

### THE AL-QAEDA ORGANIZATION AND THE ISLAMIC STATE ORGANIZATION: HISTORY, DOCTRINE, MODUS OPERANDI, AND U.S. POLICY TO DEGRADE AND DEFEAT TERRORISM CONDUCTED IN THE NAME OF SUNNI ISLAM

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#### INTRODUCTION

It is declared U.S. Government (USG) policy to degrade, defeat, and destroy two transnational adversaries that conduct terrorism in the name of Sunni Islam: the al-Qaeda Organization (AQO) and the Islamic State Organization (ISO). The present book has been written to assist policymakers, military planners, strategists, and professional military educators to more effectively accomplish that objective. Chapter 1 documents the distinct history and doctrinal beliefs of each organization; Chapter 2 examines AQO's and ISO's basic strategic concept and terrorist modus operandi; and Chapter 3 recapitulates chief conclusions, considers strategic implications, and supplies select recommendations.

AQO and ISO claim to represent the true and abiding interests of the world's Sunni Muslims (*Ahl-us Sunnah*), estimated to number 1.4 billion persons. This book finds that this is unsupported by the evidence. Instead, AQO and ISO may be conceived in the very terms of the Sunni Islam they themselves profess, as deviant criminal terrorist organizations guilty of committing reprehensible and forbidden acts, undermining Islamic interests, and besmirching rather than elevating Islam in the eyes of the non-Muslim world. A more optimistic prognosis for the future destruction of each entity is therefore warranted. The world's Sunni Muslims must make that determination, however, and define for themselves where the bounds of faith, godly fear (*taqwa*), and righteous conduct begin and end; who may or may not legitimately claim to speak and act in **their** name; and who may or may not be deemed a genuine ally, fellow soldier, friend, or enemy in this historic endeavor.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Despite their common genus as violent transnational Sunni "jihadist" organizations, AQO and ISO are distinct species that substantially diverge in conceptions of doctrine and creed, strategy, and terrorist modus operandi. Doctrinally, the original AQO "idea" first arises in opposition to Palestinian-Jordanian Shaykh Dr. Abdallah Azzam's conception of Sunni global jihadism. AQO shares with "Azzamism" a Sunni pan-Islamic ecumenical approach embodied in Azzam's Muslim Brotherhood-Salafi-Wahhabi fusion. This mission is originally one of lumping, **not** splitting, Church **not** sect, openness **not** exclusivity, and emphasizes intra-Sunni solidarity, unity, community, brotherhood, and the tolerance of differences among all fighting elements willing to serve as force multipliers and allies within broader alliances in a now-fermenting Arab Muslim world.

AQO differs from Azzamism in two key respects. Osama bin Laden sought to create an autonomous bin Laden-led army; whereas Azzam viewed his role as one of assisting, complementing, and subordinating Arabic volunteers to the Afghan-led Islamic forces fighting against the Communist-installed and backed Afghan regime. Second, for Azzam, Palestine occupied a privileged theater of future near-term operations, whereas the original AQO instead de-privileged Palestine and conceived itself as an Arab-led transnational military expeditionary force, a type of Arabic jihadi Foreign Legion, serving as a force multiplier, deploying high-quality operatives with advanced training possessed of the AQO worldview and belief-system, and co-opting localized insurgencies into various AQO nodes, fighting to first win Islamic lands,

reestablishing an Islamic Caliphate, and eventually launching a future offensive jihad against the original infidels.

The AQO idea's second chief opponent was *jihadi takfirism*, i.e. rigidly-extremist sectarians who extravagantly accuse other Muslims of apostasy (*Ridda*). Though bin Laden's emergent "Base of the Jihad Organization" (*Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihad*) viewed the Shia as a wayward and deviant sect, it did not at any time privilege a war against Shi'ism per se as the essential starting point for the purification and revivification of Sunni orthodoxy as a ruling imperium. Moreover, AQO in its training camps deliberately policed and opposed *takfirism*, and in its stead supplied indoctrination into the uniquely ecumenical AQO pan-Islamist Sunni jihadist vision of a vanguard Sunni armed organization whose singular mission was to unite disparate struggles into a broader transnational struggle to eventually restore a supranational Caliphal sovereign. The AQO idea is not exclusively Salafist, though it includes a significant number. It is not exclusively Salafi-Wahhabi or Wahhabi, though it also includes their number; it is not exclusively inspired by Sayyid Qutb, though he is recognized and honored as a pioneering jihadi thinker. It is rather a broad, transnational Church-like conglomerate whose vision, values, and mission statement prohibit extremely strict "Muslimness" tests or other instruments designed to split into ever-smaller numbers those considered virtuous enough to wage a united Sunni war against the occupying "Crusaders" of Muslim lands.

This original AQO idea was eventually transformed into a terrorist entity controlled by bin Laden and focused nearly exclusively on orchestrating highly symbolic mass casualty attacks against all Americans, civilian and military, wherever they may be found. Five key elements according to AQO chief spokesman Adam Yahye Gadahn, characterize this "bin Ladenism": its global/international reach and membership as a type of "Islamic Internationale"; its exclusive focus on fighting America, the Crusader West, and the Jews; its lack of a written religious creed, doctrine, or specific strategy that every prospective member must agree to before joining; emphasis on the critical role of Muslim popular support for an enduring, long-term victory; and its unique privileging of, and subordination to, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (i.e. the Afghan Taliban).

Bin Ladenism is characterized by a unique mixture of profound ignorance, delusion, resentment, and hubris. It rests on a deeply flawed analogy between the United States and the former Union of So-

viet Socialist Republics (USSR), and a grossly caricatured understanding of the civil society foundations of enduring American power. Moreover, there is no precedent in Sunni Islam for bin Ladenism's signature "Far Enemy" doctrine. It was never embraced by the vast majority of existing Sunni Islamist insurgents. Bin Laden was deeply criticized from within his own ranks for having caused the practical extinction of a decade's long effort to recruit, train, deploy, and create a global Sunni jihadist movement, and by other Salafi-Jihadists as unlawful and at the very least imprudent. 9/11 may be usefully viewed as a "lone wolf" terrorist attack and AQO's first and last great "one-off" based in treachery, criminality, and the USG's unpreparedness for that plot's unprecedented use of American civil aviation as a weapon of mass destruction.

AQO's most lethal affiliate, *Qa'idat al-Jihad* in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), has amended but not ended classical bin Ladenism. There is no discernible difference from classical bin Ladenism as doctrine, and its accompanying "Far Enemy" economic attrition conception of collapsing the American economy and forcing its withdrawal from Islamic lands.

ISO, in stark contrast, is that very type of extreme ultra-sectarian *jihadi takfiri* organization AQO opposes. ISO's "idea" originates in Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's "Zarqawism," and is characterized by three principal doctrines: ultra-sectarianism, an abiding fundamental commitment to annihilate in masse all Shia Muslims, leader and lay; an unprecedented conduct of ultra-violence as a media-based spectacle; and focus on the immediate creation of an Islamic State as a base for the prophesied return of the Caliphate. Zarqawi's original notions are later extended to "Neo-Zarqawism," and its current incarnation as "Baghdadism." Four doctrines uniquely characterize the present ISO's "idea," each of which starkly contrasts with the AQO's species of Sunni global jihadism: apocalyptic and eschatological beliefs informing its sense of temporality and morality; its doctrine proclaiming the mass annihilation of all Shia Muslims; its prioritizing of the "Nearest" and "Near Enemies," and postponement of jihad against the "original Kufr"; and, its belief in its right to monopolize and immediately declare the Islamic State/Caliphate. These key elements of ISO's worldview and doctrine place it on the remote fringes not just of Sunni Islam generally, but also of the vast majority of Sunni global jihadist organizations.

AQO and ISO exhibit similarities as transnational terrorist entities, but as the author's Terrorist Quadrangle Analysis (TQA) heuristic confirms, they substantially diverge in their respective conceptions

of strategy and terrorist modus operandi. Bin Ladenism's sequenced strategy requires the removal of U.S. and allied militaries from the Arab Muslim world and territories, thus undermining U.S. military presence, power projection, and access to energy reserves; the overthrow of so-called apostate pro-Western regimes and replacing them with orthodox Sunni Muslim governments that adhere to strict Islamic legal orthodoxy; uniting Muslim states into a supra-state caliphate that shall serve as a religio-political base for further amassing Muslim power and conducting offensive jihad to confront the remaining world of infidelity (*dar al-Kufr*); and, a sustained, permanent offensive jihad to be fought until all other forms of worship and polity are overthrown.

The USG, while still focused on AQO external operations, intentions, and capacities, has practically decimated AQO. Assisted by recent upheavals in the Arab Muslim world, AQO has apparently shifted to focus far more on the Near rather than Far Enemy. This new direction suggests a more gradual, evolutionary insurgent strategy involving a greater emphasis on preaching (*da'wa*); embedding within various ongoing rebellions and working within and through the various nationalist-Islamist currents often dominant in these theaters; and rebranding as local supporters/helpers for the rule of Islamic law (*Ansar al-Sharia*), such as has appeared in Tunisia, Yemen, and Egypt.

AQO's affiliate AQAP, while maintaining deep doctrinal affinities to AQO, has substantially departed in practice from the classic Bin Ladenist, top-down model for carefully planned, long-term, high-visibility, strategically symbolic "Far Enemy" targeting. AQAP's terrorist modus operandi is based in what it calls "lone jihad" or the "lone mujahid" strategy. In its essence, it combines media and non-media terrorist operations to incite, galvanize, mobilize, train, and deploy individual persons – glorified in its media operations as "lone mujahids" whose martyrdom (*Shuhada*) destines them for the highest reaches of Paradise – to commit what the vast majority of Muslims consider forbidden terrorist acts, such as sabotage, targeted assassination, mass arson, mass-casualty bombings, and a vast array of highly deviant acts generally classified within religious law as major sins and crimes, and within secular law as intentional acts of malicious, felonious criminal conduct.

The ISO's strategy and terrorist modus operandi is carefully outlined in its inaugural online publication *Dabiq*, and ideally comprises five key stages: (1) emigration from a hostile milieu to one where sanctuary exists or can be created through terrorist acts (*Hijra*); (2) creation of the nucleus jihadist organiza-

tion (*Jama'ah*); (3) destabilization of the existing "infidel" regime through inflicting mass injury (*Nikayah*) eventuating in the collapse of existing authority, and thereby fomenting chaos and mayhem (*Tawahhush*); (4) creation and consolidation of a territory, resources, and base accompanied with the immediate declaration of the Islamic State (*Tamkin*); and (5) further consolidation and expansion of the Islamic State with the immediate declaration of the Caliphate (*Khilafa*).

However, this idealized five-stage blueprint for restoring the Caliphate (*Khilafa*) was **not** followed in practice. The very nature of the ISO as an ultra-sectarian *jihadi takfiri* organization led it to hereticize (*takfir*) virtually all other organizations, tendencies, groups, and movements. As a result, the stage of *Fitnah* (conflict, strife) – a stage not specified in their ideal model – has accompanied ISO from its beginnings in Abu Musab al-Zarqawi through each of its metamorphoses. Further, the ISO's blueprint exhibits ambiguity regarding the precise timing for declaring a State and later Caliphate. ISO's achievements have been substantially assisted by its fearsome and highly professional military leadership cadre, comprised of former Ba'athist military and intelligence officers, and by the revengeful anti-Sunni policies pursued by former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Kamil Mohammed Hasan al-Maliki in the context of a dramatically changed regional dynamic enervated by the "Arab Spring."

Our findings largely support existing USG policy and strategy vis-à-vis classic bin Ladenism. What arose in its wake, however – though AQO classic "Far Enemy" attacks must still be countered – was an alternative "lone mujahid" terrorist modus operandi currently employed by AQO's most lethal affiliate, AQAP. Current policy and strategy are sufficient to meet that latter challenge. Findings also substantially support current USG policy and strategy to degrade, defeat, and destroy ISO, though further recommendations are suggested by the present author to address its specific "stateness" dimension. Our findings also strongly support current USG explicit repeated declarations that the USG could **temporarily defeat** ISO within a brief period; however, the **permanent defeat** of the ISO idea will only occur when Iraqis themselves make the choice to create a new social compact in which its Sunni citizens are respected, represented, and protected.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Doctrine-independent recommendations include advocating well-known methods for combating terrorism. Doctrine-dependent recommendations include developing a deeper understanding of Sunni

Islam, of AQO's and ISO's extreme deviance in relation to Sunni Islam, and of how Sunni Islamic orthodoxy, including some militant strands, may be leveraged to more effectively delegitimize, marginalize, and implode these unlawful criminal terrorist entities.

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