Al Qaeda’s Survival and Success: 
The Spread of Extreme Jihadist Terrorism due to Media and Ideological Manipulation

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An honors thesis submitted to the History Department of Rutgers University
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Rutgers University
School of Arts and Sciences Honors Program
New Brunswick, New Jersey
April 2011
Table of Contents:

Introduction

Chapter 1 – The Development and Solidification of the Terrorist Group al Qaeda
   Section 1 - The Taliban and al Qaeda – Post-Afghan War
   Section 2 - The Appeal of Extremism: Globalization and Fundamentalist Islam
   Section 3 – Al Qaeda’s Jihad Legitimacy and Justification for Violence

Chapter 2 – The Attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001
   Section 1 – Inspiration and Planning of 9/11
   Section 2 – Intentions of 9/11
   Section 3 – Democracy and al Qaeda: Justification for the Murder of Civilians

Chapter 3 – Al Qaeda and the Media
   Section 1 – The Media and September 11: Bin Laden’s Media Manipulation
   Section 2 – Al Qaeda’s New Structure
   Section 3 – Netwar: A New Battlefield

Chapter 4 – The Challenges of Countering al Qaeda
   Section 1 – The Failure to Capture Osama bin Laden
   Section 2 – Learning to Fight a Virtual War
   Section 3 - Operation Iraqi Freedom: Fueling the Terrorist Fire

Conclusion
Introduction:

Over the past decade, the term “terrorism” has developed a connotation primarily linked to radical Muslim militants who aim to use violence to achieve their political and religious goals. Much of the reason for this association comes from the attacks of the extreme jihadist terrorist organization known as al Qaeda on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. Killing over three thousand American people in this single, orchestrated attack, the events of September 11 constituted the deadliest terrorist strike in modern history; in fact, “until 9/11, no terrorist operation had ever killed more than five hundred people…more than twice as many Americans perished on 9/11 than had been killed by terrorists since 1968 – the year acknowledged as marking the advent of modern, international terrorism” (Hoffman, 18-19). This deadly assault on citizens of the United States dramatically altered the dynamics of the international world, especially as further terrorist activity linked to al Qaeda unfolded, with instances such as the London train bombings on July 7, 2005.

Counterterrorism strategy includes four distinct approaches to responding to terrorist organizations. Among these options are the focus on diplomacy with a region or group of people, an effort to better local conditions in a struggling area, the utilization of the criminal law charges in the justice system, and the exertion of military force. Immediately after September 11, the United States and Coalition forces attacked Afghanistan against al Qaeda and the Taliban; they chose to retaliate to the terrorist attacks with a full-out military confrontation in Afghanistan. The United States held the Taliban accountable for the activities of al Qaeda, and provided the Taliban with various ultimatums including the surrender of leaders of the terrorist
organization, especially Osama bin Laden; this accountability was a result of the partnership of al Qaeda and the Taliban in the 1990s as both organizations solidified their ideologies and intended realms of influence. Although this military effort was successful in its attempt to destroy the previously existing structure of al Qaeda and disrupt its hierarchy of leadership and command, the terrorist organization has managed to continue to plan and attempt attacks as well as recruit new members. While it may not be surprising that Western forces are still conducting a militaristic war with the Taliban, al Qaeda’s survival and continued influence are far more complex to comprehend. How is it possible that a terrorist organization that was physically destroyed by military forces did not collapse and completely lose power in the Middle East and around the world?

Al Qaeda has managed to successfully remain a presence in the periphery of its enemies for various reasons. The organization’s ideological and militaristic principles were established with a religious foundation, twisting Islam’s sacred texts in order to fit the leaders’ anti-Western agenda. Furthering its aptitude to appeal to potential recruits, al Qaeda provided legitimacy to its ideology by proclaiming that United States’ and Coalition reactions and retaliations following 9/11 were evidence that verified bin Laden’s former claims against the Western world in his 1996 and 1998 fatwas. Simultaneously, al Qaeda has utilized the media to both publicize its ideology and instill fear in the democratic societies that have been declared its enemies. Modern technology has also allowed al Qaeda to evolve structurally after the U.S. and Coalition invasion of Afghanistan; the Internet, for example, has provided a means for communication within the organization and to potential recruits. By applying a technologically networked approach to its
internal correspondence strategies and publicity and recruitment methods, al Qaeda has managed to reach a wide audience despite losing its structural center of command, successfully spreading its influence and continuing recruitment of supporters all around the world. The term “al Qaeda” literally translates to “the Arabic word for ‘base of operation’ or ‘foundation’- meaning the base or foundation from which worldwide Islamic revolution can be waged – or as other translations have it, the ‘precept or method’”(Hoffman, 22). Al Qaeda’s survival in the face of the western military assault and its evolution into an ideologically based movement available globally on the Internet has made the organization embody the very meaning of its name. Al Qaeda’s continuous and strategic ideological development, manipulation of the modern media, and transition into a technologically-savvy network, in conjunction with the failure of Western forces to capture the organization’s figurehead Osama bin Laden, have transformed the organization into a relevant, and even credible, foundation for a violent jihadist movement with a clear anti-Western mission that is accessible to anyone with the ability to turn on a computer.
Chapter 1: The Development and Solidification of the Militant Group al Qaeda

The Taliban and al Qaeda – Post-Afghan War

From 1979 to 1989, the Soviet-Afghan War took place in Afghanistan. A major force against the Soviet Union was the Mujaheddin, militant Islamic Afghans, who were fighting what they believed to be a defensive holy war. This struggle drew attention and support from all over the world, and many Muslims traveled to Afghanistan to join the Mujaheddin on behalf of this holy struggle. When the Soviet troops withdrew, Afghanistan faced the violence of various warlords, and could not manage peace in the chaos of all of the warring groups. Osama bin Laden had been involved in the Soviet-Afghan war, becoming a part of the holy war that inspired so much Muslim support from around the world. He strongly supported the Afghan Mujaheddin movement, and opened his first training camp in 1986. However, as the war came to an end, bin Laden’s focus shifted:

Bin Laden seemed to be heading in a new direction. The change arose... partly from the political debates now developing in the University Town’s Arab parlors: Who was the true enemy of jihad? The communists? The Americans? Israel? The impious government of Egypt? What was the relationship between the Afghan war and the global goals of the Muslim Brotherhood? (Coll, 156).

Instead of staying united with the Mujaheddin leaders, bin Laden began to stray from his former allies in order to advance his own vision with different militarist goals. Drawing upon his experiences in the anti-Soviet jihad, bin Laden developed the foundation for a pan-Islamic movement called al Qaeda, which began uniting separate jihadist factions under one organization as early as 1988 (Wright, 153).

By 1994, Mullah Mohammed Omar became increasingly influential in the civil war in Afghanistan as the leader of the Taliban. His followers included those who had formerly been in
favor of the “the jihad but [became] deeply disillusioned with the factionalism and criminal activities of the once idealized Mujaheddin leadership… from madrassas they learned about the ideal Islamic society created by the Prophet Mohammed 1,400 years ago and this is what they wanted to emulate” (Rashid, 23). As the Taliban fought to gain power, they implemented what they believed to be purifying laws, including the idea that women were an “unnecessary distraction from being of service to Allah,” and created a law that forbid them from “working, going to school and even from shopping…the subjugation of women became the mission of the true believer and a fundamental marker that differentiated the Taliban from the former Mujaheddin” (Rashid, 33). For the Taliban, women were the main mark of adjusting the law to become more Islamic. These new laws provided some stability in the midst of civil war, and the Taliban made significant progress in their quest for power in Afghanistan.

In retrospect, the Taliban’s actual knowledge of the history of Islam and Afghanistan has been questioned; however, in the first two years of the Taliban rise to power, this validity of their religious claims did not necessarily matter. Instead, the people were influence by the Taliban’s claims to be working toward a peaceful Afghanistan abiding by restored order and Islamic laws. Perhaps the most influential element of the Taliban’s rise to power was their presentation to “the Muslim world and the West with a new style of Islamic extremism, which rejects all accommodation with Muslim moderation and the West…The Taliban have given Islamic fundamentalism a new face and a new identity for the next millennium – one that refuses to accept any compromise or political system except their own” (Rashid, 93-94). This type of unwillingness to compromise any aspect of Islamic law was also adopted by al Qaeda upon the conclusion of the Soviet-Afghan War.
When bin Laden arrived back to Afghanistan in 1996, the “Taliban were entering a new phase of power and ambition… [bin Laden] had his own plan: He would convert the Taliban to his cause” (Coll, 342). For the next few years, bin Laden cooperated financially and actively with the Taliban and convinced them to support his idea of a global jihad. Some of the reason for this support came from remnants of the Mujaheddin:

Under the spell of the Afghan struggle, many radical Islamists came to believe that jihad never ends. For them, the war against the Soviet occupation was only a skirmish in an eternal war. They called themselves jihadis, indicating the centrality of the war to their religious understanding (Lawrence, 125).

The Afghani Mujaheddin was a major precedent to the extreme jihadist terrorist movement of al Qaeda. Because bin Laden was able to capitalize on the religious fervor stemming from the war against the Soviets, al Qaeda and the idea of a pan-Islamic movement was positioned in a direction for legitimacy. In addition, bin Laden strategically set particular goals that coincided with that of the Taliban, as demonstrated by the assassination of the Taliban’s rival, Ahmed Shah Massoud, in Afghanistan two days before the attacks on September 11, 2001.

**The Appeal of Extremism: Globalization and Fundamentalist Islam**

Because of the religious context of the period, the Taliban and al Qaeda were able to generate a support base as many Muslims throughout the Middle East were struggling with the impact of globalization. The success of the Taliban is evidenced by the implementation of Islam’s legal presence in society; in fact, Omar “created the first and only jihadist state in the Muslim world” (Shore, 11). The ability to create such a state is related to the major turn to Islamic fundamentalism that occurred throughout the Middle East little more than a decade after World War II:
The reassertion of Islam in politics is rooted in a contemporary religious revival or resurgence beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s that affected both personal and public life. On one hand, many Muslims became more religious observant...on the other hand, Islam reemerged as an alternative religiopolitical ideology to the perceived failures of more secular forms of nationalism, capitalism, and socialism (Esposito, 146).

During the Cold War, United States’ interests in the Middle East were connected to tensions with the Soviet Union. As globalization shifted the competitive focus of the economic interests of the United States and the Soviet Union to the Middle East, the region encountered the ideologies of democracy and communism as well as to new values and customs. Consequently, the religious revival was a reaction to the increased foreign presence, especially as Middle Eastern people began to feel that their own identities were being lost. The global market “compels societies to alter their cultural practices. Globalization brings about cultural Westernization and destroys traditional ways of life... the infiltration of a supposedly alien or corrupt culture (Gotchev, 107). Because the West became a part of life in the Middle East, some extremists within those societies turned to violence as a means of purifying their cultures, aiming to remove the influence of outsiders. This extreme and radical counter movement is terrorism, “as violent extremists react to enormous changes they sense, changes that seriously threaten the continuation of the lifestyles they support. In an important sense, Islamic terrorists are fighting for survival, the survival of their moral order” (Moghaddam, 19). In other words, violence is a reaction to the frustration and anger regarding the increased presence of international values and ideas that were not Islamic in nature.

Because globalization marked the infiltration of modern values and beliefs on the Middle East, those who support jihadist terrorist ideologies consider Islam threatened by the West,
especially the United States. These extremists believe that the Prophet Mohammad, the founder of Islam, lived according to the will of their God and provided Muslims with instructions for how to live; the Western world was a threat to that holy way of life. In fact, “the extreme Islamist version of history blames the decline from Islam’s golden age on the rulers and people who turned away from the true path of their religion, thereby leaving Islam vulnerable to encroaching foreign powers to steal their land, wealth, and even their souls” (Zelikow, 50). For this reason, the Taliban was able to gain support among the people of Afghanistan, as they did not oppose the idea of returning to the fundamentals of Islam in the midst of a chaotic civil war. In terms of his motivations for forming al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden remarked on the power exerted by the West that threatens the existence of Islamic world in an interview with CNN’s Peter Arnett in March of 1997:

After the collapse of the Soviet Union – in which the U.S. has no mentionable role, but rather the credit goes to God and the mujahidin in Afghanistan – this collapse made the US more haughty and arrogant and it started to see itself as a master of this world and established what it calls a new world order. It wanted to delude people [into thinking] that it can do whatever it wants, but it can’t do this. It wants to occupy our countries, steal our resources, install collaborators to rule us with man-made laws, and wants us to agree on all these issues (Lawrence, 50-51).

In this statement, bin Laden highlighted the mujahideen jihad in Afghanistan while at the same time criticizing the United States for its presence in and attitude toward the Middle East. This anti-western sentiment is directly connected to accusations toward Middle Eastern governments and inhabitants who do not exemplify Islamic values; Egypt and Saudi Arabia, for example, are heavily criticized for their continued cooperation with Western nations.

In terms of extreme jihadist terrorist ideology, these indictments against the West and distinct Middle Eastern parties return almost cyclically to neofundamentalist Islam, a value that
bin Laden emphasized in his ideology to appeal to potential Muslim recruits dealing with the financial, social, and political struggles of developing country. Neofundamentalism is “a closed, scripturalist and conservative view of Islam that rejects the national and statist dimension in favour of the ummah, the universal community of all Muslims, based on Sharia (Islamic law)” (Roy, 1). Although neofundamentalism is not the same as terrorism, Bin Laden has equated this type of return to Islamic law with a position against the Western world. Bin Laden was first actively part of an effort working to protect the ummah in the Mujahideen in Afghanistan; this movement is exemplary of this pan-Islamic effort to defend the values and interests of Muslims, as it attracted physical and financial support from Muslims all over the world. Drawing from the fervor and effort of Muslims in regards to the Mujaheddin, Osama bin Laden continued this idea of an ummah with Al Qaeda’s jihad, claiming defense and support of the ummah in his offensive version of holy war against the West.

**Al Qaeda’s Jihad: Legitimacy and Justification for Violence**

Osama bin Laden very clearly understood the strategies necessary to recruit for the terrorist movement al Qaeda. He created training camps both in the Sudan, where he went into exile from Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan as he worked with the Taliban, and his awareness of those around him allowed him to generate support, especially initially among the mujahideen:

> With a structure that resembled a sect more closely than it did a political party, Al Qaeda brought together many repentant born-again Muslims, militants who had broken with their former organizations… he [bin Laden] knew how to address volunteers whose religious education was more primitive, if indeed they had received any: men who were…dazzled by the luminous pedantries put forth by this autodidact (Kepel and Milelli, 20).
Conscious of the concerns and values of his Muslim audience in the Middle East, bin Laden began targeting the pool of individuals who supported the ummah through the jihad in Afghanistan, uniting them under a common cause in order to create a support base for his violent anti-Western agenda.

At the same time as he drew from an audience of people who would be impressed and influenced by his rhetoric, bin Laden skillfully crafted an ideology that drew from the religious context to which the Muslim population could relate. As his smaller recruitment efforts began to succeed, Bin Laden strategically used religion in a way that served his purpose to generate an appeal to a wider audience outside those who were already committed to a holy war:

At a time when impersonal forces of economic determinism and globalization were thought to have submerged the ability of a single man to affect the course of history, bin Laden has effectively melded the strands of religious fervor, Muslim piety, and a profound sense of grievance into a powerful ideological force (Hoffman, 2).

Bin Laden was able to accomplish this organization and effectively manage recruitment because of his manipulation of the Islamic faith. Although most Muslims perceive their religion as one that encourages peace, bin Laden found justifications for violence within religious doctrine in his personal interpretations of the Koran. However, the alleged justification of violence in the Koran is quite complicated, especially since “A critical issue in the war against global terrorism is the issue of legitimate verses illegitimate uses of violence. The problem is compounded by religious authority. Islam lacks a central authority… the lack of a central authority has led to a war of fatwas” (Esposito, 156). Unlike many other religions, Islam does not have an overlying authority. Because of its less hierarchical structure, no one can make an absolute decision on interpretations of the Koran. A “fatwa” is a “specific legal ruling: it can be a mere reminder of a
prescription explicitly stated by the sources, or a scholar’s elaboration on the basis of a non-explicit text or in the case of a specific situation for which there is no scriptural source” (Ramadan, 259). Fatwas are interpretations of the Koran, and can be issued by anyone; the most respected are those from individuals educated in the faith, but often times fatwas contradict each other.

**Jihad** is one of the religious terms highly debated in fatwas, especially in recent history. This concept is referenced in various contexts throughout the Koran; as a result, variance occurs when interpreters refer to different sections of the Koran when expressing their opinions on jihad:

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, because of Muslim politics and global communications, *jihad* has become even more widespread and complex in usage. The importance of jihad is rooted in the Quran’s command to struggle – the literal meaning of the word *jihad* – in the path of God and in the example of the Prophet Muhammad and his early Companions. In the most general meaning, jihad refers to the obligation incumbent on all Muslims, individuals, and the community to follow and realize God’s will: to lead a virtuous life and to spread Islam through preaching, education, example, and writing. Jihad also includes the right, indeed the obligation, to defend Islam and the Muslim community from aggression (Esposito, 149).

Modern implications of the interpretations of jihad include radical views that place the individual duty in a violent context. The term “jihad” in Arabic translates to mean “effort” or “struggle;” in the Koran, “jihad is the struggle or effort to strive ‘in the path of God’ (22:78). The ‘lesser jihad’ [is] physical holy war, and the ‘greater jihad’ [is] the inner struggle to submit to God” (Heit, 1). In other words, there are two types of jihad, one concerning the individual with his effort to live the way God instructed, the other referring to the holy war in defense of Islamic peoples. The extreme jihadist ideology of bin Laden and extreme jihadist terrorists conflates the individual
duty with holy war, and is able to do so because jihad is not an explicitly defined responsibility as are the five pillars of Islam

Jihad is not one of the five pillars of Islam (profession of faith, prayer, fasting, alms-giving, and pilgrimage) and is therefore a collective duty (fard kifaya) under given circumstances. But radicals… explicitly consider jihad a permanent and individual duty (fard’ ayn). This is probably the best criterion with which a line can be drawn between conservative neofundamentalists and radical ones: the latter are called jihadists (Roy, 41).

While neofundamentalists focus on the return to Islamic values, extremists draw on neofundamentalism and also include emphasis of the individual duty to participate in a warring jihad. Individual duties would normally include the five pillars, but jihadists extend these duties to include violent jihad. The lack of a central religious authority combined with open interpretation of jihad through fatwas creates an opportunity for extremism to draw support and credibility.

Radical claims about jihad contribute to issues of legitimate and illegitimate violence. Because the justification is on a religious basis, those who are convinced of this interpretation of jihad view the violent message of jihadist extremists as a part of their commitment to Islam:

There can be no doubt that religion provides a powerful source of authority, meaning, and legitimacy. Religiously motivated or legitimated violence adds the dimensions of divine or absolute authority buttressing the authority of terrorist leaders, religious symbolism, moral justification, motivation and obligation, certitude, and heavenly reward that enhance recruitment and a willingness to fight and die in a sacred struggle (Esposito, 155).

Jihadist extremists use certain passages of the Koran to validate their claims, and place violence in the context of a responsibility of Muslims everywhere. Religious justification makes many individuals more inclined to commit to the idea that jihad in fact their duty. This contextualization makes the moral views applied to actions taken in the name of jihad immensely

Jillian Fiore - Page 14
different, as religion “Changes the perception of conflict by those engaged in it and vastly alters
the way that the struggle is waged. It absolutizes the conflict into extreme opposing positions and
demonizes opponents by imagining them to be satanic powers (Jeurgensmeyer, 142). In addition
to this perspective change regarding the identification and understanding of the parties in the
alleged conflict, the motivation behind taking action becomes based on a sense of religious duty
to God:

Extremists…believe that they have a mandate from God…for extremists, Islam is
not simply an ideological and political alternative but an imperative. Since it its
God’s command, implementation must be immediate, not gradual… Moreover,
acts normally forbidden, such as stealing, murdering noncombatants, and
terrorism… are seen as required (Esposito, 147-148).

The religious rationalization for jihad both defines holy war to be a responsibility of the
individual Muslim and justifies any violence or aggression that would otherwise be considered
against their faith; religion also allows for the identification of a very distinct enemy.

According to bin Laden’s jihadist ideology, the West and any Middle Eastern nation that
affiliates with the customs of the western world is a threat to Muslims around the world. On
August 23, 1996 and then again exactly a year later in 1998, bin Laden declared jihad, a World
Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusader. He pinned Muslims against “the Americans
occupying the lands of the two holy sanctuaries… the Judeo-Crusader alliance… [and] Saudi
Arabia, which is the cornerstone of the Islamic World” (Lawrence, 25). In this statement, bin
Laden recognized the United States, Israel, and the Saudi Arabian government as conducting
themselves against Islam. He encourages Muslims to engage in a jihad against them, stating:

Cavalry of Islam, be mounted! This is a difficult time, so you yourselves must be
tough. You should know that your coming-together and cooperating in order to
liberate the holy places of Islam is the right step towards unification of the world of our umma under the banner of God’s unity (Lawrence, 30).

Bin Laden construed the Western presence in the Middle East as against the worldwide community of Muslims, and declared holy war against the West on these grounds. By making it a jihad, Bin Laden created a context so that “violence is a sacramental act or divine duty executed in direct response to some theological demand or imperative” (Hoffman, 91). For Muslims who may otherwise have been peaceful, this radical turn to holy war by bin Laden rallied people to the Muslim cause as it did in Afghanistan.

Although it was not his focus, Bin Laden also brought the issue of Palestine into his fatwa. By doing so, bin Laden recognized that jihad had previously been declared as a defensive holy war for Palestinian Muslims against Israel. In Palestine, those fighting jihad were considered to be fighting for their holy land and freedom that could be attained in no other way:

Such a liberation could be achieved, they argued, only by means of a popular jihad. ‘Jihad,’ in this context, referred not only to a collective struggle, as it is commonly understood, but also to the belief that the use of organized violence was the ‘sole legitimate way to retrieve Palestine in its entirety’ (Hoffman 146).

This jihad in Palestine, like the Afghan Mujahideen fighting against the Soviet Union, was generated from what is considered by Muslims to be a defense against an intruder. By including Palestine in his battle against the West, bin Laden had the chance to appeal to a wider audience, especially because “Muslims feel a profound sense of wrong about the creation of Israel that infuses every aspect of al Qaeda’s thinking and activities and has become the rallying cry used to convince the ummah of the righteousness of al Qaeda’s cause” (Shore, 12). He articulated al Qaeda’s anti-Western sentiment in terms of the defensive jihad that was presently taking place in Palestine and had occurred just a decade earlier in Afghanistan. By crafting al Qaeda’s jihad
around the collective values of many Muslims in the Middle East, bin Laden was able to create a justification on the basis of religion for an all out war against the West. His declarations in 1996 and 1998 demonized the western world as the reason for all of the problems in the Middle East, and othered places like the United States as infidels and enemies of Islam; according to al Qaeda, a jihad against the West was a holy war in defense of an ummah. Bin Laden’s fatwas were the start of a “movement [that] then aimed to crown these efforts: six months later…the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam were targeted in deadly attacks that left over two hundred dead” (Kepel and Milelli, 27). Al Qaeda’s extreme jihadist terrorist agenda would continue to plan against the Western world, becoming strikingly evident in the attacks on the United States World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.
Chapter 2 – The Attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001

Inspiration and Intentions of 9/11:

Immediately after the bombings of American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, al Qaeda began to plan the September 11 attacks on the United States. Al Qaeda generated the idea of the 9/11 attacks based on a terrorist attack by four Algerian terrorists in France in 1994. Hijacking a plane before departure, these terrorists executed hostages until authorities allowed them to depart; “French counterterrorism authorities learned that the terrorists were planning to crash the aircraft into the Eiffel Tower to cause a mass casualty disaster in Paris” (Reidel, 3). Fortunately, French forces managed to overtake the plane and save the hostages, but this failed mass-casualty attempt at using a plane as a human-filled missile inspired al Qaeda to develop similar plans in an attack on the United States.

Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda recognized that, unlike the United States, they did not have a well developed military force to conduct war with the West. Instead, they needed to utilize their resources, and fight in a way that could challenge American and Western forces despite their advantages in military prowess. While they could not invade United States in a traditional form, al Qaeda could launch an attack on the nation that would provoke the Western world to invade Afghanistan. In terms of this tactical strategy, “Al Qaeda believed that the United States would bleed to death in the mountains of Afghanistan just as the Soviet Union had bled into collapse at the hands of Afghanistan’s Muslim guerilla warriors” (Shore, 7). By drawing the United States into Afghanistan, al Qaeda believed that they could defeat the Western powers in the same way the mujahideen did against the Soviet Union. Unconventional guerrilla warfare in the mountains of Afghanistan drained the Soviet Union of its supplies, forces, and
morale, causing them to eventually withdraw as not to incur further losses. Al Qaeda believed it could do the same to the United States; specifically, bin Laden also considered United States military historical precedent, and was expecting an offensive military invasion:

For Bin Laden references were Vietnam, the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan, and the US withdrawals from Lebanon in 1984 and Somalia ten years later. He was convinced that the United States would not stand a long war and that in any case a protracted war would stir up plenty of turmoil and even uprisings in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt – with no need to organize them (Roy, 55).

By drawing the United States into Afghanistan in retaliation for the September 11 attacks, bin Laden, succeeded in causing the longest American war in modern history. This time, bin Laden recognized the importance of Afghanistan having a relatively well-trained force under Taliban; thus “bin Laden personally handled… bringing on board the Taliban – The Afghan militia that hosts al Qaeda in the badlands of Afghanistan and Pakistan – and its leader, Mullah Omar” (Riedel, 6). With the Taliban securely involved in the plot against the United States, al Qaeda’s anti-Western agenda would have a chance to successfully drain the American and Coalition military forces in a fashion similar to that of the Soviet-Afghan war.

Another important facet of the 9/11 attacks was the selection of the American targets of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. At the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings in 1997, the United Nations defined a terrorist as “any person [who]… intentionally delivers, places, discharges, or detonates an explosive or other lethal device in, into, or against a place of public use… with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury; or with the intent to cause extensive destruction… where such destruction results or is likely to result in major economic loss” (Resolution 52/164). Whether or not bin Laden was aware of this ruling, he certainly selected a target with a symbolic, economic, and military meaning in the
attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. These targets demonstrated the motivation behind the attacks in a representative way:

The perception that the modern idea of secular nationalism was insufficient in moral, political, and social terms... the hatred of the global system was overreaching... as in al Qaeda’s network targeting of the World Trade Center. Thus, the motivating cause... was the sense of a loss of identity and control in the modern world” (Jeurgensmeyer, 140).

The selection of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon demonstrate symbolically that globalization and military presence of the West in the Middle East has created identity and religious based tensions. In terms of the intentional selection of these targets, bin Laden defended these violent acts, stating, “As for the World Trade Center, the ones who were attacked and who died in it were part of a financial power. It wasn’t a children’s school! Neither was it a residence. And the general consensus is that most of the people who were in the tower were men that backed the biggest financial force in the world, which spreads mischief throughout the world” (Lawrence, 119). Bin Laden’s words reflect the view of radicals that business enterprise in the Middle East is as problematic as military presence. Additionally, while the Western world would consider the targeting of a business to be targeting civilians, bin Laden and al Qaeda considered business workers guilty of corruption through the global market as well as threatening to the ummah. Targeting the World Trade Center was symbolically representative of al Qaeda’s grievances against globalization, and made it clear to the Western world who al Qaeda held responsible for the conditions of the Middle East.

In terms of al Qaeda’s long-term intentions, the events of September 11 also served the purpose of marking a divide between Muslims and non-Muslims. On October 7, 2001, in his address to the nation, President George W. Bush stated:
Today we focus on Afghanistan, but the battle is broader. Every nation has a choice to make. In this conflict, there is no neutral ground. If any government sponsors the outlaws and killers of innocents, they have become outlaws and murderers, themselves. And they will take that lonely path at their own peril… in the face of today’s new threat, the only way to pursue peace is to pursue those who threaten it (Bush, 2).

Although President Bush was referring to the divide between extreme jihadists and peaceful people in his declaration of war against terrorists, this statement was exactly the type of assertion for which al Qaeda was looking. Osama bin Laden makes these intentions evident in a video al Qaeda sent to the television network al-Jazeera that was prepared prior to President Bush’s speech. The United States began its military assault on Afghanistan on the October 7 date, and bin Laden instructed that his message be aired to viewers when the attack began. This video addressed the division of the world into spheres:

I tell you that these events have split the entire world into two camps: one of faith, with no hypocrites, and one of disbelief—may God protect us from it. Every Muslim must give what he can to help his religion. The winds of faith and change have blown to remove falsehood from the peninsula of Muhammad (Lawrence, 105).

Despite having been filmed prior to hearing President Bush’s Address to the Nation, bin Laden’s video seemed to be a direct response. President Bush’s polarizing words that stemmed from his “with us or against us” address to Congress were strikingly paralleled by bin Laden’s speech, who took the division and framed it in the scope of religion. The world, according to al Qaeda, would be divided into Muslims and infidels, defined on the basis of religious faith and commitment to the ummah. Such a division tangentially connecting to Bush’s speech validates bin Laden’s claims that the United States are enemies of Islam, twisting Bush’s message to make it fit a Western as anti-Muslim scenario. By doing so, bin Laden validated his jihadist ideology...
of the 1990s, represented the United States as having declared war against the Islamic people, and provided a basis for further recruitment and justification for any actions he deemed necessary.

**Democracy**

The radical perspectives on the parties guilty and responsible for an alleged decline in Muslim values throughout the world have been communicated explicitly by bin Laden. According to al Qaeda’s radical jihad, the mission of Muslims around the world should be to take up arms against the Western world, which threatens the existence of Islam. Bin Laden framed this call to arms in the context of individual jihad, “Claiming that American had declared war against God and his messenger, they called for the murder of any American, anywhere on earth, as the ‘individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it’” (Kean, 47). As demonstrated by September 11, the terms of al Qaeda’s war are explicitly connected to the citizens of the United States and the western world.

The justification for the attacks against western civilians lies in bin Laden’s Muslim and infidel identity polarization and the resulting manipulation of ideas regarding democratic societies as infidels. Democracies are founded on the idea of representative government, that the people of the nation have a voice in regards to the actions of the government. Leaders are elected representatives, and therefore are technically assumed to act on behalf of their constituencies. Because of this process, al Qaeda can justify the murder of civilians because of their alleged participation in elected government:

Since the United States is a democracy, American citizens may be held collectively responsible for the actions of their government. The same logic
applies to Spanish, British, Australian, and other democracies as well. Where the people rule, the people should be held not merely morally but physically accountable for the actions of their governments (Weinberg, 55).

This logic acts as a validating reason for civilian causalities in attacks on the West. Typically, the Muslim faith would not permit the murder of civilians in any way, even in war, and permits violence only in military circumstance; however, because civilians in a democracy are participants in voting, every citizen in a democracy is implicated in any of the actions of their government and therefore no longer considered innocent.

This perspective on American civilians was used to justify the events of September 11, making the actions acceptable to radicals despite the fact that those who died on the planes and at the World Trade Center were not affiliated with the military. Prior to this attack, bin Laden clearly stated his opinion of American accountability in an interview in March of 1997:

Regarding the American people, they are not exonerated from responsibility, because they chose this government and voted for it despite their knowledge of its crimes in Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and in other places, and its support of its client regimes who filled their prisons with our best children and scholars (Lawrence, 47).

This idea regarding citizens of democracies as being directly responsible for the grievances of the Muslims world due to their voting processes is clearly a simplification of the majority-based democratic processes of the United States and other complicated democratic systems of the West. However, bin Laden succeeded in using this philosophy to promote the killing of western citizens, as well as to provide a validation for those who support his cause, defining them as heroes of the Muslim world.

**Dependence on Suicide Bombing: A Willingness to Kill and to Die**
A critical component to the execution of the attacks on September 11 was the ability of al Qaeda to find individuals willing to die for their cause. Because of the religious context bin Laden grafted into al Qaeda’s jihad, finding volunteers to kill and to die was not difficult. In fact, bin Laden was able to individually select each individual hijacker to be part of this cause, “personally recruit[ing] all the so-called muscle terrorists – the fifteen operatives who would control the passengers during the hijackings – from the largest pool of Saudi al Qaeda volunteers in Afghanistan” (Reidel, 5). Willing to kill and to die for the jihadist cause, these men were selected from many who would have been ready to do the same.

Bin Laden very clearly understood the military disadvantage of al Qaeda and his followers; for that reason, he turned to a very common tactic in terrorist ventures: suicide bombing. The 9/11 attacks cost al Qaeda between $400,000 and $500,000, “while America lost – according to the lowest estimate – more than $500 billion” (Hoffman, 133). In fact, there are various reasons why suicide missions are an appealing form of attack:

Terrorists have become increasingly attracted to suicide attacks because of their unique tactical advantages compared to those of more conventional terrorist operations. Suicide tactics are devastatingly effective, lethally efficient, have a greater likelihood of success, and are relatively inexpensive and generally easier to execute than other attack modes. The terrorist decision to employ this tactic…is an entirely rational and calculated choice, consciously embraced as a deliberate instrument of warfare (Hoffman, 132).

For al Qaeda, suicide terrorism became a tactic that allowed them to successfully create devastation against an enemy with far superior weaponry, military organization, governmental organization, and resources. By including western civilians in their victims, al Qaeda’s strategies also attacked the psychology of the western people. This unconventional version of
warfare and unfamiliar ideal of suicide posed a direct threat to the everyday person, generating thoughts and feelings of fear and vulnerability among the democratic populations.

According to the Islamic faith, suicide is unacceptable. However, al Qaeda needed a flow of individuals willing to kill themselves in the name of the jihadist agenda. For that reason, a distinction needed to be made between the murderous tasks al Qaeda asked of its supporters and the standards set forth by Islam and the Prophet:

The Qur’an, however, expressly forbids suicide. It is considered one of the ‘Greatest wrong-doings’ a Muslim can commit… Accordingly, a semantical distinction has been devised… that differentiates suicide- the taking of one’s own life – from martyrdom, in which the perpetrator’s death is a requirement for the attack’s success and is thus justified and accepted (Hoffman, 159).

Just as he positioned the West as an enemy of the Islamic faith, bin Laden constructed suicide in al Qaeda’s jihad as a religious self-sacrifice. Killing infidels in suicide attacks therefore becomes something of an honor rather than a blasphemous affront to Islam. Emphasizing this perspective prior to the attacks of September 11, bin Laden stated, “Being killed for God’s cause is a great honor achieved by only those who are the elite of the nation. We love this kind of death for God’s cause as much as you like to live. We have nothing to fear for. It is something we wish for” (Lawrence, 56). Jihadist interpretations of the Koran that justify the use of violence also have condoned the use of suicide bombing by equating it to martyrdom.

The availability of suicide agents have expanded the strategies available to al Qaeda in terms of the types of attacks they can conduct as well as the targets they can hit. Although they are crucial to the cause, the suicide bombers do not need to be well trained to carry out their missions, and the fact that “suicide bombers don’t need to be sophisticated is precisely what makes them so dangerous” (Hoffman, 166). In terms of these various types of attacks, al
Qaeda’s suicide bombers allow them to use “aircraft as human missiles (as in the 9/11 attacks) or boats as human torpedoes (as in the 200 attack on the USS Cole), involving vehicular bombs… or using pedestrians, connected to a manual or remote control detonator (Hoffman, 166-167). These capabilities allow al Qaeda to select their targets on a symbolic basis; as there is no need for an escape plan, they simply need to determine a means of successfully reaching a target in order to succeed in their attacks.

The religious justification for suicide bombing is crucial to the sustainability of al Qaeda, as it provides a basis for recruitment and justification for both suicide and acts of violence against civilians in the West. Suicide bombers prove invaluable to the tactical strategies of al Qaeda, as they permit the jihadists to conduct attacks using individuals who are willing to die for the cause as pawns in their aggressive agenda. Due to the manner in which bin Laden constructed the idea of martyrdom and defined the West and all non-Muslims as absolute enemies, civilians included, he managed to convince his followers to go against the peaceful and self-valuing ideals set forth by their own religion, thus generating a willingness to commit an act of violence under the guise of an act of defensive war for the ummah.
Chapter 3 - Al Qaeda and the Media

The Media and September 11: Bin Laden’s Media Manipulation

As his various speeches addressing Western nations and Muslims around the world indicate, Osama bin Laden recognized the important role the media plays in making terrorism’s tactics effective and impactful. The success of an act of terrorism is dependent not only on the physical attack itself, but also on the reactions of multiple audiences; as a result, terrorists “do not commit actions randomly or senselessly. Each wants maximum publicity to be generated by its actions and, moreover, aims at intimidation and subjection to attain its objectives…frighten and, by frightening, to dominate and control. They want to impress. They play to and for an audience” (Hoffman, 173). In terms of appealing to an audience, terrorists need to make sure that their actions are not excessively severe, as extreme violence can provoke feelings of opposition to their cause; they must keep in mind the audience they claim to represent, as they are constantly seeking support. At the same time, terrorism plays upon fear, since “Terrorism is as much about the threat of violence as the act of violence itself” (Hoffman, 32). Terrorist activity strives to generate an atmosphere of fear, insecurity, and uncertainly about potential aggression. This instability can prompt people, and even governments, to think and react differently than they would have otherwise. This is exactly the factor that al Qaeda recognized and exploited in attacks of September 11.

The use of terrorism as a tactic for the advancement of a political agenda is complicated, and even advanced, by the modern media. Terrorism and the media are intertwined very specifically in terms of violence’s impact on an audience, as television, the Internet, and other forms of technology spread the messages that groups like al Qaeda strive to communicate.
Terrorist organizations are completely cognizant of this fact, since “Terrorism is theater…carefully choreographed to attract the attention of the electronic media and the international press” (Jenkins, 16). The planning of terrorist attacks is “theatrical,” taking into account how to most effectively reach the audiences with modern technology and media attention. By enticing the media to cover and present to the public stories about their extremist activities, terrorists manipulate the media to perpetuate fear among the audiences they strive to reach.

Bin Laden explicitly recognized the important connection between the media and terrorist activities. On behalf of al Qaeda, bin Laden crafted a message that utilized the media in order to deliver the perspective of extremist jihadis, and was clearly cognizant of how he represented himself and his organization. In his first video release after the events of September 11, bin Laden’s self-presentation was deliberately expressive of his perspectives:

[Bin Laden was] dressed in Afghan garb and sitting cross-legged at the mouth of a cave. He began his speech with a sermon peppered with Quranic citations…The challenge he posed to America as an ascetic stripped of all worldly goods and hiding out in Afghanistan’s miserable mountains was multiplied by the gaping breath that – as he delighted in emphasizing – separated him from the United States predatory opulence (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 363).

This strategic presentation of his media release to the West was very clearly intentional; bin Laden visually juxtaposed himself to the Western globalized capitalist lifestyle by being in a cave in the mountains. By filming this video in advance of the American military assault on Afghanistan, bin Laden guaranteed that his speech would be delivered no matter where he was hiding, his words broadcasted; being in the caves while giving his speech strengthened his words by demonstrating his influence on the world even when in hiding. His traditional Afghan attire connected him to the Muslim world, showing his association to the customs of the Middle
Eastern world. At the same time, the presence of weapons and camouflage print often visible in consequent addresses represented the militarist jihadist views bin Laden was striving to project that would cause fear in Western viewers.

Just as importantly, bin Laden began his address to the world with references to the Koran. With this tactic, bin Laden intensified Islamophobia; he generated fear of Islam among the Western world by expressing to the audience that Muslims were enemies of the United States and the West. Simultaneously, bin Laden manipulated the viewers who might be swayed by religious rhetoric by providing justifications for the actions of al Qaeda. This religiously oriented basis changed the nature of the way potential supporters could view the attacks, providing a different framework for legitimacy, as “Indeed, this disproportionate nature of the terrorists’ use of force – including mass murder of civilians – can only reinforce feelings of righteous indignation. Against this, the perpetrators are likely to exalt their own ‘holy war’ imagery, which they will have trouble exploiting beyond the Islamic world” (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 367). Because he filmed this speech and broadcasted it on Al Jazeera, bin Laden was able to manipulate the perspectives of a wide audience located all around the world, strengthening the potential for his appeal to vulnerable future recruits. As the media publicized the twists to Islamic doctrine that he employed to fit his extremist agenda, bin Laden also generated fear in the West that would further his goal of dividing the world into Muslims and non-Muslims.
Al Qaeda’s New Structure

Prior to the events of September 11, al Qaeda had created for itself a strong base in Afghanistan in its union with Mohammed Omar and the Taliban. With training camps and jihadist schools across Afghanistan and into Pakistan, the established version of al Qaeda was “a unitary organization, assuming the dimensions of a lumbering bureaucracy…because of its logistical bases and infrastructure in Afghanistan, that now-anachronism version of al Qaeda had a clear, distinct center of gravity” (Hoffman, 283). Bin Laden’s mujahideen from Afghanistan were ready to fight the international jihad; he expanded beyond these two nations by establishing an “Islamic Army Shura” in Sudan with groups enlisted from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Oman, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Somalia, and Eritrea, and forged collaborative connections with groups in Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria Uganda, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines (Kean, 58). The scope and reach of al Qaeda was tremendous, with extremist cells across the world. Al Qaeda’s operatives trained and carried out various attacks throughout the 1990s, including bombings of United States embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. In preparation for these attacks, al Qaeda began “developing tactical expertise for such attacks months earlier, when some of its operatives – top military committee members and several operatives who were involved with Kenya cell among them – were sent to Hezbollah training camps in Lebanon” (Kean, 68). Leading up to September 11, Osama bin Laden was the central authority of planning these attacks, and developed into a revered leader and symbol of jihad among his followers.

The formal and hierarchical structure of al Qaeda, operating according to a distinct chain of command, made it the type of organization that the United States military would have
traditionally been able to combat. In fact, “that structure was not only extremely vulnerable to the application of conventional military power, but played precisely to the American military’s fast technological strengths” (Hoffman, 283). For that reason, the United States and coalition troops were able to physically destroy al Qaeda in the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Perhaps this knowledge of al Qaeda’s organizational composition was what prompted the American government to choose military intervention as the primary form of counterterrorism strategy immediately after September 11; in terms of what was expected, “The invasion in the winter of 2001-02 should have destroyed al Qaeda and the Taliban. The leadership was rapidly cornered along the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Bin Laden was caught between what was supposed to be an American hammer and a Pakistani anvil” (Riedel, 8). However, issues such as America’s decision to focus on an invasion of Iraq complicated what was supposed to be a relatively clear military victory. Al Qaeda as this hierarchical power with a formal structure collapsed; however, despite the attempted obliteration of the organization, al Qaeda was not actually destroyed.

Al Qaeda managed not only to survive the United States military attack, but also to recover and adapt to the drastic changes generated by this destruction. In fact, since the American and coalition invasion of Afghanistan in October of 2001, “al Qaeda in essence has transformed itself from a bureaucratic entity that could be destroyed and an irregular army that could be defeated on the battlefield to the clearly less powerful, but nonetheless arguably more resilient, amorphous identity it is today” (Hoffman, 283). With Osama bin Laden hiding out in the caves of Afghanistan attempting to dodge American troops, al Qaeda had to completely change the way it functioned. Instead of attempting to take on the huge and powerful army of
the West, the organization evolved into the basis of an ideological movement that lived up to its name, “the base.” The transition away from a hierarchical, vertically organized power structure actually helped alleviate some of the financial complications of al Qaeda, especially “since the Afghanistan intervention forced al Qaeda to decentralize and eliminated the financial burden of maintaining a large physical base, al Qaeda has needed less money to operate. Al Qaeda stubbornly adheres to its broader fundamental strategy: continuing to inspire a broader radical jihadist movement” (Hoffman, 285). In order to effectively focus on inspiring a movement, al Qaeda turned to modern technology such as the Internet in order to extend the range of its influence without a physical central base.

While attempting to sustain itself through the military attack, al Qaeda used technology to spread its ideology across the world in hopes of recruiting individuals to their cause. By doing so, al Qaeda was able to exist in a more horizontal means, abandoning the hierarchy and chain of command. Instead, this new form of al Qaeda allowed small groups to take action independently of the others while still working under the motivation of the same cause:

The al Qaeda network seems to have a grasp of the nonlinear nature of the battlespace, and of the value of attack from multiple directions by dispersed small units… thus, bin Laden and his cohorts appear to have developed a swarm-like doctrine that features a campaign of episodic, pulsing attacks by various nodes of his network – at locations sprawled across global time and space where he has advantages for seizing the initiative, stealthily (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 367).

By embracing the technology, bin Laden could become a symbolic leader rather than a commander in chief of forces of holy war. His messages could continue to spread, and recruitment could take place without any physical communication, with tactics like “a two hour al Qaeda recruitment video that bin Laden had circulated throughout the Middle East during the summer of 2001…with its graphic footage of infidels attacking Muslims [and] children starving
under the yoke of the UN economic sanctions in Iraq” (Hoffman, 221). Circulating recruitment videos through the Internet publicized negative incidents that could incite sympathy and feelings of being wronged in the viewer; for that reason, the appeal of al Qaeda increased, especially as bin Laden’s claims against the United States and the West were validated with horrific footage. At the same time, the Internet and videos allowed groups to form on the basis of supporting the cause of al Qaeda to function no matter where they were in the world. In fact, “The result is that today there are many al Qaeda’s rather than a single al Qaeda of the past. The current al Qaeda therefore exists more in an ideology…with like-minded local representatives loosely connected to a central ideological or motivational base by advancing the remaining center’s goals at once simultaneously and independent of each other” (Hoffman, 282). Instead of having a strong centralized unit commanding all supporters, al Qaeda evolved into a technology-based organization that could reach its audience through the use of the Internet.

**Netwar: A New Battlefield**

Al Qaeda’s strategic manipulation of the media goes far beyond the medium of the television; in fact, the Internet has become a crucial element to jihadist extremist recruitment in a post-September 11 world. United States and Coalition military efforts in Afghanistan disrupted the physical infrastructure of al Qaeda, making its leaders and the leaders of the Taliban disperse into the mountains and into Pakistan. Since then, various jihadist terrorist leaders have been captured or killed; al Qaeda does not exist the way it did prior to September 11. Despite these drastic changes, al Qaeda has successfully managed to adapt; these changes have actually contributed to the spread of their ideology in countries outside Middle East, as the organization
has been forced to abandon a vertical hierarchical structure, and move to a more horizontal existence with supporting facets all over the world. The Internet has allowed al Qaeda to appeal to a variety of audiences without losing support by turning to modern communication technology, including websites explaining jihadist ideology, containing training videos with propaganda against the west:

The Internet can be an effective tool…especially when it is combined with other communications media… It facilitates such activities as educating the public and media, raising money, forming coalitions across geographical boundaries, distributing petitions and action alerts, and planning and coordinating events on a regional or international level (Denning, 242).

While attempting to dodge traditional warfare, al Qaeda turned to the Internet and media forms in order to continue spreading its mission of creating a jihad against the West uniting Muslims from around the world. Because it could no longer use Afghanistan as a location to train jihadists, al Qaeda switched to a different kind of battle strategy known as “netwar”:

The term netwar refers to an emerging mode of conflict and crime at societal levels, short of traditional military warfare in which the protagonists use network forms of organization and related doctrines, strategies, and technologies, small groups, and individuals who communicate, coordinate, and conduct their campaigns in an internetted manner (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 6).

Al Qaeda has embraced the Internet as a means of communicating with its audience around the world; perhaps the West was clued into this strategy by bin Laden’s direct addresses to Western nations post-9/11. Extreme jihadists no longer had the capabilities to communicate directly with each other, and as a result changed the conditions of the war the United States was attempting to fight. In terms of this netwar, “For bin Laden and his followers…the weapons of terrorism are no longer simply the guns and bombs they have always used. Now those weapons include the minicam and videotape…and, most critically, the laptop and desktop computers, CD
burners, and e-mail accounts, and Internet and World Wide Web access” (Hoffman, 198). The availability of communications technology also permitted the leaders of al Qaeda to correspond with each other, despite their lack of geographic proximity to one another.

Perhaps the most important aspect of netwar is capabilities that the Internet and technology provides for al Qaeda in terms of manipulating audiences. Whether in the form of recruitment videos, training videos, or simply explanations of their ideology, al Qaeda can spread propaganda to elicit a specific reaction or emotion in their viewers, as well as publicize the actions that al Qaeda takes to gain recognition and explanation:

The Internet now expands the opportunities for publicity and exposure beyond the traditional limits of television and print media. Before the Internet, a bombing might be accompanied by a phone call or fax to the press by a terrorist claiming responsibility. Now bombings can be followed – should terrorists so desire - by an immediate press release from their own websites (Zanini and Edwards, 42).

Many terrorist organizations maintain their own websites; al Qaeda has managed to use the Internet to provide perspective to the jihadist extremist movement, explaining the rationalization behind why they are justified in their actions. The ability to receive direct commentary from the sources of terror, especially from the leader bin Laden himself, contextualizes the movement in a way that could have not been done without the modern capabilities of the Internet.

With access to these mediums, al Qaeda can “control the entire production process; determining the context, context, and medium over which their message is project and targeting precisely the audience (or multiple audiences) they seek to reach” (Hoffman, 198). By choosing to include certain visual elements, footage, and doctrine, al Qaeda can present itself in whatever form they believe will be most effective. They can also target various types of vulnerable individuals for recruitment all around the world. For example, bin Laden’s messages have
reached “less discernible and more unpredictable entities drawn from the vast Muslim diaspora in Europe” (Hoffman, 288). Tied to complicated issues of maintaining national and cultural identities, European nations are currently struggling with the alienation of Muslim communities from mainstream society. There is a multifaceted “sense of exclusion from European society is one factor fueling pan-Islamism among young Muslims…Fixated by graphic images of embattled Muslims around the world, Europe’s younger Muslims increasingly identify with those perceived victims” (Shore, 45). The isolated Muslim youth in Europe are prime targets of al Qaeda for recruitment, as they are often unable to assimilate into European society. These young adults are vulnerable, as they are “westernized and deterritorialized, meaning they are not linked with any given country, including their family’s country of origin…linked with a generational gap and a depressed social status” (Roy, 160-163). Not quite finding their place in European society while also not having the strong cultural ties to their country of origin, these youth have the potential to be impacted by propaganda campaigns launched extreme jihadists, images of Muslims suffering become something to which these youth identify. They are prime examples of how the Internet can be used for recruitment, and demonstrate the impact that modern technology can have on ideological movements like al Qaeda. These targeted youth are manipulated, as “An Internet presence could prove advantageous for mobilizing ‘part-time cyberterrorists’ – individuals not directly affiliated with a given terrorist group who nonetheless support its agenda who use…instructions available at a terrorist website” (Zanini and Edwards, 42). Using this cyber strategy, al Qaeda has managed to recruit supporters from within the West itself; the Internet allows someone sitting alone in his or her bedroom surfing the web to embrace an identity as a jihadist fighting a holy war. Since 2001, there have been various instances of
violent jihad from individuals claiming to be serving al Qaeda, as in the case of Mohammed Bouyeri, murderer of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh. Social frustrations in the Netherlands led Bouyeri, a Muslim, to extremity as he faced desperation to find meaning and identity in his life; the Internet was his major connection to radicalization, and his turn to jihadist ideology took only a little more than a year to ignite and solidify (Buruma, 193). From jihadist extremist websites, Bouyeri gained a new sense of duty, and felt justified in murdering Van Gogh because of a dramatic film of Van Gogh’s that criticized the way many Muslim women are treated. Bouyeri had no direct affiliation to any leaders of al Qaeda, but was completely influenced by the organizations’ propaganda; he did not know any Arabic, but became convinced based off of these websites that he would achieve salvation for his jihadist actions against a Western enemy of Islam.

This new form of netwar manages to be so successful and manipulative because of its conjunction with bin Laden’s fatwa of an individual jihad. Bin Laden framed his 1996 and 1998 fatwas around the idea of personal responsibility to participate in a holy war against the West, and al Qaeda continued to promote this idea of individual jihad in media propaganda on television and the Internet. Netwar is not simply about increasing awareness of the activities of al Qaeda in hopes of support for the cause; instead, its success is contingent on the ideology that al Qaeda has crafted to rationalize its beliefs:

The information age conflict at the less military, low-intensity, and more social end of the spectrum… [has been] coined netwar, largely because it resonated with the surety that the information revolution favored the rise of network forms of organization, doctrine, and strategy…An organizational network works best when it has the right doctrinal, technological, and social dynamics (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2).
Bin Laden has been masterful in his techniques of framing extreme jihadism with these qualities necessary for network expansion. He expressed the version of al Qaeda that he wants the movement to become, stating, “I say what I have stated before, that this matter isn’t about any specific person, and that it is not about the al-Qaeda organization. We are the children of an Islamic Nation, with the Prophet Muhammed as its leader; our Lord is one, our Prophet is one, our direction of prayer is one, we are one umma, and our Book [the Qur’an] is one” (Lawrence, 120). In this statement, bin Laden promoted the idea of equality, sacred text, and one almighty God, for all Muslims united in an ummah, all points emphasized by the Prophet during the foundation of Islam. Bin Laden rooted this perspective in Islam, and then surrounded Islam with political and military complications of the modern international world.

Bin Laden’s twists on the concept of jihad in his expression of the ideology of al Qaeda also make the extreme ideology resonate with individuals around the world, especially those who are not well versed in the scriptures of Islam; he intertwined his inherently political beliefs into a religiously articulated mission. Because the meanings of jihad have been interpreted and reinterpreted, especially in recent history, bin Laden was able to draw on the history of the mujahideen as an ideologically relevant parallel to holy war with the West, and provoked images of suffering Muslims throughout the world to generate defensive feelings of compassion and anger for those who were struggling. He held the West responsible for all of the suffering and problems of Muslims, and motivated those to feel passionately about these issues and this blame; all of this reasoning and rational is available on the Internet in videos and speeches for anyone to access:

Continuing to inspire and motivate the broader radical jihadist community. The principle of jihad is the ideological bond that unites this amorphous movement,
transcending its loose structure, diverse membership, and geographical separation… The struggle is cast in narrow, defensive terms, extolling the duty of the faithful to defend Islam by the sword. Imitation by example is encouraged through the depiction of the sacrifices of past martyrs (suicide terrorists who perished in battle against the infidel) coupled with messages about the importance of continuous battle against Islam’s enemies (Hoffman, 289).

Bin Laden’s individual jihad made it the duty of each Muslim to do whatever possible to contribute to holy war; he took a radical interpretation of jihad and applied it in a systematic and aggressive way. This ideology fits into netwar, as the connection drawn to religious doctrine as it pertains to individuals matches the type of exposure al Qaeda gets through the Internet. The individual, like Bouyeri, would not have to be a part of a group of collaborators or take direct orders from a central command; instead the ideology of al Qaeda became the central command, and individuals could wage their own personal jihad in means separate but still connected to the cause. The individual jihadist could view examples of martyrdom and violence on the Internet in a propaganda form that praised and exalted these actions, and find his own personal inspiration and take action. This netwar clearly exhibits dangers in recruitment, as solo-actors or part-time terrorists, spurred by the Internet, assert themselves with violence in the name of the bin Laden’s cause.
Chapter 4: The Challenges of Countering al Qaeda

The Failure to Capture Osama bin Laden

President Bush was staunch in his declaration that the United States and coalition forces would track down bin Laden, claiming that there was nowhere in the world he could hide. However, events did not unfold as President Bush had affirmed. When American forces had the opportunity to capture bin Laden, complications prevented this from actually occurring, even when a United States Special Forced Delta team was collaborating with ally Afghans on bin Laden’s trail:

The administration’s strategy was to let Afghans do most of the fighting. Using radio intercepts and other intelligence, the CIA pinpointed bin Laden in the mountains near the border of Pakistan. Following the strategy of keeping an Afghan face on the war...[the] Delta team joined the CIA and Afghan fighters and piled into pickup trucks. They videotaped their journey to a place called Tora Bora (Efran, 1).

The Delta team in Afghanistan at Tora Bora, near the Pakistan border, picked up on his radio feed and determined his location. Despite knowing his location, the troops did not get the order to apprehend bin Laden as American forces bombed the mountains instead of closing in on him. The communication from military decision makers and lack of knowledge of the reality of what was happening in Tora Bora gave bin Laden the opportunity to manage escape through to Pakistan, slipping right through the grasp of American troops.

The failure to capture the figurehead of a terrorist movement can be crucial to an audience’s perspective on the credibility of that leader. In fact, historically, “the capture of a leader or leaders proved to be an important element in the decline of the organization...if a leader is captured or jailed, undermining his or her credibility and cutting off inflammatory communications are critical to demoralizing his following” (Bjorgo and Horgan, 58). This facet
of countering terrorism seems particularly applicable to the situation of Osama bin Laden, the face and voice of jihadist extremism. In any terrorist group, “the role of leader is crucial in drawing together alienated, frustrated individuals into a coherent organization. They provide a sense-making unifying message that conveys a religious political, or ideological goal to disparate followers” (Post, 21). Bin Laden certainly played a unifying role in Afghanistan, and also throughout Northern Africa and East Asia, particularly with his training camps in Afghanistan and the Sudan. Bin Laden was able to articulate a purpose and a message to his followers, and provide them with a sense of purpose and duty in their lives. In the case of al Qaeda:

The hate-mongering leader – or political entrepreneur – also plays a crucial organizing role, as exemplified bin Laden who has become a positive identification object for thousands of alienated Arab and Muslim youth. For them, he serves as the heroic avenger with the courage to stand up against the superpower. And in following his lead, the individual is seen as unselfish, altruistic, and heroic to the point of self-sacrifice (Post, 21).

As the mastermind of al Qaeda’s ideology, bin Laden is the revered figure that, despite the military and technological disadvantages as compared to the Western world, managed to launch a devastating attack on the United States. For that reason, capture of bin Laden would have been detrimental to the morale of his followers; accordingly, failure to capture bin Laden further legitimized him as a leader.

An important factor in maintaining morale of his followers was bin Laden’s consistent communication, continuously referring back to al Qaeda’s ideology and his previous statements to the Muslim and Western world. A primary example of this strategy was bin Laden’s video address to the Iraqi people on February 11, 2003, as the United States seemed to begin preparing for invasion:
Despite the unprecedented scale of this bombardment and the terrible propaganda, all focusing on one small, besieged spot, as well as the hypocrite’s forces, which they got to fight against us for over two weeks, non stop, and whose daily attacks we resisted by the will of God Almighty, we pushed them back in defeat every tie, carrying their dead and injured. Despite all this, the American forces dared not storm our positions. What clearer evidence could there be of their cowardice, of their fear and lies, of the myths about their alleged power? (Lawrence, 182).

In this address, bin Laden directly confronts the idea that the United States did not capture him as President Bush had promised he would. He remarks on the vast military power employed in the region where he was hiding, the bombs that were continuously dropped by planes in Tora Bora. Bin Laden emphasizes the military mistake made by the United States in failing to directly pursue him in the caves, and describes this mistake as cowardice on the part of American troops. The allusions to religion in regards to his escape also frame his argument strongly; he credits God, not himself and those around him, for their survival. By doing both of these things, bin Laden helped to reaffirm his status as a religious hero. He undermined the common perspective that the United States is a superpower capable of anything; despite all of their military superiority, the Americans could not manage to capture him. This escape would not have seemed possible to most people, especially since the United States had the technology to pick up on radio waves and uncover bin Laden’s position. The religious rhetoric validated bin Laden’s claimed that he was fighting a holy war, as God’s grace was the reason he was able to get away from American troops into Pakistan despite the unbelievable odds. After reestablishing his credibility in this passage, bin Laden advised the Iraqi people of the upcoming American invasion and even about guerilla warfare tactics that would keep the United States and Coalition troops struggling; he also encouraged martyrdom missions in the name of God, and provided
religious authority in these commands given the context and ideology he set up in his previous addresses to the Muslim world.

Contributing to the power of bin Laden as a heroic symbolic figurehead of jihadist holy war was the way President Bush handled the American troop’s failure to capture Osama bin Laden. Although he made confident claims about the military capabilities of the United States against al Qaeda, President Bush’s reactions to questions about the failure to capture bin Laden did not at all include a strong and confident response, especially in comparison to the words of bin Laden. According to a Washington Post article, President Bush state, “‘Terror is bigger than one person… He’s a person that’s now been marginalized.’ The president said bin Laden has ‘met his match’ and ‘may even be dead,’ and added: ‘I am truly not that concerned about him’” (Gellman and Ricks, A104). Bush’s words did nothing to address the fact that the United States did not manage to honor his threatening promise of bin Laden’s capture. Instead, they reaffirmed bin Laden’s claims about the United States, as Al Qaeda has “long described the United States as a ‘paper tiger,’ on the verge of financial ruin and total collapse as much as the USSR once was, with the power of Islam poised similarly to push America over the precipice” (Hoffman, 290). The image of a paper tiger was referenced various times by bin Laden, who claims that the United States appeared threatening, like a tiger, but could easily fold like paper; in other words, President Bush and America were not nearly as strong as they claimed to be. Bin Laden’s escape affirmed that, despite President Bush’s threats, the United States was not undefeatable. Instead, the comparison bin Laden made of al Qaeda’s jihad to the mujahideen defeat of the Soviet Union was given even more credibility.
While bin Laden gained credibility, reverence, and even a kind of mythological veneration for his success in avoiding capture in the Middle East, President Bush managed to use bin Laden’s fugitive status as leverage in his foreign policy decisions. For the American and Western people, the failure to capture Osama bin Laden became part of complicated elements that would contribute their nations’ ultimate invasion of Iraq:

Osama isolated – but not caught – was actually useful to George Bush, strange as that may sound. In that position helped the president maintain his knife-edge balance between claiming credit for no new terrorist outrages on American soil, and warnings that the slightest letup in the war would surely unleash untold horrors far beyond what had happened in 9/11 (Gardner, 214).

Because he managed to escape from United States and Coalition troops in Afghanistan, bin Laden remained a threat that, as al Qaeda’s figurehead, continued to instill fear of attack in the Western world. For that reason, an intervention in Iraq, a nation that the Bush administration considered a potential safe-haven and breeding ground for terrorist activity, was represented by the United States government as a reasonable and even critical course of action to the fearful American people.

**Learning to Fight a Virtual War**

The evolution of al Qaeda into an ideological basis for the spread of jihadist extremism around the world greatly complicated the enemy that the United States and Coalition forces thought they would be battling in the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Although the United States has various power advantages over al Qaeda in terms of forces of organization, finances, and military power, America was not prepared to fight a netwar; the enemy of al Qaeda transformed into an entity that the American military has never been equipped to fight:

This type of networked adversary is a new and different breed of terrorist entity to which traditional organizational constructs and definitions do not neatly apply. It
is populated by individuals who are ideologically motivated, inspired, and
animated by a movement or leader, but who neither formally belong to a specific,
identifiable terrorist group more directly follow orders issued by its leadership
and are therefore outside any established chain of command (Hoffman, 38).

As the United States launched its military attack in Afghanistan, America provided fuel for al
Qaeda’s rhetoric against the West. Continuing to expand its support base by utilizing the
modern media, propaganda included speeches from Osama bin Laden, martyrdom videos,
instructional videos, footage of suffering Muslims, and more. Just as Islam dictated proper day-
to-day understanding of life circumstances for Muslims, al Qaeda analyzed and explained current
events and the actions of the United States in context of bin Laden’s extreme jihadist ideology.

Part of the major struggle for combating this networked version of al Qaeda is the
ideological appeal that bin Laden’s doctrine has provided for Muslims around the world. The use
of the Internet provides for the spread of ideology to vulnerable individuals who find themselves
at odds with modern society and the conditions in their lives; in terms of the United States’
approach to dealing with virtual recruitment, a military force cannot stop the appeal of the
ideological basis of a movement:

At present, bin Laden and al Qaeda seem to hold advantages at the social and
doctrinal levels, and apparently in the organizational domain as well. The United
States and its allies probably only hold marginal advantages at the narrative and
technology levels…Because, at its heart, netwar is far more about organization
and doctrine than it is about technology (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 269).

The jihadist extremist ideology is grounded first and foremost in religion; from the start, bin
Laden made declarations through fatwas through religious terminology and drew upon the
Koran. Only after he established a religious basis did he bring in the international political
dilemmas that faced the Middle East; when doing so, he provided a vast number of options for
followers to support. Bin Laden addresses various grievances of Muslims around the world,
including the issues between Israelis and Palestinians, the presence of United States military bases and troops in the Middle East, the economic relationship of the West and the Middle East involving fossil fuel, and now the military involvement of the United States and Coalition forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. All of these issues are united under one cause under al Qaeda’s ideology as jihadists fight to make the world safe for the ummah of all Muslims:

The network features tight religious and kinship bonds among the terrorists, who share a tribal, clannish view of ‘us’ verses ‘them.’ Al Qaeda’s edge in this dimension ties into its narrative level, with Islam being the pivot between the story of ‘holy war’ against ‘infidels’ and the network’s ability to recruit and deploy hate-filled, death-bound strike forces who evince a singleness of mind and purpose (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 368).

Despite the absence of a physical organization and leader, individuals have the ability to become part of a movement that provides them with an identity, direction, and passion.

Recruits who are manipulated by al Qaeda’s media campaigns become part of an ideology that provides for them both a set of beliefs and a purpose with the encouragement of direct action. These recruits who embrace the idea of suicide terror become pawns in al Qaeda’s violent political movement against the West, involved in a complicated war that skews their previous values using religious justifications:

The blurring of offense and defense reflects another feature of netwar...It tends to defy and cut across standard boundaries, jurisdictions, and distinctions between state and society, public and private, war and peace, war and crime, civilian and military, police and military, and legal and illegal. This makes it difficult if not impossible for a government to assign responsibility to any single agency – e.g. military, police, or intelligence – to be in charge of responding (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 14).

The complicated basis for jihadist extremism as a product of netwar makes it particularly difficult to combat. Bin Laden’s ideology cuts across various sectors of life, especially since it draws upon facts of Islam that dictate behavior and responsibilities of the individual. Creating
such a sense of identity for followers means that various disciplines must go into understanding how to deal with netwar; in order to effectively combat netwar, the United States must take an approach other than conventional military tactics. Instead, America must combine an understanding of psychology, religion, history, and even technology to keep this ideology from continuing to spread. Al Qaeda was successful in surviving the United States military coalition in Afghanistan because of its ability to convince individuals around the world that its claims were valid, and so far, the United States has done nothing but affirm these claims with its physical displays of military force in Afghanistan and Iraq.

**Operation Iraqi Freedom: Fueling the Terrorist Fire**

As bin Laden indicated to the Muslim world in February 2003, the United States was preparing to launch an attack on Iraq; he had already provided them with an analysis of the way the military would fight, as well as given advice on strategies for combating such a superpower. On March 19, 2003, President Bush declared war on Iraq; in his speech, he explicitly connected the events of September 11 to the alleged existence of Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq, stating:

> The people of the United States and our friends and allies will not live at the mercy of an outlaw regime that threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder. We will meet that threat now, with our Army, Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard and Marines, so that we do not have to meet it later with armies of fire fighters and police and doctors on the streets of our cities (Gill, 2001).

Perhaps the most striking conflation of terrorism and the regime of Saddam Hussein is the way President Bush led the American people to believe that this military intervention was necessary to prevent another instance like the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. He specifically states that American soldiers would fight so that civilians of his nation would not be
attacked, despite the absence of a legitimate correlation between the invasion of Iraq and the attacks of al Qaeda on the United States.

Although the idea of invading Iraq was met with opposition from nations around the world, the United States proceeded with Operation Iraqi Freedom. Because of the superior military force to that of the army of Iraq, the United States and Coalition forces were able to physically destroy the nation:

The U.S.-led forces smashed into Iraq in 2003, swept aside the central government and the ruling elite in Baghdad, and then completely failed to manage the situation to bring about peace, security and progress. There ensued a breakdown of law and order, devastating sectarian violence, leading to millions of Iraqi refugees, and the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians (Moghaddam, 112).

Despite the initial advantages that ensued on the American occupation of Iraq, the attempt at attaining stability and democratic reform in the nation were anything but simple. Just as individuals from around the Middle East had traveled to Afghanistan to fight the invading Soviets in the war in the 1980s, many jihadists took up guerilla warfare in Iraq. In fact, “at least eighteen thousand individuals who trained in al Qaeda’s Afghanistan camps between 1996 and 2001 are today theoretically positioned in some sixty countries around the world” (Hoffman, 184). Many of these jihadists are the individuals still setting up roadside bombs in the name of jihad in Iraq today.

Operation Iraqi Freedom transformed al Qaeda’s ideological struggle from theoretical war on a Western society of infidels to a physical battle with the United States, invader of Iraq. The presence of the American military brought holy war to a reality, as it created a situation more similar to Afghanistan’s war with the Soviets in the past; this factor validated bin Laden’s prediction, as well as legitimised his fatwas of the West as a threat to Muslim civilians.
everywhere. In fact, the war in Iraq actually affirmed many of al Qaeda’s claims against the West. The ideology of bin Laden was based around the fact that the United States and the West were a threat to Islam and Muslims everywhere, especially because of the extent to which they influenced events around the globe. Invading Iraq provided the Muslim world with evidence supporting al Qaeda’s claims:

The [extreme jihadist] movement flows from a widespread perception of Islam under siege: threatened by an ineluctably bellicose Western-dominated world order and portrays al Qaeda as the true defender of Islam and protector of Muslims everywhere. In this respect, the use of U.S. military force – even in self-defense or to protect terrorist attacks – is seen not only by Muslims but by many others as too symptomatic of a heavy-handed foreign policy (Hoffman, 129).

The United States’ invasion of Iraq created tensions throughout the Middle East, especially after the allegedly existent weapons of mass destruction were not found. President Bush led an invasion of a Middle Eastern nation under false pretenses, as the initial reason for going to war was proven false. These events demonstrated the American willingness to invade a nation without any legitimate and substantiated reason. As a result, the war in Iraq had a negative psychological impact on those in the Middle East and around the world, as “The 2003 invasion of Iraq has brought about an intense sense of collective insecurity to people in Muslim societies…Day after day of seeing images of death and destruction in Iraq, year after year of turmoil and insecurity, have brought home a vital message: This could be us! America could invade our country” (Moghaddam, 113). In terms of validity of a reason to go to war, President Bush conflated the situation in Iraq with the events of September 11:

[T]he 2002 State of the Union Speech pretty much settled the outcome of debate within the inner circle by asserting-if still obliquely-that there existed a connection between 9/11 and Iraq. The key sentence in regard read, “They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred.” Iraq’s possession of WMD is simply
assumed here, and its desire to distribute them to terrorists is placed in the conditional, they could if they so chose, do just that (Gardner, 118).

In this speech, President Bush both confirmed unmerited suspicions about the existence of weapons of mass destruction and made unfounded connections to Saddam Hussein and alleged terrorists. The war in Iraq, while conducted under the guise of protecting the American people, actually drastically weakened the position of the United States in the eyes of the world, causing dissent and opposition as fuel against America.

The groundless link between terrorism and Iraq also validated bin Laden’s division of the West and Islam, providing evidence for the idea that the United States was an aggressive and direct threat to Muslim people all over the world. Regardless of the intentions of either invasions, the United States has failed to achieve stability and peace in either Afghanistan or Iraq. Instead, the American and Coalition military presence has threatened civilians throughout the Middle East who see the communities of their neighboring countries completely uprooted according to the whim of the American government.
Conclusion

Osama bin Laden was clearly successful in establishing the base for the extreme jihadist terrorist movement far beyond the proximate al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan at the turn of the twenty-first century. Upon the conclusion of the Soviet Afghan War, bin Laden had already created the foundations for a pan-Islamic movement that would later become a militant force of violence on the international stage. With careful planning and minimal cost, Al Qaeda effectively launched the single deadliest modern terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001, killing thousands of citizens of one of the most powerful nations in the world. Damaging the American psyche by shocking civilians with this show of unexpected violence in the American home front, the September 11 attacks advanced al Qaeda by negatively impacting the global market, costing the United States billions of dollars in losses, and ultimately leading to the worldwide media broadcast of al Qaeda’s anti-Western message.

In his various addresses and writings, bin Laden cited al Qaeda’s goal of prompting military retaliation of American and Coalition forces into war in Afghanistan. Wise to the weaknesses of al Qaeda and the Taliban, bin Laden understood the tactical advantages of the United States against his forces. He accounted for the strength of the United States military invasion, taking into account the Soviet presence and failure to successfully defeat the disadvantaged Mujahideen, as well as the United States military history in Vietnam, Lebanon, and Somalia. Bin Laden expected guerilla warfare in the mountains of Afghanistan to challenge the American and Coalition troops, and prompted the start of the longest war in American history.
While initiating a struggle that continues to drain the western forces of finances, supplies, and even morale, bin Laden and al Qaeda managed to survive the military confrontation and intended complete destruction through their evolution into an ideologically based movement that no longer held the hierarchical constraints of a physical organization. With its leadership killed, captured, or spread across the mountains in hiding, al Qaeda turned to media outlets such as television and the internet to communicate with a wide audience that included both potential recruits and its declared enemies, citizens of western societies. Through websites, recruitment videos, and other propaganda messages, al Qaeda’s extreme jihadist ideology has spread violent Islamist militancy throughout the Middle East and the rest of the world, including the west itself. This networked approach to dispersing al Qaeda’s message permits small groups and even individuals to become inspired and take violent action against the west.

Bin Laden framed of al Qaeda’s ideology as a struggle to protect Muslims of the ummah from non-Muslims or infidels, specifically the United States. Despite the prohibition of this kind of activity in much of Islam’s doctrine, this ideological construction provided a justification for violent action, even against those that would otherwise be considered innocent by Islam. Al Qaeda explained attacks like that of September 11 as acceptable on the basis that the victims were citizens of democracies; bin Laden justified their deaths because these types of citizens had the ability to elect the governments that he claimed had wronged the Muslim world. At the same time, bin Laden framed al Qaeda’s anti-western jihad in as an individual duty in which each Muslim should personally partake. Political violence has been presented and disguised by al Qaeda as a religiously-oriented initiative to protect Muslim values and people. For that reason, the internet is a vital tool for recruitment and for inspiring violent action, as any individual could
find a way to participate in al Qaeda’s jihad without direction from any leader or source other than a website.

In addition, bin Laden’s successful evasion of capture by the United States and Coalition forces had a worldwide psychological impact. Within the United States and the west, bin Laden’s fugitive status was threatening and caused fear among civilians. Bin Laden’s and highly publicized video and written communication with television viewers was shocking, especially as he spoke to his audiences from the front of a cave. The fear of those in the west allowed the governments more freedom to take military action, as this action was in the name of national security. Within the Middle East, bin Laden became a revered figure whose escape seemed impossible and whose actions were incomprehensibly successful. Bin Laden managed to inflict terrible damage on the United States, an almost a mythical achievement, and then addressed the western world on television, escaped their powerful military forces, and continued to communicate to the Muslim world with messages about defending the ummah. Because of this communication and the constant circulation of jihadist material on the Internet, al Qaeda persists in the efforts to advance as a movement of individuals separated geographically but motivated by a unifying cause. In addition, al Qaeda can constantly critique the actions of the west and broadcast the critiques through virtual mediums, citing evidence like the American and Coalition invasion of Iraq as western behavior threatening to Muslims. The United States and the western world now face the challenge of determining how to fight an enemy that can surface anywhere in the world as the extreme jihadist ideology continues to spread to individuals through the Internet and other forms of media.
Bibliography


Bibliography (continued)


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