



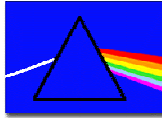
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according to a rather unified strategy. That strategy has been directed by several elements:

- First, by the old ‘core’ leadership of Al-Qaeda, which directed the group through a variety of both known (e.g. the Internet and satellite communications) and unknown means (probably face-to-face meetings and messengers) means;
- Second, by independent tactics and strategies that evolved in accordance with local conditions. Examples here include the Tawhid wal-Jihad, later renamed to Al-Qaeda in Iraq, of Zarqawi, the Algerian GSPC, the Arab battalion in Chechnya, groups in Indonesia, local independent groups in Europe, or Jihadi groups in Sinai/Egypt, Jordan, or Saudi Arabia.
- Third, by attempts to coordinate and achieve a maximum of unity of strategy and ideology by the younger generation of Jihadi-Salafi clerics and scholars through the Internet. Dominant among these scholars were Saudis, as well as other Arab clerics who graduated from Saudi Islamic universities during the 1990s. In addition to the basic neo-Wahhabi Salafi doctrines they absorbed in Saudi Arabia, this class of scholars was influenced by the emergence of the Saudi reformist movement, which was partly a reaction to the U.S. presence in Arabia following the first Gulf war in 1991.

Since the formation of the front of Al-Qaeda, no attempts were made to establish any global organizational tools to unite the efforts under a certain command, but only attempts to found a unity of lines of thought. In two of their speeches, Osama Bin Laden (in 2003) and Ayman al-Zawahiri (in 2004) raised the idea of an Islamic Council for the decision-makers for the community in the traditional Islamic form—*Majlis al-Hall wal-`Aqd*. Such a council has not been established yet, and it is doubtful whether it can be founded in the near future, given the present conditions of Al-Qaeda and its leadership. That said, local efforts have been made in Iraq. This included Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi and his *Tawhid wal-Jihad's* declaration of loyalty to Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda in 2004; the formation of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (aka Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers) as a front organization of six local groups, the same year; public speeches by Ayman al-Zawahiri and other Jihadi scholars to influence and even moderate the policy of Zarqawi, until his killing in June 2006; and the foundation of the Islamic State in Iraq in September 2006. That state was designed to be dominated by Al-Qaeda, but the group was to be but one of several elements composing the state, which was to be ruled by Abu Omar al-Baghdadi al-Hashemi. In 2006, Several other groups declared their loyalty to Al-Qaeda – the Algerian GSPC, part of the Egyptian Gama`at Islamiyyah, and unofficially, the Somalian Islamic Courts. The main motive of this strategy has been the principle of creating unity in the Muslim world. Hence, wherever and whenever an attack was taking place against Muslim lands and Muslims, or a conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims, all the Muslims should wage a Jihad.



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2006 has also witnessed a growing focus on the anti-Shi'a strategy, not only in the context of the Sunni Jihadi insurgency in Iraq. The victorious image of the Lebanese Hizballah in the war with Israel; the growing Iranian involvement in the Palestinian arena and with Hamas; and the way in which Saddam Hussein was executed, have all added to the growing anti-Shi'a sentiment as an integral and significant part of the global Jihad strategy.

Hamed al-Ali and his Call for the Foundation of a Global Jihadi Council

In 2005-2006, the Kuwaiti Sheikh Hamed al-Ali became the leading Jihadi-Salafi cleric of the younger generation of Jihadi scholars and Muftis. His growing prominence and popularity was aided by the fact that most of his colleagues were either killed or arrested, while several others changed their mind under heavy pressures by the Saudi government. As a result, few clerics today have a similar impact on the supporters of global Jihadi-Salafiyah. Sheikh al-Ali also benefits from living in Kuwait, where he enjoys a relatively high degree of freedom of speech and activity, and complete freedom to use the Internet for his purposes. In 2006, he also became the most fruitful Jihadi scholar in the Arab world, as his articles and Fatwas were read and circulated immediately in all the Jihadi forums. While his organizational links to Al-Qaeda are unknown, his effect on the supporters of the Jihadi global front is immense. As a result, his writings became a leading torch for consolidating a globally accepted Jihadi doctrine.

The document he published on January 14, 2006, should be viewed as an attempt to consolidate a united strategy for global Jihad in the near future. Whether it is a result of a personal initiative, or in accordance with leading operatives such as Ayman Zawahiri or the commanders of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, his call should be viewed as a strategic document. It should be noted, however, that Al-Ali presents his document as if there had already been a meeting of Jihadi scholars and the document is the result of that meeting, which "discussed the conditions of the Islamic nation and the conspiracy against it by two enemies."

Whether his "Covenant of the Supreme Council of Jihad Groups," is a call to really form such a council, or is merely an attempt to sketch the outlines of a united strategy, what is clear is that the document is an official stamp marking the opening the anti-Iranian and anti-Shi'a front alongside the traditional anti-"Crusader-Jewish" one, which is assisted by Arab governments. Al-Ali's document is an attempt to draw the future strategy of fighting simultaneously in two fronts. What began in Iraq as the major strategy of Zarqawi and his Tawhid wal-Jihad followers has been approved by Al-Qaeda after his death and is now carried on by the new leadership of the Jihadi insurgency. With this document, that strategy obtains the clerical approval through Hamed al-Ali.

In order to focus on the innovative element in this strategy, Al-Ali places the Iranian-Shi'i threat as the first of the two: "The Safawi enemy that searches for the destruction of



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the Islamic civilization and slaughtering the Muslims under false religious banners.” The second is naturally the Zionist-Crusader campaign. These two anti-Islamic campaigns receive the same priority and the nature of a personal obligation (*Fardh `Ayn*), where each Muslim should participate in Jihad in the defense of the Muslims.

Another significant and new element in the document is the call for unity, albeit within a framework of organizational pluralism of the various Jihadi groups. Unity is achieved by concentrating the efforts in the framework of a united strategy, although not necessarily through a unity of the organizations. Moreover, there is a call for tolerance towards the other Islamist groups, and against any extreme excommunication of the other Muslims (*Al-Ghuluw fi al-Takfir*). The document also rejects the fighting against groups or individuals that do not obey a certain Jihadi group or vow its leadership. “We should understand that the nation, as well as it needs the Jihad, it also needs the wisdom of all its components and groups. The nation needs to tolerate legitimate disputes.”

The Covenant is accompanied by a supplement, which the author opens by stating that there are only three projects in the Middle East: The Safawi-Iranian, the Zionist-Crusader, and the Islamic Jihad. Once again Al-Ali mentions the Iranian project first. The supplement focuses on the Jihad against the Western conspiracy, but, it also predicts a conflict over the dominance of the Middle East between the two enemies, which will lead to “a chaos in the region for some period, which will be in favor of the Jihad project that will expand all over the Muslim world like fire in the wood.” Al-Ali continues, saying that “The most important mission of the Jihadi project today is to show long breathing in face of the enemy and stick to our path under its banner until victory. And if not now, we shall deliver our achievements to the next generations till the ultimate victory.”

The Jihadi response to the Western campaign should include four elements: Jihad by violence, which is taking currently place; economic independence; contradicting the Western mindset by promoting the Islamist one; and the destruction of the “Zionist entity.” “There is no importance at all in the speed of achieving the goals. The most important is the comprehension of the plan and in keeping the spirit of challenge.”

Conclusion

The importance of Hamed al-Ali’s document lies mainly in its attempt to draw the outlines of a unified Jihadi strategy—one that pays no attention to the organizational structure of the various groups, nor to organizational unity. The strategy is called for in the face of a dual enemy campaign: an Iranian-Shi’i and a Western one. The emphasis on the organizational pluralism of the Jihadi project is an innovation, and is probably the result of the inability to unite all the Jihadi insurgent groups in Iraq. It is also likely emanates from the recognition that different conditions govern the realities in various parts of the Muslim world.



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On one hand, this new approach may seem as a failure on the part of Al-Qaeda to establish a single unified Jihadi group, despite the declaration of an “Iraqi Islamist State” in the Sunni area of Baghdad and around it. The recognition of this legitimate pluralism is also reflected in the system of information, propaganda, and indoctrination campaign that the various Jihadi groups are waging in the Internet. In 2006, it seemed that a truce of sorts has developed between the various groups, and that a better cooperation in this field has replaced previous infighting. It also seems that unlike in the past, the different information systems—Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), Al-Sahab, Al-Furqan, Al-Fajr, Al-Boraq, and some others—currently act in harmony with one another. Whether this is the result of deliberate planning or a compromise, reality shows that there is someone who attempts to include it into a strategy, in order to create some order in the Jihadi project.

In some way, Hamed al-Ali completes some of the policy guidelines of policy aired by Ayman al-Zawahiri in his audio or video tapes. It is unclear to which extent there exists actual contact between the two of them, but there are strong signs that global Jihad manages to put in place a procedure whereby new thinking is constantly produced, lessons are being learned, and new adaptations to policy or strategy are outlined. Al-Ali’s clear opposition of to radical refutation of other Sunni Muslims resembles the writings of Zawahiri and the criticism of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi of Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi in 2005. These thinkers do not appear to arrive at their conclusions as a result of mutual consultations or a hierarchy of institutions, but mainly by drawing a common logical strategy—logical from their point of view, at least.

The notion of the Shi’i enemy as equal to the “Crusader-Jewish” one must also be noted, even though it is not a new development, but a result of the events in Iraq and the prospects of what Jihadi Salafis interpret as a withdrawal of the United States from Iraq in the near future. The conflict with Iran and the Shi’a has already been predicted in early 2003, in the writings of the late Sheikhs, the Saudi Yousef al-Uyeri and the Jordanian Abu Omar Seyf, two of the leading architects of the Jihadi strategy in Iraq. The enmity towards Iran and the Shi’a has only been demonized during the past three years. Hamed al-Ali came now and provided it with the stamp of the official strategy of global Jihad. Whether by his own initiative or in accordance with Al-Qaeda, by doing so he closes the door to any possible compromise with Iran or the Shi’i community in Iraq, unless future conditions will force them to do so.

There still remains the question of how Al-Qaeda or global Jihad in general is directed. We do not know the exact process of decision-making in Al-Qaeda, or if the call by Bin Laden to establish an “executive council” was responded. The discourse of Al-Ali’s document hints to the possible existence of some form of this council.