

The Virtual Sanctuary of Al-Qaeda and Terrorism in an Age of Globalisation

**By
Magnus Ranstorp**

The conjunction of 21st-century Internet speed and 12th-century fanaticism has turned our world into a tinderbox
- Tina Brown¹

The fusion of globalisation and terrorism in the 21st century created a new, adaptable and complex form of ‘networked’ asymmetric adversary. For al-Qaeda and its successor affiliates Internet has become not just a virtual sanctuary, where every dimension of the global jihad is taking place online. In many ways cyberspace has created a virtual university of jihad with advice available anytime to any militant. It was also more than a functional tool to enhance its communication, to promote its ideology, recruit, fundraise and even train. For al-Qaeda and its progeny, cyberspace constitutes a type of central nervous system as it remains critical to its viability in terms of structure and even more as a movement. Some have even argued that al-Qaeda has become the “first guerrilla movement in history to migrate from physical space to cyber space.”²

This virtual migration has opened up infinite and powerful avenues to project the Salafist jihadi narrative. In this virtual battlefield it is clear the militants have mastery of mechanisms to project this ‘single narrative’ in a way that carries enduring resonance and with a logic that thousands of Muslims find absolutely compelling. This allows it to regenerate and reconstitute endlessly and survive, flourish and expand in the real and virtual worlds. Some argue that this new form of “cyber-mobilisation” is “perpetuating a fractionation of violence, a return to individualised, mob-driven, and feudal forms of warfare.”³ Thomas Friedman argues that globalisation has led to the emergence of “super-empowered individuals”⁴ In this sense, these terrorist entities display a “global microstructural configuration...as structures of connectivity and integration are global in scope but microsociological in character.”⁵

Others scholars have focused on the ideational dimensions of what al-Qaeda represents and emphasise the normative environment. As Marc Lynch has argued “al-Qaeda’s constructivism derives both from structural factors – absence of a territorial base, a globalized field of

¹ Tina Brown, “Death by Error”, *Washington Post*, 19 May 2005 quoted in Bruce Hoffman, *The Use of the Internet By Islamist Extremists*, CT-262-1 (May 2006) Testimony presented to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence on May 4, 2006.

² Steve Coll and Susan B. Glasser, “Terrorists Turn to Web as Base of Operations”, *Washington Post*, August 7, 2005.

³ Audrey Kurth Cronin, “Cyber-Mobilization: The New *Levée en Masse*”, *Parameters* (Summer 2006): pp.77-87.

⁴ Thomas Friedman, *Longitudes and Attitudes: Exploring the World After September 11* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2002).

⁵ Karin Knorr Cetina, *op.cit.* (2005): p.215.

contention shaped by the new media and information technologies – and Islamist ideas themselves.”⁶ In this constructivist terrain, “strategic social construction – actions oriented towards shaping the background beliefs and norms of international politics – is at the core of al-Qaeda’s strategy.”⁷ Globalisation has enabled this transfiguration of local politics into the global instantaneously in what Ulrich Bech describes as “a non-linear, dialectic process in which the global and the local do not exist as cultural polarities but as combined and mutually implicating principles.”⁸

As Jarret Brachman has argued “al-Qaeda’s harnessing of technology has been a calculated strategic move – the goal being to catalyze awareness of the need for Muslims to “resist” and open new ways for them to participate in that resistance.”⁹ This chapter explores this strategic move and the full spectrum of interaction between violent “resistance” and cyberspace.

Understanding Globalisation and Terrorism

Al-Qaeda has been described by Francis Pisani as a “particularly complex organisation, halfway between a sect and a medieval military order. It is a network of networks.”¹⁰ The debate how al-Qaeda is best understood reveals the uncertainty whether it is an ideology; social movement; a dark network; “several networks or the network of networks?”¹¹ Some have argued that it is “more of an *ideal* or social movement that is replicated by relatively disconnected groups than a network of cells controlled by a “mother ship”.”¹²

In order for us to understand the durability and resilience of the polymorphic constellations of Salafist jihadist networks it may be useful to turn to David Ronfeldt’s analytical framework in which he advances that the strongest network rests on the integration across five levels: on the organisation level (their networked design); on doctrinal level (collaborative strategies); technological level (particularly information systems); social level (relationships that ensure loyalty and trust in closed systems); and on the narrative level.¹³ In fact, Ronfeldt argues that “the strongest networks will be those in which the organisational design is sustained by a winning story and a well-defined doctrine, and is all this is layered atop suitable communications systems and strong personal and social ties at the base.”¹⁴ The prevalence of personal relationships have been persuasively underscored by Marc Sageman’s work, arguing in his voluminous case-study of 400 al-Qaeda members that seventy percent were initially formed and shaped through close friendship and the remainder through family contacts or other such similar relationships.¹⁵ These social dimensions are difficult to penetrate but critical to understand.

⁶ Marc Lynch, “Al-Qaeda’s Constructivist Turn”, *Praeger Security International*,

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Beck, Ulrich (2002) ‘Cosmopolitanism and its Enemies’ Theory, Culture & Society Volume 19 (1-2) pp.17-44, p.17, Beck, Ulrich (2000) What is Globalization?, trans. Patrick Camiller Cambridge: Polity Press

⁹ Jarret M. Brachman, *op.cit.* (2006): p.158.

¹⁰ Francis Pisani, “How to fight the terror networks”, *Le Monde diplomatique*, June 2002.

¹¹ Presentation given by Brint Milward entitled: “Dark Networks as Organizational Problems” at the Cambridge Colloquium on Complexity and Social Networks, March 9, 2006.

¹² Steven R. Corman and Jill S. Schiefelbein, *Communication and Media Strategy of the Jihadi War of Ideas*, Report No.0601 (Arizona State University, April 20, 2006): p.4.

¹³ David Ronfeldt, “Foreword: Netwar Observations”, in Robert J. Bunker, *Non-State Threats and Future Wars*, (London: Frank Cass, 2003).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Marc Sageman, “Understanding Jihadi Networks”, *Strategic Insights* Vol.4, No.4 (April 2005).

Again David Ronfeldt forcefully argues that al-Qaeda and its affiliates represent a global tribe waging segmental warfare¹⁶ in whereby upholding codes of honour – respect, pride, trust, dignity, reciprocity and revenge are powerful tribal motifs that confer legitimacy to their violent action and as a powerful instrument of mobilisation to widen their social and popular appeal. These cultural themes are reoccurring across many different levels of Salafist jihadist propaganda and psychological warfare, offering a remarkably revealing window into the connectivity between past battles, contemporary realities and future missions. Often skilfully choreographed in cyberspace and in Arabic, this rich figurative symbolism evokes powerful passions from within Islamic history and culture. From using the Black Flag (*al-rawa*), the battle flag of the Prophet, and horses with riders (emphasising the human agency in jihad) and swords to using different colours within the Islamic tradition and the iconography of martyrdom are all skilfully designed to conjure up key salafiyya notions of jihad in early Islam and to stir the passions of the heart and mind of soldiers and potential sympathisers and recruits.¹⁷ In the mindset of Salafist jihadi adherents, 9/11 was a *ghazwah*, a raid following in the footsteps of the Prophets many raids as a warrior emir. The immediate connectivity between the sacred past and the present is at the very centre of the Salafist jihadi mindset.¹⁸ This cultural paradigm is critical to study and unlock in order to understand the inner landscape of jihad and Occidentalism.¹⁹ In many ways, one could liken al-Qaeda to a band of historic ghazi “constantly occupied with raiding the lands of the infidel...coming under his flag of ever increasing numbers of *gharibs* (rootless wanderers of various origins).”²⁰

Another cultural dimension that has remained unchanged by the forces of globalisation but is little understood is the *different conceptions of time and space* concerning the longevity and sacred nature of the jihadi mission or its direction. Based on extensive secret contacts and inner thoughts of al-Qaeda leaders and members, Fouad Hussein (a Jordanian journalist who spent time in prison with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi,) provides in his book *Al-Zarqawi – al-jil al-jadid lil-Qa’idah* (Qaeda’s Second Generation) a unique synthesis of the disparate elements making up what is essentially al-Qaeda’s grand strategy. In essence, Hussein argues that al-Qaeda views its struggle as a long-term war with seven distinct phases that are going to last at least until the year 2020:

- Phase one is the “awakening” in the consciousness of Muslims worldwide following the September 11, 2001, suicide attacks to the fall of Baghdad in 2003. The aim of the attacks was multifaceted. First and foremost the attacks were designed to provoke the US into declaring war on the Islamic world in order to “awaken” Muslims everywhere. The radical Salafist jihadi message would reverberate across the globe creating the conditions for mobilising a new generation of radicals.
- Phase two is known as “Opening Eyes”, which began in the autumn 2003 and lasting until 2006. The underlying aim is for the terrorists to make the “Western conspiracy” aware of the “Islamic community” and where al-Qaeda transforms from an organisation to a movement. Iraq constitutes the epicentre for the jihad and for global

¹⁶ David Ronfeldt, “Al Qaeda and Its Affiliates: A Global Tribe Waging Segmented Warfare?”, *First Monday* Vol.10, No.3 (March 2005).

¹⁷ For an excellent overview, see: www.ctc.usma.edu/imagery.asp

¹⁸ See: Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol.29 (2006): pp.207-239.

¹⁹ Faisal Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad* (London: Hurst, 2005). Also see: Xavier Raufer, “Al Qaeda: A Different Diagnosis”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol.26 (2003): pp.391-398.

²⁰ Michael Vlahos, *Terror’s Mask: Insurgency Within Islam* (John Hopkins University: Applied Physics Laboratory (May 2002): p.13.

operations while it continues to mould secret battalions ready for battle and bases across the Arab world.

- Phase three, “Arising and Standing Up”, should last from 2007 to 2010, with a focus on attacks against Turkey and the arch-enemy Israel and neighbouring Jordan. The focus on attacking Israel is designed to increase the legitimacy of the movement. It is also believed there will be a focus on Syria.
- Phase four, lasting between 2010 and 2013, will see the downfall and even collapse of hated, corrupt and ‘godless’ Arab regimes. The weakening of these Arab regimes will only strengthen the support for the movement. A primary focus will be on attacking oil suppliers and the US economy will be targeted using cyber terrorism.
- Phase five will be the point at which an Islamic state, or caliphate, can be declared – between 2013 and 2016. This will become possible as Western influence in the region is significantly reduced with Israel weakened. The Salafist jihadi resistance will not be feared anymore and the new situation is the beginning of a new world order.
- Phase six, from 2016 on, will be a period of “total confrontation”. As soon as the caliphate has been declared, the “Islamic army” will instigate the “fight between the believers and the non-believers” which has been often prophesied by al-Qaeda’s leader, Osama Bin-Laden.
- Phase seven, the final stage, is described as “definitive victory” because the rest of the world is worn down by and cannot resist the will of one-and-a-half billion Muslims.²¹

The synthesis of these different strands provides a useful window into the multi-strand and often parallel priorities pursued by those mobilised by the global revolutionary flag of al-Qaedaism. In some ways it crystallises the different instrumental dimensions of terrorism. As underscored by Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, the Chief of External Operations within al-Qaeda and the principal architect of 9/11, in the written submission of evidence at the Zuhairi Moussaoui trial, the initial purpose of the attack on the Twin Towers was to ‘wake the American people up’.²² It was also meant to create a massive American overreaction through which the powerbase of Islamist extremists could create a momentum with a self-feeding mechanism and replication power.

All these different phases are strictly not meant to be a sequential blueprint for action but they reveal overlapping directives and areas of priority and concentration for subversive violent action. Collectively they also reveal the competing different centres of gravity within Salafist jihadi ideological circles. These differences appear either in their ideological discourse or based on geographic considerations that sharply focus where and against whom violence should be directed. At its core this divergent issue reveals the internal debates whether to focus in the violence against the ‘near’ or ‘far’ enemy. This division of labour has always been the object of debate since Abdallah Azzam, one of the chief ideologues behind al-Qaeda, advanced the idea of *ribat*, the necessity of ‘enlightened’ jihadists to place themselves directly as a spearhead in defence of Muslims under siege. Answering the call for action was a sizeable contingent of foreign mujahedeen fighters flocking from principally Afghanistan and the Arabian Peninsula towards defending Muslims in the Balkan conflict in the early 1990’s.²³ Some of these fighters joined the call to battle, *Ilhaq bi-l-qafila (Join the Caravan)* to

²¹ Allan Hall, “Al-Qaeda chiefs reveal world domination design”, *The Age*, 24 August 2005; Yassin Musharbash, “What al-Qaida Really Wants”, *Spiegel online*, August 12, 2005.

²² “Substitution For The Testimony of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed”, Defendant’s Exhibit 941 U.S. v. Moussaoui Cr. No. 01-455-A

²³ For an excellent overview, see: Evan Kohlmann, *Al-Qaida’s Jihad in Europe* (London: Berg Publishers, 2004).

martyrdom while others committed 'war crimes.' Many moved periodically between regional conflicts from Bosnia and Kashmir to Chechnya and of course Afghanistan. These regional conflicts crystallised the spirit of a Salafist jihadi vanguard that would later become al-Qaeda. It did, however, constitute a heterogeneous ideology as it contained a number of "intellectual substreams with various priorities."²⁴ As globalisation intensified the local became instantaneously global, providing news of any local Muslim issue in any remote region of the world. This 'cyber-umma' is constantly in evolution and developing in all directions. It is supplemented at its base by more traditional modes of physical interaction spreading ideas, new doctrines and contacts. In particular, the role of the hajj to Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia can be considered the 'mothership' of the networking of Muslims worldwide as ideas and virtual networks spread and replicate, cross-fertilise and intensify. For the Islamist extremists, moving constantly between these spheres of virtual and physical interaction provides a high degree of interoperability and survivability in hostile environments.

Fouad Hussein's synthesis of al-Qaeda's plan for the future reveals not only different spatial dimensions in terms of the concept of time. It also manifests itself in the form of organisation. Unlike the West's proclivity to categorise and create sharply delineated boundaries and hierarchies to achieve structure and order, the creation of al-Qaeda represented not only a 'solid base' but a norm, a principle to follow. As underscored by Abdallah Azzam, "every principle needs a vanguard to carry it forward...this vanguard constitutes *al-qaeda al-sulbah* for the expected society." This formlessness was emphasised by Khalid Sheikh Mohammad: "you must study these matters to know the huge difference between the Western mentality in administration and the eastern mentality, specifically at al-Qaeda."²⁵ The difference is also reinforced by the evolution of the revolutionary intellectual contributions by various Salafist jihadi strategists, most notably Abu Musab al-Suri and his 1,600-page treatise *Da'wat al-muqawamah al-islamiyyah al-'alamiyyah* (The Call for an International Islamic Resistance). In this work, al-Suri emphasised the slogan *nizam, la tanzim, 'System, not organisation.'* As perceptively argued by Brynjar Lia, this slogan meant "there should be an "operative system" or template, available anywhere for anybody, wishing to participate in the global jihad either on his own or with a small group of trusted associates, and there should not exist any 'organisation for operations.'"²⁶ In essence, argued al-Suri, these independent and self-resurrecting cells would only be glued together by "a common aim, a common doctrinal program and a comprehensive (self-) educational program."²⁷ This individualised and autonomous terrorism revolves around total self-reliance and self-finance for security and "relies on a total de-territorialisation of jihadist warfare" with the entire globe as the theatre of war.²⁸ As underscored by Ubeid al-Qurashi, one of Bin Laden's lieutenants, al-Qaeda had embraced so-called 4th generation warfare²⁹ as these wars it was argued would, tactically, be small-scale, emerging in various regions across the planet against an enemy that, like a ghost, appears and disappears. This de-territorialisation of jihadi warfare with the principle of atomisation and self-initiation of terrorist cells do follow some forms of order and structured

²⁴ Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer, "Jihadi Strategic Studies: The Alleged Al Qaida Policy Study Preceding the Madrid Bombings", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 27 (2004): pp.355-375.

²⁵ "Substitution For The Testimony of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed", Defendant's Exhibit 941 U.S. v. Moussaoui Cr. No. 01-455-A p.55.

²⁶ Brynjar Lia, *The al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri: A Profile* (Working Paper) (unpublished paper presented at a OMS-Seminar in Oslo, Norway), 15 March 2006.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*: p.16.

²⁹ Abu Ubeid al-Qurashi, "Fourth Generation Wars", *Al Ansar: For The Struggle Against The Crusader War*. February 2003.

pattern. As highlighted by a Dutch Interior Ministry report, new jihadist networks differed from traditional ones in that the new network:

“Lacks a formal (hierarchical) structure, and has an informal, flexible membership and fluctuating leadership. It is incorrect, however, to conclude that such a network possess no structure whatsoever. There is always a pattern of connections between individuals who communicate with one another with a view to achieve a common goal. In some cases these communication lines converge in one or more core groups, which thus play a coordinating and controlling role. In other cases there are random communication patterns between all members while the network functions practically without leadership or central control. It is also possible for several groups to be active within one network.”³⁰

As argued by Ronfeldt, the durability and strength of these networks relies on the close integration across five levels with a well-functioning communication system providing the essential glue for an effective projection capability of the narrative (or directives). Within this context, globalisation and the revolution in information technologies have provided infinite number of new avenues to explore and exploit for the Salafist jihadi autonomous cells. Cyberspace has provided full-spectrum capability to a degree that is almost limitless. It is abundantly clear they have been quick to absorb these new technologies as they greatly expand the range of their operational and structural capabilities. They have also clearly showed the knowledge and determination to exploit these capabilities innovatively to enhance and protect their command and control within and between cell structures. This innovation is not just driven by their command of technology but sometimes by its intelligent simplicity in design or process. Predetermined coded messages between cell members are often transmitted through ancient personal messenger methods the closer a complex operation moves towards execution. For example, this simplicity was revealed by Khalid Sheikh Mohammad who stated that “I conducted the September 11 operation by submitting only oral reports. I would travel for a day-and-a-half until I reach Bin-Laden, and I inform him what was happening... (the) operation could be run successfully with simple primitive means.”³¹ At the same time, the emir of the operation, Muhammad Atta, did provide the initiation code of launching the 9/11 attack three weeks before the operation using an e-mail message to Ramzi bin al-Shib, the go-between to al-Qaeda’s operational command: “The Semester begins in three more weeks. We’ve obtained 19 confirmations for studies in the faculty of law, the faculty of urban planning, the faculty of fine arts, and the faculty of engineering.”³²

The infinite variations, mixing advanced and simple low or no-tech methods, create an impressive spectrum of choices. In many ways, al-Qaeda has recognised and exploited, along with other terrorist organisations, the infinite advantages that cyber space/sphere can offer in significantly enhancing their own offensive capability in terms of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) as well as their defensive capability in terms of command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence (C4I).

Adopting a multi-dimensional cyber approach, combined with creative new communication technologies, allows operational agility and stealth mode far in excess of what was possible

³⁰ *Violent Jihad in the Netherlands: Current Trends in Islamist Terrorist Threats*, Ministry of the Interior, the Netherlands, November 2005: p.13.

³¹ “Substitution For The Testimony of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed”, Defendant’s Exhibit 941U.S. v. Moussaoui Cr. No. 01-455-A

³² Yosri Fuda and Nick Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror* (London: Mainstream Publishing, 2003): p.140.

previously for terrorist organisations. It facilitates a polymorphic structure or design with multiplicity of nodes or pods swarming towards a mission or resurrecting shortly before or after an operation. More fundamentally it allows survivability through a constant virtual presence with no real or tangible physical centres of gravity and in constant stealth mode and ideological motion. Having simply an online presence confers a certain degree of legitimacy which they otherwise would not have. It also allows them to resurrect and reconfigure at any time.

In many ways, the virtual world has become the principal vehicle through which terrorist organisations communicate with their own clandestine members, reach a broad audience of real and potential sympathisers, publish propaganda and wage a skilful auxiliary psychological warfare campaign to amplify violence on the ground. Nowhere is this most starkly illustrated than their determination to invoke moral shock through videotaped brutal beheadings of hostages in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many of these shocking videos appear in extremist chat-rooms and websites available for anyone to access. The empowerment of the terrorist to create and distribute news themselves is evident in the explosion of Salafist jihadi websites, from below twenty before 9/11 to over 5,000 websites providing ideological tracts, discussion forums, weblogs and videos.³³

The increase in the number of Salafist jihadi websites is only indicative of the fact that the cyber environments provide almost infinite tactical and strategic operational advantages. The Internet has become one of the principal means by which terrorists publish propaganda; proselytise, indoctrinate followers; recruit new members; communicate, train; engage in information gathering and reconnaissance; raise funds and other material resources; transfer funds; plan operations; and engage in information attacks on enemy websites or other critical information infrastructure.

1. Publishing propaganda and proselytising in cyberspace

Cyberspace has emerged as a principal arena for spreading Salafist jihadi ideology targeting internal and external audiences. Maintained by thousands of dedicated IT-literate activists, the jihadist internet infrastructure is exploding in terms of size, scope and sophistication.³⁴ In many ways the cyberspace are becoming a readily accessible digital library, an endless reservoir which contains a vast variety of religio-ideological tracts and texts; fatwas and khutbas (sermons) providing militant theological justification for undertaking violent actions. This virtual domain simultaneously expands and de-territorializes the social interactions between the local and global jihadist milieus. Ideological doctrines, derived and synthesised from Sayyid Qutb, Saudi neo-Tawhid, Azzam, al-Maqdisi³⁵ and other contemporary Salafist jihadi sources and strategic thinkers, contribute to sharpening the internal ideological debate over the nature and direction of the sacred mission. Thomas Hegghammer has identified five principal categories that exert and shape the ideological tendencies and the direction of the mission: the leadership of the 'old' al-Qaeda (providing purpose for taking up arms against Crusaders); the religious scholars or 'jihadi shaykhs' (issuing fatwas and clarifying religious legitimacy of behaviour); strategic thinkers (offering

³³ Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute for Peace, 2005).

³⁴ See: Brynjar Lia, "Al-Qaeda online: understanding jihadist internet infrastructure", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, (January 2006).

³⁵ For an excellent biographical sketch of Maqdisi and his influence and disagreement with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, see: Steven Brookes, "The Preacher and the Jihadi", in Fradkin; Haqqani; Brown (eds), *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology, Vol.1* (Washington, DC: Hudson Institute, 2005): pp.52-66.

advice how to best fight the enemy through doctrines and paramilitary manuals); the active militant organisations (publishing their own texts and justifications for violence); and so-called ‘grassroots’ (radicals participating anonymously on radical Islamist discussion forums).³⁶ A unifying factor across all these levels is that most of this material is published and distributed on the Internet in various forms. In essence, these diverse Salafist jihadi contributors from around the globe participate in a collective “global brainstorming” how to achieve the desired effects through various action.³⁷

Often these website contributions “keep ideological pace with breaking events.”³⁸ In this sphere, *al-Qa’ida fi Jazirat al-‘Arabiyya* (al-Qaeda forces in the Arabian peninsula)³⁹ has been particularly active, from establishing on-line magazines dealing doctrinal or military instructions such as bi-weekly *Sawt al-Jihad* (Voice of Jihad), *Muaskar al-Battar* (the Al-Battar Military Camp, the name of the Prophet Muhammad’s sword) and *al-Neda* who carry directives and interpretations by al-Qaeda-affiliated Centre for Islamic Studies and Research.

A large portion of *Sawt al-Jihad* is dedicated to doctrinal issues and the religious justifications for waging offensive jihad and the numerous supporting *fatwas* supporting violence itself.⁴⁰ There are also many first-hand jihadi battlefield accounts alongside portraits and wills of killed martyrs as well as interviews with fighters living on the run in the underground. They also demonstrate the zeal and heroism of young fighters. Many of those working “in the service” of al-Qaeda utilised “authorised” web sites in Arabic (rather than English sites that were primarily of propaganda value) to communicate internally within and between operational and sympathetic members. A case in hand is the establishment of the Yemeni-wing of al-Qaeda website: “You ask and the jihadi base in Yemen answers”, established to counter rumours about arrests of members and to address broader queries of the jihadists.⁴¹ An important Saudi-maintained website in this respect was one devoted to publishing a book on how to assist the mujahedin who are hunted down by the security organs in Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Afghanistan. Published by At-Tibyān Publications and entitled “39 ways for serving jihad and the mujahedin”, the book calls for adopting various means of publicising the “mujahedin news” through Internet chatrooms and forums as well as printing and photocopying the news from websites for broader distribution, including relatives and friends; in mosques and public places and even through text-messaging.⁴² Many of these websites are no longer just in Arabic in order to reach a new generation of sympathisers and recruits living in the West.

Closely associated to *Sawt al-Jihad*, a new publication surfaced in August 2004 dedicated solely to the female jihadists, *al-Khansa*, named after a famous woman poet who eulogised martyrs in the early days of Islam. Published by the Women’s Media Bureau in the Arabian Peninsula, *Al-Khansa* focused on practical ways women married to radical Islamists could provide support, especially when they faced pressure from the authorities, and how they should raise their children to become martyrs. Similarly *Muaskar al-Battar* offered the

³⁶ Thomas Hegghammer, “Global Jihadism After the Iraq War”, *Middle East Journal*, Vol.60, No.1 (Winter 2006): pp.11-32.

³⁷ *Ibid.*: p29.

³⁸ Stephen Ulph, “Al-Qaeda’s Ideological Hemorrhage”, *Terrorism Focus*, Vol.1, Issue 2 (August 20, 2004).

³⁹ For further information about the Saudi dimension, see: Roel Meijer, “Jihadi Opposition in Saudi Arabia”, *ISIM Review*, Vol.15 (Spring 2005).

⁴⁰ *Sawt al-Jihad* was allegedly edited by Abd-al-Aziz Bin-Rashid al-Tuwayli’I (under various disguises) until his arrest in May 2005. See: *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, April 26, 2006.

⁴¹ “Al-Qa’ida Yemeni Branch Opens Chat Channel For Members”, *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, October 24, 2003.

⁴² “Pro-Qa’ida Website Publishes Book On ‘Ways For Serving Jihad’”, *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, August 14, 2003.

provision of a practical jihad culture to a new generation of youths through paramilitary guidance from the comforts of their homes. As stated in the first issue of *Muaskar al-Battar*: “Oh Mujahid (holy warrior) brother, in order to join the great training camps you don’t have to travel to other lands... Alone, in your home or with a group of your brothers, you too can begin to execute the training program.”

Another important website was al-Qaida’s official site *Al-Neda* maintained by the late Sheikh Yusuf Bin-Salih al-Ayiri, listed by Saudi Arabia’s list of 19 wanted persons in connection with the 12 May Riyadh terrorist attacks and who was killed in a clash on 31 May 2003. Sheikh al-Ayiri remains one of the most influential ideologues over the Salafist jihadi trends (especially in connection with Saudi Arabia and Iraq) and authored around 40 books all published on the Internet.⁴³ “Under the shadows of spears” series written by Sulayman Abu-Ghayth, this web-site carried the news releases of Usama Bin-Laden for a couple of months. Al-Ayiri communicated regularly with Bin Laden in Afghanistan using a lap top and was the main coordinator between members in Pakistan, Iran and the Arabian Peninsula.⁴⁴ In Al-Ayiri’s possession when he died was four identity cards, a fake drivers licence, a Magellan GPS system, a mobile phone with multiple SIM cards and a large amount of money.⁴⁵ The capture of this website forced al-Qaeda-affiliated members to establish alternative ones, registering these on-line by e-mail and using fake credit cards for the server fees.

This specific capture of *Al-Neda* provided the crucial lesson for these jihadis that fixed Internet sites were exceptionally vulnerable as instead they turned more nomadic to “rapidly proliferating jihadist bulletin boards and Internet sites that offered free upload services where files could be stored.”⁴⁶ This nomadic virtual sanctuary points towards a dynamic and multilayered infrastructure of diverse functions flourishing globally. Brynjar Lia has categorised these interrelated functions as: the key nodes or ‘mother sites’; the distributors (who copy and upload jihadist material on new sites); and the ‘producers’ (reproducing raw material in sleeker form).⁴⁷ As such, these websites constantly move their URLs and change addresses and even embedding themselves within other websites to avoid detection. A recent example of this hijack was the discovery of hidden files of Abu Musab al-Suri’s 1,600-word *The International Islamic Resistance Call* behind a password-protected U.S.-based crafts website allowing extremists to avoid using “traceable data needed to start a new website.”⁴⁸

Other websites and discussion forums contain key strategic texts by Salafist jihadi providing essential leadership and military principles alongside a longer-term vision. E-books are posted on various forums as exemplified by a 415-page book authored by Bassam Assili and found on the *al-Firdaws* (Paradise) forum outlining the essential strategic cornerstones for success and leadership in the paramilitary arena and even stressing the necessity of having a sea presence.⁴⁹

⁴³ For a useful overview of the different ideological currents, see: Reuven Paz, “The Impact of the War in Iraq On the Global Jihad”, in Fradkin; Haqqani; Brown (eds), *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology, Vol.1* (Washington, DC: Hudson Institute, 2005): pp.39-50.

⁴⁴ “Fundamentalists: Al-Ayiri was in charge of ‘Al-Neda’ Internet web site, Al-Qa’idah’s mouthpiece”, *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, June 4, 2003.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Steve Coll and Susan B. Glasser, “Terrorists Turn to the Web as Base of Operations”, *Washington Post*, August 7, 2005.

⁴⁷ Brynjar Lia (2006), *op.cit.*: p.17.

⁴⁸ Michael Levenson, “Crafts website hacked by terrorists”, *Boston Globe*, May 7, 2006.

⁴⁹ This book contained the e-mail address ZUBEIDDAH1417@hotmail.com on the front cover.

Among the most influential strategic texts distributed over the Internet is the 113-page e-book entitled: *Idarat al-Tawahhush* (Managing Savagery), authored by Abu Bakr Naji who is an influential contributor to *Sawt al-Jihad*. Published by the al-Qaeda-affiliated Center for Islamic Studies and Research, the ten-chapter long *Managing Savagery – The Most Crucial Period to Be Faced by the Nation* maps out a series of progressive stages towards empowerment and identifies suitable targets to direct violent attacks against to create disorder, beginning with key targeted regimes and eventually spreading worldwide. The name itself refers to the period of “savage chaos” that appears following the collapse of a superpower or an enemy regional state. Abu Bakr Naji argues that the initial focus should be on key group of targeted states: Saudi Arabia; Northwest Africa; Nigeria; Pakistan; Jordan; and Yemen, before applying the plan worldwide.

This “path towards empowerment” revolves around three distinct phases. Firstly, the “Disruption and Exhaustion” phase is principally geared towards the dual goal of exhausting the enemy worldwide while attracting supporters and converts. It is argued that this phase is achieved by creating maximum security disarray worldwide by disparate and uncoordinated attacks by jihadist groups. These types of attacks will also attract the jihadi youth to join the ranks. Secondly, “The Management of Barbarism” phase refers to the control and management of the anarchy ensuing after the first phase. This phase is built around the mechanics of re-Islamisation and in providing governance in all spheres of public life (security; social welfare; legal system based on Sharia; education; intelligence; foreign relations, etc) in an overall effort to establish an Islamic state. Lastly, Abu Bakr Naji presents the third phase, “Empowerment”, which focuses on extending “Management” by continued disruption and exhaustion attacks against the West and Israel worldwide, forming logistical lines between liberated territories under “Management.” Furthermore he favours targeting tourist and oil facilities focusing in on the tremendous value and effect of economic targeting. This last phase does, however, require a well-developed and sophisticated media and propaganda strategy for its success, specifically geared towards attracting military officers towards the joining the jihadi ranks.

The abrupt disappearance of *Muaskar al-Battar* after 22 issues in November 2004 and *Sawt al-Jihad* after 29 issues in April 2005 can probably be attributed to an accelerated Saudi security success on the ground within the Kingdom. It is also largely due to the fact that the Iraqi conflict has become the principal ideological vortex of Salafist jihadi currents and spawns a number of important web-based publications which are used to legitimate the intensity and direction of the insurgency tactics. A major new jihadi magazine and successor to *Sawt al-Jihad* has become *Dhurwat al-Sanam*, (the highest or most virtuous belief/insight) providing critical ideological and doctrinal guidance motivating violence, especially focusing on the Iraqi theatre.⁵⁰ All focus is not on Iraq as a new successor publication appeared in May 2006 dealing with the Arabian Peninsula. *Ansar al-Mujahideen fi Bilad al-Haramain (the Supporters of Mujahideen in the Land of the Two Holy Places)* provides standard doctrinaire ideological and political content. The authors do provide counter-surveillance security advice using the Internet and recognise that it offers invaluable avenues when pressured. As stated by the first published issue: “the governments have coiled around the field of *Dawa* and Jihad and have narrowed the trenches that can be used. But God has opened a new, great, and hugely valuable door, and that is the Internet.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ See: Robert F. Worth, “Insurgents Adopting Defence Tone”, *New York Times*, March 13, 2005.

⁵¹ *TRC TWW Report*, May 19, 2006 ed.2 vol.20: p.5.

This plethora of Salafist jihadi publications was complemented by the *As-Sahab Foundation for Islamic Media Publication*, a clandestine in-house media/video production company affiliated to al-Qaeda and based somewhere in Afghanistan/Pakistan, that periodically released communiqués and threats by Bin-Laden and Zawahiri; choreographed testimonies of the 19 hijackers in the 9/11 attacks as well as a range of statements by jihadis on the run or “martyred heroes.” These videos appeared in hard-copy distributed to *al-Jazeera* or on the *As-Sahab* website. Perhaps among the most surprising appearances was the *As-Sahab* video release of the principal ringleader behind the 7/7 London bombings, Muhammad Siddique Khan, especially as the investigation pointed to the cell’s autonomy from outside external direction.

Another recent media development is the advent of Internet streaming video news programs, most notably *Sawt al-Khilafah (Voice of the Caliphate)*, which provides a 15-minute news roundup covering various conflict zones with Mujahideen successes. This new web-cast method allows the extremists to bypass mainstream media outlets to shape more effectively their anti-Western and anti-Zionist ideological messages. It also allows them to act directly as a counterweight to Western propaganda efforts.⁵² In its inaugural broadcast *Sawt al-Khilafah* even veiled itself as charity organisation, urging supporters to boycott support for the victims of the Katrina hurricane and instead “pay more attention to the victims of famine in the Muslim parts of Niger.”⁵³

The literal explosion of the growing number of web-based messages, articles, and videotaped lectures is dramatically expanding the scope of internal and external audiences and affecting violent radicalisation locally, linking instantaneously the global with the local. While much new material is appearing daily in an uncontrollable fashion, a variety of Internet discussion forums, message boards and websites are busy circulating old materials from recent years to instil a culture of Salafist-jihad martyrdom to a new generation of potential activists. Along several battlefronts, this exclusionary ideological force has skilfully established “new ‘command headquarters’ on the Internet to spread fear among its adversaries and boost its men’s morale.”⁵⁴

2. Radicalisation and Recruitment

The proliferation of extremist literature and doctrines in a new digital frontier has reshaped the social spaces and boundaries for interaction linking simultaneously terrorist strategists and recruiters with their sympathiser and potential recruits as well as the enemy audience. As Brynjar Lia perceptively argues, “online jihadism brings geographically scattered and isolated militants together in virtual transnational extremist communities that bind the global jihadist movements together.”⁵⁵ The Dutch security and intelligence service, *AIVD*, identified early the growing trend of so-called ‘self-radicalisation’ or ‘*autonomous radicalisation*’ among Muslim youths occurring increasingly through the virtual world which increases the “risk of ideological ghettoisation.”⁵⁶ These autonomous radicalisation processes, combined with *deculturalisation* (alienation of individuals trapped between two cultures) provide for the

⁵² Yassin Musharbash, “Terror Television: Al Qaida Launches a Weekly News Show”, *Der Spiegel online*, October 7, 2005.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Habib Trabelsi, “Al Qaeda takes jihad to media four years after 9/11”, *Middle East online*, September 9, 2005.

⁵⁵ Brynjar Lia, *op.cit.* (2006): p.17.

⁵⁶ *Violent Jihad in the Netherlands: Current trends in the Islamist terrorist threat*, AIVD, Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, The Netherlands (March 2006).

susceptibility to more radical, dialectic and emotionally appealing ideological force projected by a cadre of Salafist jihadi scholars.⁵⁷ Through web-based interaction, radical youths can identify with, connect to, and emotionally share the intensity of suffering of fellow Muslim victims and the cause of the Mujahideen around the globe. The importance of these virtual platforms has not been lost on al-Qaeda-affiliated strategists:

“We should direct some of these efforts to other targets that could serve another goal, namely to promote the glory of the Muslims, especially the youth, who are swimming in the oceans of pleasures and lust. Those youth are in fact unused petrol, while many efforts are dedicated to confront those clerics who are selling their minds to the dictatorships, and who are useless too. These moral attacks would leave in the souls of the defeated youth a tremendous impact. Many idle youngsters were motivated to join the Jihad by a photo or a video such as of the USS Cole, or Badr al-Riyadh, or by watching the crash of the planes into the high buildings. Those youngsters, even though they were not fully aware of the impact of the attacks upon them, turned their minds and bodies towards the Jihad. Here comes the role of indoctrination and developing the thinking of these people. It is a mistake to leave these youngsters with their superficial understanding of the nature of the war. Whoever listens to the calls of Osama bin Laden senses in his words his care for the indoctrination of the supporters of the Jihadi current, like for example in the Gulf States, in order to target the oil fields. The Sheikh, I think, could direct the Mujahidin by personal messages. Yet, he wanted to do it in public, in order that the crowds of people, who wait for the speeches of the Sheikh through the TV channels or the Internet, would internalize his targets and follow them.”⁵⁸

Professionally choreographed video productions create a blurring effect between the real and virtual worlds, producing an artificial high degree of intimacy with the battlefield. It can also contribute towards moral disengagement, gradually breaking down any inhibitions to use violence for new recruited members. As underscored by Scott Atran, “the semi-anonymity of Internet communication, which lessen the compulsion to hedge and defend oneself, promotes self-disclosure and facilitates disregard of contextual differences that might otherwise distract from or hinder communication.”⁵⁹ It even allows for anonymous women participation in an otherwise exclusive male-oriented activity. Direct female activism via the Internet surfaced in connection to the Dutch Hofstad-network, where women participated in radicalisation and recruitment efforts. David Cook has argued that there are visible signs that some Salafist jihadi authorities is trying to legitimise active women participation in the actual fighting.⁶⁰

The virtual world of Salafist jihadi extremism provides a perfect medium to understand the world around them for some alienated Muslim youths. As Peter Mandaville has observed: “more than anything else the Internet and other forms of information technologies provide spaces where Muslims, who often find themselves to be a marginalized or extreme minority group in many western communities, can go in order to find others ‘like them.’”⁶¹ This virtual world is also perfectly suitable for the self-anointed Salafist jihadi religious authorities that

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Al-Faruq* website quoted in Reuven Paz, “Rakan ben Williams: The Next Generation of Jihadists in Europe”, *PRISM Occasional Papers*, Vol.3, No.8 (November 2005): p.4.

⁵⁹ Scott Atran, “Commentary: A Failure of Imagination (Intelligence, WMDs, and “Virtual Jihad”)", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* Vol.29 (2006): pp.293.

⁶⁰ See: David Cook, “Women Fighting in Jihad?”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol.28 (2005): pp.375-384.

⁶¹ Peter Mandaville, “Reimagining Islam in Diaspora”, *Gazette*, Vol.63, Nos.2-3 (2001): p.183.

bridge time and space; that combine religious dogma with contemporary political realities to appeal to their audiences and to compensate for a lack of traditional or prestige filled clerical education. In the words of Oliver Roy, these are “Islamist new intellectuals” that is “a tinkerer; he creates a montage, as his personal itinerary guides him, of segments of knowledge, using methods that come from a different conceptual universe that the segments he recombines, creating a totality that is more imaginary than theoretical.”⁶²

The mechanisms or processes of violent radicalisation in the virtual sphere do not substantively differ from those occurring in the radical mosque; garage mosque (informal study-groups) or prison environments. The Internet has revolutionised collective actor’s ability to create as well as frame new opportunities for mobilisation of contentious politics “as it offers a diverse menu of options to those seeking new channels of protest.”⁶³ Here social movement theory (SMT) is particularly useful to explain the processes and framing strategies underpinning the role of charismatic leadership and authority struggles within Salafist jihadi circles. As Wiktorowicz reminds us “a movement group – a faction, clique, submovement, network cluster, organization, etc. – asserts its authority to speak on behalf of an issue or constituency by emphasising the perceived knowledge, character, and logic of its popular intellectuals while attacking those of rivals.”⁶⁴ Moreover, he provides a convincing theoretical pathway as to the processes that explain the attraction of the ideology and specific factors enabling engagement: through cognitive openings; religious seeking; and constructing sacred authority.⁶⁵ Within the context of creating cognitive openings, he emphasises the importance of catalysts inducing a sense of moral shock or crisis to create receptivity for influence and for frame manipulation.

Cyberspace is an ideal vehicle for creating a wide range of intensely emotional and powerful visual messages to prospective recruits and current fighters. The real world influence of clandestine face-to-face contact in a backroom of a mosque with emotionally stirring stories and videos from the battlefield have been replaced with professionally edited CD-roms, websites and discussion boards filled with thousands of clips of Muslim massacres and suffering in Bosnia, Chechnya, Iraq and elsewhere that is stark and overpowering in content and form leaving no one exposed unaffected. As recognised by Cetina, “the information transmitted between Al Qaeda participants is not only cognitive or symbolic in nature, but has strong sensory and motivating components.”⁶⁶ Essentially the virtual-based Salafist jihadi ideological currents demonstrate a built-in capacity to achieve “frame resonance”, where ideology is “always balanced by factors such as the political and cultural environment and resource mobilization and leadership.”⁶⁷ Additionally, this “frame resonance” is facilitated by the doctrine known as *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’* (loyalty or fealty and disloyalty or disassociation) whose polarity enables the extremists to maintain control over the definition of being authentic or true Muslim.⁶⁸

⁶² Oliver Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994): pp.96-7.

⁶³ Jeffrey M. Ayres, “From the Streets to the Internet: The Cyber-Diffusion of Contention”, *AAPSS*, Vol.566 (November 1999): p.137.

⁶⁴ Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Framing Jihad: Intramovement Framing Contests and al-Qaeda’s Struggle for Sacred Authority”, *International Review of Social History*, Vol.49 (2004): pp.159-177.

⁶⁵ Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

⁶⁶ Karin Knorr Cetina, “Complex Global Microstructures: The New Terrorist Societies”, *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol.22, No.5 (2005): p.223-4.

⁶⁷ Roel Meijer, “Review Essay – Taking the Islamist Movement Seriously: Social Movement Theory and the Islamist Movement”, *IRSH*, Vol.50 (2005): p.282.

⁶⁸ See: David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 2005): pp.141.

The Internet has also empowered the activist in terms of reaching new audiences worldwide in an instant and in anonymous mode. It has also generated new spatial forms of interaction between the recruiters and the targets as well as potential sympathisers. It has allowed for asynchronous communication between the centre and periphery; between activists and sympathisers. In other forums it has promoted immediate synchronicity and efficiency in securely communicating through encryption or password protected channels. In essence it has provided infinite recruitment possibilities and configurations as well as interactive channels to distribute their ideas and calls for action. Heroism, martyrdom and the historic mission and vanguard role of the *Mujahideen* are skilfully choreographed for maximum effect and cascades across the web.

Chat forums and weblogs (*Muntadayat*) have exponentially revolutionised the scope of actual and potential audiences and forms of interaction. For example, one of the most popular jihadist forums, *al-Hesbah*, (www.alhesbah.org/) had almost 60,000 postings under the sub-forum for communiqués (archives for different communiqués) with a couple of million visitors according to the webpage count.⁶⁹ This forum facilitates fluidity in communication, provides panoply of multi-layered screening processes against infiltration and reduces vulnerability against the potential shutdown of official, static websites. These blogs have also resulted in a highly specialised fusion of Arabic and extremist phraseology with computer lingo, greatly complicating intelligence efforts to effectively penetrate and participate in these jihadist forums.

3. Enhancing Command, Control and Communication

Al-Qaeda and other Salafist jihadi-affiliates have shown a remarkable degree of ingenuity in recognising the operational advantages of interfacing with new information technologies. They have shown quick adaptability in absorbing cutting-edge solutions and the latest gadgets while integrating them into their command, control and communication repertoires, expanding their own operational security requirements while minimising the possibilities of detection. A uniform trademark is their relatively advanced awareness of Western counter-surveillance techniques and technologies as they continue to reduce and limit any electronic footprints whether in the cyber sphere or over the phone. To avoid being pinpointed these networks used to “vary its methods and never use one system too long.”⁷⁰ Varying operational security increased after Bin-Laden stopped using his Compact-M satellite phone in October 1998 with a majority of calls (260 out of 700) were made to 27 numbers in the United Kingdom.⁷¹

Al-Qaeda itself demonstrated an early awareness of cyberspace and the Internet as a convenient form of communication. While Ramzi Yousef, the convicted mastermind of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, used sophisticated encrypted files to conceal a plan to destroy 11 aircrafts flying over the Pacific (Operation Bojinka), Wadih El Hage, one of the suspects in the 1998 bombing of two U.S. embassies in East Africa, sent encrypted e-mails to other al-Qaeda associates.⁷² Similarly, Khalil Deek, involved in the so-called 1999 ‘millennium

⁶⁹ For a comprehensive overview of the various forums, see: Hanna Rogan, *JIHADISM ONLINE – A study of how al-Qaida and radical Islamist groups use the Internet for terrorist purposes*, FFI/Rapport-2006/00915.

⁷⁰ Michael Evans, “Al-Qaeda agent’s laptop yields vital intelligence clues”, *The Times*, August 7, 2004.

⁷¹ Nick Fielding and Dipesh Gadhery, “Al-Qaeda’s Satellite Phone Records Revealed – No Calls To Iraq”, *Sunday Times*, March 24, 2002.

⁷² See: Jack Kelley, “Terror groups hide behind Web encryption”, *USA Today*, February 5, 2001.

plot' in Jordan, used encrypted CD-roms to conceal an electronic version of the 11 volume, 7000-page Encyclopedia of Jihad and his plans for multiple bomb attacks in Amman.⁷³ Even evidence exists that Ayman al-Zawahiri, Bin-Laden's deputy, used a stationary computer since 1997 with over 1,700 password-protected or encrypted documents (written in Arabic, French, Farsi or Malay) containing a treasure trove of communications, training manuals and targeting information for future operations.

In order to ensure the secrecy of communication, Al-Qaeda did discourage the use of e-mail or phones and favoured faxes and personal couriers.⁷⁴ Sensitive messages were encoded using "one-time pad" systems that paired individual letters with randomly assigned numbers and letters and produced messages readable only by those who knew the pairings.⁷⁵ These so-called 'laundry lists' were found in many training camps in Afghanistan. No uniform standard codes exist but instead they were naturally individualised and frequently changed to suit the operational as well as security circumstances. Often the actual coding assumed simple forms linked with word association, using so-called "idiot-codes" in intelligence terminology⁷⁶ or pre-determined "code" words, like "apples" (grenades); "seven Seas" (EU entry visa); and "red training shoes for 'runs'" (EU red passports).⁷⁷ Other times they used number systems as in the case of Andrew Rove, who only spoke about mobile phone models. "Money was 'Nokia 3310'; trouble-police was '3410', weapon was '3610'; airport '3310' and army base was '3331'."⁷⁸ Another case is Pakistani militant Mohammed Naeem Noor Khan who "protected cellphone numbers by copying them down in a code that did not use the digits zero, two or three."⁷⁹ The beauty of this system was its simplicity and the infinite range of combinations available to the operatives. This extended to Al-Qaeda's use and distribution of so-called "laundry-lists" of chemicals available on the open market, which it used in combination with "how-to" videos in the construction of improvised explosive devices.

Advanced knowledge of counter-surveillance techniques became manifest, ranging from the encryption of computer files and CD-roms to using untraceable SIM or pay-as-you-go telephone cards,⁸⁰ single use of Thurayya satellite phones⁸¹ and mobile phones before they were discarded, to the employment of coded "flagged" spam e-mails, common chat rooms and simple electronic dead drops to communicate between cell members and between the operational centre and periphery. The genius of al-Qaeda could be seen in the creative shell game techniques used, as exemplified by the establishment of yahoo or hotmail accounts with prearranged shared usernames and passwords. The operational cells would communicate by lodging a draft message – a dead drop – on the server without having to ever send or receive electronic mail. Just like the one-time use of mobile phones, anonymous e-mail accounts were established for one-time purposes.

⁷³ Nick Fielding, "Revealed: the bloody pages of Al-Qaeda's killing manual", *Sunday Times*, November 4, 2001.

⁷⁴ Alan Cullison, "Inside Al-Qaeda's Hard Drive", *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 2004).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ See: Gene J. Koprowski, "The Web: Terrorists prove elusive", *UPI*, October 23, 2003.

⁷⁷ Desmond Butler and Don Van Atta Jr., "A Qaeda Informer Helps Investigators Trace Group's Trail", *The New York Times*, February 17, 2003. Also see: "Danish Islamists 'Closely Linked to International Terrorism'", *Danmarks Radio web site* in BBC Monitoring International Reports, August 24, 2003.

⁷⁸ Stephen McGinty, "15 years for foiled al-Qaeda terrorist", *The Scotsman*, September 24, 2005.

⁷⁹ Nick Fielding, "Al-Qaeda betrayed by its simple faith in high-tech", *The Times*, August 8, 2004.

⁸⁰ "Swiss SIM Cards Slammed", *Intelligence Online*, march 21, 2003.

⁸¹ *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, September 23, 2003.

This familiarity with electronic intelligence measures was evident in the field survival kit distributed during the American military campaign in Afghanistan, where it urged fleeing members:

”If you use a cell phone, use one obtained under fake name and address. Never use a phone provided by your ’nazm’ for calling a friend or relative. If you ask your friends to call you, give them a specific time and keep your phone open only when you are expecting a call. For using the Internet, you must go to an internet cafe. Never visit a site that can reveal your identity...when opening an e-mail account, go to an Internet cafe, never do it at home. Never use the same Internet cafe again and again.”⁸²

In order to ensure continued and easy and anonymous means of communication, al-Qaeda and its affiliates employ the spectrum of wireless networks, private mobile phones, instant messaging and remote access email accounts to enhance digital coordination and to circumvent security procedures and detection. The arrest of Khalid Sheikh Muhammed in Rawalpindi in 2003 revealed a trove of material identifying the Internet cafes in Quetta used by his couriers to send coded messages to sleeper terror cells in Europe, America and Asia.⁸³ Pornographic images were used to hide coded messages or explosives recipes. In a November 2001 police conducted a raid on the Via Quaranta mosque in Milan, seizing 11 computers with pictures of the Twin Towers (created on 4/11 2001) and hundreds of pornographic images some with hidden messages using stenography.⁸⁴ Equally, al-Qaeda developed and improved on basic cryptography methods as illustrated by the various spin-off versions from *Mawsu’at al-jihad (the Encyclopaedia of Jihad)* and other so-called “military manuals” found around the world. Al-Qaeda has even established the so-called “Al-Qaidah University for jihad sciences” imparting advice through speciality subjects such as ‘electronic’ and ‘media’ jihad alongside the technology of explosive devices and the operational art of terrorism in all its facets.⁸⁵ For example, *Al-Firdaws* website contained 80-pages of detailed instructions how to make a nuclear or ‘dirty’ bomb and biological weapons.⁸⁶ This training material is not just consigned to being downloaded from the web, through services like YOUSENTIIT.COM, but also onto mobile phones and other mobile devices.⁸⁷ Even Department of Homeland Security briefings can provide a treasure trove on new means of clandestine communication or FBI suspect lists with known addresses within the U.S. and their e-mail addresses.⁸⁸ For example, one of the Saudi nationals on this FBI suspect list had the ominous e-mail address LAST_DAY_11@hotmail.com.

It is also clear that the digital sphere is providing new ways for terrorists to raise and transfer funds in technologically creative and clever ways. New digital online banks provide useful anonymity and it is feared that Internet based alternative value transfer processes such as Paypal, E-Gold and other similar services are providing auxiliary avenues for concealed and highly mobile financial transactions. In some investigations of Salafist-jihadi cells there is

⁸² “An Al Qaida blueprint for terror”, *Hindustan Times*, February 15, 2004.

⁸³ *Sunday Telegraph*, March 9, 2003.

⁸⁴ *Corriere della Sera*, May 5, 2003.

⁸⁵ *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, November 20, 2003.

⁸⁶ Uzi Mahnaimi and Tom Walker, “Al-Qaeda woos recruits with nuclear bomb website”, *Sunday Times*, May 11, 2005.

⁸⁷ Jarret M. Brachman, “High-Tech Terror: Al-Qaeda’s Use of New Technology”, *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, Vol.30, No.2 (Summer 2006): p.153.

⁸⁸ For example, see briefing by Robert Ballantine available on the web: <http://> The FBI suspect list was found on the web by the author in 2003:

even evidence that terrorists are using small credit card transactions to purchase goods which in turn is resold on E-Bay and other similar commercial sites.

There is growing concern that Salafist jihadi cells are cognisant of virtually untraceable real-time communication methods such as IP telephony and Skype, PalTalk, alongside social networking services such as Orkut,⁸⁹ and other new collaborative social software tools such as KaZaA's P2P networking or Morpheus. Additionally Salafist jihadi circles are beginning to circulate interactive videogames to extol the heroism, martyrdom and virtues of the Mujahideen in Iraq.

A recent emerging trend is the creation of 'virtual cells', where like-minded extremists meet online anonymously until bonds of trust is sufficiently established at which point the group meets in person to conduct an operation.

Additionally there are some signs that the Internet has been used to plan operations remotely. Bruce Hoffman astutely underscores that: "*The 9/11 Commission Report* cites four specific instances in which KSM and the 19 hijackers accessed information from the Internet to plan and facilitate the 9/11 attacks.⁹⁰ Investigators found also nearly 2,300 encrypted messages and data files on the computer of Abu Zubayda (Bin-Laden's operational chief) in a password-protected section of an Islamic Web site. Sent primarily from Internet cafes in Pakistan and public libraries around the world, "the messages began in May 2000, peaked in August 2001 and stopped Sept. 9, two days before the attacks, (and) al-Qaeda operatives have been sending hundreds of encrypted messages that have been hidden in files on digital photographs on the auction site eBay.com."⁹¹ As revealed in a recovered al-Qaeda manual in Afghanistan in January 2003, "using public sources openly and without resorting to illegal means, it is possible to gather at least 80 percent of all information required about the enemy."⁹²

Al-Qaeda has also demonstrated an "offensive" capability in terms of surveillance and reconnaissance of targets. For example, in the conduct of surveillance of a U.S. diplomat in Saudi Arabia, al-Qaeda managed to break into the targeted diplomats e-mail account and retrieve his bank statements and from this deduce his general and specific pattern of location and movement.⁹³ Towards these ends, al-Qaeda employed simple hacking tools such as LophtCrack and other available hacking tools to penetrate simple eight-digit passwords.⁹⁴ This incident demonstrated the sophisticated ability of the network to locate the e-mail addresses of highly protected targets as well as using semi-advanced hacking tools freely available on the Internet.

Al-Qaeda went beyond using publicly available hacking tools. An al-Qaeda safe house in Pakistan was reportedly devoted solely to training operational members for computer hacking and cyber warfare. This "cyber" training facility was devoted to "basic training" as well as more advanced cyber reconnaissance of both infrastructure and SCADA systems, probing the control mechanisms of numerous electricity grids and dam structures within the United States. In the aftermath of 9/11, the FBI identified multiple casings of sites nationwide by

⁸⁹ Kasie Hunt, "Osama bin Laden fan clubs build online communities", *USA Today*, March 8, 2006.

⁹⁰ Bruce Hoffman, *op.cit.* (2006): p.11-12.

⁹¹ Jack Kelley, "Militants wire web with links to jihad", *USA Today*,

⁹² David Carment, "A Framework for Understanding Terrorist Use of the Internet, Vol.2", *CCISS-ITAC Trends in Terrorism*, Vol.2006-2

⁹³ Al-Qaeda operational blueprint entitled 'Relief Operation' in author's possession.

⁹⁴ "What are al qaida's capabilities?", *PBS*, April 24, 2003.

“anonymous” suspected al-Qaeda sources routing themselves through Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Pakistan, studying emergency telephone systems, water storage sites and distribution (including pipelines and dams), electricity grids, nuclear power plants, and gas facilities. A worrying sign of this was the discovery in one of the al-Qaeda’s computers in Kabul of an engineering programme simulating the sequences of a catastrophic breach of dam and advanced computer programmes simulating the direction of flow of bursting dam water.⁹⁵ In addition, there also seems to be worrying signs that al-Qaeda was interested in targeting specific fibre-cables underpinning large sections of the entire Internet system.

Fitting Al-Qaeda to International Relations Theory?

In July 2005, Ayman al-Zawahiri announced that “we are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media...we are in a media battle for the hearts and minds of our umma.”⁹⁶ Understanding how al-Qaeda and its progeny shapes the narrative and worldview and delivers it innovatively through modern technologies has become a major strategic challenge for the West. The de-territorialization of violent Salafist jihadi extremism has been achieved by the simultaneous fusion of local and global contention. In essence, al-Qaeda’s success is derived from its ability to fuse the war against the “near” and “far” enemy into parallel and mutually supporting battlefronts through the globalization of the local jihad. Pentagon’s 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review described it as a “long war struggle against Islamist terrorism...against global terrorist organizations that exploit Islam to achieve radical political aims.” As such, constructivism constitutes the core theoretical lens for effectively waging this battle for ideas against a religious, transnational movement.

International relations theory has traditionally struggled to fit or include non-state actors as significant players shaping the international system. The sheer scale of the 9/11 attacks and al-Qaeda have forced most to rethink our theories. As Robert Keohane has argued “the globalizations of informal violence” has undermined our assumptions about security threats and reconceptualizes the notion of geographic space and sovereignty. “Most problematic”, according to Keohane, “are the assumptions in international relations theory about the role played by states...as states no longer have a monopoly on the means of mass destruction.”⁹⁷ Similarly, Joseph Nye has argued that the recent “confluence of globalization, mass destruction, and extremism amounts to the ‘privatization of war’.”⁹⁸ While many theorists argue that the 9/11 events did not fundamentally change the international system, some acknowledge that the state-centric underpinning of international relations theory have difficulty accounting for the growing influence of transnational and networked non-state actors. Deibert and Stein have argued that not only is actor models misleading in an age of networks but so too the traditional concept of power in international relations theory.⁹⁹ This is particularly the case as “al-Qaeda refuses a sharp distinction between “hard” and “soft” power with the matter in a supporting role; instead, it sees ideational and material power as

⁹⁵ “Terrorist Interest in Water Supply and SCADA Systems”, *National Infrastructure Protection Center, Information Bulletin* 02-001, January 30, 2002.

⁹⁶ Marc Lynch, *op.cit.* (2006).

⁹⁷ Robert O. Keohane, “The Globalization of Informal Violence, Theories of World Politics, and the “Liberalism of Fear”, *International Organization*, (Spring 2002): pp.29-43.

⁹⁸ Francis Fukuyama and G. John Ikenberry, *Report of the Working Group on Grand Strategic Choices* (Princeton: The Princeton Project on National Security, September 29-30, 2005).

⁹⁹ Ronald J. Deibert and Janice Gross Stein, “Hacking Networks of Terror”, *International Organisation*, (Spring 2002): pp.1-14.

intimately connected and mutually constitutive.”¹⁰⁰ As underscored by Fiona B. Adamson, there is a “lack of theory regarding the relationship between individual agents and global ideological structures – a disconnect between the structural theories of the international system and the micro-practices of individual actors engaged in the promotion of normative agendas...who are deeply embedded within particular ideological and geopolitical configurations in world politics.”¹⁰¹

Constructivism seems to offer a valuable pathway out of this conundrum. As persuasively advanced by Lynch, “al-Qaeda’s actions, both terrorism and rhetoric, can be conceptualized as a series of “arguments” directed primarily toward the Islamic world about the interests inherent to a Muslim identity.”¹⁰² As such, a focus on interpreting al-Qaeda’s frames and their resonance offer another lens into their ‘life-world’ and a deeper understanding of its durability and longevity both as a network and as a movement. In our understanding of these ideational packages, frames and repertoires as well as processes of violent radicalization, it is useful to turn towards social movement theory. This theory focuses on how these social movements “frame” their arguments effectively to persuade audiences and guarantee support and participation. As argued by David Leheny, “the sheer variety of studies of social movement theory provides a rich portfolio from which to analyze terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda.”¹⁰³ The relationship between symbolism and strategy, meaning and action in contentious politics, require a more sophisticated theoretical approach achieving “a synthesis of rationalist and culturalist approaches in international security.”¹⁰⁴ In this new global “neomedieval” order, Philip G. Cerny, argues that terrorist groups today can easily “extraterritorialize their very identities” and in essence constitute a global tribe that advocate violence as an individual obligation in communicating ‘orders of battle’.¹⁰⁵ As such, it is critical as argued by Quintan Wiktorowicz to emphasize a wider theoretical “role for ideas” in the task of examining transnational Islamic activism and extremism.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ Marc Lynch, *op.cit.* (2006).

¹⁰¹ Fiona B. Adamson, “Global Liberalism Versus Political Islam: Competing Ideological Frameworks in International Politics, *International Studies Review*, Vol.7 (2005): pp.547-8.

¹⁰² March Lynch, *op.cit.* (2006)

¹⁰³ David Leheny, “Terrorism, Social Movements and International Security: How Al Qaeda Affects Southeast Asia”, *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, Vol.6, No.1 (2005): p.88.

¹⁰⁴ David Leheny, “Symbols, Strategies, and Choices for International Relations Scholarship After September 11”, *International Organisation*, (Spring 2002): pp.57-70.

¹⁰⁵ Philip G. Cerny, “Terrorism and the New Security Dilemma”, *Naval War College Review*, Vol.58, No.1 (Winter 2005)

¹⁰⁶ See: Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).