solution. Peaceful dialogue is a failed option. The 1997 ceasefire of all armed operations by Jemaa Islamiya drew strong criticism from Zawahiri who had been critical of the Muslim Brotherhood's non-violent approach to jihad and firmly believed that there was no dialogue with the ruling regime. According to Zawahiri the Brotherhood had committed political and ideological suicide in pledging allegiance to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

Endurance, patience and perseverance are the keys to victory. Strong and steadfast leadership are key to fulfilling the goal of establishing a Muslim state as a base for launching the battle to restore the Caliphate. Here, Zawahiri stresses loyalty to the leadership and cautions against diverting attention away from the original principles of militant Islamism.

The nation must be mobilized to participate in the movement. The reach of the militant Islamists must move beyond the elites to

the masses. They must be motivated to defend their honor and fight injustice against Muslims around the globe, the nation must own jihad, and there must be unity before the single enemy. Public discontent is a condition for public support. Palestine is "a rallying point for all the Arabs, be they believers or non-believers, good or evil" because every Muslim in Palestine is a part of the global Muslim community.[19]

Every person is capable of killing and inflicting terror. Zawahiri favors suicide missions for their ability to inflict maximum damage with minimal effort and loss. His message attempts to build a sense of self-efficacy among Muslims who identify with the cause. "Tracking down the Americans and the Jews is not impossible. Killing them with a single bullet, a stab, or a device made up of a popular rod is not impossible. Burning down their property with Molotov Cocktails is not difficult. With the available means, small groups could prove to be a frightening horror for the Americans and the Jews."[20]

The discourse of jihad provides a narrative basis for a shared Islamic identity. In this narrative the imagined nation of Islam is under attack from the West—constructed as the US and Israel—which seeks to destroy it by infiltrating the Muslim world both politically and ideologically. It is a powerful narrative for unifying the masses. It is not the shared Islamic identity that is at the center of the issue here. Indeed the Ummah has long been a unifying concept for Muslims all over the world who find ontological security in the idea of belonging to an imagined community of believers. What is at issue here is the basis for that shared identity. In the discourse of jihad that basis is victimhood and injustice. This is both the locus and focus of power in the discourse of jihad that has enabled the key messages to proliferate and permeate the world views of Muslims around the globe and become subsumed into their understandings of what it means to be Muslim. Importantly it is not a message that appeals only to the poverty stricken, disaffected and marginalized youth, it is a message that appeals to Muslims of all ages everywhere.

The global appeal of the jihad discourse

There are several reasons that can be put forward to explain the global appeal of the messages embedded in the jihad discourse. One of the most compelling reasons is that the underlying message of Islam under attack resonates with the real or imagined experiences of Muslims around the globe. The narrative of victimhood is one that is easily subsumed into the real life or imagined experiences of Muslims in the diaspora and in the Muslim world. Discrimination, vilification, marginalization, negative media reporting on issues involving Muslims, Bosnia, Chechnya, Palestine: all are evidence of a Western led attempt to destroy Islam.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in New York in 2001 and the ensuing "war on terror," the notion of Muslims as the "common enemy" became the framework for understanding the experiences of Muslims in diasporic communities in the US, UK, Europe and Australia. Underlying this construction of the victim identity is a widespread perception that Muslims are the targets of negative media, negative public opinion and negative political rhetoric.[21] This perception is embedded in a broader framework in which Australian Muslims who see themselves as part of a global community of believers identify with a notion that Muslims around the globe are under attack, and that they are the victims of a larger conspiracy aimed at undermining Islamic identity and eradicating Islam as a world religion. The following quotes from interviews with Australian Muslims demonstrate the extent of this notion:

> —*They [the West] are aiming to destroy us and we are not aware of it but now we are under attack we are being destroyed. What about realizing we are being attacked by purpose not by our people. And now there are terrorists- all these crimes that are happening under the name of the Muslims. Who are really behind them?*

> —*Because we have something different we have Islam, and that is the difference. They want that we must not lead that way of life.*

> —*Decades ago people revolted against oppression as such we labelled them freedom fighters. Now we all even looking at the media so much we even said terrorists. But who's instilling the fear?*

Who is actually terrorising? It's not the people that are being op-pressed…But they're not the terrorists. They're not instilling the fear. They're not terrorising.[22]

The growing identification with the perception of a global war against Islam and the construction of an Islamic identity based on the notion of shared victimhood fulfills the requirements for the propagation of the jihadist message and Zawahiri's vision to breach the chasms of understanding between militant Islamism and the "common people."[23]

The video message left by London bomber Mohammed Siddique Khan is a striking reminder that the concept of a hostile divide between "us" and "them" is a powerful message for vulnerable minds:

> Your democratically elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world. And your support of them makes you directly responsible, just as I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters…
>
> Until we feel security, you will be our targets. And until you stop the bombing, gassing, imprisonment and torture of my people we will not stop this fight. We are at war and I am a solider.

Despite being born and raised in the United Kingdom, Siddique Khan's reference to "my people" is a potent articulation of the ability of the militant Islamist message of unity to transcend nationalism. The Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on July 7 2005 asserts that British intelligence has been unable to establish a link between al Qaeda and the four young British citizens who carried out the bombings in 2005. It also asserts that there is little evidence of overt compulsion by an individual or organization concluding that "the extremists appear rather to rely on the development of individual commitment and group bonding and solidarity."

Countering the jihadi discourse

One of the main reasons that the jihadi discourse has resounded and continues to resound with particular individuals and groups of Muslims is the dismal failure by Western governments and media to counter the key messages in the jihadi discourse. Rather than challenge the message of Islam under attack, the political rhetoric employed in the lead up to the coalition-led "war on terror" provided confirmation of an ideological battle between the West and Islam.

There is a remarkable resemblance in the language used by both sides of the divide to garner collective support for their respective agendas. The language of war became the primary language for describing counter-terrorism efforts whether in terms of homeland security, foreign policy or offshore operations. This language legitimates al Qaeda's message and speaks directly to those who have internalized the message and perceive themselves not as violent terrorists, but as mujahideen fighting a just battle for a just cause against the oppressors.

The terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001 set the scene for the Western media's distinct role in the developing discourse on terrorism and counter-terrorism. The emerging media discourse on terrorism reinscribed the binary of Islam and the West and perpetuated the notion of ideological opposition between the forces of "good" (the West) and "evil" (fundamentalist Islam).[24] Importantly, the tendency for the media discourse to use religion as the primary marker of identity for Muslims contributed to the construction of a new, de-ethnicized, identity among Muslims in Western nations: an identity that is primarily religious and that is shaped by a shared perception that the media is a complicit player in a global conspiracy to undermine Islam.[25]

There is no counter-hegemonic discourse that challenges the notion of a global battle forged along religious and ideological fault lines. The terrorist attacks on New York and Washington in September 2001 were galvanizing events designed to inspire Muslim youths around the world to take up the cause of violent jihad. What has transpired since then—most notably the war in Iraq, the revelations of mistreatment at Abu Ghraib prison, the Lebanon-Israel war, and the emerging media discourse on terrorism—inveterate key points in al Qaeda's jihad discourse and reinforce the image

of the US and the West in general as the enemy. In the absence of a counter-hegemonic discourse, the jihadi discourse gains legitimacy as an irrefutable truth.

Paradoxically, both defeat and victory serve as powerful motivators to action for the jihadi cause. Just as the humiliating defeat of Egypt in June of 1967 rallied together Muslim youth searching for a viable alternative to the failed promise of Nasserism, so too the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States inspired various splinter groups to emulate the "victory" of violent Islamism. This paradox presents a challenge to counter-terrorism efforts and highlights the need to develop counter-terrorism messages that undermine the notions of victory and defeat in violent conflict.

Conclusion

The phenomenon, tactics, demands, and political motives of contemporary terrorism are not new. What *is* perhaps new about this current wave of terrorism is the proliferation of the message of militant Islamists (referred to variously as jihadists, mujahideen, fundamentalists, radicals) to a globalized audience and the ability of that message to motivate individuals and groups to commit violent acts of terrorism for a cause that, apparently, has little if anything, to do with their everyday lives: second generation youth, professional and homegrown terrorists living and working in the diaspora who fall under the influence of the militant Islamist message.

Al Qaeda's stated objective is to create a single Islamic nation to which bin Laden refers repeatedly in his speeches when he addresses the Islamic nation, bringing to an end what they perceive as the oppression of Muslims by the West. Propaganda used by Islamist groups including al Qaeda nurtures a belief among Muslims that Muslims around the world are being "victimized." Indeed one of the central methods Islamists use to recruit people to their cause is to expose them to propaganda about perceived injustices to Muslims across the world with international conflict involving Muslims interpreted as examples of widespread war against Islam and conspiracy theories abounding.

The basis of al Qaeda's ideology embodied in its jihad discourse

has, to a large extent, become entrenched as the primary basis for the formation of an Islamic identity of shared injustice and victimhood. There are now generations of Muslim youth both in the Muslim world and the diaspora who are increasingly identifying with this notion of victimhood and who are growing up with this definition of what it means to be a Muslim in today's world. What is most problematic here is that if individuals or groups identify with the notion of Islam under attack they are exponentially more likely to also identify with the notion of the West as the infidel enemy. They may also be more likely to identify with the notion that the Ummah must unite against this enemy and with the notion that violent jihad is not only their duty but also easily achievable. The bridge that spans ideas, notions and beliefs and behavioral responses is therefore, narrowed.

One of the most important lessons we can learn from the historical development of al Qaeda is how Ayman al Zawahiri's discourse of jihad developed from an ideological viewpoint to a global message that resonates with increasing numbers of Muslims. Those who sympathize with the jihadists believe that they have a cause: the cause of freeing Islam from the infidel shackles. The "war on terror" has failed to generate a counter-discourse that challenges this notion and to regain the power of language and persuasion.

Notes

[1] C.A. Russell and B. H. Miller, "Profile of a Terrorist," *Terrorism: An International Journal* 1.1 (1977), 32.

[2] Edgar O'Ballance, *The Language of Violence: The Blood Politics of Terrorism* (California: Presidio Press, 1979).

[3] Rex Hudson, *The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why?* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1999).

[4] L. Winerman, "Criminal Profiling: The Reality behind the Myth," *Monitor on Psychology* 35 (2004): 66.

[5] Ayman al Zawahiri cited in Montasser Al Zayyat, *The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden's Right-hand Man,* trans. Ahmed Fekry, ed. Sara Nimis (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 43.

[6] Ayman al Zawahiri, "Knights under the Prophets Banner," in *His*

Own Words: A Translation of the Writings of Dr. Ayman al Zawahiri, trans. Laura Mansfield (USA: TLG Publications, 2006), 47.

[7] *Ibid.*, 28.

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] Al Zayyat, *The Road to Al- Qaeda.*

[10] Al Zawahiri, "Knights Under the Prophets Banner."

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 113.

[12] H. N. Ansari, "The Islamic Militants in Egyptian Politics," *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 16.1 (1984): 123-144.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 125.

[14] Al Zawahiri, "Knights Under the Prophets Banner," 55.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 109.

[16] Karen J. Greenberg, ed., *Al Qaeda Now: Understanding Today's Terrorists* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[17] S. Sayyid, A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism (New York: Zed Books Ltd, 2003), 89.

[18] R. Fowler, *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 42.

[19] Al Zawahiri, "Knights Under the Prophets Banner," 211.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 212.

[21] Anne Aly, "Australian Muslim Responses to the Discourse on Terrorism in the Australian Popular Media," *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 42.*1* (2007): 27-40.

[22] The quotations used here were expressed during interviews with Australian Muslims as part of a research project on the construction of terrorism and the fear of terrorism among Australian Muslims and the broader Australian community.

[23] Al Zawahiri, "Knights Under the Prophets Banner."

[24] Anne Aly and David Walker, "Veiled Threats: Recurrent Anxieties in Australia," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 27.2 (2007): 203-214.

[25] Anne Aly, "Australian Muslim Responses to the Discourse on Terrorism in the Australian Popular Media."