



# ***THE OPERATIONAL CODE OF THE JIHADISTS***

***A Briefing prepared for the Army  
Science Board***

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# *Origins of the Idea of a Jihadist Operational Code*

- **Why didn't terrorists do the things we could think of?**
- **Why did some terrorists reject certain tactics?**
- **The concept of self-imposed constraints. Terrorist groups had operational codes.**
- **RAND research on al Qaeda**
- **DARPA-sponsored "red team" project**

# *What Are We Interested In?*

- **Not a rigorous analytical method, but rather an approach**
- **What is their worldview, mindset, concept of fighting**
- **Focuses on elements of their decisionmaking: their objectives, their values, their code of operations**
- **What counts most? What makes their heart race?**
- **Why would they do this...or why would they not?**

# *Al Qaeda's World View (1)*

- **Islam in mortal danger from the West; jihad a duty**
- **Recent events confirm al Qaeda's interpretation--  
Americans are the new Mongols:**
- **U.S. troops still in Saudi Arabia**
- **U.S. remains in Afghanistan**
- **U.S. establishing bases in the Middle East, Gulf,  
Central and South Asia**
- **Pakistan, America's puppet, has abandoned true  
path to join the oppressors**

## *Al Qaeda's World View (2)*

- U.S. occupies Iraq, threatens Syria, Iran
- Palestine occupied--supported Zionists
- Western corruption threatens Muslim souls
- Jihad is the antidote
- U.S. is thus a threat and an opportunity--hostile to Islam, supports local tyrants, but also provides common enemy and basis for unity
- Action will awaken, demonstrate, instruct, inspire, bring about spiritual revival, foster unity
- A powerful message whose appeal thrives on failure, humiliation, and anger

# *What Made al Qaeda Unique?*

- **A common multinational experience in Afghanistan**
- **Unifying vision (remains)**
- **Commitment to spectacular violence without limits (unchanged)**
- **Vast reservoir of potential recruits (still there)**
- **Availability of safe haven and accessible training camps (now dispersed)**
- **Large throughput (now may be drawing on capital)**
- **Ample cash (sufficient)**

# *Briefing bin Laden (1)*

- **January "State of Islam" message deliberately painted a dark picture--Muslims indeed guilty of substandard zealotry and must be aroused to action**
- **No doubt, a difficult 30 months.  
Our training camps in Afghanistan have been dismantled**
- **Some of our top planners killed or captured--this kind of talent is hard to replace**
- **Thousands of brothers arrested worldwide**
- **Our cash flow has been squeezed**

## ***Briefing bin Laden (2)***

- **The infidels occupy Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Bahrain, the Emirates, Qatar and Oman, and threaten Syria**
- **Apostate governments in Jordan, Pakistan, and in Southeast Asia assist the infidels**
- **Our communications have been disrupted**
- **The operational environment remains difficult-- transactions are dangerous**
- **Pure Muslims are being persecuted everywhere, but apart from the Palestinians, there have been no uprisings**

## ***Briefing bin Laden (3)***

- **America's puppets in Kabul and Islamabad hunt us with mercenary tribesmen**
- **We face capture or martyrdom**
- **We have been forced to decentralize our operations and must beware of fragmentation and loss of unity**
- **Zarqawi was second-rate when with us; he roars like a lion in Iraq but may challenge our leadership**

# ***These Are Clear Signs That We Are Succeeding! (1)***

- **We have thus far survived**
- **Recruits continue to seek to join us (but we must be cautious about infiltrators)**
- **America's arrogance has alienated many of its allies in Islam and Europe**
- **Much of our original leadership remains intact--we have survived the infidels' mightiest blows**
- **We retain a large cadre of loyal dispersed Afghan veterans--sufficient for hundreds of operations**
- **Financing is adequate to continue operations**

# ***These Are Clear Signs That We Are Succeeding! (2)***

- **We can communicate publicly and clandestinely**
- **Preparations for further operations continue**
- **Our pace of operations, in fact, has accelerated in the past 30 months. We carried out 12 major successful terrorist operations**
- **The shadow of 9-11 still hangs over America's economy**
- **Most importantly, we have demonstrated our faith, our courage, our prowess which will cleanse our souls, inspire the Muslim world and demonstrate our worthiness before God**

# *America's Invasion of Iraq Is a Gift (1)*

- **America's invasion split the infidels and has provoked the community**
- **America's quick military "victory" has put its soldiers where they are vulnerable to the kind of warfare we can wage--Iraq will be America's Afghanistan!**
- **It opens a new front for jihad**
- **It will provide a new radicalizing, bonding experience for hundreds of young recruits**
- **Our cadres will gain valuable field experience**

## ***America's Invasion of Iraq Is a Gift (2)***

- **How long can the Americans stay? It took a decade to convince the Soviets, but American's have even less spine or stomach for losses. Will they last until 2013 with 6,000 dead?**
- **Once they depart to live in angry isolation, chaos will ensue in Iraq giving jihad new space**
- **The apostate regimes of the Gulf will tremble and fall**
- **The Holy Land will again be ours, and with its oil wealth we will force the West to abandon Israel--the three Holy places will be ours--to be united under a mighty caliphate**

# *To Survive in the Vanguard of Jihad, al Qaeda Must: (1)*

- **Reconfigure itself to operate in more hostile environment**
- **Protect its surviving top leadership**
- **Find a secure base**
- **Develop a functioning command and control capability able to operate in clandestinity**
- **Continue to communicate with operatives, recruiters, volunteers, constituents**

# *To Survive in the Vanguard of Jihad, al Qaeda Must: (2)*

- **Collect and disburse funds**
- **Inspire followers with words and deeds**
- **Demonstrate that it can still strike**
- **Continue recruiting--Iraq War and Palestinian situation offer opportunities**

# *Operations Are Imperative*

- Without a continuing terrorist campaign, Osama bin Laden is yesterday's bogeyman--a picture on a T-shirt
- Contributors won't support inactive organization (why do they contribute?)
- Recruits will go elsewhere (action is a recruiting poster)
- Ensure branding

# *Al Qaeda's Current Dilemmas*

- **Has a dedicated core sufficient for continued operations, but endless repetition of Riyadhs and Istanbuls will not shake Americans--eventually needs another 9-11, but can be patient**
- **May still have talented planners at the center, but harder for them to recruit directly and supervise operations**
- **Local planners may or may not have talent--quality control may suffer (but look at Madrid)**
- **Cannot sustain a surge--can only hit and hide**

# ***Still the Jihadists Could Get Lucky-- the Environment Can Change***

- **Afghanistan could slip back into chaos**
- **Mushareff could be killed or overthrown, Pakistan could fly apart, or go to war with India**
- **Iraqi resistance to occupation could continue to bog U.S. down in bloody pacification**
- **Saudi Arabia could become increasingly unstable**

# *Remember the Tri-continental?*

- **Inspired by Cuban Revolution and with Cuban support, representatives of revolutionary governments and movements met in Havana in 1966**
- **Objective: global revolution**
- **No global movement resulted and many groups wiped out**
- **Cuban role varied from movement to movement, generally faded**
- **But Marxist-driven guerrilla warfare and terrorism continued for decades**

# *Why No Attacks on American Soil Since 9-11? (1)*

- **Another attack remains an ambition**
- **The jihadists lack capability?**
- **Improved intelligence and security measures have made operation environment too difficult?**
- **They certainly could do something**
- **Anything below 9-11 scale would appear feeble**
- **They are patient--8 years between '93 WTC bombing and 9-11**

# ***Why No Attacks on American Soil Since 9-11? (2)***

- **They are exploiting opportunities in Iraq right now?**
- **Locals won't act without approval?**
- **There is local community pressure against action?**
- **Al Qaeda has declared war but not called for BYOB jihad?**
- **Or they have and no one showed up yet?**
- **Free lance jihad is dangerous for al Qaeda.**
- **Attacks could be counter-productive, dismissed as crazy**

# ***Why No Attacks on American Soil Since 9-11? (3)***

- **If al Qaeda planning (or has ambitions for) another big one, a lesser attack now would make it more difficult--attack when the enemy is inattentive**
- **Local recruits instructed to prepare themselves--a crackdown is expected**
- **A strategy of "many Madrids?"**

# *Al Qaeda's Future Models: the Issue Is Connectivity*

- A restructured al Qaeda
- A decentralized al Qaeda
- A splintered al Qaeda
- Leaderless resistance

# *A Restructured al Qaeda (1)*

- **Osama bin Laden remains inspirational figure and architect**
- **Leaner command in a safe location**
- **New operational planners--less international travel, greater emphasis on clandestinity**
- **Salaried bureaucracy replaced by handful of regional or country reps**
- **Afghan vets remain core**
- **Few true sleepers replace many acorns**
- **Training sites dispersed, isolated but closer to recruiting**

## *A Restructured al Qaeda (2)*

- **Reduced cash flow, moves entirely through informal network, sufficient to support operations**
- **Communications reduced, mainly Internet, indirect, encoded**
- **Pre-9-11 scenarios (stuck to old playbook?)**
- **But looking at alternatives**
- **Shorter time horizons**
- **Remote operations**
- **Greater use of locals; trusted members recruit friends for operations--all conspiracies are intimate**
- **Rough coordination in surges**

# *A Decentralized al Qaeda*

- **Osama bin Laden and Zawahiri remain inspirational figures, exhort rather than direct**
- **Centrally-run operational planners largely disappear**
- **Recruiters play greater role in operations**
- **Local training of recruits**
- **Local planning, little input from the center (Casa Blanca, Madrid)**
- **Local funding more important**
- **Largely local operations**
- **Imitate al Qaeda's M.O.**

# *A Splintered al Qaeda*

- **Al Qaeda breaks into rival entities like Palestinians**
- **But affiliates continue as before**
- **Bin Laden, dead or alive, reduced to source of inspiration**
- **Coordinating role of al Qaeda becomes fictional veneer**
- **Funds collected and disbursed locally**
- **Recruiters play increasing role in operations**

# ***"Leaderless" Resistance Is a Lousy Model for al Qaeda (1)***

- **Al Qaeda identifies itself as a dedicated elite**
- **Premise of al Qaeda's terrorism: Islam to be galvanized by action, not left alone--premise of all terrorism**
- **Contrary to al Qaeda's warrior code**
- **Recruits seek, demand action--without action, what is al Qaeda?**
- **Deprives al Qaeda of central voice, justification for finance**
- **Leaderless resistance runs risk of no response--center must ensure action**

# ***"Leaderless" Resistance Is a Lousy Model for al Qaeda (2)***

- **Indication of failure--not attractive organizational model**
- **Leaderless resistance only useful in allowing toothless ideologues to claim credit for disparate acts**
- **Leaderless resistance adjunct not substitute**
- **Unconnected acts not evidence of leaderless resistance--always unconnected acts**
- **Compared to bin Laden, how many know Louis Beam?**

# *Al Qaeda Think*

- Allah does grand strategy
- Strategic objectives do not dictate specific actions--the objective is action
- Not what does it do to them but what does it do for us?
- Harness local commitment to global struggle--goal is unification

# *Different Views of Jihadist "Strategy"*

- **Jihad as insurgency: al Qaeda needs to control a state (or, at least portion of a state) as a safe base**
- **Jihad as a mission: al Qaeda is process, not progress-oriented; its mission is to keep fighting to be worthy of Allah--only he will award victory**
- **In the latter view, commitment to "strategy" is weak; political aims are opportunistic recruiting appeals**

# *Some Planning Characteristics*

- Long planning horizons, patient
- Persistence--a preferred target not easily abandoned (World Trade Center)
- Al Qaeda learns, perfects (boat bombs)
- Stick to familiar playbooks, core competencies, centers of excellence
- Imaginative low-tech over challenging high-tech (box-cutters, ricin)
- Operations planning is de-centralized, and therefore entrepreneurial
- Proposals start big, then back off (can't do the American embassy, can't do the Brooklyn Bridge)

# *Nature of al Qaeda Planning*

- Instruction in training camps provides generic scenarios and know-how
- Al Qaeda's history, real and claimed, provides examples
- May also order reconnaissance of specific targets
- Our public concerns may add new ideas
- Operatives scout targets, submit proposed projects; may propose alternatives to AQ suggestions
- *Operational planning not driven by strategy but rather by need for continued action; not, how do we do this, but what can we do*

# *What Are al Qaeda's Criteria?*

- Target has symbolic value
- Action(s) will demonstrate al Qaeda's capacity-- showmanship (for example, multiple attacks, multiple locations, blows in enemy's heartland, powerful weapons)--*action is the objective!*
- Action will produce quantum of terror
- Element of surprise
- Lucrative: body count, spectacular destruction, economic impact
- Feasible: high cost of failure (al Qaeda's tolerance?)
- There are some constraints

# *Operational Considerations*

- **Accessibility--level of security**
- **Access to inside information--Limberg**
- **Physical requirements--tools, weapons, quantities of explosives**
- **Money required--probably not a constraint**
- **Volunteers for one-way missions--not a pre-requisite**
- **Reliable people**

# *What Are the Sources of the Jihadists' Operational Code?*

- Islam
- Patterns of pre-Islamic warfare
- Tribal warfare in Arab world, Central Asia
- Selected history and myth (Saladin, assassins, etc.)
- Current circumstances
- Terrorist tactics observed and discussed
- Their own playbook

# *Elements of Pre-Islamic Tribal Warfare*

- Warfare continuous
- Scarce resources preclude long military campaigns
- Warfare comprises a series of isolated raids for plunder or revenge
- Rules of engagement limit destruction to reduce the risk of devastating response--a kind of mutual deterrence
- Prowess brings victories which bring power

# *The Assassins*

- **A weapons system based upon religious dedication**
- **Focus on leaders, not population**
- **Acts, not campaigns**

# *Other Sources*

- **Tribal warfare in Northwest Pakistan, Afghanistan--the ambush, the raid are opportunities for heroism**
- **Islam-inspired uprisings--an inspirational leader, self-sacrificing hordes, large-scale ambushes, attack irresistible**

# *Is Islam a Source of Operational Doctrine?*

- **Unalterable law of Allah and Sunna are source of instruction**
- **Religion more than justification for war, source of moral support, or basis for regulating conflict--it is the basis for governmental organization, law, and it guides "military" planning**
- **Not just why one fights, but also how one fights**

# *Elements of Warfare According to Islam (1)*

- **Koran and Hadiths have a lot to say about jihad and warfare**
- **Concept of jihad subject to interpretation**
- **Much reflects style of pre-Islamic warfare on Arabian Peninsula**
- **Views war as perpetual condition--not finite undertaking**
- **Views fighting as a religious obligation**
- **Fighting morally assists the combatant, galvanizes the Islamic community, fosters unity**
- **Benefits of warfare are individual and internal**

## *Elements of Warfare According to Islam (2)*

- Envisages raids, battles, isolated engagements, not campaigns
- Battle is an opportunity to demonstrate depth of beliefs through courage and sacrifice--must attack heroically--individual heroism more important than outcome
- Lie in wait, beleaguer enemy, attack when inattentive, make life untenable
- Consistent with terrorism
- Victory sometimes achieved magically--a "handful of pebbles"
- Does not envisage continued, large-scale operations

# *Elements of Warfare According to Islam (3)*

- **Does not offer a linear strategy as Prussian general staff or Pentagon would understand**
- **Allah is the strategist**
- **God manipulates the battle**
- **If not fighting each other, unity will release tremendous energy to dominate**
- **Failure is humiliation--success in combat brings great honor**
- **Extol heroes who sacrifice all**
- **Great reward for those killed in battle**



- **Conventional**

- **Static**

- **Order of battle obvious and relevant**

## *Moving Toward A . . .*

- Less predictable
- More diverse
- More dynamic
- More fluid

**Set of foes creating new demands on intelligence**

