

AN ANALYSIS OF AL-QA'IDA'S WORLDVIEW: RECIPROCAL TREATMENT OR RELIGIOUS OBLIGATION?

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By analyzing what al-Qa'ida preaches to Muslims regarding Islam's relationship to the non-Muslim world at large, and what it states to the West are its reasons for battling it, this essay seeks to highlight the many disparities behind al-Qa'ida's words. Juxtaposed in themes, the following excerpts are all derived from Usama bin Ladin's and Ayman al-Zawahiri's writings and speeches as found in The Al Qa'ida Reader.^[1]

Is al-Qa'ida waging war on the United States--issuing a fatwa to "kill the Americans and seize their money"^[2] (p. 13) in retaliation to U.S. oppression, or is this animosity founded on something else? Is it mere reciprocity or is it a religion-based ideology? Talking to the West, al-Qa'ida insists it is reciprocal treatment; talking to fellow Muslims it insists that Islam demands this animosity. Consider the following discrepancies:

When addressing the United States, bin Ladin writes in response to the rhetorical question "Why we [al-Qa'ida] are fighting you," "because you attacked us and continue to attack us." (p. 197) In fact, reciprocal treatment has been al-Qa'ida's sole justification for all the terrorist acts it has perpetrated against the West. The West attacks Muslims---for oil, Israel, land, or "Crusader" hatred---and al-Qa'ida retaliates on behalf of Muslims.

Even the September 11 strikes are rationalized as mere acts of reciprocity. After describing the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, where a massive bombing campaign leveled several high-rise apartment buildings and left thousands of Arabs dead, bin Ladin said, "[A]s I looked upon those crumbling towers in Lebanon, I was struck by the idea of punishing the oppressor in kind by destroying towers in America---giving them a taste of their own medicine and deterring them from murdering our women and children." (p. 215)

After September 11, when several more terrorist acts were committed around the world, targeting mostly Europeans, bin Ladin declared:

The events that have taken place since the attacks on Washington and New York [September 11]---such as the killing of Germans in Tunisia, the French in Karachi, the bombing of the giant French tanker in Yemen, the killing of marines in Failaka, of British and Australians in the Bali explosions, the recent operation in Moscow, and various other sporadic operations^[3]--are all reactions of reciprocity, carried out by the zealous sons of Islam in defense of their faith and in response to the order of their Lord and Prophet. [p. 231]

After the bombings in Madrid, where 191 people were killed and 1460 injured, bin Ladin again addressed the Europeans:

There is a lesson [to be learned] regarding what happens in occupied Palestine and what happened on September 11 and March 11 [Madrid train bombings, killing 191 and

injuring 1,460]: These are your goods returned to you. It is well understood that security is a vital necessity for all of mankind--though we do not agree that you should monopolize it for yourself. [p. 234]

After the July 2004 London bombings, Zawahiri addressed the citizens of the United Kingdom thus: "I speak to you today about the blessed raid^[4] on London that... made it take a sip from the same glass from which it had long made the Muslims drink.... So taste some of what you have made us taste." (p. 238)

There is no question, then, that al-Qa'ida's defense for committing all these acts of terrorism is that it is merely, as bin Ladin puts it, returning the West's "goods"--that is, "terrorism"--back to itself. Such a defense is plausible--provided, of course, that the West is guilty of initiating the terror. Under this interpretation, al-Qa'ida gouges the West's eye since the West first gouged Islam's eye.

Moreover, this defense is ultimately rooted in the "universal" concept of justice. Most people around the world, irrespective of religion or race, understand the concept of crime and punishment. And the Torah's "eye for an eye" injunction has been the standard for many people--no doubt due to its primordial, and thus universal, sensibilities. Yet even though al-Qa'ida implies that it is acting under some sort of "universal law" that both Muslims and non-Muslims can appreciate, that is not fully true. For Muslims there is only one particular set of laws that are to be adhered to--Shari'ah --and even if Shari'ah contradicts something that non-Muslims consider a "universal right"--such as equality--still, Shari'ah must have the final word.

When a group of Muslim scholars wrote to the Americans saying that there should be equality, justice, and freedom, between the West and Islam, bin Ladin had this to say about it:

[The Muslims' declaration] came supporting the United Nations and their humanistic articles, which revolve around three principles: equality, freedom, and justice. Nor do they mean equality, freedom, and justice as was revealed by the Prophet Muhammad [Shari'ah]. No, they mean the West's despicable notions, which we see today in America and Europe, and which have made the people like cattle. [p. 26]

Islam, or "submission" to Allah, is the ultimate form of justice, the Islamists argue; everything else, depending on how far it deviates from Shari'ah is oppression, injustice, and corruption. To be sure, under Shari'ah, Muslims are to defend themselves against infidel aggression--to wage a "Defensive Jihad" as al-Qa'ida claims to be doing. Indeed, most of Shari'ah divine guidelines concerning jihad have to do with the legitimacy and obligation of waging Offensive Jihad, simply to gain territory and lord over infidels; how necessary is Defensive Jihad, then, when there is a need to repulse the infidel from Islamic lands?^[5]

However, Shari'ah has other notions--equally binding according to Islamists like those who make up its leadership--that do not comport so well with al-Qa'ida's claim that all this terrorism is simply due to Western aggression and Muslim retaliation. In other words,

under Shari'ah law, even if the West completely ceased all its hostilities, real or imagined, against the Islamic world, total peace would still not commence. Under Shari'ah, permanent peace can only commence when the entire world either embraces or at the very least is governed by Islam.^[6]

Discussing the need to overthrow those Muslim "apostate" governments that do not rule in accordance to Shari'ah, bin Ladin, addressing Americans, says: "The removal of these governments is an obligation upon us, and a necessary step to free the Islamic *umma* [community], make *Shari'ah* law supreme, and regain Palestine. Our fight against these governments is one with our fight against you." (p. 199)

Ayman al-Zawahiri similarly exhorts Muslims:

We also extend our hands to every Muslim zealous over making Islam triumph till they join us in a course of action to save the Ummah from its painful reality. [This course of action] consists of staying clear of idolatrous tyrants, warfare against infidels, loyalty to the believers, and jihad in the path of Allah. Such is a course of action that all who are vigilant for the triumph of Islam should vie in, giving and sacrificing in the cause of liberating the lands of the Muslims, making Islam supreme in its [own] land, and then spreading it around the world. [p. 113]

That last sentence--"making Islam supreme in its [own] land, and then spreading it around the world"--raises questions regarding al-Qa'ida's statements to the West, the fundamental one being: Even if all of the West's perceived or real hostilities vis-à-vis the Islamic world were to cease, would Islam then be at peace with the outside world?

Concerning this question, bin Ladin has been forthright--though only when speaking to fellow Muslims. "Moderate Islam is a Prostration to the West" (p. 17-61)--the most revealing and straightforward document produced by al-Qa'ida--puts its vision of Islam's relationship with the rest of the world in clear context.

In this essay, Muslims (in the guise of Saudi intellectuals who, in response to a letter of cooperation^[7] written by Americans, responded with their own letter^[8]) are chastised for even daring to want to coexist with the infidel West. Bin Ladin makes clear that the animosity between the Muslim and the infidel--which should always be "directed from the Muslim to the infidel" (p. 43)--far transcends any talk of grievances.

UNIVERSAL JUSTICE VS. SHARI'AH JUSTICE

Here, the concept of "universal justice," which al-Qa'ida constantly makes appeals to in its messages to the West, is ridiculed with contempt. For example, when writing to the Europeans bin Ladin said: "I call upon just men--especially *Ulama* [scholars], media, and businessmen--to form a permanent commission to enlighten the European peoples of the justice of our causes, particularly Palestine." (p. 235)

Yet when the Saudi intellectuals wrote, "the heart of the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is justice, kindness, and charity--this is the equity that Allah loves and has commanded us with [p. 42]," bin Ladin was quick to clarify what true justice is:

As to the relationship between Muslims and infidels, this is summarized by the Most High's Word: "You have a good example in Abraham and those with him. They said to their people: 'We disown you and what you worship besides Allah. We renounce you. Enmity and hate shall forever reign between us--till you believe in Allah alone' " [Koran 60:4]. So there is an enmity, evidenced by fierce hostility, and an internal hate from the heart. And this fierce hostility--that is, battle--ceases only if the infidel submits to the authority of Islam, or if his blood is forbidden from being shed [a *dhimmi*],^[9] or if the Muslims are [at that point in time] weak and incapable [of spreading Shari'ah law to the world]. But if the hate at any time extinguishes from the hearts, this is great apostasy; the one who does this [extinguishes the hate from his heart] will stand excuseless before Allah. Allah Almighty's Word to His Prophet recounts in summation the true relationship: "O Prophet! Wage war against the infidels and hypocrites and be ruthless. Their abode is hell--an evil fate!" [Koran 9:73]. Such, then, is the basis and foundation of the relationship between the infidel and the Muslim. Battle, animosity, and hatred--directed from the Muslim to the infidel--is the foundation of our religion. And we consider this a justice and kindness to them. The West perceives fighting, enmity, and hatred all for the sake of the religion as unjust, hostile, and evil. But who's understanding is right--our notions of justice and righteousness, or theirs? [p. 43]

The Saudi intellectuals had tried to clarify to the West that all peoples--irrespective of religion--were entitled to justice and should never be oppressed: "Justice between people is their right, while oppression between them is forbidden--no matter what their religion, color, or nationality is" [p. 44]. When addressing and accusing the West, al-Qa'ida has relied on similar language. Writing to the Americans bin Ladin, implying that he shares universal notions of justice and injustice, sarcastically asked, "How many acts of oppression, tyranny and injustice have you carried out, O you 'callers to freedom?'" (p. 204)

Yet writing to the Saudis, bin Ladin clarifies al-Qa'ida's true notions of oppression and injustice:

As for the word "oppression," those addressed [Americans] take it to mean being placed under the authority of Islam by the sword, as the Prophet did with the infidels. They think that something that denies them [the freedom] to pursue obscenities, atheism and blasphemy, and idolatry is an "oppression." They think that an attack launched against their ground, as in an Offensive Jihad, is an "injustice." And so forth. Then come the [intellectuals] declaring that justice is a right while oppression is forbidden. If they mean justice and oppression, as understood by those addressed... then this is a great calamity, and a blasphemous conversation.... As for oppression, the only oppression is to forsake them in their infidelity, and not use jihad as a means to make them enter into the faith--as the Prophet did with them. [pp. 45-46]

UNIVERSAL COMMONALITIES VS. OFFENSIVE JIHAD

In fact, Offensive Jihad, something about which al-Qa'ida dissembles vis-à-vis the West, figures prominently in bin Ladin's diatribe to the Saudi intellectuals. In 1997, a direct question was asked of bin Ladin by a Westerner: "Mr. bin Ladin, will the end of the United States' presence in Saudi Arabia, their withdrawal, will that end your call for jihad against the United States?" Bin Ladin responded:

The cause of the reaction must be sought and the act that has triggered this reaction must be eliminated. The reaction came as a result of the U.S.' aggressive policy towards the entire Muslim world and not just towards the Arabian Peninsula. So if the cause that has called for this act comes to an end, this act, in turn, will come to an end. So, the Defensive Jihad against the U.S. does not stop with its withdrawal from the Arabian Peninsula, but rather it must desist from aggressive intervention against Muslims in the whole world.^[10]

However, bin Ladin's ultimate motives became apparent after the Saudi intellectuals wrote: "Thus we say in all earnestness and plainly that we can open a mature dialogue around every issue that the West submits, ever cognizant that we share a number of understandings, moral values, rights, and ideas with the West, which, if fostered, can create a better [world] for all concerned" (p. 37)

To this "blasphemy," bin Ladin wrote extensively:

Regarding which shared understandings, exactly, is it possible that we agree with the immoral West?... What commonalities, if our foundations contradict, rendering useless the shared extremities--if they even exist? For practically everything valued by the immoral West is condemned under sharia law.... [T]he issues most prominent in the West revolve around secularism, homosexuality, sexuality, and atheism [p. 37].... As for this atmosphere of shared understandings, what evidence is there for Muslims to strive for this? What did the Prophet, the Companions after him, and the righteous forebears do? Did they wage jihad against the infidels, attacking them all over the earth, in order to place them under the suzerainty of Islam in great humility and submission? Or did they send messages to discover "shared understandings" between themselves and the infidels in order that they may reach an understanding whereby universal peace, security, and natural relations would spread--in such a satanic manner as this? The sharia provides a true and just path, securing Muslims, and providing peace to the world [p. 31].

Moreover, when the Saudi intellectuals dared write: "It's imperative that we bid all to legitimate talks, presented to the world, under the umbrella of justice, morality, and rights, ushering in legislations creating peace and prosperity for the world," [p. 31] bin Ladin lamented:

Surely there is no power save through Allah alone! We never thought that such words would ever appear from those who consider themselves adherents of this religion. Such expressions, and more like them, would lead the reader to believe that those who wrote them are Western intellectuals, not Muslims! Those previous expressions are true *only* by tearing down the wall of enmity from the infidels. They are also expressions true *only*

by rejecting jihad--especially Offensive Jihad. The problem, however, is that Offensive Jihad is an established and basic tenet of this religion. It is a religious duty rejected only by the most deluded. So how can they call off this religious obligation [Offensive Jihad], while imploring the West to understandings and talks "under the umbrella of justice, morality, and rights"? The essence of all this comes from right inside the halls of the United Nations, instead of the Divine foundations that are built upon hating the infidels, repudiating them with tongue and teeth till they embrace Islam or pay the *jizyah* [tribute] with willing submission and humility.... Muslims, and especially the learned among them, should spread sharia law to the world--that and nothing else. Not laws under the "umbrella of justice, morality, and rights" as understood by the masses. No, the sharia of Islam is the foundation. [pp. 32-33]

FREEDOM VS. TERRORISM

Al-Qa'ida has maintained that its hostilities to the West have absolutely nothing to do with the latter's freedoms. Speaking to the Americans, bin Ladin asserted, "From the start, I tell you that security is an indispensable pillar of human life; free men do not underestimate their security--contrary to [President George W.] Bush's claim that we hate freedom. ^[11] If so, let him explain to us why we have not attacked Sweden, for instance." [p. 214].

Speaking to the Europeans, bin Ladin tries to define terrorism: "[W]e inform you that your description of us as 'terrorists' and our actions as 'terrorism' necessarily means that you and your actions must be defined likewise. Our actions are merely reactions to yours...." (p. 234)

Finally, bin Ladin makes it quite clear that terrorism is used only in reciprocity since al-Qa'ida has no other choice: "Shall a man be blamed for protecting his own? Self-defense and punishing the wicked in kind--are these shameful [acts of] 'terrorism'? And even if it is, we have no other option." (p. 216)

Taken together, all these messages assert that the terror al-Qa'ida inflicts upon the West has nothing to do with Western freedoms and everything to do with reciprocal treatment. Moreover, by stating "we have no other option" than to engage in acts of terrorism, bin Ladin clearly implies that terrorism is being relied upon as a last resort out of desperation. Thus al-Qa'ida maintains that there is no correlation between Western freedoms and Islamic terrorism--that the latter is never used simply to suppress the former.

This is not the case when addressing the Saudis. After they wrote to the Americans saying that Islam does not allow coercion in matters of religion, bin Ladin, once again, revealed his true beliefs and ultimate goals. The Saudi intellectuals had declared, "It is not permitted to coerce anyone regarding his religion. Allah Most High said: 'There is no compulsion in religion' [Koran 2:256]. Thus Islam itself does not comport with coercion." (p. 40) After explaining that this verse has to do with matters of the heart and not Islam's destiny to rule the whole world, ^[12] bin Ladin quotes the Hadith:

Whenever the Messenger of Allah appointed someone as leader of an army or detachment, he would especially exhort him to fear Allah and be good to the Muslims with him. Then he would say: "Attack in the name of Allah and in the path of Allah do battle with whoever rejects Allah. Attack!... If you happen upon your idolatrous enemies, call them to three courses of action. If they respond to any one of these, accept it and stay yourself from them. [1] Call them to Islam: If they respond [i.e., convert], accept this and cease fighting them..... [2] If they refuse to accept Islam, demand of them the jizya: If they respond, accept it and cease fighting them. [3] But if they refuse, seek the aid of Allah and fight them." Thus our talks with the infidel West and our conflict with them ultimately revolve around one issue--one that demands our total support, with power and determination, with one voice--and it is: Does Islam, or does it not, force people by the power of the sword to submit to its authority corporeally if not spiritually? Yes. There are only three choices in Islam: either willing submission; or payment of the jizya, through physical though not spiritual, submission to the authority of Islam; or the sword--for it is not right to let him [an infidel] live. The matter is summed up for every person alive: Either submit, or live under the suzerainty of Islam, or die. [pp. 41-42]

When the Saudi intellectuals wrote: "Man, from his very make-up, is a sacred creation. Thus it is impermissible to transgress against him, no matter what his color, race, or religion." Bin Ladin, after mocking their language for its "UN" tone, wrote extensively:

Now, then, how can you speak about Allah without knowledge? Who told you that transgression against man is impermissible--if he is an infidel? What about Offensive Jihad? Allah Exalted, the Most High, said: "Fight them! Allah will torment them with your hands".... [Koran 9:14] Indeed, these expressions of yours are built upon the principle of equality, as found in the charters of the United Nations, which do not distinguish [among] people, neither by way of religion nor race nor sex. Islam improves; it is not improved.... [p. 38] Furthermore, how can they [intellectuals] claim that we have no right to force a people to change its particular values, when they transgress the bounds of nature? Such are lies. In fact, Muslims are obligated to raid the lands of the infidels, occupy them, and exchange their systems of governance for an Islamic system, barring any practice that contradicts the sharia from being publicly voiced among the people, as was the case at the dawn of Islam....[p. 50] Thus they make claims and speak about Allah without understanding. They say that our sharia does not impose our particular beliefs upon others; this is a false assertion. For it is, in fact, part of our religion to impose our particular beliefs upon others. Whoever doubts this, let him turn to the deeds of the Companions when they raided the lands of the Christians and Omar imposed upon them the conditions of dhimmi[tude]. These conditions involve clothing attire, specific situations, and class distinctions known to ulamaas the pact of Omar,^[13] and they are notoriously famous. Let the signatories review them so they know that we *are* to force people by the power of the sword to [our] particular understandings, customs, and conditions, all in order to induce debasement and humility, just like Allah commanded when he said: "[...]until they pay the jizya by hand, in complete submission and humility." [Koran 9:29] Now, if you are incapable of jihad and placing people into the religion, like the Companions did, your impotence does not mean that it is not a legitimate aspect of the religion. [p. 51]

As for direct support for terrorism, bin Ladin again refers to the Koran:

"Muster against them [infidels] what fighting-men and steeds of war you can, in order to strike terror in the enemy of Allah and your enemy, and others besides them whom you do not know, but Allah knows well." [Koran 8:60] Thus whoever refuses the principle of terror[ism] against the enemy also refuses the commandment of Allah the Exalted, the Most High, and His sharia. The West prepares to defend itself in face of this extremist verse. [p. 54]

The Saudi intellectuals wrote: "Terrorism, according to the universally agreed meaning being used today, is but one of many manifestations of unjust aggression against life and property." Bin Ladin, outraged, responds:

Behold! Today they are agreed to the meaning and definition of "terrorism" as acknowledged and agreed to by the Americans, that is, "unjust aggression against life and property." And such acknowledgment by necessity must apply to and include the Prophet who assaulted the lives, properties, and women of the infidels, who were living in secure and settled cities. As did his Companions after him. Such aggression, as understood by the West, is not justified; nor does such hostility agree with the Western notion of "freedom of religion." Thus our Prophet and his Companions and the righteous forefathers have all now become "terrorists."^[14] [p. 58]

Taken together, the above three sections all demonstrate that for al-Qa'ida, hostility and violence towards the West is not merely "reciprocal treatment"--that is, "an eye for an eye"--but rather religious obligation that far transcends any and all notions of "universal justice" and claims to grievances. However, there are two more notable contradictions between what they say to the West and what they affirm to Muslims. Consider the following disparities:

TRUCE VS. TAQIYYAH

On two separate occasions, al-Qa'ida, in the person of bin Ladin, has offered the West a truce. In April of 2002, bin Ladin offered European nations an apparently long-lasting truce: "I therefore offer them this peace treaty [*mubadarat sulh*], which essentially is a commitment to cease operations against every country that pledges not to attack Muslims or interfere in their business--including the American conspiracy against the greater Islamic world.... Stop shedding our blood and thereby save your own." [p. 235]

In late January 2006, bin Ladin, who had not been heard from for over a year, resurfaced by way of an audio-tape and offered the Americans a truce: "So we have no qualms in offering you a long-term truce on fair conditions that we adhere to. For we are the umma that Allah has forbidden from double-crossing and lying." [p. 224]

However, while Islam does permit the making of truces with infidels, it only allows this under certain conditions--namely, when Muslims are in a weakened position and unable to wage an Offensive Jihad effectively.^[15] In "Jihad, Martyrdom, and the Killing of Innocents," Ayman Zawahiri declares:

Whenever they are able... believers are to enjoin good and forbid evil [i.e. enforce Shari'ah law]--which, by nature, is [waging Offensive] Jihad in the path of Allah and

spreading the call to [conversion to the religion of] the Most High: "Those whom we have given mastery over the earth uphold prayers, render alms, enjoin good and forbid evil; Allah controls the destiny of all things" [Koran 22:41].... Therefore if believers are weak, they are to wage jihad with their hearts and tongues; if they are able, they are to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, fight the infidels, and spread the call of Tawhid. [pp. 150-51]

In this same treatise, Zawahiri stresses the need for deception in warfare. Based on Muhammad's assertion--"War [is] deceit"--Zawahiri goes on to say:

Deception in warfare requires that the mujahid bide his time and wait for an opportunity against his enemy, while avoiding confrontation at all possible costs. For triumph, in almost every case, is [achieved] through deception: triumph achieved through confrontation possesses many dangers.... And in the Hadith, practicing deceit in war is well demonstrated. Indeed, its need is more stressed than [the need for] courage. [p. 142]

More importantly, however, in Ayman al-Zawahiri's treatise "Loyalty and Enmity," Muslims are flat-out told that lying and dissembling in front of infidels is permitted. This is the doctrine of *taqiyyah* (religiously sanctioned lies for purposes of self-preservation),^[16] which has plenty of Koranic but especially Hadith support. The Koran states: "Let Believers not take for friends and allies infidels rather than Believers: and who so does this shall have no relationship left with Allah--unless you but guard yourselves against them, taking precautions." (Koran 3:28) Two of the more famous Hadiths evoked by al-Qa'ida say, "Truly, we grin to the faces of some peoples, while our hearts curse them"; and "Protection is not secured by deeds but with the tongue." (p. 73)

Finally, there are also several Hadiths of Muhammad that justify oath-breaking. For instance, "Allah's Messenger [Muhammad] said, 'He who takes an oath but eventually finds a better way should do that which is better and break his oath.'" (Sahih Muslim 15: 4057)

Considering that al-Qa'ida subscribes to the view that Islam must war with the non-Muslim world till the former subsumes the latter, and that they also subscribe to these doctrines of deceit, what is to be made of al-Qa'ida's truce-offers?

WHY THE WEST IS HOSTILE TO ISLAM

As aforementioned, in their messages to the West, al-Qa'ida maintains that the former is unjust towards Islam for a plethora of reasons--Israeli interests, oil, land, and Crusader hatred being prominent among them. A quick perusal of *The Al Qaeda Reader's* "Propaganda" section will clearly confirm this. Even in most of their messages to Muslims, al-Qa'ida is quick to stress these reasons in order to incite Muslims, gain their sympathy, and grow in recruits. However, in "Moderate Islam is a Prostration to the West," bin Ladin changes his tune. He repeatedly states that the West is ultimately hostile to Islam because it knows that Islam is hostile to it--that "the West avenges itself against Islam for giving infidels but three options: Islam, jizyah, or the sword." (p. 42)

The West is hostile to us on account of Loyalty and Enmity, and [Offensive] Jihad.... What the West desires is that we abandon [the doctrine of] Loyalty and Enmity, and abandon [Offensive] Jihad. This is the very essence of their request and desire of us. Do the intellectuals, then, think it's actually possible for Muslims to abandon these two commandments simply to coexist with the West? [p. 30] In fact, the West did not treat Islam in this atrocious manner until after it [first] understood the truth about Islam--comprehended its essence and soul. And the West is knowledgeable of all religions, but it would never confront any of them, nor persecute their people. But it is bent on pulverizing the Muslims, since first learning of their enterprise [Offensive Jihad and the "three choices"]. [p. 55]

RECIPROCITY OR RELIGION?

All of the above clearly demonstrates that, for al-Qa'ida, the war with the West is not finite but eternal. The current battles may ostensibly revolve around U.S. presence in Islamic lands, or support for Israel, or support for secular though dictatorial regimes, or even oil. Even so, the ultimate war does not end with a cessation of these real or perceived injustices, but rather with the West's--indeed, the rest of the non-Islamic world's--submission to Islam. As the words of Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri--all grounded in the traditional sources of Islam--make clear, the war with the West revolves around something more transcendent than temporal grievances. It revolves around "eternal truths."

How, then, should al-Qa'ida's messages to the West--wholly crafted to vindicate al-Qa'ida, weaken Western resolve, and incite the umma--be taken? Should one conclude that all those grievances that al-Qa'ida cite are wholly unfounded? Not necessarily. In fact, it is precisely because the vast majority of the world's 1.2 billion Muslims, not to mention a considerable number of non-Muslims, believe these grievances to be true that al-Qa'ida enjoys the apparent widespread--sympathetic if not actual--support that they receive.^[17]

All that said, Westerners should also be cognizant of what al-Qa'ida and like-minded Islamists *ultimately* want as the former consider the long list of alleged wrongs the Islamic world has suffered at the hands of the West. In other words, if al-Qa'ida's arguably "just" demands are met--if the United States evacuates Iraq and Afghanistan, if the West keeps its nose out of the Islamic world's affairs, even if Israel were to disappear--would all that be enough to satisfy al-Qa'ida and their supporters? Certainly, it would be a start. Yet based on their words and convictions that *all* injunctions of the Koran must be fulfilled, it is clear that, when the time is ripe, the jihad would merely shift from being Defensive to being Offensive--the latter being the true and historic manifestation of jihad.^[18]

Nor should Westerners believe that al-Qa'ida is the root of the problem. The "problem" between the West--in fact, the world--and Islam is the "radical" version of the latter articulated by al-Qa'ida but also other Islamists--past, present, and no doubt future. This is even historically demonstrable: When Hasan al-Bana and Sayyid Qutb (respectively, founder and ideologue of Egypt's famous Muslim Brotherhood) were assassinated, that

organization did not fall apart but continued thriving underground for decades until to international dismay it won a fair number of seats in Egypt's recent elections; the Iranian Islamic Revolution did not die with its spiritual leader, the Ayatollah Khomeini, but is as strong now as it was then--with the exception that its nuclear aspirations are nearly realized; after the spiritual leader of Hamas, Ahmad Yassin was assassinated, far from losing influence, Hamas won the majority of house seats in Palestine's recent elections. Ayman al-Zawahiri summarizes this phenomenon well:

Jihad in the path of Allah is greater than any individual or organization. It is a struggle between Truth and Falsehood, until Allah Almighty inherits the earth and those who live in it. Mullah Muhammad Omar and Sheikh Osama bin Ladin--may Allah protect them from all evil--are merely two soldiers of Islam in the journey of jihad, while the struggle between Truth and Falsehood transcends time. [p. 182]

The bottom line is, perceived Western injustices--as propagated by bin Ladin's mantras--have nothing to do with the *ultimate* source of hostilities between Islam and the West (Infidelity). The doctrine of Offensive Jihad, spreading the laws of Allah to every corner of the world by the sword and enforcing the practice of Dhimmitude (that is, discriminating and humiliating those who, having been conquered and living under Islamic suzerainty, still do not embrace Islam officially), was and remains a basic tenant of Islam--well before it ever encountered the West:

Fight those amongst the People of the Book [Christians and Jews] who do not believe in Allah nor the Last Day, who do not forbid what Allah and His Messenger have forbidden [i.e. enforce Shari'ah law], and who do not embrace the religion of truth [Islam], *until* they pay the Jizya with willing submissiveness and feel themselves utterly subdued. [Koran 9:29]

The word "until" (*hata*) highlights the perpetual nature of this command. Enmity for non-Muslims, irrespective of whether or not they harm the Muslim is also a basic tenant of the faith, established before Islam and the West met:

"O you who have believed! Do not take the Jews and the Christians for friends; they are but friends of each other; and whoever amongst you takes them for a friend, then surely he is one of them [i.e., he apostasies from Islam]." [Koran 5:51]

You have a good example in Abraham and those who followed him, for they said to their people, "We disown you and the idols which you worship besides Allah. We renounce you: enmity and hate shall reign between us until you believe in Allah alone." [Koran 60:4]

It is important to keep in mind that these verses have nothing to do with reciprocity; instead they express the standard relationship between Muslims and infidels--even when the latter do not interfere in Muslims' affairs, militarily, economically, politically, or culturally, and completely mind their own business. Moreover, such hostility is perceived as altruistic, as bin Ladin concludes: "As for oppression, the only oppression is to forsake them in their unbelief, and not launch an [Offensive] Jihad against them till they submit to the faith--as the Prophet did with them." (p. 46)

At this point many will proclaim that al-Qa'ida is misusing, misinterpreting, or taking these otherwise straightforward verses out of context. That is hardly the point here: Even if this were true, that does not change the fact that many men before al-Qa'ida, going back to the first jihads of the seventh century, have also "misused" them, or that many today who have nothing to do with al-Qa'ida, "misinterpret them," or ultimately that many after al-Qa'ida will also be taking them "out of context." In other words, even if those verses *really* do not mean what they seem to be saying, they certainly led themselves to the sort of hostile interpretation that al-Qa'ida and other Islamists, past, present and future, give to them. This is all the more troubling since it took only 19 men who follow such "interpretations" to cause September 11.

Irrespective of real or imagined Western injustices, the real question of *permanent* peace revolves around the above Islamic doctrines. In this sense, then, real peace ultimately depends on Islam and how it defines itself: Either Islam will dominate the whole world fulfilling its destiny, or else Muslims themselves will reject the doctrines of jihad, Dhimmitude, and general enmity for non-Muslims. The problem, however, is that even if all these divisive doctrines are formally repudiated--will that be merely a show of taqiyya, a stratagem of war?

Based purely on al-Qa'ida's, that is, radical Islam's, worldview, it is readily apparent that the West is given no choice but to fight--to gain the upper-hand and strive to keep it, even at the risk of being oppressive. What good are al-Qa'idist appeals to justice in face of its belief that every person has but three choices (convert to Islam, live the life of a dhimmi, or die)? What good is it telling the West that they have "choices" in face of an immutable Shari'ah? What good is a truce in face of doctrines of deception?

This is unfortunate for Muslims, and in this sense al-Qa'ida's "version" of Islam brings them more harm than good. If Islam is perceived as being intrinsically hostile to the infidel world at large--as al-Qa'ida and many other Muslim insist--all of the possibly legitimate grievances that many Muslims believe they are suffering become moot, since the West is doing what it must to stay dominant against a potentially hostile force. Thus even if Muslims are being oppressed, as long as these grievances are being articulated through an Islamic paradigm that perceives justice solely through Shari'ah and not through anything universal or innate to the human condition, the West--in the interest of self-preservation as well as the preservation of freedoms--has no choice but to reject all accusations, offers, and threats from Islamists, and fight.

Indeed, according to this worldview, upheld by al-Qa'ida, where the Abode of Peace (Islam) and the Abode of War (the rest) are forever in a struggle of life and death, the West can hardly be blamed for behaving oppressively, if in fact it does, towards the Islamic world. In this context, such oppression can be understood as a sort of "preemptive" reciprocal treatment, as the argument can be made that if the West does not keep Islam suppressed, Islam will suppress it. A survival of the fittest mentality--"get them before they get us"--is the only mentality that can withstand radical Islam, as so well represented by al-Qa'ida.

In fact, bin Ladin's many statements of reciprocity work both ways: "Shall a man be blamed for protecting his own?" "The road to safety begins by eliminating the aggression." "Reciprocal treatment is part of justice." "He who initiates aggression is the unjust one." "We believe that this right to defend oneself is the right of *all* human beings."^[19] "We want to defend our people and our land. That is why I say that if we don't get security, the Americans, too would not get security.

This is a simple formula that even an American child can understand. This is the formula of live and let live."^[20] Ironically, every single one of these statements actually justifies Western aggression against radical Islam.

Thus, the West is damned if it does, damned if it doesn't. If the West voluntarily concedes to the demands and grievances of al-Qa'ida, it will be perceived as a weakness or an admission of defeat, and will eventually only encourage an Offensive Jihad, when the time is right. If the West actually loses the current war, that too will provoke an offensive response, one seen as the natural next stage in the struggle toward the total victory of Islam. This is an important reminder to those many who, while condemning al-Qa'ida's methods, agree or sympathize with their grievances. The current battle at hand may ostensibly revolve around those grievances; but the forthcoming war will ultimately be about militarily establishing Islamic supremacy over the entire globe.

Some will discount this possibility as implausible since it seems so distant; but the wild vicissitudes of history are constantly proving otherwise.

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NOTES

[1] Though they are representative of the entire book, many of the more revealing remarks come from "Moderate Islam is a Prostration to the West," where Saudi bin Ladin, writing to fellow Saudis and "pouring out his heart," unrestrainedly discusses many topics related to Islam that are otherwise taboo, especially here in the West.

[2] Raymond Ibrahim, *The Al Qaeda Reader* (New York: Broadway, 2007). Excerpts from the book are followed by the page number in the text.

[3] *Germans in Tunisia*: On April 11, 2002, a 24-year-old Tunisian man, who is suspected of spending some time in Afghanistan between 2000 and 2001, carried out a suicide operation in the Tunisian island and popular tourist destination Djerba: Fourteen German tourists, one Frenchman, and six Tunisians were killed, and 30 were wounded. *French in Karachi*: On May 8, 2002, a suicide bomber detonated a car bomb alongside a crowded bus in Karachi, killing 11 Frenchmen and two Pakistanis. Fifty others were wounded. *French tanker in Yemen*: On October 6, 2002, the Limburg, a French oil tanker

carrying 397,000 gallons of crude oil stationed in the Gulf of Aden off the Yemeni coast, was rammed by an explosive-laden boat. One Bulgarian crewman died, 12 were injured, and nearly 100,000 barrels of oil leaked out. *Marines in Failaka*: On October 8, 2002, while U.S. marines were conducting war games on the Kuwaiti island of Failaka, two Kuwaiti nationals walked up to the troops and opened fire, killing one American and wounding two. *British and Australians in Bali*: On October 12, 2002, three bombs were detonated in the town of Kuta on the Indonesian island of Bali, killing 202 people and injuring a further 209. It is considered the deadliest act of terrorism in Indonesian history. The majority of the dead were foreign tourists, including some 88 Australians, 26 British, and 38 Indonesians. *Operation in Moscow*: On October 23, 2002, 40 armed Chechen rebels seized a crowded Moscow theater, taking over 700 hostages and demanding the withdrawal of Russian forces from Chechnya. After a siege of two and a half days, Russian special forces stormed the building after firing in some sort of anesthetic gas. All of the Chechen rebels were killed, along with 130 of the hostages.

[4] The "blessed raid" on London occurred on July 7, 2005, during rush hour and consisted of a series of coordinated suicide bombings that struck the city's public transport system. The bombings killed 52 civilians and injured over 700.

[5] As far as the thirteenth century jurist Ibn Taymiyyah--known as *the* Shaykh of Islam--is concerned, Defensive Jihad is second only after belief itself. Al-Qa'ida often quotes the following passage from Taymiyyah's fatwas to demonstrate the obligation for Muslims to join the Defensive Jihad against the United States and its allies: "Defensive warfare is the most critical form of warfare, [since we are] warding off an invader from [our] sanctities and religion. It is a unanimously accepted duty. After belief, there is no greater duty than to repulse the invading enemy who corrupts faith and the world. There are no rules or conditions for this; he must be expelled by all possible means. Our learned Ulama and others have all agreed to this. It is imperative to distinguish between repulsing the invading, oppressive infidel [Defensive Jihad] and pursuing him in his own lands [Offensive Jihad]."

[6] This is the standard view adopted by, for instance, the Four Schools (*Madhahib*) of Sunni jurisprudence, and is attested by many standard works of Islamic law. For example, the *Encyclopedia of Islam's* entry on jihad simply states, "The duty of the *djihad* exists as long as the universal domination of Islam has not been attained."

[7] http://www.americanvalues.org/html/what_we_re_fighting_for.html.

[8] http://www.americanvalues.org/html/saudi_statement.html.

[9] Non-Muslims, Jews and Christians, who are "protected" in exchange for sociopolitical submission and the payment of special taxes.

[10] <http://www.anusha.com/osamaint.htm>

[11] In several public addresses, the American president has often referred to al-Qa'ida and its affiliates as "enemies of freedom" and "people who hate freedom." In his address to a joint session of Congress and the American people delivered nine days after the September 11 attacks, the president remarked, "Americans are asking, why do they [perpetrators of September 11] hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber--a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms--our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other."

[12] Bin Ladin's position towards this verse is simply that, either it has been abrogated by the "sword verse" (Koran 9:5)--which, in fact, most Ulama agree has abrogated some 120 Meccan (peaceful) verses--or else that it has nothing to do with Islam's command to rule the world, but rather deals with freedom of conscience.

[13] The "pact of Umar" is the treaty that was made between the People of the Book and the second Caliph, Umar. In order to continue practicing their faiths, Christians and Jews had to agree to several social conditions enumerated in the pact that, among other things, were meant to induce humiliation and debasement in accordance with the verse cited (Koran 9:29). For instance, they were to rise from their seats if a Muslim wanted it; they were forbidden from riding on saddles or bearing any arms; they were forbidden from publicly showing their crosses or worshipping too loudly, lest Muslim eyes or ears be offended; they were forbidden from building new churches, or even repairing old ones. Some apologists maintain that these conditions were not strictly enforced at all times. However, what is important here is that "Dhimmitude," like bin Ladin asserts, is in fact a basic tenant of Islam and thus should be enforced under Shari'ah law.

[14] In fact, Shaykh Abdallah Azzam (1941-1989), the highly influential Islamic scholar, mujahid, and bin Ladin's onetime mentor and hero, often boastfully referred to Muhammad as, not only a terrorist, but the first terrorist: "We are terrorists. Every Muslim must be a terrorist. Terrorism is an obligation as demonstrated in the Koran and Sunnah. Allah Most High said: 'Muster against them [infidels] all the men and cavalry at your command, so that you may strike terror into the heart of your enemy and Allah's enemy' [Koran 8:60]. Thus terrorism is a [religious] obligation. And the Messenger of Allah is the first terrorist and the first menace" (*al-Hijrah wa al-I'dad*). Some have accused bin Ladin of falling out and assassinating Azzam in order to assume control of the then nascent base ("al-Qa'ida").

[15] Most jurists are agreed that, theoretically, ten years is the maximum amount of time for peace between Islam and infidels, based on Muhammad's treaty of Hudaibiyyah. According to the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, "Peace with non-Muslim nations is, therefore, a provisional state of affairs only; the chance of circumstances alone can justify it temporarily. Furthermore there can be no question of genuine peace treaties with these nations; only truces, whose duration ought not, in principle, to exceed ten years, are authorized. But even such truces are precarious, inasmuch as they can, before they expire, be repudiated unilaterally should it appear more profitable for Islam to resume the conflict."

[16] For more on the topic of taqiyyah, see Raymond Ibrahim, "Islam's Doctrines of Deception," *Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst*, September 26, 2008.

[17] That a bounty combined to amount nearly 100 million dollars placed on bin Ladin and Zawahiri's heads has not been collected in one of the most impoverished regions in the world is telling enough.

[18] All the original Islamic texts, from Hadiths to books on Islamic law, that discuss the term "jihad," explain it as war to simply spread Islamic authority. It was only after the Crusades and Mongol invasions that the Ulama began delineating the concept of "defensive" jihad which, according to premiere jurists such as Ibn Taymiyyah, is second only to faith, and obligatory on the entire Muslim Ummah, as opposed to offensive jihad, which is deemed a "communal duty," or *Fardh kifayah*.

[19] http://www.robert-fisk.com/usama_interview_aljazeera.htm.

[20] <http://www.dawn.com/2001/11/10/top1.htm>.