

The aims of al qaeda politics essay



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Al Qaeda, which is Arabic for “ The Base”, was formed by Osama Bin Laden in 1988, it has its origins in the Maktab al-Khidamat, “ Services Office” which was formed by Bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam in the 1980’s in Peshawar Pakistan. This group was primarily to raise and supply funds as well as recruit and support foreign Mujahedeen in Afghanistan fighting the Soviets and the communist government.

As the war with the Soviets drew to a close, Bin Laden wanted to continue the struggle beyond Afghanistan with a holy war to overthrow regimes deemed by him to be un-Islamic and to expel infidels from all Muslim land, this would be achieved by Al Qaeda operations and working alongside other Islamic extremist groups.

It has operated with groups from Algeria, Chechnya, Kashmir, Libya, Lebanon, Philippines, Somalia, Uzbekistan and Yemen, with some of the groups being the following;

This list is not exhaustive as Al Qaeda’s alliances are continually evolving, but its operations have included joint missions, sharing of intelligence and supplying of funds, to voicing support.

It has also absorbed groups into it since its inception notably, Al-Jihad,” Egyptian Islamic Jihad”, and Tanzim Qaidat al-Jiahd fi Bilad al-Rafidayn, “ Organisation of Jihad’s base in the country of the two rivers”, which became Al Qaeda in Iraq.

It has links to Sudan, where the group was based from 1991-96 when the Sudanese government was pressured to make Al Qaeda leave its territory,

the largest state alignment it had was with the Taliban in Afghanistan. This provided a stable base and backing for its activities, which has led to Al Qaeda being forever intertwined with the ongoing Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan and Pakistan and during the “ Global war on terror”, Taliban and Al Qaeda fighting side by side. Finally although it has never been proved or confirmed there is strong belief that the ISI, Pakistani intelligence services has had a murky relationship with Al Qaeda for its own benefits and aims.

Aims, Ideology and Motivations

Al Qaeda’s primary and ultimate aim from its inception has been the establishment of a global pan-Islamic caliphate ruled by Sharia law under its brand of hard-line Salafi Islam. It has set this goal as being one that covers failures with martyrdom and avoids the possibility of political failure that goes with democratic government. It is both equally as vague as it is defined so as to avoid the group being challenged on any finer points of its doctrine and being shown to be false.

This is also typified by a note found in an Al Qaeda house in Afghanistan by New York Times reporters entitled “ Goals and objectives of jihad”.

Establishing the rule of god on earth

Attaining martyrdom in the cause of god

Purification of the ranks of Islam from the elements of depravity(2)

This is one of the reasons for Al Qaeda creating alliances with other Islamic groups, for it to establish itself as the moral guardian and director of Jihad, using its own resources and that of the other groups to combine and evolve

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into a global superpower of terrorism capable of challenging military superpowers.

Al Qaeda has subdivided its aims since its inception issuing various edicts, the destruction of the state of Israel. Al Qaeda could not ignore or fail to take the lead on the issue of the state of Israel to be the leader of global jihad; Israel has been the focal point of almost all Islamic extremism in the Middle East. To garner support from established groups and place them in a position where all attacks by them can be attributed to the Al Qaeda umbrella, it took the most extreme line for the destruction of Israel its citizens and allies wherever in the world they may be. Although so far Al Qaeda has taken very little direct action against Israel, it has taken two steps of action against Israelis in Kenya on November 28th 2002, with the bombing of a hotel and the attempted shooting down of an Israeli airliner.

The destruction of the house of Saud, this aim has been twofold, one as custodians of the holy sites of Mecca and Medina which promotes the house of Saud to the most eminent position in the Islamic world and gives it the chief voice. The removal of the house of Saud who enable Al Qaeda to claim guardianship of the holy sites and further twist Islam for its own ends and portray itself as the official voice of Islam for all Sunni Muslims. Secondly the house of Saud represents the only Sunni superpower; Al Qaeda views it as corrupt and a western stooge if it destroys the house of Saud it will project itself as the Sunni superpower, control the world's largest oil reserves as a weapon, and remove a key western ally.

Thirdly the destruction of the United States, Al Qaeda views it as Satan on earth responsible for all the ills and its perceived repression by leading a crusade against Muslims and the key obstacle to establishing a global caliphate. In 1998 it issued a statement that the United States had made " A clear declaration of war on God, his messenger and Muslims" (3). It has done this it may be viewed cleverly by using 9/11 to provoke the United States into attacking Afghanistan, sacrificing its bases and the Taliban regime in the process. Al Qaeda knows it cannot win a military war against the United States, but instead by using a war of attrition bogging the United States down in a conflict similar to the Soviet one, wearing down of American public moral, increased financial cost of the war on terror. Its aim here is to force the United States to take its eye off the ball in other parts of the world by engaging in a chase for Al Qaeda, committing acts of terrorism on the USA to force it to enact new measures to deal with the threat, thus causing the fall of the USA by a weakening in all its areas rather than by destruction of either the military, economy, democracy. (4)

Its ideology and beliefs are Salafi, which is a strict form of Sunni Islam. It preaches the purify of Islam from impure elements to achieve a pure Islamic society, this has been seized upon by Al Qaeda as part of its strategic goal to reclaim Islam from those who are not worthy and have been diluted by outside influences. It has also merged its ideology with that of the teachings of Sayyid Qutb, a radical Egyptian author and member of the Egyptian Muslim brotherhood. His teachings are that the Quran is not just Holy Scripture but rules to live by that defined every part of a person's life and that anything other than it is evil and corrupt, that Islam must attack those

not part of it to defend Islam and eventually attain leadership of humanity throughout the world.(5)

These two views have been manipulated by Al Qaeda's leadership, to show that

Muslims are under attack everywhere

Only Al Qaeda are fighting the oppressors of Islam

If you do not support Al Qaeda, then you are supporting the oppressors

Thus forcing people immediately to be on one side or the other, it has taken 8 themes of Islam and interpreted them for its own aims;

Jihad, Islamic scholars class this as striving for excellence, AL Qaeda as an obligatory act of which armed struggle is the highest and to be undertaken against all enemies of Islam

Bayat(Pledge), Can only be decided by scholars, and rulers not by one person, whereas Al Qaeda believes it can be made to the Emir and is of the same standing as one made to Mohammed, once given it cannot be broken if it is the person becomes a kafir and must be dealt with as such.

Daru Islam, scholars believe it to be a relative term with no exact meaning, whereas Al Qaeda views it that in order to establish Islam, it is vital to establish an Islamic state which will lead to the Caliphate and is a duty of all Muslims.

Ummah, for scholars peaceful coexistence whereas for Al Qaeda, all Muslims show follow its path as the right way, if they do not then they are a non believer.

Takfir, this is the act of accusing another of being an infidel or non believe, scholars forbid others to do this, Al Qaeda uses this to turn other Muslims into enemies

Shaheed(Suicide), forbidden in the Quran, promoted by Al Qaeda as part of a migration to god and to be rewarded by the highest order in heaven.

Al Wala Wal Bara (Us versus them), Scholars believe all human beings are to be respected; it is used by Al Qaeda as justification of being with them or being its enemy.

Hijrah (Migration), for scholars it should only be undertaken with great care and thought, it is encouraged by Al Qaeda for all Muslims to migrate from worldly to heavenly goals and that the purest way of doing this is by sacrifice through a suicide bombing.(6)

These together provide justification for all it calls enemies, all acts of violence, and to convince people that it is taking the true path of Islam without leaving any areas of debate.

Its motivation is a hatred of anything it considers un-Islamic, that it is the truth and only it holds the key to free Islam and put it back on its place. That it can motivate, manipulate others into heeding its call to arms and carrying out its deeds, it can propel itself from an organisation that carries out acts to one akin to a spiritual group where others carry out acts in its name and it

becomes the source of all Islam. That democracy undermines Islam and gives people an alternative avenue of thought, it must be destroyed to prevent rivals to its aims and to close all avenues of alternative thought. It has skilfully used the media and Islamic teachings to brand all others apostates to legitimise their killing, and to channel the views of the disaffected that it has taken the sword of Allah and in a reversal of the Christian crusades is now taking the crusades back to its enemies. It is also motivated by the need to survive having placed itself as the leader of global jihad it knows others are waiting in the wings to take its place, and that it must take the lead in issuing every edict and challenging every act of its enemies to avoid it losing out to democracy, it has learnt a lesson from Iraq where the very people it purported to be helping turned against it and that if repeated again could lead to its own destruction.

Leadership and structure

Al Qaeda was founded by Osama Bin Laden; he was born in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on March 10th 1957, the son of a wealthy Yemeni with close ties to the Saudi royal family. He was raised a devout Wahhabi and attended university in Saudi Arabia but it is not known if he completed a degree. In 1979 he joined with Abdullah Azzam to assist in opposing the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and moved to Peshawar, Pakistan. In 1984 along with Azzam they established Maktab al-Khidamat, to channel funds, arms and fighters into Afghanistan; he also established a camp in Afghanistan and moved to fight there himself. He split from Azzam in 1988, and established Al Qaeda to pursue his more militant agenda; following the Soviet withdrawal he then changed his focus to the world outside of Afghanistan. After the

invasion of Kuwait in 1990, he had began a feud with the Saudi royal family over its refusal of his offer of his warriors to defend Saudi and this led to his campaign for the destruction of the house of Saud, which led the Saudi authorities to strip him of his citizenship and his exile to Sudan in 1992. He remained in Sudan until 1996 when the Sudanese authorities were persuaded to remove him; he returned to Afghanistan now under the rule of the Taliban and established his relationship with them. He remained in Afghanistan until the fall of the Taliban post 911, and his whereabouts have forever been unknown since then, speculation and intelligence place him to be in the Pakistani border regions.

Dr Ayman Al-Zawahiri is the deputy leader of Al Qaeda and leader of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, born in Egypt on June 19th 1951. He was raised by a religious family and aged 14 joined the Muslim brotherhood, after leaving university he served as a surgeon in the Egyptian army for 3 years. Implicated in the aftermath of the assassination of President Sadat, he was arrested and jailed for 3 years. He then travelled to Saudi Arabia in 1985 and onto Peshawar where he met Osama Bin Laden, he remained here reconstituting his group and travelled onto various countries fund raising and on unknown activities. He also went to Sudan and remained there before being expelled around the same time as Bin Laden; in 1998 he issued a joint fatwa " World Islamic Front against Jews and Crusaders" (6). Stating the joint aims of Al Qaeda and Egyptian Islamic Jihad, In 1998 he returned to Afghanistan where he merged his group into Al Qaeda and was sentenced to death in absentia by Egypt in 1999 for his role in Egyptian Islamic Jihad's massacre in Luxor, Egypt in 1997. He remained in Afghanistan until the fall

of the Taliban where he is believed to have fled to the tribal border areas of Pakistan with Osama Bin Laden.

Al Qaeda was structured prior to 9/11 like a conventional military force with its headquarters run by Bin Laden, divided further into supply units, the various camps established in Afghanistan and the ground fighting units, linked into this was the media arms responsible for propaganda and publishing. Also part of this was its foreign operations wing of its sleeper cells in various countries ready for activating for operations, and its web of loose alliances

Al Qaeda pre 9/11 (7)

Following 9/11, Al Qaeda knowing that its traditional structure would be destroyed shifted to a decentralised horizontal structure where it retained its Shura council responsible for issuing edicts and decrees akin to the grand Ayatollah in Iran, becoming the name and the guide that others act for to further and achieve its goals, converting Al Qaeda into the Jihad itself. A media wing that would disseminate its propaganda and show its perceived success and the crimes it alleges have been committed by its enemies. It has possibly also retained remnants of its overseas operations with sleeper cells still possibly being in place in countries.

Al Qaeda post 9/11

Analysis, Strategy, Targets and Tactics

Al Qaeda's ideology of destruction in the name of saving and restoring Islam means that vital to its existence is a strong leadership, to issue edicts and enemies. It cannot function as an organisation with foot soldiers alone, its

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position has to be one of the name in which others aspire to Jihad for. For this reason it relies heavily on sermons and edicts by Bin Laden and Zawahiri being released to motivate its followers, it needs to radicalise them to such an extent even when foiled in an attack they go to prison as committed as ever to the cause.

Its strategy is one of causing mass casualties in the enemies heartlands to civilians preferably to create mass panic, loss of confidence in its governments, show the police and military unable to protect its citizens, cause economic collapse, and create a climate of permanent fear. Its denouncing as Apostates all who do not follow it, allows its operatives to kill Muslim and non Muslim alike while feeling justified and blessed by Allah.

Prior to 911, Al Qaeda had established itself as a jihad foreign legion, attracting the angry and disaffected of the Muslim world, and channelling their anger and discontent into a weapon. Since 911 it has had to attract, motivate and train followers by means of the internet and media, and relied more on its affiliates to deliver striking blows to its enemies, it has become an organisation that provides strategy, direction and targets and the justification for acting.

It has maintained a strategy of using suicide bombers as its most effective weapon both for the psychological impact on its enemies and the mass damage caused for little output, but also as it eliminates the possibility of its operative repenting or deserting and the bomber dies believing in Al Qaeda's goals.

Its tactics and targets are ones of mass civilian casualties and damage striking at the soft underbelly of its targets showing that no-one and nowhere is safe, travel networks, nightclubs, and areas of heavy congregation are its preferred targets. Its tactics are for multiple suicide bombers to target multiple locations, causing maximum loss and paralyzing the government and emergency services response.

Future

Al Qaeda knows it has a limited life span as with all groups, a new group that is more extreme, more successful will appear and take its mantle.

It will be forced to rely more on Jundullah, "Soldiers of Allah"(8), individual Muslims, who are self taught, self trained and self motivated to act autonomously to achieve its aims. This places a great reliance on getting the right message across and being able to radicalise successfully, it will also lead to what has been seen more amateurish, less damaging and more prone to failure operations.

It needs another 911 to confirm it is still the premier jihad group and to show it is not a spent force.

It is facing several challenges, if the Taliban turn to negotiations in Afghanistan it will have lost its spiritual home for little gain, the world's attention and efforts to prevent Pakistan from becoming a failed state mean that it is likely to lose its footholds and support in the border areas.

Likewise Iran is an ever present shadow on it, if it obtains nuclear weapons it will become the Islamic superpower and steal Al Qaeda's mantle.

Time is also not on its side both its leaders are elderly men if they are still alive? Unless younger newer figures begin emerging on the Shura, it risks like the hydra that loosing one head will not kill it but both may cause it to splinter and break.

It has made large inroads in West and East Africa and Yemen, with affiliated groups gaining ground in Niger, Mali and Mauritania and Somalia, if these groups managed to destabilize the regimes sufficiently it will again have found a sanctuary to reconstitute and reform to its previous level, unless it can establish these it faces a future of fading away on a history of failed attempts to repeat 911.