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Studying Jihadism 1

Rüdiger Lohlker (ed.)

New Approaches to the Analysis of Jihadism

Online and Offline

Vienna University Press

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Studying Jihadism

Volume 1

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With 34 figures

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Rüdiger Lohlker

Introduction

This volume is a result of an ongoing research project at the University of Vienna (Austria). The project “Jihadism online” aims at a multi-dimensional analysis of the online presence of the transnational tendency often called Jihadism. Five of the contributors work in the context of this project, the sixth contributor (Holtmann) is a PhD student at the University of Vienna and an affiliated member of the project.

Since various aspects of the project will be discussed in the chapters of this volume we may only mention the specific approach of the project combining elements of religious and media studies.

A short overview by Philipp Holtmann introduces the field of Jihadist online campaigns.

Orhan Elmaz demonstrates how a close reading of Jihadi ideo-theological texts discovers the slight shifts Jihadi authors use when moving from mainstream Islamic ways of thinking to Jihadist ones. Understanding these shifts is necessary to understand the strategies Jihadists use to claim their Islamic legitimacy.

Thomas K. Gugler analyses the development of militant groups in Pakistan, the state where modern transnational Jihadism was born in the city of Peshawar. He is focussing on the organization Lashkar-e Tayba and its diverse manifestations, offline and online. Understanding the specifics of the South-Asian dimensions of Jihadism is indispensable for a thorough analysis of the future of Jihadism.

The emergence of specific forms of virtual Jihadist leadership on the web is analysed by Philipp Holtmann distinguishing three levels of leadership: hierarchical, mutual and discursive leadership. The online communication of Jihadist communication is described as being structured by a multi-layered interaction of rituals.

Rüdiger Lohlker tries to clarify some basic categories currently used in the study of Jihadism stressing the importance of a religious studies approach. Since the religious dimensions of Jihadism are often seen and misunderstood as mere

varieties of ideology this approach must be added to the toolbox of Jihadism studies.

Videos on popular platforms like YouTube are an important medium for jihadi propaganda. Bouchra Oualla meticulously analyses one video following the rhetorical strategies used by the producers of these videos. This aspect of online communication is still not thoroughly understood so Oualla lays the foundations for a new approach in Jihadi studies.

Nico Prucha contributes two articles. The first one describes the ways Jihadis use modern devices for mobile phones to disseminate their worldview via blue-tooth etc., the second one deals with the ways jihadis are operating online compared to the strategies of the gaming industry. His two contributions are giving new insights into jihadism online as a media phenomenon.

Thomas K. Gugler contributed a lot of editorial work to finish this volume. Special thanks to him. Andrea Nowak did the final editing.

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Philipp Holtmann

Virtual Jihad: A Real Danger

In the end of February 2011 a suicide bomber by the nickname of Abu Omar al-Shami detonated himself in a cultural centre in Western Iraq. The man was a former jihadi forum member. He was the second high profile jihadi forum member within one year who perpetrated a suicide attack. Also in February 2011, an ethnic Kosovan killed two U.S. Soldiers at Frankfurt Airport. Arid U. was a lone wolf and radicalized via jihadist propaganda on the Internet. Currently, a Saudi national is on trial in the United States for the planned attack of high profile U.S. targets. The accused, Khalid Aldawsari, did not have operational ties to a terrorist group, but was guided through the Internet. In march 2011, a Bangladeshi national was sentenced in Great Britain for his support of media jihad and for plotting to bomb a U.S.-bound British Airways flight. He received operational orders via the Internet from the US-Yemeni al-Qaeda preacher Anwar al Awlaki, who is a further example for the connection between internet activism and terrorism: A dozen attempted and executed attacks are supposedly linked to al-Awlaqi's calls for Jihad. All above mentioned individuals are deeply entrenched into a terrorist thought milieu, which is being created via the Internet and its propaganda. Online jihad and especially jihadi fora play an increasingly important role for Islamic terrorists. Chatting, up and downloading of radical content does not only serve to entrench ideologies. Terror scenarios propagated on the internet are increasingly put into action. In view of this it is important to closely observe how the virtual jihadi subculture promotes attacks.¹

Besides its many positive aspects such as the use by democratic opposition groups, the internet also has a more disturbing darker side. One element of which is the increasingly professional exploitation of its communicative possibilities by jihadis. As yet, these individuals are less interested in attempts to jam the public transport, information, or supply system (cyber hacking). Internet jihadis focus much more on perfecting terrorist propaganda. It is their aim to

¹ The original version of this article was published in German by the SWP. The article was translated into English by Michael McEvoy and updated by the author.

make the divide between the virtual and the physical more permeable with the help of elaborate media strategies. The participants in discussions call more and more for the keyboard to be exchanged with the detonator. The reference to “role models”, such as the Khost attacker Humam al-Balawi, is designed to inspire sympathizers to mutate from internet surfers to terrorists. In large scale media campaigns this transfer process is glorified.

Al-Qaeda on the Net

Online Jihad means that sympathizers can adopt the ideology of al-Qaeda from their computers. The jihadi scene on the internet is admittedly a subculture that only represents a fraction of Muslims. However their propaganda is so massive that they seem many times greater. Al-Qaeda and affiliated groups are steering the mindsets of followers by initiating propaganda. Followers are then reproducing the propaganda and trying to re-enact their jihadi role-models. As U.S.-terrorism researcher Jarret Brachman argues, key individuals like the U.S.-Yemenite cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, who is related to al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, present themselves increasingly in simple, but popular ways. Jihad related concepts are constantly watered down. This makes it even easier for followers to jump on the ideological band wagon of Jihad and become radicalized. In this sense, one could also speak about communicative leadership via the Internet (virtual leadership).

A handful of Arabic speaking jihadi fora constitute the scaffolding of al-Qaeda’s virtual infrastructure. These are currently “Ansar” (supporters), “Hanin” (yearning), “Shumukh” (glory), “al-Buraq” (the horse of Mohammed), “al-Mujahidin al-Elektruniyya” (electronic fighters), “at-Tahaddi” (the challenge) and “Sinam al-Islam” (hump of Islam). If any of these websites are blocked, their operators immediately upload them with all associated data onto a different server. The main fora have between 4 000 and 15 000 active members. These also include numerous experts from the security services that do not belong to the jihadi milieu.

Furthermore, several thousand smaller secondary websites have emerged in recent years that support the jihadi framework on the internet. In particular, the number of English, Turkish and Indonesian language websites has risen drastically. They serve as discussion fora to disseminate media products, or as quasi-official sites for terrorist organizations. Many jihadi organizations may propagate their own aims which are of a nationalist, ethnic, or separatist nature. Yet their ideologies often overlap with those of al-Qaeda. Jihadi material is also translated from Arabic into Urdu, Kurdish, German, English, Indonesian and other languages.

Jihadi organizations, terrorist attacks, conflicts in Islamic countries, Western foreign policy and the regime change in Arab countries are debated in the fora. The tone is characterized by a strongly simplified anti-Western rhetoric that sits under the motto of global Jihad. Critical voices are suppressed if they address fundamental questions such as the legitimacy of terrorism. Virtual courses on how to create propaganda images (*tasmim*), or bomb making instructions can be found in the fora. Also “media raids” to flood mainstream social networks with jihadi material are organized on forums. Detailed and well thought out analyses imply a high level of education of individual discussion participants. An elitist clique of members with administrative privileges controls the topics. As a rule, the ratio 90-9-1 applies: one percent of members author 90 % of messages, 9 % of members author 10 % of messages; 90 % are so called “lurkers”, that read content, but are not signed up.

Some websites operate under unsuspecting names such as “Islamic Awakening” and appear at first sight harmless. However, upon closer inspection, they turn out to be militant discussion fora. In addition, radicalized surfers and chatters often appear in moderate Islamist discussion fora to recruit for the global Jihad.

“Media Production Companies”, Fora

Al-Qaeda operators and middle men upload video and audio material in respective jihadi fora, which can then be downloaded and duplicated at will. This initiates a simple, but very effective propaganda and radicalization process. Thus hundreds of links and postings to a propaganda video or text can be found almost instantaneously. Videos and statements are delivered by so called media production and distribution companies (MPDCs), in particular al-Qaeda’s “Sahaab” (clouds), “Fajr” (dawn), and “Furqan” (revelation). Besides that, there are dozens more MPDCs that either belong to al-Qaeda’s regional organizations or independent groups. MPDCs consist of small groups or single activists who work with the most simple yet highly effective means: A broadband connection, a laptop, as well as appropriate graphics programs are enough to produce videos, audio messages and graphics in a very short time. The input comes partly either from people who were directly involved in terrorist actions, or it is forwarded via middlemen. Because coded IP addresses are used, the origins of such outputs can often not be traced. In fora, so called media teams are responsible for triggering wide ranging discussions. In pursuing this end, they upload several dozen links to the “product”, distribute it on different fora, or they initiate a media campaign. Such campaigns are conducted using the snowball principle. The virtual mouth to mouth propaganda leads to the wide dissemination of a

topic and as such consolidates the sought after copycat effect. “Popular” contributions can be endlessly linked and hence reach a theoretically infinite number of recipients.

From the Chat Room to the Front

The members of the Sauerland Cell that planned the large scale attack in Germany in 2007 used the internet according to their own statements, for “self-radicalization”. Such a marked overlapping of the virtual and the real was demonstrated by the attackers at Fort Hood in November 2009, Detroit in December that year, and by Faisal Shazad, who in May 2010 tried to detonate a bomb in New York’s Times Square. All three perpetrators were influenced significantly by the Yemeni-American jihadi preacher Anwar al-Awlaki. The US convert Colleen LaRose, who was arrested in October 2009 in the United States, was likewise radicalized and recruited through the internet. Whilst LaRose, alias “Jihad Jane”, didn’t have physical contact to jihadis, it was online that she took the order from an Irish Jihad group to murder the Swedish caricaturist Lars Vilks (the latter had caricatured the prophet Mohammed as a dog). LaRose was arrested before she could implement her plan. The feeling of having ones religious integrity attacked by – for instance images like the Mohammed caricatures – is often underscored in jihadi fora and used for propaganda purposes. A feeling of insult was also the reason for an attempted suicide attack in Sweden in December 2010. Taimour al-Abdaly, an Iraqi national, stated in his testimony that he acted on behalf of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), which is a virtual entity that claims to represent al-Qaeda in Iraq. Several more incidents in early 2011 show that the trend of strongly internet-connected attackers is not breaking off.

The most striking example of an attacker originating from the virtual space is Humam al-Balawi. The Jordanian doctor who simultaneously worked for the CIA and al-Qaeda blew himself up at an information exchange of both secret services on December 30th 2009 at a US military base at Khost. In doing so he also took with him seven CIA agents and one Jordanian secret service officer. Since then, al-Balawi has been venerated in jihadi fora as an icon, has been also compared to Osama Bin Laden. Beginning in 2007, Al-Balawi wrote articles under the pseudonym “Abu Dujana al-Khorasani” on the jihadi forum “al-Hisba” (the reckoning), which has now been shut down. His articles were noticed by the administrators of “al-Hisba” forum, and in the same year al-Balawi was promoted as an administrator. With more than 40 essays, he was able to establish himself as an influential propagandist and strategist in the jihadi fora “al-Hisba”, “al-Buraq”, and “al-Ikhlas”.

In the spring of 2009, al-Balawi was arrested by the Jordanian secret service

that most likely recruited him. A short time later, once again at large, he joined a group closely affiliated with al-Qaeda in Pakistan to put his heralded intentions into operation. Meanwhile, the Jordanian secret service passed him along to the CIA, who hoped to get information from him about the whereabouts of high ranking al-Qaeda leaders. Yet al-Balawi played a double game. His last essay, drafted three months before his suicide attack carried the title: “when will my words drink from my blood!?” Therein he wrote that all his online activities were useless if not put into action. The title of his treatise has become one of the most important slogans on jihadi fora. Al-Balawi’s transfer from the role of blogger to that of assassin is interpreted as a “true Islamic confession of faith” and as a propaganda victory for al-Qaeda.

Media Campaigns: Copycats Wanted!

The major media campaigns on jihadi fora that followed the suicide attack of al-Balawi can be understood in the sense of “communicative leadership”. As such, no physical connection exists between the participants, nor is there a hierarchical order. The intention is nevertheless to inspire sympathizers to imitate “role-models” by giving attackers like al-Balawi the limelight. During the “media campaign to support the bold martyrs of al-Khorasani” the fora “al-Faluja” and “Ansar” were especially prominent. In a short space of time, a new sub forum “archive of Abu Dujana al-Khorasani” was opened on “al-Faluja”, that contained short of 30 documented discussions and collections of material. By now, al-Faluja has been closed down, but the articles of al-Balawi circulate in countless fora all over the net. In the jihadi logic, the attack of al-Balawi is therefore evidence that media propaganda functions successfully. In February 2011 another prominent forum member blew himself up. Abu Omar Al-Shami, who may have been a Syrian citizen, had prepared a testimony similar to that of al-Balawi, in which he praised the activities of online jihadists, who in turn immediately glorified him and called for his imitation. Extremely agitated discussions on al-Shami appeared on the “Shumukh”-forum in March 2011. Participants discussed how to cross from the virtual into the physical terrorist world.

Real Threat Potential?

Online radicalization and recruiting are often facilitated through conflicts in Muslim countries in which the West is involved. As long as Muslims have the impression that Western states act with different standards in the Islamic world,

they will be susceptible for radical discussion. Naturally, jihadis have latched onto this.

Already in autumn 2009 in the run up of the German Federal elections, Germany came into the firing line of internet jihadis because of its participation in the ISAF deployment in Afghanistan. Given the linkage between internet activists and Islamist terrorist attacks increasingly observed during the past year, vigilance is imperative. In the case that the new government would not withdraw its troops, major attacks against the civilian population in Germany were at the time encouraged, if possible with chemical weapons. To this end, the jihadi Forum “al-Faluja” stated that a schoolbag filled with deadly bacteria placed in a public place would be sufficient. The discussion revolved around how it might be possible to perpetrate an attack that would cost the lives of 100 000 people. In response, one contributor offered up a strategic analysis of population concentrations in Germany.

Altogether, the media campaign against Germany lasted several weeks, and the topic dominated jihadi fora. Long discussions unwound over possible attack locations and dates. Images with bloody, mutilated bodies were shown as “incentives”. The “media onslaught” against Germany intensified systematically. “Publication teams” were called upon to work in tight unison to promote an eventual attack. The reaction of the German and international press was closely observed and extensively commented upon by jihadis.

Conclusion

In dealing with jihadi media, a multi-pronged approach is required. Western security services and analysts should survey forum communication even closer. At the same time, Western politicians and the media should under no circumstances give the jihadis the spotlight, even if only to failed terror attacks such as that of Detroit in 2009. In doing so, they turn such attempts into a propaganda victory for al-Qaeda. Communicative strategies, like the targeted invalidation of terrorist propaganda, should be more comprehensively utilized to minimize the threat from virtual Jihad. In the long run, however, only a genuine political strategy can curb this conflict. The jihadi propaganda will cease to be effective, if it finds zero acceptance among Muslims, which requires the development of freedom and human rights in Muslim countries and better integration policies in the West.

Jihadi-Salafist Creed: Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi's Imperatives of Faith

ولو علمنا أن ثقب الأوزون يضعف هذه الأنظمة الحكيمة
ويعجل في سقوطها لاجتهدنا في توسيعه (أبو فراس)

If we only knew that the ozone depletion
Weakens these bloody [i.e. Arab] regimes
And accelerates their collapse, we would
Definitely strive for its expansion (Abu Firas)

The author of the tract to be discussed, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi is hardly an unknown person. As comparatively a lot has already been written on him and his life,¹ only some basic facts shall be given in short. Born in 1959 as Isam Tahir al-Utaybi² or fully Abu Muhammad Asim b. Muhammad b. Tahir al-Barqawi³ in Barqa near Nablus in Palestine, his family immigrated to Kuwait soon. To the satisfaction of his father, he went to study engineering at the University of Mosul⁴, instead of studying *shari'a* at the Islamic University of Medina⁵. According to Steinberg, al-Maqdisi studied – science – in Mosul only for two years and left for Medina⁶. Journeys have led al-Maqdisi, theorist and preacher, to Saudi-Arabia, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Jordan, where he settled eventually⁷. He seems to have radicalised through reading key Salafi books and texts by Ibn Taymiyya and his disciple Ibn al-Qayyim, Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab⁸ and

1 Among others, Steinberg 2005: 135 ff, Brooke 2006, Brachman 2008: 67 – 72, Wagemakers 2009 and Baehr 2009: 117 – 22.

2 See Abu Halalah 2005. Al-Maqdisi has used the tribal name of Juhayman al-Utaybi in admiration, but he recently condemned the promotion of tribal identity see Hegghammer 2010: 132.

3 Wagemakers 2009: 285.

4 Al-Maqdisi's second son Umar, who had been jailed in Fallujah for seven years since 2003, was killed in Mosul in June 2010 at the age of 25 leaving a daughter, see al-Najjar 2010b).

5 Brooke 2006: 52 f.

6 Steinberg 2005: 135.

7 Since 1994, he has spent more than 10 years in Jordanian jails and he was lastly jailed on 17th September 2010, see Al-Najjar 2010b).

8 See Lahoud 2009: 209.

the besieger of the Ka'ba, Juhayman al-'Utaybi⁹. Since al-Maqdisi's writings – which are available on his website (www.tawhed.ws)¹⁰ – are not only widely read and cited¹¹ but do constitute a core element of Jihadist theory and reading lists¹², he is regarded as a – if not the – main exponent of present-day Jihadi ideology¹³.

Practically, al-Maqdisi is considered the mentor¹⁴ of top terrorist and “Slaughter” Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, the Emir of al-Qaida's Iraq branch¹⁵, as well as one of the arch-enemies of the Saudi government after calling for a violent overthrow of Al Saud and “‘impious' regimes through violent means”¹⁶. He is also known for citing Western scholars “to discredit his critics and to boost his own credentials”¹⁷, and for expressing reservations¹⁸ about suicide operations¹⁹ or the so-called “*takfiri* targeting”²⁰.

During his time in prison together with al-Zarqawi in 1995 – 1999, he wrote a little book or rather a tract on creed, which – according to the *Militant Ideology Atlas*²¹ – was the most read text on al-Maqdisi's website as of November 2006. After four years, this is still true if we follow the data provided on al-Maqdisi's

9 Al-Maqdisi is al-Utaybi's most prominent intellectual heir see Hegghammer and Lacroix 2007: 115 f, cf. Wagemakers 2008b: 349, 364, 368. For al-Utaibi's writings see Kechichian 1990.

10 As of 13th November 2010 there are 24 books and studies (*kutub wa-abhath*), 4 dialogues (*hiwarat*), 116 articles and tracts (*maqalat wa-rasa'il*), 88 fatwas and answers (*fatawa warudad*), 141 [answers to] questions of the Minbar forum (*as'ilat muntada al-minbar*), 22 *qasidas* and poems (*qasa'id wa-ash'ar*), 8 audios (*sawtiyyat*), 2 videos (*mar'yyat*), 3 *anashid* and 2 leaflets (*matwiyyat*), which yields 410 items. Some of the links, for example the link to the 2005 interview with al-Jazeera which can be found on youtube, are broken.

11 McCants and Brachman 2006a: 8 f, 12.

12 Brachman 2008: 194 f and Lohlker 2009: 61, 116.

13 He is deemed more influential than Osama bin Laden and his mentor al-Zawahiri, see McCants and Brachman 2006a: 8 f, which is referred to in Mansbach and Rhodes 2008: 72.

14 Pargeter (2008: 206) states that al-Qaradawi, Bin Baz and al-Maqdisi “hold a far greater sway and importance than any Islamist figure in Europe”. The Austrian youth organization IJÖ (*Islamic Youth Austria*) had been following a. o. the teachings of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, see Schmidinger and Larise 2008: 136. Similarly, one of the hijacker-pilot of 9/11 Muhammad 'Atta is assumed to have read some of al-Maqdisi's intellectual output, see Brisard 2005: 18.

15 Lia 2008: 328 f.

16 Sookhdeo 2010: 235; see also Hegghammer 2009a: 249n9, Hegghammer 2010: 47 and Trofimov 2007: 248 – 50.

17 Hegghammer 2009b.

18 On the following dispute between al-Maqdisi and al-Zarqawi see Kepel and Milelli 2008: 244 – 250, and especially Kazimi 2005. For an overview on Islam and violence see Lohlker 2007.

19 Aaron 2008: 91 ff.

20 Springer, Regens and Edger 2009: 49.

21 See McCants and Brachman 2006b: 18, who give a summary of “This is our Creed” (McCants and Brachman 2006b: 168 f.).

author's profile²². This is, because Salafi movements ascribe enormous importance to their distinct *'aqidah*,²³ or in the words of Brachman: "Above all else, Jihadists are concerned with perfecting their *Aqidah*, or Islamic creed, so that they can be as closely aligned with God's teachings as possible."²⁴

But, although the tract to be dealt with here was written in October 1997 (Jumada al-Akhira 1418), and the position of al-Maqdisi as a Jihadi theorist is indisputable, his tract on creed does not seem to have been treated with the consideration it obviously deserves yet. One may well point to Lahoud's article, in which besides al-Maqdisi's intention a single passage is quoted²⁵, to Wagemakers' quotation "he [i.e. al-Maqdisi] deems the 'apostasy' (*ridda*) of Muslim leaders worse than the 'original unbelief' (*kufra* *asli*) of Jews and Christians"²⁶ and similarly to Brachman²⁷. Maybe Wagemakers' thesis with the title "*A quietist Jihadi-Salafi: the ideology and influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi*" will offer an analysis in greater depth. However, his article on the ideology of al-Maqdisi contains the title of the tract in a note²⁸ and he solely deals with the concepts of *al-wala' wa-l-bara'*, the so-called "religion of Abraham", *kufra* and *jihad*, which are central to Jihadi thinking, though. Similarly, relying on a German translation of the tract prepared by the *Islamic Youth (of) Austria*, Baehr²⁹ cites some passages regarding *tawhid*, *takfir* and *al-wala' wa-l-bara'*. Thus, to date, little attention seems to have been paid to theological topics³⁰ discussed in "*hadhihi 'aqidatuna*", which this contribution – notwithstanding its limitations – is meant to address.

Hadhihi 'aqidatuna can be retrieved from <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=j-zoyryz8> and can be downloaded as a Microsoft Word document (doc) or read online in Arabic. Languages into which translations have been made include English (*This is our 'Aqidah*), Russian (*Èto naša ideologija*), French (*Ceci est*

22 As of 13 November 2010, the tract has been read 170.341 times and downloaded 26.270 times, see *Milaff Abi Muhammad al-Maqdisi* (<http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=2qrikosd>). One should not overestimate the given "web statistics" because selecting a specific text calls its chapter index. One can easily show that in the case of www.tawhed.ws, every hit – whether you just select a chapter by clicking on its title and scroll through it or not, read its very first word, none or every word – does increase the number of readings of a text by one. Likewise, clicking the download link which does not necessarily mean to save, open and read the whole text, either. However, this website "boasts the largest online collection of jihadist works" (Kepel 2008: 154).

23 Meijer 2007: 427n21.

24 Brachman 2008: 41.

25 Lahoud 2009: 213 f.

26 Wagemakers 2008: 8.

27 Brachman 2008: 46 f, but also 42 and 199.

28 Wagemakers 2009: 283n15.

29 Baehr 2009: 122 – 36.

30 A major exception is Lohlker 2006.

notre 'Aqidah), German (*Dies ist unsere 'Aqidah*), Bosnian (*Ovo je naša aqida*), Albanian (*Kjo është akidja jonë*), Turkish (*Akîdemiz*), Persian (*'Aqideh-e mā*) and Indonesian (*Inilah aqidah kami*). Therefore, Brachman rightly names al-Maqdisi a "global Jihadist scholar"³¹, and the fact that "his creed" can be read in so many languages may indicate his rank among radical Muslim ideologues. But what is this tract about?

Starting off with an untitled preface, the recently paginated tract is divided into several chapters marked with unnumbered headings which he often closes with summarising key phrases (*thamarat* "fruits"). The first six chapters may well constitute a cohesive first part instead of being chapters strung together, since they address the six articles of Sunni faith. These are as follows: unity of God (*tawhid Allah*, 4 p.), the angels (*al-mala'ikah*, 1 ¼ p.), the books (*al-kutub*, 1 p.), the messengers and prophets (*al-rusul wa-l-'anbiya'*, 3 ½ p.), the Last Judgment (*al-yawm al-akhir* "the last day", 4 p.) and predestination (*al-qadar*, 3 ¼ p.). In a second part, Al-Maqdisi then explains belief (*al-iman*, 2 p.) and unbelief (*al-kufr*, 6 p.) separately, and goes on with *dar al-kufr* and *dar al-iman* (1 p.). Finally, what seems to be incoherent, is a climax consisting of a chapter each on prayer (*al-salah*, 1 ¼ p.), *jihad* and rebellion (*al-jihad wa-l-khuruuj*, 2 p.), and the victorious 'sect' (*al-ta'ifah al-mansurah*, 1 p.), followed by the closing words. A climax, for the tract starts with God's unity and ends with three *ahadith* on a specific subgroup of the Muslim community characterised by its continuous struggle.

In the following, we want to read the tract while focusing on discursive structures which form the backbone of al-Maqdisi's Jihadist ideology. So to say, we want to apply a critical epistemic discourse analysis as proposed by van Dijk, in order to show "how the knowledge of the recipients may be manipulated in the interest of powerful groups"³².

The tract begins with the *basmala* ("In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the giver of mercy"), the traditional thanking to God³³ (which corresponds to Q 1:1–3 here), and the blessings on the seal of prophets, his family and all his companions (*al-salat wa-l-salam ala khatim al-anbiya' wa-l-mursalin wa-ala alih wa-ashabih ajma'in*). Al-Maqdisi explains his motivation in writing *hadhihi 'aqidatuna*³⁴ first:

31 Brachman 2008: 22.

32 Van Dijk 2008: 12.

33 Al-Maqdisi's thanking words correspond to Q 1:1–3. At the end of his preface, he prays for becoming part of the *al-ta'ifa al-mansura* ("the victorious sect") and closes with the words "He [i.e. God] is our protector, the best protector and the best helper" (cf. Q 8:40).

34 Al-Maqdisi 1997: 2, Cf. Lahoud 2009: 213 "I wrote it in my prison cell after I was informed that some people are attributing views to us that we do not espouse, and putting words into our mouth that we never uttered".

“This is an outline of our creed and worship comprising the most essential aspects of religion ... [*recte*:...] I wrote it during my prison sentence after I got to know that some people attribute themselves to us, and put words in our mouths which we did not utter on any day, especially regarding unbelief and belief”.

He had not been thinking about writing on a topic like this, for the seeker of truth (*talib al-haqq*), he continues, could rely on al-Maqdisi's more detailed writings. However, some brethren in *tawhid* (*ikhwat al-tawhid*) who visited him in prison asked him to write on this topic. In so doing, he wants to diminish irritation among beginners in seeking knowledge (*mubtadi'un fi talab al-'ilm*), for maybe some absolute statements of threat [to punishment] (*wa'id*) are not provided an interpretation; or, some pragmatic rulings have been generalised and the not-so-knowledgeable cannot differentiate between them and applying a rule to contemporaries [or senators, cf. below] (*a'yan*); or, some absolute statements have been left as they are without details or an interpretation, in order to make them more effective to the readers, so that nobody can find excuses not to follow them.

Accordingly, al-Maqdisi tries to be like many pious forebearers (*salaf*)³⁵ by generalising statements of punishment, for one should fear not to become an unbeliever as unbelief is not like anything else (*ka-sa'ir al-a'mal*). He defends himself stating that he has dealt with unbelief in detail in his more comprehensive writings. However, he knows that some extreme *takfiris* (*ghulat al-mukaffira*), who do not hesitate in declaring someone to be an unbeliever, are skimming his writings looking for support to their own views; and, in contrast, his enemies among the present-day Murji'ites (“deferrers” of judgement by leaving it to God³⁶) and their like, are striving for his defacement. His respond to objections of any kind is twofold. Firstly, he cites the hadith “Whoever claims for a believer what is not in him, God will let him abide in the sweat of the condemned (*radghat al-khabal*), until he takes it back”³⁷. Secondly, he will be the first, to dissociate himself from anything he has said, if it should turn out that it is

35 Al-Maqdisi admits quoting passages even literally from texts like Abu Ja'far al-Tahawi al-Hanafi's *al-Aqida al-Tahawiya* and Ibn Taymiya's *al-Aqida al-Wasitiya*, for they have had a major impact on him; see al-Maqdisi 1997:3. He also refers to these earlier books defending his choice of restricting himself only to the most important aspects of creed; see al-Maqdisi 1997: 4.

36 In Murji'ite creed, wrongdoers are not regarded as unbelievers, but as misguided believers, see Blankinship 2008: 43; or more generally, “sins do not impair belief”, see Abrahamov 1998: 42.

37 Al-Maqdisi cites only this passage of the *hadith*, which is mentioned in a footnote to be found in Ibn Hanbal 1996, 9: 283 (Nr. 5385); and Abu Dawud 1999:398 (Nr. 3597), but there the wording is ... *hatta yakhruja mimma* ... instead of *hatta ya'tiya bi-l-makhray mimma qal* as given by al-Maqdisi. The *hadith* as given by al-Maqdisi has been passed by 'Abd Allah b. 'Umar and is to be found in al-Albani 2000, 2: 353 (Nr. 1809).

against any text in the Book (i. e. the Qur'an) or the Prophetic tradition (*sunna*) which was concealed (*khafiy*) from him.

The six articles of faith

God's unity

To illustrate God's uniqueness and unity (*tawhid*), al-Maqdisi cites 19 verses (from 60 in total³⁸) from the Qur'an: He is an only one and has no partner – neither in His Lordship (*rububiyya*), nor in His divinity (*uluhiyya*), nor in His attributes (*asma'*) or traits (*sifat*). First of all, he cites Q 51:56 (“I created jinn and mankind only to worship Me”) and Q 6:162 – 3 (“Say, ‘My prayers and sacrifice, my life and death, are all for God, Lord of all the Worlds; * He has no partner. This is what I am commanded, and I am the first to devote myself to Him.’”), in order to make clear that God is (the only one) to be worshipped (Q 7:54, Q 12:40). Thus, the Lord of all worlds, is also the only sovereign and legislator.

Regarding legislation, al-Maqdisi uses the root *sh-r-*; to which *shari'a*, the verb *sharra'a*, the participle *musharri'* and the verbal noun *tashri'* belong, nine times here. He stresses this stance by citing Q 6:121 (“The evil ones incite their followers to argue with you: if you listen to them, you too will become idolaters”), but only partly, for this verse occurs in the context of the illegality of eating meat sacrificed to an idol (cf. Q 6:118 – 121); thus, this verse is not against democratic structures³⁹ or contemporary jurisdiction, both of which al-Maqdisi condemns: *wa-nabra' wa-nakhla' wa-nukaffir bi-kull musharri' siwah* “We dissociate ourselves from any legislator other than Him [i.e. God], abdicate them and declare them to be unbelievers”.

As to God's other attributes which are taken from His or His prophet's descriptions, al-Maqdisi urges to understand them literally and not figuratively (*'ala wajh al-haqiqa la al-majaz*), and – arguably following Ibn Taymiyya – without distorting [them], or stripping [them] away, or [giving them] modality, or likening [them to something else] (*min ghayr tahrif wa-la ta'til wa-min ghayr takyif wa-la tamthil*)⁴⁰. What then follows is a conglomerate of unmarked quotations from *al-Aqida al-Tahawiyya*, articles 41 – 46, which prohibit interpretation in favour of an absolute submission of the mind for a literal understanding of the Qur'an⁴¹. To make a long story short, al-Maqdisi refers to a

38 Unmarked Qur'anic quotations will be given in parentheses in the text introduced by “cf. Q”.

39 On al-Maqdisi's views on democracy see Khosrokhavar 2009: 111 – 118.

40 On the terms *tahrif*, *ta'til*, *takyif* and *tamthil* see Hoover 2007: 49; *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “*Tashbih wa-tanzih*”, and especially Wein 1973: 15 – 18.

41 Cf. Al-Tahawi 1995: 13 – 5.

statement attributed to Malik b. Anas: *al-istiwa' ma'lum wa-l-iman bihi wajib wa-l-kayf majhul wa-l-su'al 'anh bid'a* "God's sitting on the Throne (*istiwa'*) is known and the belief in the *istiwa'* is obligatory (*al-iman bihi wajib*), but its modality is unknown and the inquiry about it is an innovation [and thus forbidden]"⁴². Thus, God is above the heavens on His throne (*'arsh*), but with His worshipers wherever they are, knowing what they are doing; he is near to those praying to Him and He is with His believing (*mu'min*) worshippers whom He guards, helps and protects. All because God is unique.

Angels

One ought to believe that angels are God's honoured servants (*'ibad Allah mukramun*) created from light, who do not speak before He speaks, act by His command and tremble in fear of Him (cf. Q 21:26–28). They praise Him at night and day and do not invent [anything against Him]. Their number is only known to God and they pray for forgiveness for the believers. Amongst them there are messengers (*rusul*) with two, three, four or more wings (cf. Q 35:1). Believers should be embarrassed [by their own behaviour] in front of the [invisible] angels protecting them and love them, because they are part of God's army (*min jund Allah*).

Books

Al-Maqdisi urges to believe in all scriptures revealed to God's messengers (*kutub ... allati anzalaha subhanah 'ala rusulih jumla^{tan}*); especially, those which God named: the Torah (*al-tawra*), the Gospel (*al-injil*) and the Zabur. However, the last revelation is the Qur'an which truly represents God's words⁴³ (*kalam rabb al-'alamin 'ala al-haqiqah*) and is considered to be the final authority (*muhaymin 'ala sa'ir kutub Allah*) as well as a warning [against unbelief] (Q 6:19). The Qur'an was not created and no created speech bears comparison with it. Hence, claiming it is nothing but mortal talk (Q 74:25) will lead one astray (*haqq^a 'alayh* [sc. *al-dalala?*], cf. Q 7:30 and Q 16:36). But God protects the Qur'anic text from substitution and alteration (Q 15:9). Al-Maqdisi states that the Qur'an is the stronghold of salvation (*al-'urwa al-wuthqa*, cf. Q 2:256 and Q 31:22) and therefore, one should hold fast to and live in accordance with the Qur'an. The well-known formula "belief in the ambiguous [parts of the Qur'an] and acting in

42 Cf. Abrahamov 1995: 366 and Wein 1973: 17.

43 Al-Maqdisi believes that God spoke to Musa (*kallam Musa taklim^{an}*), see al-Maqdisi 1997: 11.

accordance with the unambiguous [parts of the Qur'an]" (*al-iman bi-mutashabihih wa-l-'amal bi-muhkamih*)⁴⁴ is rendered by al-Maqdisi to "belief in the ambiguous [parts] and returning them to the unambiguous [parts] in the way the firmly grounded in knowledge did" (*al-iman bi-mutashabihih wa-radduh ila muhkamihi 'ala tariqat al-rasikhin fi al-'ilm*; cf. Q 3:7)⁴⁵. As to the principle of returning the ambiguous parts to unambiguous ones, it is found in Zamakhshari's exegesis on Q 3:7 and earlier in the work of Imamite exegete al-Tusi (d. 460/1067) or Hanafite legal scholar al-Jassas (d. 370/981)⁴⁶; it is also considered as a saying of al-Imam al-Rida (m. 818) "whoever traces back the ambiguous [parts of the] Qur'an, has been guided to the straight path" (*man radda mutashabih al-Qur'an ila muhkamihi hudiya ila sirat mustaqim*).

The passage on interpretation in the unmentioned verse Q 3:7 reads interlinearly as "and (he/they) not does know its interpretation except God (*qlā*) and the firmly grounded in knowledge (they) say". In all relevant readings⁴⁷ we find a small *qlā* after God indicating a favoured stop (*al-waqf awla*) with the firmly grounded in knowledge starting a new nominal clause followed by the verb "say" introducing their statement; except for the reading of Ibn Kathir, which has come down to us through al-Bazzi and Qunbul. The latter two readings do not imply a stop, but the Qari' Muhammad 'Abd al-Hakim Sa'id al-'Abd Allah⁴⁸ does stop after "God" (01:50 – 01:55).

Al-Tabari elucidates different understandings (apart from the point mentioned) and prefers the stop out of syntactical reasons⁴⁹, but the Mu'tazilite al-Zamakhshari does not rule out al-Maqdisi's understanding, for he claims that the meaning, i.e. whether the knowledgeable can figure out God's intention (*ta'wil*) or not, is dependent on the stop which some observe⁵⁰. However, if we follow early non-canonical readings, we have to accept that – as Abdel Haleem puts it – literally spoken "only God knows the true meaning"; for example, 'Abd

44 In al-Nawawi's commentary to the well-known hadith "religion is the advice" (*al-din al-nasiha*) in Muslim's canonical hadith collection this is found as "acting in accordance with the unambiguous [parts of the Qur'an] and submission [of the mind] to the unambiguous [parts of the Qur'an]" (*al-'amal bi-muhkamih wa-l-taslim li-mutashabihih*), see al-Nawawi 1929, 2: 38.

45 Q 3:7 is the verse regarding exegesis and its limitations, see Mårtensson 2009:44n5 for references.

46 Lane 2006: 112 f.

47 Hafs 'an 'Asim, al-Dawri 'an Abi 'Amr, al-Dawri 'an Kisa'i, Hisham 'an Ibn 'Amir, Khalf 'an Hamza, Abu al-Harith 'an al-Kisa'i, Qalun 'an Nafi', Shu'ba 'an 'Asim, al-Susi 'an Abi 'Amr, Dhakwan 'an Abi 'Amir, Warsh 'an Nafi' and Khallad 'an Hamza.

48 The recitation of the whole Qur'an in Ibn Kathir's tradition is to be found as MP3 files on the website of Ibtisam Badr 'Awad al-Jabiri, who teaches at the University of Umm al-Qura in Mecca, see al-Jabiri.

49 al-Tabari 2001, 5: 217 – 222.

50 al-Zamakhshari 1998, 1: 529.

Allah b. Mas'ud read "and its interpretation lies with God", which would make [*inda llah*] *wa-r-rasikhin* necessary (instead of *wa-r-rasikhun*) if we were to include the knowledgeable; yet, Ibn Abi Ka'b and Ibn 'Abbas read "and the firmly grounded in knowledge say"⁵¹, which solves the problem entirely as it constitutes a new verbal clause with the knowledgeable as its subject and renders it impossible to make them a second subject of the preceding verbal clause.

Nevertheless, al-Tha'labi (d. 427/1035) held the opinion that the knowledgeable [i.e. arguably Qur'an scholars] are "partakers in God's knowledge of every aspect of Qur'an interpretation"⁵² – a capability, philosophers claimed for themselves only⁵³. A non-exclusive interpretation of the syntactic category of "and" (conjunctive or resumptive; *waw al-ʿatf* or *waw al-istiʿnaf*)⁵⁴ is not only advocated by 20th century Turkish Qur'an interpreter Yazır⁵⁵, but also by Ibn Taymiyya, who reduced the unknowable to the reality of God's attributes⁵⁶. Due to al-Maqdisi's exclusivist attitude against interpretation in other respects, we may assume that he follows the latter.

Prophets and Messengers

A Muslim ought to believe in all messengers (*rusul*) and prophets (*anbiya*) which God or His Prophet (Muhammad) mentioned, and one should not differentiate between the prophets (cf. Q 2:136, 285 and Q 3:84). Al-Maqdisi cites Q 4:165, Q 16:36, Q 17:15, Q 21:25 and Q 67:8–9 for the various functions of prophets as warners (*nadhīr*, *mundhīr*) and bringers of good news (*mubashshir*), who deliver the message that God is an only one and the only one to be worshipped (Q 21:25). But, they are not capable of guiding the hearts of believers, for these are "between the fingers of the Merciful" (*bayn asabi' al-Rahman*) who turns them the way He likes (*yuqallibuha kayfa yasha*). Thus, God's guidance is a favour which is bestowed upon – al-Maqdisi cites Q 29:69 – those who "strive(d) for our cause" (*jahadu fi sabilina*) which yields the first mentioning of a word related to Jihad; actually it is a verb and *jihad* the related (verbal) noun. Nevertheless, the *jihad* mentioned in Q 29:69 – the only *jihad*-verse al-Maqdisi quotes – has nothing to do with fighting⁵⁷. He adds a part of a hadith to this: "Whoever seeks good will be given it" (*wa-man yataharr^a al-khayr yu'tah*).

51 Al-Khatib 2002, 1: 445.

52 Saleh 2004: 94.

53 Akhtar 2008: 79.

54 Neuwirth 2010: 515.

55 Albayrak 2003: 27–9.

56 Hoover 2007: 54.

57 See Abdel Haleem 2010a: 147 f.

Al-Maqdisi believes in the prophets' wonders and sees them as the best among all mankind with the Prophet Muhammad being the seal of the prophets. There was not and will not be a prophet after him and his [irreplaceable] legislation (*shari'ā*) is the dominant (*muhaymina*) one. A servant of God is not considered a believer until he follows his *shari'ā*, which al-Maqdisi confirms citing Q 4:65, which stands in the context of a dispute between hypocrites (Q 4:64). In addition to this, al-Maqdisi states that God took Muhammad as a friend (*khalil*), just as he did with Ibrahim⁵⁸, and ordered that his community shall follow Ibrahim's model (Q 60:4). Through his decontextualised and dehistoricized re-reading, al-Maqdisi reads the very key concept of modern Jihadi thought⁵⁹ which is known as "association and dissociation" (*al-wala' wa-l-bara'*) or: "loving and hating" for the sake of God⁶⁰ into this verse. So far, al-Maqdisi called for loving of the angels for they belong to "God's army" (*min jund Allah*, p. 9) and the messengers (p. 13), as well as hating those who hate the angels and the messengers, those who associate with God anything else (*mushrikun*) as well as their helpers (*ansar*) and allies (*awliya'*).

From this point, al-Maqdisi switches over to the necessity of loving the pure family of the Prophet (*al baytih al-athar*), his companions, followers and helpers, supplicating for them and making efforts to be from among them; while hating those who hate them. He underlines this position reproaching those who hate the Prophet's companions (*rawafid*) and those who hate the Prophet's lineage (*nawasib*) giving two quotations from a poem, the so-called *Nuniyya* of al-Qahtani. Eventually, al-Maqdisi stresses the irrelevance of lineage quoting the hadith "Whoever was slowed down by his actions will not be sped up by his lineage" (*man abta'a bihi 'amaluh lam yusri' bihi nasabuh*).

The Last Day

Dealing with the topic of the Last Day (*al-yawm al-akhir*), al-Maqdisi touches upon the trial at the grave (*fitnat al-qabr*), the questioning by Munkar and Nakir⁶¹ and the period between burial and the Final Judgement known as *barzakh*, which is only perceivable for the dead and serves as a discriminator between the believer (*mu'min*) in the unperceivable (*al-ghayb*) and the denier (*mukadhdhib*) of it.

He goes on listing the conditions of the "hour" as described by God and His

58 Cf. Muslim 1991, 1: 377 (Nr. 532).

59 Lohlker 2008: 62 f; Wagemakers 2008b and Wagemakers 2008c.

60 Brachman 2008: 47.

61 For other names of the trialling angels see Ess 1997, 4: 528; 4: 531.

Prophet but he does not go into details and does not accept any interpretation of the events: the coming of the *dajjal*, the descending of Maryam (Mary)'s son 'Isa (Jesus) who will kill the *dajjal* eventually, the rising of the sun from its setting point (*tulu' al-shams min maghribiha*), and the appearing of the *dabbat al-ard* (cf. Q 27:82) among others. Taking the last event as an example, we may demonstrate al-Maqdisi's negligence of the so-called "interpretation of the People of innovations" (*ta'wil ahl al-bida*). The term *dabbat al-ard* can be translated roughly as "creature (animal, beast) of the earth" which is to appear on Doomsday. Its characteristics and tasks⁶² have been elaborated upon⁶³, while one may be prone to link it to the beast Behemoth⁶⁴; in fact, about twenty years ago, Harun Yahya argued for its identification with HIV and AIDS⁶⁵ and more recently, with computers and Internet technology⁶⁶.

Al-Maqdisi then points out the belief in the resurrection after death (*ba'th*), the recompense (*jaza'*) for worldly deeds, the being brought to trial (*'ard*) barefooted, nude and uncircumcised (*hufa^{tan} ura^{tan} ghur^{tan} ghayr makhtunin*) in order to be trialed (*hisab*), as well as the reading of the books [of deeds] (*qira'at al-kutub*) and the balance [of Divine justice] (*mizan*; Q 21:47). Furthermore, he mentions the lowering of the sun above the servants' heads, so that everyone stands in his own sweat, while the sweat reaches his heels, knees, loins or his mouth (*yuljimuh 'araquh iljam^{an}*) dependent on his deeds. On this very day, some members of the Prophet's community will drink from the Prophet's basin (*hawd*) which is a month's journey each in length and width at which there are as many vessels available as stars in the sky, containing water that is whiter than milk and sweeter than honey, which stops thirst forever. As to who will be denied access (*mimman yudhad*) to the basin, al-Maqdisi mentions the helpers of tyrannical emirs (*a'wan al-umara' al-zalama*) on his part and the innovators in religion on the Prophet's part (*suhq^{an} suhq^{an} li-man baddala ba'di* "Away with those who made changes after me").

Al-Maqdisi goes on with "*sirat*", the bridge across Hellfire with dogs watching over it. This bridge will be crossed with varying speed, manner and success dependent on the worldly deeds of God's servants. The successful will enter Paradise, others will be snatched or will plunge to Hell. But, before finally entering Paradise, the purgatorial bridge (*qantara*)⁶⁷ is to be passed at which the

62 Cook 2002: 92 – 3.

63 *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Dābba", and Eisenstein 1989 analysed the descriptions of *dabbat al-ard* in Q 34:14.

64 Arjomand 1997: 6.

65 For a discussion of the association of the *dabbat al-ard* with HIV and AIDS see Schönig 1990 and Gülen 2005: 103 – 112.

66 Yahya 2009.

67 Cf. Wansbrough 1977: 173.

successful will be purified from injustices among themselves. The first one to enter Paradise will be the Prophet Muhammad followed by his community.

At this point, al-Maqdisi states – in opposition to Jahmite creed⁶⁸ – that Paradise and Hell are [already] created and do not perish (*makhlūqatan la tafnayan*) except for the temporary stay of sinful *muwahhidun* (i.e. those practising *tawhid* cf. above) in the Fire. God has created occupants for both Paradise and Hell. Whoever He wills, will enter Paradise through His favour (*bi-faḍlih*) and whoever He wills, will enter Hell through his justice (*bi-ʿadlih*). Paradise, the eternal abode of delight, was created for the believers (*muʾminun*), while Hell, the eternal abode of punishment, was created for the unbelievers (*kafirun*) and the disobedient Muslims (*ʿusat al-muslimin*). The latter have to expiate their sins by suffering in Hell for a certain period of time, not for ever as in Kharijite creed⁶⁹. Furthermore, in opposition to Ibadite creed, the Prophet will be allowed to intercede for mankind, for those to enter Paradise in order to enter it and for those *muwahhidun* who deserve Hell in order not to enter it or to be taken out from it, while God will take some of the sinful out without any intercession.

Al-Maqdisi closes this chapter with a paragraph on the belief that the believers (*muʾminun*) will see God on the Day of Resurrection and in Paradise (Q 75:24 [sic!, *recte*: Q 75:23] “looking towards their Lord” or “will be expecting their Lord’s mercy”⁷⁰) as clear as they see the moon in a full moon night (*laylat al-badr*), according to the Prophet. Hence, as looking (*nazar*) and seeing (*ruʾya*) are not equal to perceiving (*idrak*) – which is beyond all question (Q 6:103 “no vision can take Him in”) –, al-Maqdisi claims to be in accordance with the Qurʾan and the tradition of the Prophet. Then, whoever does not believe in the seeing (*ruʾya*)⁷¹ of God may be denied this bounty.

Predestination

Reporting al-ʿAqida al-Tahawiyya, Al-Maqdisi introduces the notion of the omniscient Creator who has decreed death terms for all and without whose will nothing happens. All servants are subject to His will (*yataqallabun fi mashiʾatih*) between His bounty and justice, for He guides and leads astray whoever He wishes and He has no obligation towards creation.

Al-Maqdisi states, that belief in predestination is twofold. First, God knows

68 Blankinship 2008: 44.

69 Blankinship 2008: 46.

70 Mir 1989: 349, and e.g. Zayd b. ʿAli as an exegete.

71 Hermansen 2008: 320, Blankinship 2008: 46 f and 53; Abrahamov 1996: 16 f and Cuperly 1982: 91 f for the discussion of perceiving God in Tibghurin’s Ibadite creed.

what the creation (*al-khalq*) is doing and He already knew what creation will be doing before creation. His commands and decrees were written on the preserved tablet (*al-lawh al-mahfuz*, cf. Q 85:22) and “the pen dried out” (*jaff al-qalam*). So, whatever [event] misses a slave was not meant to befall him (*ma akhta' al-'abd lam yakun li-yusibah*) and whatever [event] befalls him, was not meant to miss him (*wa-ma asabah lam yakun li-yukhti'ah*). Second, is the belief in God's operational will (*mashi'at Allah al-nafidha*) and his all-inclusive power (*qu-draturah al-shamila*)⁷². God's will is of two types: a prescriptive or legislative will (*mashi'a shar'iyya*) which could be disobeyed, and a creational will (*mashi'a qadariyya*) which cannot be changed.

God created the actions of His servants (Q 37:96) and their wills. God willing, they will (Q 81:29). Hence, being provided with intention (*irada*) and will (*mashi'a*), the human being is actually the agent of his actions (*fa'il li-afalih 'ala al-haqiqah*); a fact which contradicts the Qadariyya and Ahl al-Ithbat (affirmationists [of predetermination]), who have gone to extremes, depriving the servant of any capability (*qudra*) and choice (*ikhtiyar*).

Al-Maqdisi concludes that this should be enough to know about predestination (*qadar*), for God has concealed details of His knowledge from His servants and has forbidden immersion therein, for “He cannot be called to account for anything He does, whereas they [i.e. the servants] will be called to account” (Q 21:23). Hence, whoever asks “Why did He do that” (*li-ma fa'al*) has become an unbeliever, has lost and failed (*kafar wa-khasir wa-khab*), because knowledge is of two types: existent (*mawjud*) knowledge, which God provided, and absent (*mafqud*) knowledge, which God concealed. Denying the existent knowledge is unbelief; likewise with pretending knowledge of the absent. Thus, belief is accepting the existent and leaving the absent to its Knower (*'alimuh*). One should seek confidence (*tawakkul*) in God only and feel content (*itmi'nan*) for everything that happens – be it good or evil – is happening through God's will.

Belief and unbelief

Belief

Al-Maqdisi gives a widely used definition of belief (*iman*) as action (*'amal*), speech (*qawl*) and intention (*niyya*), which he paraphrases (in reverse order) as believing with the heart (*i'tiqad bi-l-janan*), affirmation with the tongue (*iqrar bi-l-lisan*) and acting physically [with the limbs] (*'amal bi-l-jawarih*; cf. Q 41:19 – 24, Q 24:24). Belief is dependent on obedience, as such it increases with obe-

72 Cf. Hoover 2007: 119.

dience (*ta'ā*) and decreases with disobedience (*ma'siya*). It consists of several branches (*shu'ab*, sg. *shu'ba*), the highest of which (*a'laha*) is the credo *la ilaha illa Allah* "There is no God beside God" and the lowest (*adnaha*) is putting injustice out of the way (*imatat al-adha 'an al-tariq*). Furthermore, belief does have several hand-holds (*'ura*, sg. *'urwa*), the firmest of which (*awthaquha*) is to love and hate for God's sake (*al-hubb fi llah wa-l-bughd fi llah*), and [feeling] sympathy and aversion for God's sake (*al-muwala fi llah wa-l-mu'ada fi llah*), which we mentioned to be among the key concepts of present-day Jihadi thought.

But, we may point out here that in the Qur'an *al-'urwa al-wuthqa* "the firmest hand-hold" is belief in God and benefaction. It occurs twice, in Q 2:256 "whoever rejects false gods [*al-taghut*] and believes in God has grasped the firmest hand-hold", and in Q 31:22 "Whoever directs himself [his face] wholly to God and does good work, has grasped the firmest hand-hold". However, Jihadists' firmest hand-hold of belief (*awthaq 'ura al-iman*) being association and dissociation (*al-wala' wa-l-bara'*) for God's sake is argued for on grounds of *ahadith* which e.g. Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab's grandson Sulayman b. 'Abd Allah (d. 1233 / 1818) has put together in a tract entitled – as one may expect – *awthaq 'ura al-iman*⁷³. Yet, the concept of *walaya* and *bara'a* has been serving Ibadites (the so-called *khawarij*) as "the spiritual and physical cement of the [Ibadi] community binding it to God"⁷⁴ from the ninth century on⁷⁵.

Going back to the branches of belief, al-Maqdisi classifies them into core belief (*asl al-iman*), obligations of belief (*wajib[at] al-iman*) and perfectionisers of desirable belief (*mukammilat al-iman al-mustahabb*). He exemplifies the essential core by *tawhid*, prayer and their likes of what the Legislator [i.e. God] (*shari'*) prescribes; upholding the view that their omission negates faith. Omission of actions which fall in the second category lessens belief. Among them is loving and hating for the sake of God, and that one's neighbour feels safe from one's evil (*ya'man jaruh bawa'iqah*), and their likes of actions the ommitter of which is regarded a sinner (*ya'tham tarikuh*); [its omission is] like committing forbidden actions (*iqtiraf al-muharramat*) like fornication (*zina*), drinking alcohol [wine, intoxicant] (*shurb al-khamr*) and theft (*sariqa*). The committer of such sins does not become an unbeliever and the core of belief is not negated, but his obligatory belief decreases and he is not safe from [the threat to] punishment (*wa'id*). One will not to be held accountable for omitting the perfectionisers of desirable belief like putting injustice out of the way (*imatat al-adha 'an al-tariq*) or charity (*husn al-'ahd*).

73 Abd al-Wahhab 2002: 53–6.

74 Wilkinson 2010: x.

75 Lohlker 2009: 62.

In order to demonstrate that a believer is obliged to follow the legislative texts, he cites once again Q 4:65 (cf. 1.4), which actually stands in the context of hypocrites and reads: “By your Lord, they will not be true believers until they let you decide between them in all matters of dispute, and find no resistance in their souls to your decisions, accepting them totally”. If one should act against a single textual prescription only, one loses his belief and becomes an unbeliever. By omitting parts of obligatory belief, one becomes a sinner (*athim, fasiq*), and the otherworldly fate becomes dependent on God's will – core belief (*asl al-iman*) provided. Thus, al-Maqdisi sees himself distinct from Murji'ites and Kharijites in terms of punishment (*wa'id*), as the former leave judgement to God and prefer interior faith over external actions⁷⁶, while the latter hold the view that sinners will be eternally in Hell. According to al-Maqdisi, the *asma' al-iman wa-l-din*, i. e. the predicates of belief and religion like *mu'min, muslim, kafir, fasiq* etc. form another distinctive feature between him and the Haruriyya, Mu'tazila, Murji'a and Jahmiyya. We may explain this using the example of the sinner: the Haruriyya as a Kharijite group declared the committer of a grave sin to be an unbeliever (*kafir*)⁷⁷, the Mu'tazila claimed the sinner to be in an intermediate state between belief and unbelief, and the Murji'ites regarded the sinner to be a misguided believer (*mu'min dall*), while the Jahmiyya hold the view that faith is an affair of the heart without any outward expression at all, hence an unbeliever is an ignorant of truth (*jahil bi-l-haqq*)⁷⁸. In the following, al-Maqdisi introduces his idea of unbelief which takes up 6 of the 33 content pages.

Unbelief

Al-Maqdisi dismisses the Jahmite innovative (*bid'i*) position that “man does not become an unbeliever except by heartily denying [belief]” (*al-mar'la yakfur illa bi juhud qalbi*), for denying [belief] occurs through actions, as well as speech and the heart – just like affirming [belief]. Furthermore, he mentions three types of unbelief (*kufur*): through denial (*juhud*), ignorance (*jahl*) and turning away (*i'rad*). As there are lots of negators (*nawaqid*) of Islam, it is easier to attain unbelief than Islam.

As such, *kufur* deeds are of varying severity. Hence, there are severe and less severe *kufur* actions, severe and less severe errors and deviations in faith (*i'tiqad*). A severe action of *kufur* is legislating beside God (*tashri' ma'a llah*)⁷⁹, proster-

76 Blankinship 2008: 43 f.

77 On Khariji *takfir* and its impact on modern Islamic movements see Green 2009.

78 Blankinship 2008: 38.43.44.47 and Ibn Taymiyya 2005, 5: 120 f (7/189); 5: 123 (7/193).

79 Al-Maqdisi formulated the idea of condemning “gouvernerait pas selon ce que Dieu avait

nation to the Sun (*sujud li-sh-shams*) and to idols (*asnam*); slandering (*sabb*) God, or the religion or the prophets, or showing mockery (*izhar al-istihza*), or offending (*istihana*) something related to religion. Yet, being disobedient does not always lead to excommunication (*la tukhrij sahibaha min da'irat al-islam*). For instance, this applies to fornication (*zina*), theft (*sariqa*) and drinking alcohol (*shurb al-khamr*). By stating that there are sins (*dhunub*, sg. *dhanb*) which impair or even negate belief, al-Maqdisi adopts an anti-Murjite / anti-Jahmite position.

He affirms that every child is born with a naturally religious disposition (*fitra*; cf. Q 30:30) and its parents Judaize, Christianise, Zoroastrianise the child or make the child become a polytheist. In al-Maqdisi's creed we do not meet the terms *ahl al-kitab* or *dimma* for one simple reason: He regards every non-Muslim a *kafir*⁸⁰; hence, Jews and Christians are *kuffar*⁸¹ too and whoever is not a follower of Islam, is an unbeliever (*kafir*), whether the message of Islam reached him or not. If it reached him, he is an adversary unbeliever (*kafir mu'anid*) and if it did not reach him, he is an ignorant unbeliever (*kafir jahil*). For, in order to disclose His order, God sent messengers and revealed books, the final authority of which is the Qur'an and the only true religion in God's judgement is the religion of Islam (Q 3:19).

Among all the other things which are contrary to Islam, from which al-Maqdisi dissociates, is – once again – democracy, which in his view is a religion. He states that whoever follows democracy seeks a religion different from Islam, and whoever seeks a religion different from Islam will be among the losers on the Last Day (Q 3:85). So, he declares to be an unbeliever whoever legislates beside God, according to the religion of democracy which is predicated on legislation of people for people (*tashri' al-sha'b li-l-sha'b*). But not every elector is an unbeliever, since some of the electorate want to elect a representative for matters of worldliness and life which reflects contemporary needs and is of wide occurrence (*amr 'ammat bihi l-balwa*). While such non-legislating representatives are not regarded as unbelievers, on the contrary, participation in *élections législatives* (*intikhabat tashri'iyya*; general, legislative, parliamentary or national elections) is an act of unbelief, if there is an argument (*hujja*) – in a complex situation.

prescrit" as Rougier puts it firstly in *Millat Ibrahim*, which he wrote in 1988 in Peshawar, the cradle of the contemporary Jihadist Salafism, see Rougier 2008: 81. In this point, he arguably seems to follow Ibn Taymiyya, see Wiktorowicz 2005: 78.

80 Al-Maqdisi 1997: 26. See also the "exclusive or" (*am*) in the disjunction in *kuffar^{an} kanu am muslimin* (al-Maqdisi 1997: 32).

81 This is implicitly clear from the partitive phrase *fa-ma makkana li-l-yahud wa-la li-l-nasara wa-la li-ghayrihim min al-kuffar ...* (al-Maqdisi 1997: 35), in which the Jews and Christians occur as subgroups of *kuffar*.

Al-Maqdisi eases the rule not to declare anyone of the Ahl al-Qibla (people who pray towards the *qibla*, i. e. facing Mecca) to be an unbeliever for a sin by adding “[a sin] which does not make someone an unbeliever (*ghayr mukaffir*) and as long as he does not declare it to be allowed (*ma lam yastahillah*)”, which is taken from al-‘Aqida al-Tahawiyya with the amendment of *ghayr mukaffir*⁸². Thus, not every kind of disobedience, not every sin and not every innovation (*bid'a*)⁸³ leads to unbelief. A sinner, in his view, is to be described as a “believer deficient in belief” (*mu`min naqis al-iman*) or as a “believer through his belief, a sinner through his big sin” (*mu`min bi-imanih fasiq bi-kabiratih*). Muslims are judged on their Islam and their abstention from setting up partners (*shirk*) or equals / rivals (*tandid*, cf. Q 2:22) to God as long as they desist from negations of faith (*ma lam yatalabbasu bi-naqid*). So, the conditions (*shurut*, sg. *shart*) and estoppels (*mawani*‘, sg. *mani*) of declaring someone to be an unbeliever (*takfir*) are considered and looked upon; while the weakening factor of the absence of an Islamic authority (*sultan*), rule (*hukm*) and state (*dawla*) is taken into account, as well as the subsequent ignorance, doubts going back to reasons of poor erudition and the poor number of religious scholars devoted to God (*‘ulama’ rabbaniiyyun*, cf. Q 3:79). Eventually, he states that it is not upon men to look into others’ hearts, and one can only judge based on the obvious [conduct] in this world. As to the group of interpreters (*ahl al-ta`wil*), he does not declare them to be unbelievers as long as the differences are verbal (*lafzi*), or knowledge-based (*masa’il ‘ilmiyya*) which are excused by ignorance.

Al-Maqdisi does not hurry in declaring someone to be an unbeliever without proof and evidence, and adds a slightly changed quotation from al-Qadi ‘Iyad’s *Kitab al-shifa*⁸⁴ which he gives two more times:

“There is a danger of making the blood of Muslims [or: those who pray] and affirm Allah’s unity lawful. The error which leaves a thousand unbelievers untouched is lighter than the error of shedding the blood of a single Muslim in the amount of a cupping glass (taking the life of a single Muslim)”⁸⁵

He differentiates between an [absolutely valid] action of unbelief (*kufr al-naw’* or *‘amal mukaffir*) and declaring a single individual to be an unbeliever (*kufr al-mu`ayyan*). Whoever entered Islam by conviction (*yaqin*) may not leave it through mere doubt. But, one becomes an unbeliever oneself, if one does not accuse someone of being an unbeliever, disregarding proofs in terms of textual prescriptions that are provided for declaring him to be an unbeliever.

82 Tahawi 1995: 21 (Nr. 78).

83 Maqdisi 1997: 29.

84 Al-Khafaji 2001, 6: 328 (*fasi fi tahqiq al-qawl fi ikfar al-muta`awwalin*).

85 Cf. al-Yahsubi 2006: 421.

Mobilization

Dar al-kufr, dar al-islam and their dwellers

Al-Maqdisi goes beyond the definitions of *dar al-kufr* as the world of unbelievers and *dar al-islam* as the world of Islam, the dwellers of which (*qatiniha* [sic! *recte: qatinuha*]) are unbelievers respectively Muslims. He urges to treat people in the way of what they display. Hence, if someone displays Islamic practices (*sharaʿ al-Islam*), he will be treated as a Muslim and if someone displays unbelief, he will be treated as an unbeliever until he believes in God alone and unifies Him in his worship, and desists from what could lead to unbelief in worship. Yet, declaring someone to be an unbeliever on grounds of his shaven beard or his resemblance to unbelievers is not sufficient proof, and hence, not to be used as a proof therefore.

Prayer

As long as someone from Ahl al-Qibla does not display any negator of faith (*naqid* [sc. *al-iman*]), and as long as there is an obstacle (*maniʿ*) for declaring him to be an unbeliever, he may lead a prayer. He will not be accused of being an unbeliever, *mushrik* or hypocrite unless obvious evidence is available (*ma lam yazhar minhum shayʿ min dhalik*). One may not pray behind [governmental Imams who are] associates of Satanic governments [*mutawall li-nuwwab al-tawaghit*]; otherwise, al-Maqdisi urges for a repetition of the accomplished prayer. As to such [governmental Imams] who work for causes of living and worldliness, prayer behind them is detestable along the lines of prayer behind malefactors (*ahl al-fisq*) and non-unbelieving innovators (*ashab al-bidaʿ ghayr al-mukaffira*).

What concerns invocation for rulers, likewise believers and unbelievers, al-Maqdisi regards it an innovation of the Friday prayer and as a sign of obedience to them. Thus, as long as the imam does not supplicate for the triumph of Satanic rulers (*tawaghit*) or their religion which associates partners to God ([*li-*] *dinihim al-shirki*), praying behind such an Imam is only to be avoided and not illicit.

If a religious scholar (*ʿalim*) renders homage (*bayaʿ*) to the Satanic legislator (*al-taghut al-musharriʿ*) or the unbelieving ruler (*al-hakim al-kafir*), he becomes an unbelieving apostate (*kafir murtadd*). In general, his state [i.e. predicate of belief] is dependent upon the office he takes. If it does involve unbelief or support (*iʿana*) to unbelief like participation in unbelievers' legislation etc., he becomes an unbeliever. If he is involved in "intensifying the black of the wrong" (*takthir li-sawad al-batil*) or clothing the truth (*talbis al-haqq*) through his

position, then he is among the ignorant heads (*al-ru'us al-juhhal*) who deviated and lead astray (*dallu wa-ʿadallu*).

Jihad and Rebellion

Finally, al-Maqdisi introduces his notion of Jihad. It is a common past of every Muslim community and one is obliged to fight (*yujahid*) on his own or together with the leaders – as long as they do not command to disobey God – until the Last Day. If required, it is permissible to fight unbelievers with those who disobey God according to the guideline of putting down the major of two evils through the lesser of both (*dafʿ aʿzam al-mafsadatayn bi-adnahuma*). Thus, the obligation for Jihad does not drop even if an Imam or an Islamic State are missing and absent.

Al-Maqdisi urges for rebellion (*khuruʿ*) against unbelieving Imams (*aʿimmat al-kufr*)⁸⁶ of unbelieving leaders who command Muslims and have become apostates, for several possible or multiple reasons: they changed the *shariʿa*, their legislation beside God, their Eastern and Western Satanic arbitration, their association to God's enemies, and their hating God's religion and His friends (*awliya*). Apart from that, it is none other than these apostates who have given reign to Christians and Jews and other unbelievers over Muslims. So, fighting them is better than fighting anyone else, for apostate unbelief (*kufr al-ridda*) is worse than essential unbelief (*al-kufr al-asli*) [i.e. non-Muslims], securing one's funds (*hifz raʿs al-mal*) is preferable to profit, defensive jihad is preferred over offensive jihad, and it is better to start waging Jihad against the near unbelievers than against the far ones. Likewise, it is among the absolute duties (*awjab al-wajibat*) to fight those holding someone back (*muʿattilun*) from Jihad, and to remove and replace them until the entire religion (*din*) is for God alone. Perfect preparation is necessary for such actions and thus preferred over individual actions (*aʿmal fardiya*) and disorganised efforts (*juhud mubaʿthara*). Jihad is an irrevocable (*la yubattiluh shayʿ*) kind of worship and a prescribed obligation (*farida mashruʿa*) that can be carried out at any time and by one's own; even if one is sure of his martyrdom and forlornness.

86 Intentionally or not, or maybe due to unfortunately chosen words, al-Maqdisi's specification of some governmental Imams as "Imams of unbelief" (*aʿimmat al-kufr*) might evoke associations to Q 9:12 "fight the leaders of unbelief" which employs exactly this term.

Al-Ta'ifa al-mansura

In this very last chapter, al-Maqdisi quotes three *ahadith* which state that a subgroup of the Prophet's community is a fighting one (*umma yuqatilun*). He sees this group as a struggling [or: Jihadi] and fighting (*ta'ifa mujahida muqatila*) group, the members of which are the helpers of the religion. He wishes to become part of them and to die as a martyr in the cause of God.

Conclusion

In this paper of limited scope we gave some basic information about the life of Abu Muhammad 'Asim b. Muhammad b. Tahir al-Barqawi and his becoming Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi who is considered as today's most influential Jihadi theorist. We introduced and commented his tract on creed entitled "This is our creed" (*hadhihi 'aqidatuna*) and may note his tendency to suppress interpretation and exegesis by condemning those who do so. Instead, he seems to content himself with listing some deferred facts through a literal, reductionist and highly exclusivistic reading of some Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions as well as texts by Ibn Taymiyya and the *Aqida* of al-Tahawi. Al-Maqdisi stresses that whoever claims knowledge about the unknown and the unperceivable – despite the wealth of material in traditional Muslim scholarship – is an unbeliever. Yet, he admits the return of ambiguous Qur'anic verses to unambiguous verses to those firmly grounded in knowledge (Q 3:7). In doing so, he creates the impression that further questioning – instead of taking orders and listening – is forbidden, and silences the readership.

Al-Maqdisi outlines the six articles of Islamic creed – belief in God, His angels, His prophets, His books, the Day of Judgement and predestination – and explains likewise belief and disbelief, but in an admittedly very shortened form and in broad terms only. Key points of his creed are the uniqueness of God in His lordship, divinity, attributes and traits, the uncreatedness and incomparability of the Qur'an to created speech, the createdness and eternity of paradise and hell, predestination while one has a will to chose one's actions (which God created); moreover, that sins weaken or even negate belief, and that Muslims with a sound core belief who transgressed against God's law will expiate their sins in hell but for a specific time only.

A dossier of particular and far more concern to al-Maqdisi than events of the Day of Judgement and eschatological imagery, is the illegitimacy of having a legislator beside God alone; an idea, which he may have taken up from Ibn

Taymiyya, and which he does not get tired of stressing⁸⁷. In al-Maqdisi's opinion, legislation beside God is a manifestation of democracy which he redefines as a religion, for giving law is a matter of God alone. He argues that whoever seeks another legislator, seeks another Lord and thus another religion; accordingly, democracy is a religion too. Against expectation, he does not condemn elections and the electorate in general, but only legislative elections such as parliamentary elections and offices related to legislation and supporting "Satanic governments". He declares such supporters to be unbelieving apostates and establishes them through the illegitimacy of co-legislation as a democratic (thus innovative, and non-Islamic) principle as a hub and starting point for waging Jihad against.

We may end this limited contribution with the words of Abdel Haleem: "Muslim extremists and anti-Muslim propagandists hold the same views on *jihād* and stand on the same ground. Both deviate flagrantly from the teachings of the Qur'an"⁸⁸.

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87 Al-Maqdisi 1997: 4.7.25 – 8.30.33 f.

88 Abdel Haleem 2010a: 164.

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Thomas K. Gugler

From Kalashnikov to Keyboard: Pakistan's Jihadiscapes and the Transformation of Lashkar-e Tayba

“Modern scholarship sees zealotry as a retrogression into primitivism and as a pathology of traditions. On closer look it turns out to be a by-product and a pathology of modernity.”¹

The global jihadist movement was born in Pakistan, a country currently commonly considered the most dangerous place in the world today as there every nightmare of the twenty-first century – terrorism, nuclear proliferation, the danger of nuclear war, lack of democratic government, poverty, drugs, and an intelligence that is not always doing what it is supposed to do – come together.² The Islamic Republic of Pakistan has a current estimated population of 170 million³ and is apparently being torn apart by religious, ethnic and regional tensions. These vary from sectarian attacks carried out by Sunni and Shia extremists in central Punjab and the Northern Provinces, to the ethnic tensions between Pathans and Mohajirs in Karachi, or the insurgency in Baluchistan. The level of violence is in practice sometimes similar to that during wartime. During 2009 more than 12,000 people got killed in terrorist or operational attacks, acts of political violence etc. (PIPS 2010: 4).

As the Pakistani military apparatus partners with jihadists in order to fight its covert wars and the political elites in Pakistan cooperate with Islamist militants to contend with political opponents inside, religious extremisms are often a continuation of state politics in Pakistan. However, extremism becomes at times dominant to an extent that it threatens to undermine the foundations of state and society.⁴

Since the jihadist transformation of local religiosities started in the shadow of the jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan, radical Sunni groups engage in several often overlapping jihads:⁵ i) internal sectarian, ii) regional jihads in Afghanistan and India, in addition to relatively new iii) global jihads against *the West*.

1 Nandy 2002: 78.

2 Cf. Riedel, 2008: 12 – 13. The copyright for the term “world’s most dangerous country” traces probably back to Moreau 2007.

3 <http://www.statpak.gov.pk/depts/pco/> [01.03.2011].

4 Cf. Rashid 2008, Hussain 2008, International Crisis Group 2009.

5 On the concept of jihad in the classical tradition see Cook 2005 and Bonner 2006.

Sectarian jihadist agenda

The Ahmadiyya, or: the first martial law in 1953

The Ahmadiyya constitute one of the most persecuted religious minorities inside Pakistan. The first post-independence riots against followers of the Islamic reform movement Ahmadiyya, founded in Qadian in 1889, broke out in 1953. Martial law had to be declared over Lahore – the first martial law in the history of Pakistan that set in many ways an example for most other crises that followed. From 1953 till 1973 persecution of Ahmadis was sporadic. A new wave of professional organized anti-Ahmadi-violence in 1974 led to the constitutional amendment on September 21 1974, when the state legitimized anti-Ahmadiyya-agitations and declared them non-Muslims as they do not recognize the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad.⁶ Equated with Jews and Hindus, many of their mosques were destroyed and since then the persecution has become quasi legal. From 1974 on Ahmadis were forbidden to call themselves Muslims in the Islamic Republic. For some *ulama*, however, this amendment did not go far enough. On April 26 1984 Zia ul-Haq promulgated Ordinance XX (Pakistan Penal Code Section 298-B and 298-C),⁷ which prohibited Ahmadis from using the term *mosque* for their places of worship, reciting *adhan*, propagating their faith, greeting with *salam* – or engaging in similar acts of styling themselves as Muslims.⁸ In 1995 two Ahmadis were publicly stoned in Shab Qadar facing police forces. The coordinated attacks on two Ahmadi mosques in Lahore on May 28 2010 that killed 93 people, were one of the more recent major incidents.

The agitations against Ahmadis set an example as some *ulama* believed their agitations against subscribers to other denominations could become likewise fruitful.

The Shias, or: Iranian vs. Pakistani models of the Islamic Revolution

With about 30 million, the second largest Shia population, after Iran, is located in Pakistan. The Shia community in Pakistan comprises Twelvers (*Ithna Ashari*), the Shia majority, and Fivers or *Ismailis* who spun off to smaller communities like the Bohras (Blank 2001).

Several leaders of Pakistan were Shias. The founder of Pakistan, Muhammad

6 <http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/constitution/amendments/2amendment.html> [01.12.2010].

7 <http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/legislation/1860/actXLVof1860.html#f110> [25.02.2011].

8 <http://www.thepersecution.org/50years/paklaw.html> [25.02.2011]. It is noteworthy that this site, documenting anti-Ahmadi-agitations, is still routinely banned in Pakistan by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority.

Ali Jinnah, was an Ismaili by birth and a Twelver Shia by confession (Nasr 2006: 88). Three of Pakistan's first Prime Ministers were Shias as well as two of its military leaders (Iskandar Mirza – Pakistan's first president – and Yahya Khan). The later prime ministers Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and his daughter Benazir Bhutto were also Shias, although Benazir styled herself as a Sunni after Sunni fundamentalism became Pakistan's ersatz-nationalism (cf. Nasr 2006: 88). The current president Asif Ali Zardari is also Shia, although not known for being in particularly religious.

Sunni-Shia-relations were peaceful in Pakistan until the 1970's (Zahab 2002 and Zaman 1998). The Pakistani state remained neutral as it had no sectarian agenda before the late 1970's. It was Zia ul-Haq's activism after 1979 to integrate and prioritize *Hanafi fiqh* into the constitution that mobilized Shia resistance.

The dynamic aspects of transformation processes in militant movements can usually be explained in the contexts of state politics. In 1979, Saddam Husain became the president in Iraq and Ayatollah Khomeini the Supreme Leader in Iran. On September 22 1980 the Iraqi army launched its Blitzkrieg-attack against Iran, which resulted in long static warfare with heavy losses known as the First Gulf War (1980 – 1988). This contributed to an internationalization of the Sunni-Shia conflict. Due to the sheer numbers of Shias in Pakistan, this is where Iran focused first following the Islamic Revolution.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran challenged Sunni political elites in Pakistan, so that a protection belt of radical Sunni mosques and *madaris* was planted in the area bordering Iran in order to prevent Shiite Pan-Islamism from spreading to Pakistan. State-sponsored politics of Sunnization fostered the dramatic increase of Sunni *madaris* in the early 1980's, in particular in the border area of Baluchistan. The massive changes during these times could be placed in the context of rival models of Islamic revolutions – an Iranian competing with a Pakistani one.

Islamization for Zia meant Sunnification, i.e. institutionalizing discrimination against Shias and also Barelwis (Sufis). Ibn Taimiya's tome *Minhaj al-Sunna al-Nabawiya* (Path of Prophetic Traditions) was rediscovered and Shias became the *enemy within*, more or less obvious misunderstanding the Sunni view of authority. In 1984 the senior Deobandi *alim* Muhammad Manzur Nu'mani from Lucknow published the book *Irani Inqilab: Imam Khumaini aur Shi'at* [its English translation *Khomeini, Iranian Revolution and the Shi'ite Faith* was published by Furqan in London in 1988]. With Saudi financial support the book was translated from Urdu into English, Arabic and Turkish. This book made Deobandis central to the sectarian confrontation in Pakistan and it became the gospel of Deobandi militant organizations in the 1980's gearing up for the fight against the Shia (Nasr 2006: 165).

The sectarian landscapes of Pakistan then gave birth to the donation-funded

mullah, travelling to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait or Iraq, systematically increasing his impact in the rural areas of Pakistan with the help of armed bodyguards. The legitimation of the Afghan jihad enabled Zia ul-Haq to transform Pakistan to a centre of US-funded Sunni Islamism (Haqqani 2005), becoming a kind of religious nationalism (Juergensmeyer 1993) in Pakistan.

Militant Sunni organizations mushroomed and the jihad-zeitgeist opened up new ways of arming people and providing military training. Iran on the other hand, established cultural centres in several larger cities of Pakistan with the aim of advertising a sort of Pan-Islamism via Shia mosques (Riesebrodt 1993). With the foundation of the TNFJ (Tahrik-e Nifaz-e Fiqh-e Ja'fariya, Organization for the Implementation of Jafari Jurisprudence) by Mufti Ja'far Husain (1916–1983) in 1979 in Bhakkar, Shias underlined their resistance against the state politics of Sunnization under Zia. After 1985 the TNFJ became militant.

The first militant Anti-Shia-organization is also the largest militant Deobandi-movement. In 1985 Mawlana Nawaz Jhangvi and others founded the SSP (Sipah-e Sahaba Pakistan, Army of the Companions of the Prophet in Pakistan). The SSP was collaborating until 1989 with the JUI (Jami'at-e Ulama-ye Islam, the political party close to Deobandi institutions). According to reports, the SSP was involved in around 1,200 cases of violence. At present about 5,000–6,000 trained activists are connected to the SSP. The then president, military dictator and chief of army Zia ul-Haq supported the SSP in Punjab and the MQM in Sindh and one of the intentions was to mobilize against the popular PPP (Pakistan People's Party) led by the Shia Bhutto-family. The SSP received financial support from the Saudi kingdom and several other governments critical of Iran. The targets of their violence were initially Shia activists, then representatives of state authority, local politicians, diplomats and judges.

The murder of Nawaz Jhangvi in 1990 led to heavy conflicts. In the same year, among others, the Iranian diplomat Sidaq Ganji was also murdered in Lahore. In 1992 the TJP (Tahrik-e Ja'fariya-ye Pakistan, Organization of the Followers of Jafar in Pakistan) and in 1994 the Sipah-e Muhammad Pakistan (Army of Muhammad in Pakistan) under Ghulam Riza Naqvi split up and became the Shia counter organization to the SSP aiming to protect Shias. TJP and SSP participated in polls and went in coalition with the PPP and PML (Pakistan Muslim League). In Jhang City, in 1993, the SSP got more than 46 % of the votes. Ramzi Yusuf, the alleged mastermind behind the attacks against the World Trade Center in 1993, was supposedly working with the SSP. In 1997 the then SSP leader Zia ur-Rahman Faruqi was killed with another 29 people in the same month as also Ganji's successor Muhammad Ali Rahimi in a bomb blast. In 1996 the LJ (Lashkar-e Jhangvi, Army of Jhang) split from the SSP. It derives its name from the murdered SSP-leader. Riyad Basra (1967–2002), the former public relation manager of SSP, became its leader. Strategically this split enabled SSP to operate

independently in the political arena with a purely militant organization and deny any involvement in anti-Shia violence at an official level – yet at the same time SSP could represent its ideology in an authentic way (cf. Nasr 2005).

SSP activists run an interesting website (<http://www.kr-hcy.com/> [25.03.2011]) including a forum to expose Shias and Ahmadis (Qadianis). The site documents *bayan* by Mawlana Nawaz Jhangvi and others. To enter the site, one has to accept the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad; those who decline by pressing the *munkir*-button, are forwarded to Urdu poetry, the first line of which says that Shias have nothing to do with Islam.

SSP has a long history of relations with the ISI and was found to host al Qaeda members; Abu Zubaydah for example, the first senior al Qaeda lieutenant captured after 9/11, was captured at a safe house belonging to SSP (Burke 2004: 275). LJ activists were recently blamed for driving a truck laden with explosives into the anti-terrorist police headquarters in Pakistan's largest city Karachi on November 11 2010, killing 20, leaving a crater of 12 meters, and probably liberating alleged al Qaeda activists.

On August 14 2001 and January 12 2002 the LJ, SSP, TJP, and SMP (Sipah-e Muhammad Pakistan, Army of Muhammad in Pakistan, Shia rival to LJ) were declared illegal by the then president Musharraf. Riyadh Basra was killed in 2002 in an exchange of fire during an attack against a Shia scholar in Multan. Iran stopped the funding of Shia militia in Pakistan in 1996 as it had started considering it counterproductive. In the same year SMP leader Ghulam Riza Naqvi got arrested.

Since 2005 Barelwi-organizations also started to attack Shias in the Northern provinces of Pakistan (International Crisis Group 2007). However, Barelwis and Shias share several values and rituals as concerns the veneration of saints, i. e. the well-known Sunni-Shia conflict is in Pakistan mostly a Deobandi-Shia conflict, although Ahl-e Hadith groups and individuals at times support anti-Shia agitations. This Deobandi-Shia conflict has also been analyzed as a proxy war between Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Also the governments of Kuwait, Libya and Iraq under Saddam financed militant anti-Shia agents on Pakistani soil. The majority of victims of sectarian violence in Pakistan after 1985 are Twelver Shiites (Rana 2003 estimates around 70 %).⁹ A major recent event in this regard are the suicide attacks on a Shia mourning procession in Lahore on

9 The Pakistani journalist Rana (2003) published a well-cited introductory study on militant groups of the larger religious movements. Rana is currently directing the Islamabad-based think tank "Pak Institute for Peace Studies": <http://san-pips.com>. The first edition of the English translation appeared under the title "A to Z of Jehadi Organisations in Pakistan" Lahore: Mashal. It was originally published in Urdu (2002). *Jihad-i Kashmir wa Afghanistan: Jihadi Tanzimon aur Mazhaibi Jamaaton ka Ek Jaizah* Lahaur: Mashal Buks.

September 1 2010 killing 31 people and injuring more than 280. The extremist outfits attacking Shias meanwhile also attack Sufis in Pakistan.

Makatib-e Fikr: Deobandi vs. Barelwi

Apart from the Sunni-Shia conflict that is prevalent in several Islamic countries, South Asia has a specific tradition of internal Sunni conflicts, for example between followers of the Deobandi and Barelwi school of thought (*Maktab-e Fikr*), the latter being close to folk Islam and Sufism.

Theological debates revolve around questions regarding specific qualities of the prophet Muhammad. Barelwis believe that the prophet Muhammad has his own natural light (*nur-e muhammadi*) created before creation, that he is omnipresent and witness to everything (*hazir-o nazir*), infallible and omniscient (*ilm-e ghaib*) and that there is no way to Allah than through his intercession (*wasila*). Barelwis also celebrate the prophet's birthday (*milad al-nabi*). Deobandis consider the attribution of superhuman characteristics to the prophet polytheism (*shirk*) and deny him any ability of intercession as Allah alone is worthy of worship. Deobandis consider Barelwis polytheists and supporters of innovations (*bid'atis*) and Barelwis consider Deobandis *Wahhabis* and their denial of the superhuman powers of the prophet is considered blasphemous by Barelwis. The Deobandi view of the Prophet Muhammad as a purely human social reformer and messenger is considered an attack of attempted character assassination by Barelwis, who hence call Deobandis *kuffar* and murderers of Muhammad and:

“We regard the movement as an agent of religious assassination, with the Personality of the Prophet (saw) being the prime target.”¹⁰

Since around 1880, a tradition of mistrust and hatred had developed between the agents of the rational-reformist neo-orthodox purists from Deoband and the counter-reformist, emotional lovers of the prophet following the Barelwi school of thought:

“Our hatred and our disgust for the Deobandi-ulama is due to their shocking words and acts of blasphemy, it is an obligation of our faith and will remain alive as long as we are alive.”¹¹

The Islamic interpretation put forward by the counter-reformist Barelwis are outlined in the works of their central figure Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi (1856–1921). He was the first to start the Barelwi-Deobandi *fatawa* wars that are going

10 al-Qadiri 2000: 89.

11 al-Qadiri 1993: 22 (translated by TG).

on until today. The famous fatwa *Husam ul-Haramain* [Urdu: Sword of Mecca and Madinah] from 1906 calls the Deobandi founding figures Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi (1833–1877), Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (1829–1905) and Ashraf Ali Thanwi (1863–1943) non-believers (*kuffar*) and Satanists (*wahhabiya shaitaniya*) (Raza 2005: 32–50).

Soon after the state of Pakistan was established on August 14 1947, both Sunni schools of thought [Urdu: *Maktab-e Fikr*] acted through their own political parties in Pakistan, the Deobandi-affiliated JUI (Jami'at-e ulama-ye Islam) and the Barelwi-affiliated JUP (Jami'at-e ulama-ye Pakistan). The interaction between both schools of thought sometimes turned violent after the 1970's, when the state politics of Deobandization of Barelwi mosques started. In the late 1970's the conflict over mosque management became more militant. The Deobandi-affiliated JUI in particular accumulated financial resources, weapons and trained fighters during the years of jihad in Afghanistan (Nasr 2002). The above mentioned outfits started to extend their attacks against Shias also to Barelwis.

In 1992 the Da'wat-e Islami district leader for Saidabad, Salim Qadiri (murdered May 18 2001), founded the militant Barelwi organization Sunni Tahrik (ST, <http://sunnitehreek.com.pk/> [11.03.2011]). ST recruited among Barelwi muhajir youth, especially after MQM (Muhajir Qaumi Movement) activists had to join in the apolitical Barelwi movement Da'wat-e Islami after the military operations *Clean Up* and *Blue Fox* (June 19 1992–1994) in Karachi to escape persecution by security agencies.¹² ST's declared main aim was to recapture former Barelwi mosques, whose administrative boards were *deobandized* during Zia's military rule. The main signifier of the organization was a brown turban.

ST became infamous by the systematic killing of prominent Deobandi *ulama*, the most famous murder was of the director of the Binori Town Madrasa in Karachi, Mawlana Muhammad Yusuf Ludhyanvi (1932 – May 18 2000). Yusuf Ludhyanvi was another infamous Deobandi jurist, who targeted first the Ahmadiyyas, and then the Shias and the Barelwis. One of his theological contributions to the climate of sectarian intolerance in Pakistan was authoring *Ikhtilaf-e Ummat aur Sirat-e Mustaqim* [Urdu: Difference within the Ummah and the Straight Path].¹³ Right on the day one year later to ST's attack against Ludhyanvi, Salim Qadiri was murdered by Deobandi activists on May 18 2001. ST was banned for several months on January 12 2002 after ST activists killed the

12 Cf. Verkaaik 2004. MQM was founded by the help of the ISI in Islamabad originally with the strategic aim to weaken the PPP in Sindh. However, MQM was such a success story, that their version of Sindhi nationalism started to threaten the political power of the central government in Punjab, so that Islamabad decided to close down MQM offices in Karachi with a military operation.

13 For further readings on this work cf. Khan 2009 and <http://shaheed-e-islam.com/> [25.01.2011].

brother of the then Interior Minister Mu'in ud-Din Haider in 2001 while demanding a change in law.

Following confrontations regarding the Shia practice of lightening fire on the occasion of 'id-e Milad ul-Nabi in 2005, ST activists also attacked Shias in the Northern Areas:

“On 8 January 2005, Ziaduddin Rizvi, the driving force behind Shia activism in the Northern Areas, was critically injured in an attack. (...) On 12 January, Rizvi succumbed to his injuries, triggering more violent protests. Although leaders of the two main religious groupings in the Northern Areas, the Shia Anjuman-i-Islami and the Sunni Tehreek Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jamaat, signed an agreement brokered by the NALC to restore peace, neither side was sincere. The tit-for-tat killings that followed included the assassination of Sakiullah Tareen, the Northern Areas police chief at the time of Rizvi's assassination. (...) A day after the education ministry declared that the textbook issue had been “amicably” resolved, four Shias were shot and injured during a religious ceremony on Eid Milad-un-Nabi, the Prophet's birthday, that was opposed by hardline Sunnis. [Sunnis in the Northern Areas resent the Shia practice of lighting fires to commemorate important religious events such as Eid Milad-un-Nabi on the grounds it takes place on hills that do not belong to Shias and often overlook Sunni localities.]”¹⁴ “Sunni Tehreek Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jamaat chief Qazi Nisar Ahmed has warned that: If the Shias continue to publicly hold offensive rituals and disparage our revered religious personages, then one should not be surprised if a Sunni takes up his gun and retaliates.”¹⁵

About a hundred people got murdered during this year in the Northern Areas due to this *sectarian* conflict. ST is the first Barelwi outfit engaging in sectarian militancy.

ST's leadership was all wiped out at once on April 11 2006 at the mawlid prayers in Nishtar Park in Karachi in which was until then the most deadly sectarian motivated suicide bombing in the history of Pakistan, killing 57. The Nishtar Park bombing was also analyzed as a continuation of the Deobandi-Barelwi fights between the followers of the Deobandi Mufti Munir Shakir and the Barelwi Afghan Pir Saif ul-Rahman in Bara 2005–06 that killed an unreported number of lives and was put down by a military operation of 8,000 troops.¹⁶

The Nishtar Park bombing radically changed the political landscape in Karachi in favor of the MQM and it is reasonable to speak of the end of ST's success story as a major political force in Karachi. Since then ST advertizes their new slogan: *Live and let live!*

14 ICG 2007: 18.

15 ICG 2007: 19.

16 http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2006\05\09\story_9-5-2006_pg3_3 [25.01.2011].

Recently, increasingly apolitical Barelwis have been targeted, most probably by militant Deobandi outfits.

On July 1 2010 two suicide bombers blew themselves up at the popular *Data Darbar*, a Sufi shrine in Lahore, killing at least 42. Ali Hujwiri – popular known as Data Sahib – lived in the 11th century and had authored *Kashf ul-Mahjub*, the oldest treatise on Sufism in the Persian language. The security camera at his graveyard shows that the suicide bombers were dressed in the *madani libas* as advertised by the apolitical Barelwi version of the Tablighi Jama'at, Da'wat-e Islami, which is co-administrating the shrine.¹⁷

Regional jihads: Militants bolstering Pakistan's geopolitical weight

The increasing militancy of sectarian elements in the religious and political spheres in Pakistan increased dramatically with the launch of the jihad in Afghanistan in December 1979. This jihad was massively financed in equal measure by the United States of America and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.¹⁸ Jimmy Carter (1977–1981) started the CIA support for this jihad against the Soviets. Ronald Reagan (1981–1989) then maximized mobilization efforts for the mujahidin fighting the Soviets (Cooley 1999). The CIA alone transferred around six billion USD to the military intelligence ISI (Inter-Services Intelligences) in Pakistan in order to make sure that this jihad is a success story. The CIA financed missiles and weaponry (Gutman 2008: 10). Brigadier General Muhammad Yousaf, the then director of the Afghanistan department inside the ISI, wrote a book disclosing the fascinating story of coordinating and synchronizing administrative tasks and the logistical support during this mega-jihad (Yousaf 1992). About 30,000 foreign jihad-fanatics travelled to Pakistan.¹⁹

The first Pakistani jihadi group was the Jami'at ul-Ansar (Coalition of Supporters) founded in 1980 in the Deobandi seminary Binori Town, Karachi. It was renamed in 1988 as HJI (Harakat ul-Jihad-e Islami, Islamic Jihad Union). The group recruited mujahidin for the jihad against the Soviets. After the victory over the Soviet troops, the focus of the group became international. After 1992,

17 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10483453> [25.01.2011].

18 Riedel 2008: 42: "All CIA money was channeled to the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI). Every dollar from the CIA was matched by an equal amount from the Saudis. The agency's director, Bill Casey, met regularly with the Pakistanis to coordinate strategy and tactics, but the business of providing the arms and training to the mujahedin was entirely in the hands of the ISI. Pakistan's dictator, Mohammed Zia ul-Haq, wanted it that way, and the CIA went along. After all, this gave the agency a measure of deniability."

19 At least 2359 Arabs were killed during the war in Afghanistan (540 from Algeria, 526 from Egypt, 433 from Saudi Arabia, 284 from Libya, 184 from Iraq, 180 from Syria, 111 from Sudan and 100 from Tunisia).

HJI's activists were fighting in Bosnia. In 1991, the HUA (Harakat ul-Ansar, Supporter Union) also became an offshoot of this group. Renamed as HAM (Harakat ul-Mujahidin) and led by Fazl ur-Rahman Khalil and Mas'ud Azhar, this group became one of the most infamous during the 1990's.

After the end of the jihad against the Soviet troops 1989–90 militants re-weight priorities. Some of the by now professionally trained and highly armed sectarian forces in Pakistan started to refocus on the subcontinent, others struggled to connect to global concerns. In the 1990's the main foreign affair projects of Pakistan were the Talibanization of Afghanistan and after 1993 the jihad against India in Kashmir. In 1989, the mujahidin returned from Afghanistan to Pakistan and many resettled in Karachi or Peshawar.

The infamous *Maktab ul-Khidmat*, led by the Jordanian-Palestinian Muslim Brother Abdullah Azzam and the Saudi Osama ibn Ladin in Peshawar, as well as several other former CIA supported outfits and networks for the global recruitment of mujahidin kept on operating and bringing Muslim men to AfPak for jihadi training. With the help the Pakistani ISI the Deobandi-affiliated Taliban (Urdu: students) began to rise and establish themselves as a political power in Afghanistan.

Ironically, the Taliban regime is the most successful political foreign affairs project in the history of Pakistan. After the fall of Kabul, several militant outfits with thousands of activists regrouped against Pakistan's political archfoe India. Between 1990 and 1994 approximately ten thousand militants were trained in the camps in Afghanistan, mostly for the JI (Jama'at-e Islami) and LT (Lashkar-e Tayba) for their missions in Kashmir and new jihadi camps were built in the Pakistan administrated part. In 1993 the Taliban handed over the Afghani training camps of the JI and Hizb-e Islami to the HAM (Harakat ul-Mujahidin), a Deobandi-affiliated organization mainly active in Kashmir and considered to be close to the ISI and the Deobandi missionary movement Tablighi Jama'at.²⁰ Later, in 1996, its Barelwi version Da'wat-e Islami supported the foundation of the Barelwi organization Lashkar-e Islam. Lashkar-e Islam joined in the jihad in Kashmir, running one camp in Sohna and merging with the Islamic Front (a splinter group of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front) in 2000 (Rana 2003:

20 Cf. Swami 2007: 181: "The Harkat-ul-Mujahideen's overall leader Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman Khalil used radical elements drawn from among the Tabligh-i-Jamaat, a proselytizing organization that in itself claims to remain above politics, but has had considerable influence in Pakistani life after it was patronized by the regime of General Zia-ul-Haq. Harkat-affiliated figures frequently used these networks to fight for domestic objectives within Pakistan. In September 1995, for example, several senior Pakistani military officials personally linked with the Tabligh-i-Jamaat and officially involved in supplying weapons to the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen were charged with attempting to stage a coup against the government of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto."

414–423), with the strategic aim to protect traditional shrines from being destroyed by Salafi-minded co-mujahidin. Most Lashkar-e Islam activists joined Sunni Tahrik later.

HAM activities revolved around the issue of Kashmir, from where Mas'ud Azhar was arrested by Indian security forces in 1994. During the hijacking of the Indian Airlines flight IC-814 from Kathmandu to Delhi on Christmas Eve in 1999, the five Pakistani terrorists successfully demanded the release of Mas'ud Azhar and another two activists from jail after landing at Kandahar airport. After his release Mas'ud Azhar founded the JM (Jaish-e Muhammad, Army of Muhammad) in February 2000 in Karachi. Mas'ud Azhar's lectures on jihad and suicide bombing are also available on *YouTube* and elsewhere.²¹ JM is for example responsible for the videotaped murder²² of the *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl in January 2002.

During the Kargil war in 1999, the mujahidin operating from Pakistani territory were glorified as national heroes (Swami 1999). The then president and military dictator Musharraf (2006: 91) praised them as freedom fighters.²³ Washington more or less followed Pakistan's distinction of what was called freedom fighters on the border with India and terrorists on the border with Afghanistan.

The militant group networks were strengthened and supported by the ISI, which coordinated missions of different groups in Kashmir. The Kashmir conflict has claimed over 40,000 lives in just the last ten years. Most military conflicts remained informal, formal wars were fought in 1947–48, 1965 and 1999 (Swami 2007).

For several activists Kashmir is an alternative jihad after Afghanistan. Since 1993 the *mihman mujahidin* (guest mujahidin with foreign passports) became more and more involved (for statistics see Swami 2007: 175). In 1991, 30 mujahidin with foreign passports were killed in Kashmir, in 1993 about one hundred and in 2001, 541 (Sahni 2002: 215).

This secret war, that is made out to be a holy one from at least one side is a conflict between nuclear powers. This fact had a major impact on war tactics. One side at least is increasingly forced to outsource military resources to jihadi

21 For example Ta'aruf-e Jaish-e Muhammad (Urdu: Knowing JM, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6p0h0VVgyoA> [25.11.2010]), Is Suicide Bombing Permissible in Islam (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2ZYa0d1dCE&playnext=1&list=PL00D2635C21EC5746&index=20> [25.11.2010]), cf. <http://www.fathuljawwad.com/> [25.11.2010] and <http://www.4shared.com/dir/13089255/3ed5da7d/sharing.html> [25.11.2010].

22 <http://www.truthtube.tv/play.php?vid=2795> [24.11.2010].

23 Musharraf 2006: 91: "I ordered FCNA to improve our defensive positions in coordination with the freedom fighters to deny access to the watershed by India. [...] The bravery, steadfastness, and ultimate sacrifice of our men in that inhospitable, high-altitude battlefield, against massive Indian forces, will be written in golden letters."

groups operating in grey areas and this helps them officially deny any involvement and *proceed* formally with the diplomatic and political peace building measures.

Since 2001, the targets of terrorist attacks have increasingly shifted from Kashmir towards the metropolises of India. On 13 December 2001 the Parliament in New Delhi was attacked. India sent troops to the border with Pakistan and declared that the country was prepared for a nuclear attack by Pakistan and had a plan to respond adequately. By then Pakistan had mobilized American diplomats and threatened to regroup its troops from the Pakistani border of Afghanistan in the west and send them to support border troops in the east, i. e. allow the Taliban to operate openly in that area. After the dramatic attacks of Pakistani mujahidin against Mumbai on November 26 2008 a similar situation developed.

After the collapse of the Taliban regime, the neglecting structures of the Western occupation (Scheuer 2009) forces were conducive to the establishment of a flourishing heroine market. In 2006, more than six thousand tons of opium were harvested in Afghanistan, i. e. 92 % of the opium production worldwide (ICG 2006: 4 – 5). In 2007 more than eight thousand tons and in 2008 around 7,7 thousand tons were harvested.²⁴ A large part was smuggled out of Afghanistan via the Pakistani port of Karachi. The dramatic rise of the drug market tightened the interactions of the former mujahidin of Afghanistan and criminal networks inside Pakistan, which had fostered the processes of Islamization in otherwise quite secular criminal networks.

Criminal networks and organizations also benefitted from the state protection of sectarian motivated movements, which criminal agents have used as cover organizations for their operations. The increasing participation of classical criminals in sectarian violence makes it more brutal: Criminals are far quicker to attack mosques and kill Muslims even during prayer (Nasr 2002: 96). This development was also a sign of the loss of control of the ISI regarding militant elements in sectarian movements.

Going global: Transnational Islamist Militancy

After the Afghan jihad, many Arab veterans' life in exile imbued them with a more transnational political vision (cf. Gerges 2005: 80 – 118). In the period after 1989, second generation radical Muslims from Diaspora countries have started to increasingly participate in jihadi activities. They do not need to go through the

24 Cf.: <http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghan-winter-survey-Feb08-short.pdf> [01.09.2010].

slow phase of politicization and militarization. Later, converts to Islam also joined in. The jihad narrative of the converted Kenyan Hindu Dhiran Barot alias Esa ul-Hindi from London is particularly interesting. The media advisor and spokesman of al-Qaida in Pakistan was the American convert Adam Pearlman alias Adam Yahiya Gadahn (1978 – 2008) alias Azzam ul-Amriki (Azzam, the American).²⁵

The political sphere as well changed dramatically. The friendship between Pakistan and the USA ended abruptly after the victory over the Soviet superpower in the summer of 1990. The United States imposed sanctions against Pakistan because of its nuclear program and the delivery of F-16 fighter jets for which Islamabad had already paid was suspended.²⁶ It was only after 9/11 that the US renewed its friendship with Pakistan (Fair 2006). The Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, made quite an undiplomatic statement offering ambiguous US friendship to the ISI chief, making clear, that Pakistan had now to choose whether it is with America or with the terrorists and that they should be prepared to be bombed back to the Stone Age, if they chose the terrorists (Musharraf 2006: 201). This statement was understood within the military apparatus in Pakistan as a blunt threat and might have contributed to the unambiguous and often openly outspoken Anti-Americanism inside their agencies.

After the Afghan jihad the Bosnian jihad became the first major pan-Islamic battleground, being *passively sponsored* by a couple of states, for example Saudi Arabia (cf. Byman 2005: 223 – 8). Veterans from the Afghan – and later Bosnian – battlefronts became active then elsewhere (cf. Kohlmann 2004). On November 13 1995, for example, a 100 kg car bomb detonated in downtown Riyadh in front of a building used by an US military contractor training the Saudi National Guard, killing five Americans and two Indians. Three of the four perpetrators were Afghan veterans and Khalid ul-Sa'id acquired his bombmaking skills in Afghanistan. This was the first large-scale bombing in the kingdom's history and shook the Saudi state to the core (Hegghammer 2010: 72 – 3).

The case of Jama'at ud-Da'wa / Lashkar-e Tayba

Since the November 26 2008 massacre of over 170 people in the Indian metropolis of Mumbai, the *Lashkar-e Tayba* (LT, Army of Madinah, lit. the pure) has received international media attention as the only attacker taken alive was a member of LT, the militant wing of *Jama'at ud-Da'wa* (JD).

25 Cf. http://www.thenews.com.pk/top_story_detail.asp?Id=12798 [01.09.2010].

26 On the nuclear program cf. Levy 2007 and Ganguly / Kapur 2008.

Due to LT's growing ambitions and capabilities – and its recently uncovered ties to al-Qaeda (Kahn 2010) – latest government reports consider the LT *the ticking timebomb of South Asia*.²⁷

“Lashkar-e Tayba and its affiliates could eventually surpass al-Qaeda as the world's most sophisticated and dangerous terrorist organization.”²⁸

“Discussion of LT should receive priority alongside al-Qaeda and the Taliban in U.S.-Pakistan political, military, and intelligence dialogues. Tougher U.S. talk must be backed by strong evidence. The United States should therefore enhance its own intelligence and interdiction capabilities to shut down LT's operations outside Pakistan and its recruiting activities in the United States and Europe.”²⁹

To start the story from its beginning: JD's main center *Da'wat ul-Irshad Markaz* (Centre for Propagation) was founded in 1986 – during the last wars of the Afghan jihad – in Muridke, near Lahore. The complex of the markaz with its residential, educational, jihadi and publishing structures was modeled after the Jama'at-e Islami centre in Mansura (Rana 2003: 336, Iqtidar 2011: 5). The 77 hectares of land for the Markaz were donated by the Pakistani government. The ISI played a key role in its creation, supplemented by a 200,000 USD donation by Osama ibn Ladin, almost certainly with the ISI's encouragement.³⁰ Apart from the ISI, the US and Saudi Arabia also funded the organization during its first years. Its main founders were the Palestinian Abdullah Azzam and the two Pakistani professors Zafar Iqbal and Hafiz Muhammad Sa'id³¹ with the aim to propagate an ideology integrating missionary work and *jihad*. For them Islamic education, advanced scientific knowledge and military training and prowess were equally important (Iqtidar 2011: 104, Shafqat 2002). Their creed is Ahl-e Hadith (Riexinger 2008), which is close to Wahhabiya (Preckel 2008: 228–237), but – as the *anti-madhab madhab* (Riexinger) – rejects all *madhahib*. This created a specific closeness to Wahhabi institutions, so that most of the Saudis, who received military training in Afghanistan from 1989–1992 were trained in Jamil ul-Rahman's (assassinated in 1991) Markaz camp in Kunar (cf. Hamza 2004), as the Ahl-e Hadith were considered doctrinally more pure than the Muslim Brotherhood dominated Service Bureau of Osama ibn Ladin.

Hafiz Muhammad Sa'id in particular deserves some attention as he is the most famous among the founders of JD and its current *amir*. He was born while his parents migrated from India to Pakistan. At the age of twelve he is said to have memorized the Qur'an, hence his title *Hafiz*. He received his B.A. from Uni-

27 Council on Foreign Relations 2010: 51

28 Council on Foreign Relations 2010: 8.

29 Council on Foreign Relations 2010: 51.

30 Riedel 2008: 43; see also Wilson 2007.

31 http://www.pakistanileaders.com.pk/profile/Hafiz_Muhammad_Saeed [20.02.2011].

versity of Punjab in Lahore in 1970, M.A. in 1972 and a second M.A. in 1974. He became a teacher at the University of Engineering and Technology in Lahore, but then left to Saudi Arabia for further education. At King Saud University he specialized in Arabic Language. During this period he also became a student of Abd ul-Aziz ibn Baz (1909–1999). After returning to Lahore he later became Professor and chairman of the Department of Islamic Studies at the University of Engineering and Technology in Lahore (<http://www.uet.edu.pk/> [20.11.2010]). Besides having been a member of the government's *Peace Committee* (1980), Sa'id was also member of the *Council of Islamic Ideology*, Pakistan's constitutional body advising the legislature in Islamic perspectives. During his studies, Sa'id was a very active member of IJT (*Islami Jami'at-e Tulaba*), the student wing of *Jama'at-e Islami*, the Islamist party founded by Maududi, the mastermind of modern Islamism. The JI served in many ways as a role model for many other Islamist organizations, which copied the former's rhetoric in any discussion of politics in Pakistan, which differs significantly from the rhetoric employed by JI in India (Ahmad 2009). In 1993 LT started military operations in Kashmir and in 1994 Sa'id travelled on preaching tours through the US and in 1995 through the UK. He is father of two daughters and one son. His son, Hafiz Talha Sa'id, is also a preacher for jihad. His wife Umm-Talha is also giving *dars* for women at JD's main mosque, the Masjid Qadsia in the Chauburji neighbourhood of Lahore.



In 1990 the *Lashkar-e Tayba* was formed to supplement the activities of the *Da'wat* militarily. Already in 1989 the JD left the Afghan front and proceeded to Kashmir, where operations began on January 25 1990. In that very year Tayba camp was established, then the Aqsa camp and finally the larger Bait ul-Mujahidin in Muzaffarabad. According to their own sources, 1,016 martyrs killed 14,369 soldiers from the Indian Army in the first eleven years (Rana 2003: 347).

LT fits into the Pakistani military's strategy towards India and continues to be

supported extensively by the ISI: “Jihad undertaken by sub-national groups with state support would thus become the instrument that allowed Pakistan to punch above its geopolitical weight.”³²

Soon LT was enlisted to help fight Pakistan’s *plausibly deniable* proxy wars, first in Kunar and Paktia provinces in Afghanistan – where LT ran several training camps for the jihad against the Soviets -, later in Kashmir.³³ Soon LT became the preferred ISI proxy. Since its formation, the LT has been one of the most aggressive terrorist groups to target India. Having lost 36 family members in the communal slaughter following partition, Sa’id said: “India has shown us the path. (...) We will not rest until whole India is dissolved into Pakistan.”³⁴

“Being a special ward of ISI’s Directorate S, the organization with responsibilities for all external operations, LT received assistance from its sponsors in the form of operational funding, specialized weapons, sophisticated communications equipment, combat training, safe haven for the leadership, hides and launching pads for the cadres, intelligence on targets and threats, campaign guidance, infiltration assistance, and, in coordination with the Pakistani Army, fire support when crossing the border into India.”³⁵

JD’s in-house printing press *Dar ul-Andlus* on Lake Road in Chauburji, Lahore, (formerly online at www.dar-ul-andlus.com) is a profit-making department producing and selling booklets, pamphlets, and six magazines including the Urdu weeklies *Jihad Taims* and *Ghazva* (Holy Raid), *Ul-Da’wa* (Urdu monthly, circulation of 200,000), *Al-Anfal* (Arabic monthly), *Voice of Islam* (English monthly) and the women’s Urdu magazine *Tayyabat* (Pure Women, including recipes and childrearing tips).



32 Tellis 2010: 2–3

33 Usher 2008.

34 Cited in Usher 2008.

35 Tellis 2010: 4.

LT became more active in Kashmir in 1993. After the Kargil war in 1999, the LT inducted *fidayin*-missions (suicide missions) on July 12 1999 into Kashmir, attacking the BSF (Border Security Force of India) headquarters in Bandipura. Their first suicide bomber was Abu Sulaiman Muhammad Akmal from Multan. During that time the LT was openly supported by the Pakistani military (Oppel 2009).

LT/JD's annual congregation has attracted around one million visitors in 2001, most of them from a lower-middle-class background (Shafqat 2002: 132). Since 2003, JD has also been sending fighters to Iraq (Rashid 20008: 228). In April 2003 Sa'id said that jihad was the only way to respond to the Western forces terrorizing Muslims. Sa'id identifies the US, Israel and India as the evil trias:

"Jihad is prescribed in the Quran. Muslims are required to take up arms against the oppressor. The powerful western world is terrorising the Muslims. We are being invaded, humiliated, manipulated, and looted. How else can we respond but through jihad? (...) We must fight against the evil trio: America, Israel and India. The Israeli-Indian defence pact is clearly aimed at taking care of Pakistan. America will not attack Pakistan directly. It will use India to do its dirty work. America has also declared the legitimate freedom struggle in Kashmir a reign of terror. The need for jihad against India is paramount. (...) Suicide missions are in accordance with Islam. In fact, a suicide attack is the best form of jihad. Muslim world agrees that jihad is the only way to respond to aggression given today's international scenario. At the moment I would say all members of parliament agree with and support jihad as a means of liberation. We are not afraid of the rulers. We only fear Allah and follow His word."³⁶

On September 12 2006 LT's media wing issued a fatwa to kill Pope Benedict XVI, published by the magazine Ausaf:

"Pakistan's Jamaat-ud-Dawa has issued a Fatwa asking the Muslim community to kill Pope Benedict for his blasphemous statement about Prophet Mohammad. The Jamaat-ud-Dawa has declared death to Pope Benedict and said that in today's world blasphemy of the Holy Koran and the Prophet has become a fashion. The leaders of the Jamaat were speaking at a Martyrs' Islamic Conference in Karachi. Prominent Jamaat leader Hafiz Saifullah Khalid said that in the present circumstances, jehad has become obligatory for each Muslim. Muslims are being declared terrorists and our battle for survival has already started. The Muslim world has rejected the Pope's apology and decided to continue protests and demonstrations in big cities. The Pope's apology is just a drama and no political leader has any power to pardon him. It is part of a crusade initiated by the US in the name of terrorism. Instead of accepting fake apologies, Muslims should realise Europe's enmity towards Islam and Muslim Ummah should prepare itself to defend its faith. Jamaat-ud-Dawa leader Hafiz Abdur Rahman Makki said the West and Europe have started a campaign against the Holy Koran and the Prophet and have

36 Shehzad, Mohammad. 2003. Suicide bombing is the best form of jihad. *Friday Times*, April 17: <http://www.hvk.org/articles/0403/100.html> [22. 11. 2010].

abused jihad. We should take appropriate steps to deal with the champions of crusade. It is time for Muslim leaders to open their eyes and understand that the West had never been a friend of the Muslims and will never be so.³⁷

Flood Jihad: The Islamist-humanitarian response

After LT was banned by the government of Pakistan on January 12 2002, the organization separated the management of LT and renamed as JD. In 2004 both organizations separated officially and the JD shifted towards social engagement, expanding their networks of schools and hospitals. Running own blood banks was found a crucial core element in professionally supporting mujahidin. Observers then started to compare the organizational structures to those of the Lebanese Hizballah, as its cadre was encouraged to diversify, becoming JD social workers rather than LT mujahidin.³⁸ LT struggles to make their belief systems more catching by displaying morality and stability at the forefront during humanitarian crises and hence more and more people could potentially view participation in violent jihad as an act of charity.

JD currently runs around 500 schools throughout Pakistan. These are not madrasas in the traditional sense but are more like educational centers, in which students recite the Qur'an and also work in physics, chemistry and computer laboratories. In 2007 around 35,000 students were enrolled. There is also the distinction between jihadi education and jihadi training, the latter being organized elsewhere. Welfare was a part of the JD markaz in Muridke from the beginning. The martyrs department is paying monthly grants to help the families of martyrs.

As government agencies in Pakistan cannot organize basic aid for the most needy after catastrophes like the earthquake in October 2005 or the flood in July 2010, health services, relief and reconstruction work as well as managing displacement camps is increasingly conducted by Islamist organizations and the JD has become the most prominent militant outfit in Pakistan engaging in extensive humanitarian work. Knowingly or out of ignorance, NGOs thus established relationships with banned jihadi organizations, for example to supply relief goods to jihadi camps: "JD distributed US relief aid and an American surgeon operated in a JD relief camp. JD is reported to have worked with the ICRC, WHO, UNICEF, WFP, UNHCR and Khalsa Aid."³⁹

37 <http://www.scribd.com/doc/985991/Fatwa-calling-upon-the-Muslims-to-kill-Pope-Benedict-XVI> [25.11.2010].

38 Usher 2008.

39 International Crisis Group. 2006. *Earthquake Jihad: The Role of Jihadis and Islamist Groups after the October 2005 Earthquake*. International Crisis Group, July 24: <http://www.crisis>

After heavy monsoon rains in north western Pakistan from July 22 2010, floods affected more than 18 million people. The problem province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa suffered the most in terms of loss of lives and infrastructure. The UNO issued the most massive call for donations in their history and Pakistan's diplomats told the "development" donor countries, that the transferred funds dedicated to the war against terror will be used for flood relief work, unless the donor countries contribute generously – as Pakistan has to set priorities. Although JD was banned in December 2008 due to involvement in the Mumbai attacks, only one-and-a half years later, the Punjab government praised the organization for their welfare services. The Punjab Chief Minister Miyan Shahbaz Sharif has sanctioned large grants for this organization, including a special grant-in-aid of PKR 3 million for the Ul-Da'wa School System, a chain of schools established by JD.⁴⁰ The military partnered Falah-e Insanayat, JD's new welfare wing (after the organization had to rename due to the UNSC ban). Apart from running four hospitals, 95 dispensaries and 101 ambulances, Falah-e Insanayat set up 71 camps in flood-affected areas and about a hundred food providing points. Due to the absence of alternative structures, it's again the most radical Islamists who deliver. The military and the militants have a higher capacity in this competition of distribution as they are ones at the forefront, providing assistance. It's a bit of an irony that JD at present benefits from funds dedicated to the war against terror; however, for the Pakistani military, it is a logical strategic decision to partner with JD when different stakeholders battle to increase their shares. In this way the cumulative effects of different crises sum up.

This highly pragmatic approach also allows the JD to claim that the most needy, the deaf, the disabled, the people treated in the medical camps and the 5,000 students receiving monthly assistance for educational fees etc. will suffer the most from their funds being frozen and offices being shut down. Osama ibn Ladin's recent message (accessible for example on <http://shamikh1.net/vb/index.php> [25. 11. 2010]) underlines the Islamic duty to support the flood relief work carried out in Pakistan.

group.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/pakistan/earthquake-jihad-the-role-of-jihadis-and-islamist-groups-after-the-october-2005-earthquake.aspx [25. 11. 2010].

40 <http://www.newslinemagazine.com/2010/09/religious-mission-or-political-ambition/> [25. 11. 2010].

Involvement

LT's first spectacular missions include the attacks on the Red Fort on December 22 2000 in New Delhi and on the Srinagar Airport on January 15 2001. They seem to be also involved in the attacks on the Indian Parliament in New Delhi on December 13 2001.

Media reports link the LT to the suicide bombings at the campus of the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore on 28 December 2005, the serial bomb blasts in New Delhi on 29 October 2005, killing 62, and the bombings in Benares on 7 March 2006, killing 21. The two most massive terror attacks against India, the train bombings on the Suburban Railway in Mumbai on 11 July 2006, killing 209 and injuring more than 700 people, and the attacks at the Taj Hotel and other targets in Mumbai on 26 November 2008 have all been linked to activists of LT. As the above indicates, the targets of terrorist attacks have increasingly shifted from (Indian administrated) Kashmir towards the metropolises of India.

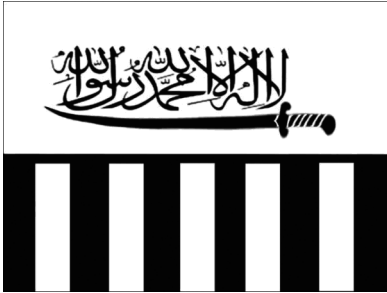
LT's outreach, however, is truly global. For example LT is believed to have been involved in plans to attack Heathrow airport in London in 2006, a plot that led to European and American restrictions regarding liquids in cabin luggage (Schwartz 2008). Following the Mumbai attacks in 2008, the LT was classified as a terrorist organization by the UN Security Council. However, LT remains the radical organization in Pakistan with the best chances to impact on future developments as it draws its recruits from people who are skilled in modern sciences.

Well after Pakistan's Interior Minister Rahman Malik finally confirmed that the Mumbai attacks originated from Pakistan in February 2009, Sa'id was put under house arrest; but this only until June 3 2009, when the Lahore High Court ordered that there was insufficient evidence to detain him. Some observers interpret this as proof of the continued close relationship between JD and the secret service in Pakistan (Iqtidar 2009: 28).⁴¹

On December 10 2008, two weeks after the Mumbai attacks, the UN Security Council's *al Qaeda and Taliban Sanctions Committee* (Resolution 1267) banned JD.⁴² The UNSC listed Zaki ur-Rahman as the group's chief of operations, Hajji Muhammad Ashraf as chief of finance, and the Saudi national Mahmud Muhammad Ahmad Bahaziq as senior financier and leader of LT in Saudi Arabia. Al Akhtar Trust and Al Rashid Trust were identified as the main supporting charities and their accounts were frozen.

41 Source: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Tahreek-e-Hurmat-e-Rasool-SAAW/320492480795> [15. 11. 2010].

42 <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/consolidatedlist.htm> [20. 11. 2010].



Following this listing, JD's official website (<http://www.jamatdawah.org/>) has been shut down by the government of Pakistan.⁴³ JD then renamed itself *Tahrik-e Hurmat-e Rasul* (THR, Movement for Defending the Honor of the Prophet, online now with its official website on <http://www.thrpk.org/> [25.03.2011]). Their main symbol, the black and white flag remains unchanged. Media reports claim that also the name *Tahrik-e Tahafuz Qibla Awwal* (Movement for the Safeguarding of the First Center of Prayer) is used by LT now. *Qibla Awwal* refers to Al Aqsa in Jerusalem and this title would indeed suggest a major shift of JD to connect to global issues of the ummah. In this regard it could be interesting to recall that Abdullah Azzam, Osama ibn Ladin's mentor, had a central role in not only establishing JD, but also HAMAS. JD's disaster relief unit operates at present under the name *Falah-e Insaniyat*.

At present, LT is not merely a Pakistani outfit, it has become truly transnational. Evident from the Mumbai attack is also the recklessness of Pakistan's long-standing policy of permitting militant groups free rein:

“The expanding global reach and ambition of LT, a group composed mainly of ethnic Pakistani Punjabis with strong historical links to the Pakistani intelligence community and to al-Qaeda, makes it especially threatening. LT is becoming a globalized terror network. Hubs and operatives across South Asia are linked to logistical, fund-raising, and recruiting networks in the Persian Gulf, and they have found supporters and sympathizers in the West – including in Britain, Canada, and the United States.”⁴⁴

When Pakistani authorities arrested LT's communications specialist Zarar Shah, they discovered a list of 320 potential targets on his laptop, most of them outside India, and especially in Europe (cf. Kahn 2010). In January 2010 charges were filed against Chicago-based David Coleman Headley and Canadian Tahawwur Rana for conspiring with LT to plan a terrorist attack against a Danish newspaper. Headley attended several LT training camps since 2002. He pleaded guilty

43 Several screenshots are included in the following paper: <http://www.ict.org.il/Articles/tabid/66/Articlsid/574/currentpage/4/Default.aspx> [25.11.1010].

44 Council on Foreign Relations 2010: 20–21.

to a dozen federal terrorism charges, including charges involving the Mumbai and Denmark plots, in March 2010.⁴⁵

Its unique focus on modern technology also helped the LT to become a sort of *militancy consultant*, in this function entering the fold of the nebulous network labeled Al-Qaeda (cf. Iqtidar 2009: 31)⁴⁶.



Islamic hate speech is the lingua franca of Salafi politics, aiming primarily at recognition. The use of English banners (regularly including several misspellings, for example: Westergaard) by LT activists in the context of rural Pakistan points out that the message to be delivered is not necessarily directed to the locals. Analyzing and exploring the usefulness of a strong language of hatred being employed during recent rallies of LT (see picture) and others, indicates that violence and language are not the same thing (cf. Cobb 2006: 15): Language of hatred and the emotion of hatred are totally different issues! Religious symbol systems – especially rhetorics revolving around salvation and damnation – employ a language of high ambivalence, expressing paralyzing hatred as well as self-disgust at the same time.⁴⁷ Indeed militant Islamist rhetorics enabled its opponents to link instances of harassment to people who would never commit such acts. Most participants in rallies or computer-mediated communication are neither bad nor mad.

45 <http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2010/March/10-ag-277.html> [20.11.2010]. Cf. Kahn 2010 and Council on Foreign Relations 2010: 72.

46 LT rally in February 2010, source: <http://www.thrpk.org/data1/pics/20100118/muzahira2.htm> [25.01.2011].

47 Cf. Cobb 2006: 174.

E-Jihad: Online Adventurism & Cyber Recruitment

Evident from these developments is a strong desideratum for more experts in this relatively new area of study, who are trained to distinguish violent rhetorics from rhetoric that finally results in worldly acts of violence.

Embracing globalization and modernity, salafi-jihadis like many other highly religious agents increasingly make use of the world wide web, the world's most extensive communication network, spreading their value and belief systems under real-time operating conditions to virtually each and every corner of this world. The closing down of numerous training camps in Afghanistan in Pakistan has contributed to the establishment of somehow virtual training camps in the Internet, where manuals are easily redistributed and circulated. Hence the direction of the activities of modern militant jihadism – especially in Pakistan – is mostly from off- to online, i.e. former fighters share their experiences and capabilities of analysis with younger supporters or sympathizers of radical ideas, who may compensate for their individual shortcomings in practical involvement through the forwarding of videos and arguments and speaking up for salafi-jihadi ideas in chat rooms. However, sharing information and community building are two different issues! Indeed virtual training cannot compare to real-life training and home made explosives have proven to be most dangerous for the prospective jihadi himself.

At the same time, there are more and more exceptions to the rule, i.e. activists of online discussion forums who finally take up weapons or engage in (suicide) missions. A famous case is the prolific blogger Hammam Khalil Abu Malal ul-Balawi alias Al-Khurasani, who has also been a moderator for the al-hisbah forum (Musawi 2010: 12 – 13). He blew himself up inside a CIA base in Khost, Afghanistan, killing seven CIA employees and a Jordanian intelligence officer on December 31 2009.

In the world wide web jihadist leadership provide manuals (like the extensive Encyclopedia for the Preparation for Jihad) as well as audio- and video files through distributor sites, clerics give theological guidance, ideological thinkers give strategic advice, Islamist movements portray their idealized story on their official or semi-official websites, and insiders and outsiders more or less in the loop, engage in online discussion forums and blogs. As the number of recruitment sites exploded, Western intelligences also jumped on this wave and created their virtual honey pots for prospective jihadis.⁴⁸

Real jihadis might want to share their experience and skills with younger ones, but this seems actually to be more a decreasing than an increasing phenomena.

48 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/18/AR2010031805464.html>[30. 11. 2010].

Central publications like the magazines *Mu'askar al-Battar* and *Sawt al-Jihad* (Prucha 2010) are meanwhile defunct. The second edition of the English magazine *Inspire* unambiguously requests prospective jihadis not to engage on jihadi websites as these would be tracked down by intelligences. Ironically, the *Inspire* authors advises (English speaking!) prospective jihadis not to use the Internet for jihad-related communication and to gather latest information on jihadi ideology through anti-jihadi monitoring sites like MEMRI, SITE etc.

This seems to be in line with Sageman's observations, when he concludes: "The leaderless jihad should be allowed to expire on its own."⁴⁹

On a whole, however, the majority of Pakistan's practicing Muslim men use Internet for recreation rather than for education. Indeed observers of the Internet scene refer to Pakistan as Pornistan – as Pakistan ranks number one in Google Insight for the most searches worldwide seeking hardcore pornographic contents, outranking every other country in the world especially as regards searches connected to sex tube, xxx, sexy videos, porn clips, rape, child sex, and animal sex. This development might be interesting as what happened in Pakistan is in many ways a window on what will follow in other Islamic states, once the number of Internet users increases in the Middle East.

Conclusion

To choose Pakistan of all countries as the major non-NATO ally in the war against terror, which has meant the loss of the important partner India, has been criticized as extremely desperate (Scheuer 2005: 223 – 224). For Pakistan and its national budget however, the friendship came just at the right time.⁵⁰ Between 2002 and 2007 the US transferred around eleven billion USD to their closest ally in the war against terror, over half in unaccounted funds for the army (Cohen 2007). This sum is equal to all the aid provided by the US to Pakistan between 1948 and 2001. The US decision to invade and occupy Iraq, however, was a lifesaver for al-Qaeda and other militant elements operating in the AfPak region (Riedel 2008: 86). Senior CIA officer Robert Grenier admits:

49 Sageman 2008: 146.

50 Musharraf 2006: 188: "Ironically, 9/11 came to our rescue. With Pakistan joining the coalition against terrorism, we earned the sympathy of the Paris Club. On the whole, the entire package resulted in the reduction of our annual debt servicing liability from 5 billion USD to 2 billion USD." "We achieved phenomenal success. In 2005 FDI [Foreign Direct Investment] crossed USD 1,5 billion, up 500 percent from 1999.", p. 190. "The critical debt-to-GDP [Gross Domestic Product] ratio fell from an unhealthy 101 percent to a much healthier 59 percent [...], per capita income has risen from USD 460 to USD 800. [...] Foreign exchange reserves have risen from a paltry USD 300 million to USD 12,5 billion.", p. 191.

“The best experienced, most qualified people who we had been using in Afghanistan were shifted over to Iraq [in late 2002 and early 2003]. I think we could have done a lot more on the Afghan side if we had more experienced folks.”⁵¹

Pakistan was hit by a plethora of crises in 2009 and 2010. The US and India, the two largest democracies on the planet, are drawing increasingly closer, leaving Pakistan in the shadows feeling even more deeply threatened by the rise of India (Riedel 2008: 141). The singular most dominant fear of the political elites in Pakistan is currently that Afghanistan could be governed by Indian-friendly forces when the NATO and US leave in 2011 or 2014. The militants might begin again in this respect to look like partners.

The Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies counted 2,148 terrorist and sectarian attacks in 2008, which is an increase of about 750 % compared to 2005, with 2,267 people killed. During 2009 only the 87 suicide attacks (63 in 2008) claimed 1,299 lives (PIPS 2010: 1). Also suicide bombers seem to increasingly attack soft targets: While during 2008 most suicide attacks targeted personnel of security forces, the major suicide bombings during 2009 included the International Islamic University in Islamabad, Moon Market in Lahore or Meena Bazar in Peshawar etc. During 2009 2,586 terrorist or sectarian attacks killed more than 3,000 people. More than 12,000 people were killed during 2009 in operational attacks, inter-tribal clashes, acts of political violence or clashes with security forces etc. Militant Sunni movements – like al Qaeda – remain highly alive and active in Pakistan, in particular in Karachi, the new epicenter of modern jihadism. Afghanistan with its occupiers remains a less attractive area for international mihman mujahidin as compared to Pakistan. Observers assume, that at present only around 100 al Qaeda fighters are active in Afghanistan; their numbers on the Pakistani side are assumed to be much higher. Meanwhile more people are killed because of political violence and war in Pakistan than in Afghanistan.

Pakistan is one of the world's most significant bases of international terrorism (Council on Foreign Relations 2010: 19) and militant outfits like LT still benefit from the assistance of the Pakistani state. The historical connections of the ISI with regional jihadi groups make the priority of anti-terror-politics questionable at best. Segments of the state apparatus (parts of the intelligence services and the army) seem to collaborate with jihadist circles also to vent their resentment against the political system (Khosrokhavar 2009: 109). The Pakistani army and the ISI seem to be dependent on the support of jihadi organizations in their politics directed to India, as Pakistan fails to find hard arguments on a diplomatic level to enforce their political agenda on India. Intelligences and police

51 Riedel 2008: 83. Cf. Rhode 2007. For further mistakes of the war against terror and the invasion of Iraq see Roy, Olivier. 2007. *Le Croissant et le Chaos*. Paris: Hachette littératures.

agencies like the FIA (Federal Investigation Agency), the CIDs (Criminal Investigation Departments) and IB (Intelligence Bureau) have neither the resources nor the authority to achieve their mission aims in the conflict with militant Islamists. Without a clearance from the ISI these agencies are not allowed to track down phone-connections; and the ISI takes sometimes weeks to issue such clearances.

As long as Pakistan is characterized by a closed political scene, political instability and mistrust, as long as frustration and discontent can find no political solution and the government proposes no viable economic solutions for the future, Pakistan remains the most dangerous country in the world today, being a relatively safe haven for global militant movements to recruit radical Sunni Muslims. Furthermore, different militant outfits increasingly cooperate, uniting via operational ties and jihadist ideals, although their specific agendas may differ.⁵² The recent transformation of the Lashkar-e Tayba as a global jihadi consultant make their IT-skilled and science-educated activists the most dangerous Islamic extremists in Pakistan and most probably the world.

52 Council on Foreign Relations 2010: 33.

Philipp Holtmann

Virtual leadership: How Jihadists guide each other in cyberspace

“By believing passionately in something that still doesn’t exist, we create it.
The non-existent is whatever we haven’t sufficiently desired.”

Nikos Kazantzakis, Report to Greco (1965)

Persuasive discussions and convincing propaganda when systematically structured, disseminated, repeated and shared, can guide people’s thinking and actions. Online-jihadists have understood this very well and have adapted their media-activities to it. Cyber jihadist networks play a major role in creating terrorist mindsets. In the present article, I will call this process “leadership in cyberspace” and “virtual leadership.” Both terms will be used interchangeably.

What is leadership in cyberspace? Unlike integrated terrorist organizations with clearly defined structures, the work mode of cyber jihad networks seems hard to grasp. In physical terrorist networks one is used to find a clear chain of command through which orders are issued. Admittedly, the structure of terrorist cells in the post 9/11 security environment has become more complicated. Some dormant European cells have been activated by orders that came from faraway central networks, such as the cells that perpetrated the Madrid attacks 2004 and London bombings 2005. Yet, physical terrorist groups show much clearer patterns of leadership and guidance than cyber jihad-networks. But who guides the thousands of jihad websites, discussions forums, blogs and jihadist user-accounts? The myriad of virtual jihad presences has no central leaders, but relies on a multitude of participants, who bring in their own strategic thoughts and shape the networks.

Of course, one might be tempted to say that the chain of command and leadership in electronic jihad is a mere reflection of physical jihad. The central and largest terrorist organizations have the most influential media-teams. Therefore, they create media hierarchies by issuing agendas through their media wings. Yet, the matter is more complicated, since terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda cannot be the exclusive leaders of online jihad. There are no exclusive leaders online. Online organization and social networking are per se participative and interactive. Concerning guidance and leadership in new social media one has to think less traditionally.

Thus, my first hypothesis is that a very specific form of leadership exists in

cyberspace, which clusters around jihadist communication. The central motto of cyber jihad is “Do not rely on anyone but yourself and incite the believers.”¹ Self-responsibility, yet a high degree of cooperation define electronic jihad.² Accordingly, cyber jihadists create a steady forth and back of discursive propaganda, which takes place in a ritualized fashion. Rituals, in turn, establish hierarchies among individuals. The second hypothesis of this article is that virtual activity creates terrorist reality. If we understand reality also as a specific way to think, then radical ideas are a part of an individual’s mental reality. In a growing number of cases this leads to terrorist attacks in the physical world.

This article is structured as follows: Firstly, it will define leadership in cyberspace and the analytical tools being used. Then, it will describe the workspace in which virtual leadership takes place, i. e. the jihadist Net. This concerns the social structure of the jihadist Internet, as well as its infrastructure and work mode. Furthermore, the article will explain factors that facilitate virtual leadership in Sunni Muslim culture and summarize some thoughts of prominent jihadist strategists on communicative leadership. Finally, four models of leadership in cyberspace will be described and some recent cases of terrorist attacks and radicalization will be shown that are strongly connected to the phenomenon. The research method is qualitative and orientated at the sampling of expressive examples, watching the behaviour of online-jihadists by participant observation. No quantitative data can be obtained from this approach, but the subjects can be studied in much more detail. The main questions when studying and observing cyber jihadists are: Do they indeed lead without central leaders? How do they create power and truth in their discourses? Are there hierarchical virtual institutions in cyber jihad? What are the most common rituals by which cyber jihadists self-organize and steer each other?

I would like to thank the editor of the present volume, Professor Rüdiger Lohlker, who has given me the chance to formulate the concept of leadership in cyberspace in detail. “Keep it short” is a good reminder; however, the present article has more than fifty pages. People who feel impatient and would like to get to the point right away may just read the definition and then jump to the last chapter on models of virtual leadership.

Leadership in cyberspace may be roughly defined as networked, discursive and ritualized communication. This article defines four models of virtual leadership: Firstly, the adaptation of classical Islamic leadership rituals to the

1 “La tukallif illa nafsaka wa harrid al-mu’minin,” Qur’an, Surat al-Nisa’, Verse 84. Translation by the author.

2 See for example, Ahmad al-Misri (name of a forum member), “Al-I’lam al-jihadi...mas’uliyah mushtarika” (Jihad media...a shared responsibility), al-Jahafal forum, accessed March 31, 2011, <http://al-jahafal.com/vb/showthread.php?t=9205>.

Internet; the creation of discursive hierarchies; the participative production of jihadist propaganda; and the creation of virtual milieus that glorify jihad.

The impact of cyber jihad becomes stronger by the day. To name just the most recent cases of attackers who left footprints in cyberspace: The Iraqi-born Taimour al-Abdaly detonated himself prematurely on his way to a suicide bombing in Sweden's capital Stockholm in December 2010; The Bangladeshi Rajib Karim plotted to bomb a passenger plane in Great Britain in 2010; The Kosovar Arid Uka shot two U.S. soldiers fatally in Germany in February 2011; The Saudi Khalid Aldawsari plotted terrorist attacks in the USA and a man who is probably of Syrian descent calling himself "Omar al-Shami" in terrorist discussion websites committed a suicide bombing in Iraq. They were all influenced by a jihadist thought milieu, which is being created via the Internet and its propaganda.³ They were tapping jihadist networks and thoughts before their attacks and activities.⁴ These cases bring up major questions such as: Can leadership exist without leaders? What are the mechanisms that create communicative and discursive leadership in cyberspace? Who is participating?

It is, of course, tempting to construct a direct connection between virtual and physical activity. Admittedly, there are strong intersections between cyber jihad and real terrorist attacks. However, it is extremely hard to measure the exact degree of the influence of cyber jihad on terrorist attackers. Therefore, it is nearly

3 1) Taimour al-Abdaly was born in Iraq and lived since 1992 in Sweden, later Great Britain. He blew himself up prematurely on the way to a suicide bombing in Sweden's capital in December 2010. Al-Abdaly was entangled into the jihadionline milieu and said in his martyrdom will that he acted on behalf of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), which is a virtual entity that claims to represent al-Qaeda in Iraq.

2) Rajib Karim was born in Bangladesh and lived in Great Britain, where he has been sentenced in March 2011 for supporting the media work of Jammāt-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and for plotting to bomb a U.S.-bound British Airways flight. Karim received direct operational orders from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's main ideologue Anwar al-Awlaqi, who since then also counts as an operative leader.

3) Arid Uka comes from Kosovo and grew up in Germany. He killed two U.S. soldiers at Frankfurt airport in March 2011. Uka radicalized via the Internet (nickname "AbuReyyan"), had no contact to terrorist organizations, and is the picture book example of a lone wolf (single attacker without organizational affiliation).

4) Khalid Aldawsari is a Saudi national who studied in the United States and planned to attack several high profile targets. According to Arlington Police, Aldawsari did not have any operational ties to a terrorist group, but was a "lone wolf" guided by strategic, ideological and tactical material from the jihadi internet.

5) Abu Omar al-Shami is the avatar name of a popular cyber jihadist, who first propagated on jihadi forums and then allegedly blew himself up in a suicide attack in Iraq in March 2011. Al-Shami was probably a Syrian national.

4 One might also stress the fact that they were and are all Muslims with a migrant background, some of them well integrated and married, such as Faisal Shahzad and Taimour al-Abdaly. They did not perpetrate their attacks in their home countries. But none of them perpetrated his attack without accompanying media activities, which is the issue here.

impossible to establish a leadership pattern and chain of command that stretches directly from cyberspace into non-digital reality. In addition, not all online jihadists must necessarily become terrorists. So called “armchair-jihadists”, i. e. participants in electronic jihad may as well gain a therapeutic effect from it, similar to a release valve for frustrations and anger.⁵ This question needs further research.⁶

Therefore, this article will focus on internal mechanisms of virtual leadership that can be clearly identified. That means communicative, discursive and ritualistic mechanisms within cyber jihadist networks. They are the key to understand how jihadists steer and organize each other in cyberspace. It is much easier to examine the internal factors of cyber jihad than the influence of cyber jihad on reality. The major arenas of field study will be the most popular jihadist forums and blogs, but also jihadist user-accounts on Facebook and Youtube. Jihadist discussion forums are the epicentres of online jihad. It is important to examine the exact types of communication on the forums, where certain fixed linguistic codes and jargons reconstruct and reproduce the intellectual world of jihadists on a day-to-day basis.

From a terrorist perspective, networking and communicating in cyberspace seems to be a practical way to substitute physical terrorist structures that have come under pressure. Abu Mus’ab al-Suri, one of the most advanced strategic thinkers of al-Qaeda, has taught the principles of communicative leadership since the 1990s. He has argued that propaganda should guide sympathizers of global jihad and be produced by sympathizers at the same time. According to al-Suri, the ultimate chain of command is the divine contract (‘ahd) with Allah itself: A believer must obey and needs no other leaders but Allah. The final way to incite is to perpetrate individual terrorist attacks. The goal is to attract a mass follower movement, which is not physically connected to larger organizations.⁷ However, al-Suri neglected the fact that many online-supporters are unwilling to perpetrate actual attacks. In addition, decentralized leadership has its own dynamics and is extremely hard to control.

There is an ongoing academic debate on the role of al-Qaeda organization versus its grassroots activists. Also the discussion on the relevance of the Internet for al-Qaeda and its followers concerns this question.⁸ Some researchers

5 See for a similar approach also Brachman and Levine 2011.

6 This requires interviewing a high number of participants in order to find out about their emotions connected to electronic jihad.

7 See Holtmann 2009a.

8 The debate is often identified with the U.S.-American scholars Bruce Hoffman and Marc Sageman. For the Hoffman-Sageman debate see Sageman 2008; Hoffman 2008; and Sageman’s answer to Hoffman’s critique “The Homegrown Young Radicals Of Next-Gen Jihad”, The Washington Post, June 8, 2008. See also Arquilla and Ronfeld 2001 on the development of

argue that Internet-propaganda, virtual training and networking cannot replace traditional organizational structures and hierarchies. Others hold that virtual activity has a massive influence on terrorist reality. I agree with the second approach. Online jihad has a major influence on jihadists. Would the Dutch terrorist Muhammad Bouyeri have gruesomely killed the filmmaker and political activist Theo van Gogh in 2004 without reading hyper-extremist E-guidelines prior to his attack? In a preceding study on virtual leadership, I have stressed the effects of extremist E-fatwas on followers.⁹ However, in this discussion one should keep in mind that physical terrorist networks and organizations have by no means diminished. In addition, a number of jihadist plotters and attackers have been strongly connected to the physical and virtual terrorist worlds in parallel.

Marc Sageman argues that “the true leader of global jihad is the collective discourse of the half-dozen influential forums. It provides general guidance to the participants in the absence of physical command and control found in traditional terrorist organizations.”¹⁰ Yet, there is a major weakness in Sageman’s argument. He has not analyzed jihadist discourses in depth and has overseen the ritualistic aspects of leadership in cyberspace. Media activities and interactions are not only discussed, they are also repeated hundreds of times. Examples are ritualized mutual activities, but also the ritualized subordination under virtual institutions such as the “Islamic State of Iraq.” Moreover, Sageman’s claim that virtual discourses have abolished leadership in terrorist organizations is far-fetched. Terrorist attackers are often guided by media jihad, physical networks and recruiters in parallel. One should keep in mind that the making and guidance of an actual terrorist relies on a multitude of factors.

As I have argued so far, leadership in cyberspace concerns mainly the virtual dimension of jihadist networks. Moreover, two different players have developed

non-hierarchical virtual networks that have rapidly changed inter-human behavior. For many researchers, the discursive, informative and propagandist functions of the jihadist Net stand at the centre, which, however, does not contradict the thesis of virtual leadership, see Weimann 2006, Bunt 2009; also Lia 2006. Some researchers doubt that online recruitment can be effective, it needs physical networks. McCants 2009 argues that a long-term radicalization always relies on physical contacts. The Internet plays only a supporting role. Neumann 2008 claims that it is about time for a radical rethinking of the role of the Internet for radicalization and recruitment. Radicalization and recruitment can take place solely via the Internet.

⁹ Holtmann 2011.

¹⁰ Sageman 2008: 118. Sageman’s thesis that virtual discourses have replaced the physical leadership of global jihad goes too far, since physical organizations still exert control. Moreover, Sageman has not analyzed jihadist discourses in depth. Therefore, the present article modifies Sageman’s thesis, arguing that discourses and ritualized mutual guidance on the Internet play a decisive role for the leadership of the cyber jihadist movements, but central physical organizations still exist and exert leadership both on the ground and on the Internet through their media wings.

in the jihadist media. In order to demonstrate the difference of structure between the cyber jihad movement and “real” jihad organizations, the following definitions may be useful:¹¹

- Organization: An organized group of people with a particular purpose.
 Movement: A group of people working together to advance their shared political or social ideas.
 Network: A group of people who exchange information and contacts for professional or social purpose

When speaking about al-Qaeda, this article refers to an organization with numerous affiliates that promotes a global terrorist interpretation of jihad and thus inspires a movement of followers via the Internet.¹² Jihadism is the modern ideology and terrorist interpretation of jihad, and jihadists are persons who hold up its principles and doctrines. An intermediate control level of al-Qaeda and other organizations exists, and it can be illustrated with the steady output of ideas and agendas. However, there are countless other actors who exert influence on jihadism online. Thus, it is preferable not to use the term “al-Qaeda” to describe the participants of online jihad. Most of them have nothing to do with al-Qaeda. The term al-Qaeda implies a hierarchical organization according to Western standards. This is not the case with cyber jihad. Furthermore, tactical and operational control of al-Qaeda central organization and its affiliates are nowadays swaying. But the communicational power of jihadist online networks is steadily developing.

When speaking about cyber jihad, this article employs both networking and movement concepts. Cyber jihad is a movement with a common agenda whose followers form virtual social networks. Al-Qaeda inspires this movement. However, the movement’s shared goal is much broader than the organizational interests of al-Qaeda, which narrows down to self-legitimacy, survival, expansion and the establishment of an Islamic core state. The movement, in contrast, aims at disrupting the Western way of life by promoting Islamic terrorist propaganda through a physically disconnected satellite network with total flexibility and a multitude of planning divisions. Its communicational strategy aims to frighten the West and to support al-Qaeda in the media sector. The single member of the movement is a “cyber jihadist,” which leans on jihadist parlance, since jihadists call online jihad “electronic jihad” (al-jihad al-elektruni), or

11 See Emma Brandsen, “Organisation or Movement: A classification of al-Qaeda”, King’s College London Summer School 2010, 1st Session; Course: The Law and Politics of International Terrorism.

12 The majority of jihadiforum visitors are “armchair jihadists”, but a number of members of al-Qaeda organization and affiliated organizations have access to jihadiforums, too. They provide the forums with jihadist media productions, for example.

“jihad media” (al-i’lam al-jihadi). Cyber-Jihadists perceive themselves as autonomous actors, which is demonstrated by the way they reflect on themselves and by lengthy discussions that solely turn around themselves. Although they adore al-Qaeda organization and its ideology, they clearly differentiate between jihad organizations (such as al-Qaeda central in Pakistan and its affiliates in Muslim countries) and “media jihad.” Media jihad is perceived as a separate sphere with its own logics and mechanisms.¹³ Its participants don’t die on the battlefield, but they support terrorism as a form of communication. In a leadership sense, followers of cyber jihad self-organize and guide each other by redesigning and redistributing leadership-tasks into autonomous work-groups that operate without regular supervision. Jihad on the Internet is like an all-channel network, in which information flows freely in a fully collaborative manner.¹⁴ If one node is cut off, it is quickly replaced. Every forum, blog and activist contributes in shaping and leading this network. This is the basis for virtual leadership.

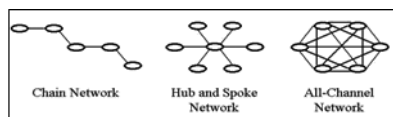


Figure 1. Network structures (adopted from Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 2001).

Source: Jackson, Brian A. “Groups, networks, or movements: A command-and-control-driven approach to classifying terrorist organizations and its application to al-Qaeda.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. Vol. 29, (Virginia: RAND Corporation, 2006), pp. 241 – 262, (July 16 2010), 246).

Accordingly, there are two major factions in cyber jihad. Established organizations with their semiofficial media-companies” have quasi-institutional power. Their blinking banners dominate jihadist forums and make them look like advertisement tables for jihadist organizations. However, grassroots activists often copy the concept of “media-companies” and form own media outlets. This is a sign of professionalization and also the wish to create independent authority. As much as the media work of jihadist groups is admired by grassroots activists, they also want to be understood as independent players and challenge

13 See, for example, “Ahad a’da’ al-muntadayat al-jihadiyya yunaffidh ’amaliya istishhadiyya fi bilad al-rafidayn – suratuhu ma’ al-wasiya: Abu Umar al-Shami yanfur ila bilad al-rafidayn wa yunaffidh ’amaliya istishhadiyya” (A member of the jihad forums executes a martyrdom operation – his picture with his advice and will: Abu Amr al-Shami hurries to Iraq and executes a martyrdom operation), Shumukh al-Islam Forum, accessed 29 February, 2011, <http://www.shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=97338>.

14 Originally, Brian Jackson holds that al-Qaeda on the Internet is like an all-channel network, in which information flows freely in a fully collaborative manner. But more correctly, “cyber-jihad” fulfils this role. Not all activists and supporters of cyber jihad are also members or supporters of al-Qaeda.

the aspired hegemony of established groups. Members of the popular jihad form “Sanam al-Islam” (Hump of Islam [jihad]), for example, have recently established an own media company.¹⁵ In addition, the forum itself calls for violent actions such as kidnappings, which is a form of agitation that is rather associated with actual groups.¹⁶

Broadly speaking, leadership in cyberspace is “communicative leadership on the Internet”. In a technical sense, cyberspace is “the electronic medium of computer networks, in which online communication takes place.”¹⁷ In his 1980s science fiction novel “Neuromancer”, William Gibson defined cyberspace as a “consensual hallucination.”¹⁸ Yet, media environments like virtual realities seem to be more than a mere hallucination. They have a real impact on individuals’ imaginations and perceptions of norms and principles. Humans tend to accept incoming information as true if it is sensory, networked and affirmed by others.¹⁹

Since Web 2.0, cyberspace is extremely user-friendly, offering new social media platforms for communicational networking. In this respect, information is also one of a several forms by which a movement is organized.²⁰ By the same token, communication is one of a movement’s leadership forms. Especially virtual social networks are led by communicative processes. Communicative leadership in political and terrorist movements can be illustrated with three examples.

Firstly, Wladimir Iljitsch Uljanow (Lenin) propagated a media-strategy based on communicative leadership. The party-newspaper “Iskra” (Spark) served during 1901–03 as “collective organizer”, whereas Stalin’s bank robberies secured the continuation of its publication.²¹ Both levels, communicative and

15 See for the foundation communiqué the Sanam al-Islam forum, accessed March 3, 2011, <http://www.snam-s.net/vb/showthread.php?t=4581>.

16 The media company is called “Mu’assasat al-Qabidun ‘ala al-Jamr al-I’lamiyya” (Media Foundation of Those Who Clutch the Glowing Coal [of Jihad] with Their Hands). See for the announcement “Shabakat Sanam al-Islam##: Na’lan ‘an ja’iza maliyya li man yakhtaf ra’s al-khabith Wi’am Wahhab” (The Hump of Islam Network announces a bounty for the abduction of the head of evil Wi’am Wahhab [A Lebanese Politician]), accessed March 31, 2011, <http://www.snam-s.net/vb/showthread.php?t=5305>.

17 TheFreeDictionary, accessed March 14, 2011, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/cyberspace>.

18 Gibson 1986.

19 Mantovani 1995: 669–682.

20 Yang Hsu 2003.

21 Collective organizers are methods or carriers of communication such as newspapers, magazines, websites, rituals, or icons, platforms for networking such as jihadist websites, but also central ideas around which the discourse of a movement develops. The concept of “collective organizers” stems from Professor Rüdiger Lohlker, who guides the inter-disciplinary “jihadism-online”-project at the University of Vienna, <http://www.univie.ac.at/jihadism/>. Lohlker speaks about collective organizers such as Lenin’s newspaper “Iskra” and the jihadist webmagazine “Sawt al-Jihad”. Lohlker says that the concept of “collective organizers” works for electronic media as well. Jihadi websites and e-magazines serve as

physical, were dependent upon each other. Without armed action, there had been no financing of the propaganda, and without propaganda, no justification of armed action.

Secondly, communicative leadership can already be observed in the 19th century anarchist movement.²² In the second half of the 19th century, an impressive print-industry propagated anarchist thought the world over.²³ Dozens of newspapers and magazines served as the intellectual incubators for anarchist terrorism and had a steering influence on anarchists ("Propaganda of the Deed").²⁴ Anarchist ideologues often had no direct contact to activists, who acted more or less alone. They were inspired by the violent ideology distributed through the anarchist press.²⁵

Thirdly, since 2003 al-Qaeda has been trying to inspire followers by audio-messages on the Internet.²⁶ Some sleeper cells like in Madrid and Istanbul probably took these messages at face value as commands to attack.²⁷ Grassroots followers of al-Qaeda probably took these messages as inspirations. In the last years, followers of al-Qaeda's ideology have started to produce ideology by themselves and to guide each other's thinking and communicative behaviour. They spread jihad ideology all over the Net. Direct links between individuals can often not be established. Central actors like al-Qaeda can initiate agendas and create a framework of communicative guidance by publishing videos, speeches and stressing central issues, but they cannot lead directly in cyberspace. Thousands of followers have specific ways to interpret the information they receive. Therefore, leadership in cyberspace has numerous leaders, because smaller actors like role-models, opinion leaders, discursive leaders and various contributors co-steer information, diversify, process and transfer it. This can only take place in a thought milieu where actors steadily reference each other and cluster around a guiding ideology.²⁸ This article identifies the following key points of virtual leadership, including the key-definition:

collective organizers for the jihadi movement. See Lohlker, Introduction to Prucha 2010; also interview of the author with Lohlker in August 2009.

22 This comparison refers to the revolutionary, not the evolutionary wing of the 19th ct. Anarchist movement.

23 See Hoffman 2006.

24 Among these newspapers and magazines were the *Bulletin de la Fédération jurassienne, La Révolution Sociale, Freiheit* and the *The Alarm*. See also Laqueur 1987.

25 Kassel 2009: 237 – 252.

26 For example, "Usama Bin Ladin's Message to Iraq, Urges Muslims To Overthrow Regime," al-Jazira, February 11, 2003; "Usama Bin Ladin Urges Muslims To Launch 'Suicide Attacks' Against US," *Daily Ausaf*, April 9, 2003.

27 Interview with Guido Steinberg, terrorism analyst at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, February 9, 2011.

28 This behaviour is called discursive leadership. See for discursive leadership Uitermark, Traag and Bruggeman 2010

- a. Two major groups of actors are involved in virtual leadership on the Internet. On the one hand, terrorist organizations with their highly professional media groups and productions are trendsetters for the terrorist milieu. On the other hand, grassroots activists increasingly become autonomous actors, who do not act as puppets of the organizations, but impact themselves on the development of cyber jihad.
- b. Established organizations and their media wings try to present hierarchical chains of authority also in the Internet; their propaganda goes back to integrated structures. They try to establish a hierarchical form of communicative leadership. Examples are al-Qaeda and affiliated groups with their media companies.
- c. The decentralized grassroots faction of cyber jihad understands leadership as a participative endeavor. Every activist is self-responsible and can take part in the mutual leadership process. Their networks are organized through information-sharing and led by participative communicative processes. One cannot force anyone on the Internet to act against his or her will. Participants and members need to consent.
- d. Jihadist propaganda can be found all over the Internet, but jihadist discussion forums are the epicentres of jihadist propaganda. Because of that it is so important to examine the exact types of communication that take place on these forums. They are the arenas where certain fixed linguistic codes and jargons reconstruct and reproduce the intellectual world of jihadists on a linguistic level.
- e. Virtual leadership is a steady process of trend-setting and steering communication to influence the behaviour of individuals in order to achieve a goal. This process involves the target-oriented use of forces and resources, is rendered by a computer and independent of time and space. It is based on mutual information.

Furthermore, leadership in cyberspace is a virtual phenomenon. One cannot assume an absolute division between the virtual and physical worlds. With the development of Web 2.0, an increasing entanglement of both spheres has taken place. Most people take virtual worlds dead serious. Nobody wants to be harmed in his or her virtual identity, i. e. to be “netslutted” and “netshitted” on Facebook, Twitter, or Youtube. Yet, people love it to be “netflirted” or “netloved”. As yet, there is an essential human conflict how to deal with cyberspace and its effects on human behaviour. Virtual phenomena thus are still being interpreted nearly as an illusion, or something that is true, but not totally true. The virtual world and its effects are like a phantom to the human mind. Propaganda in the

Web is “nothing but a virtual call,” can often be heard in the news. Yet, authoritarian states are shutting down Net-services to avoid calls for demonstrations that might endanger their existence (for example in Egypt and China). Participants in Net-agitation are being punished with long prison terms by repressive states. Therefore,

“Virtual” is perceived as something that has the potential to come into existence and is rendered by a computer. People tend to associate virtual with “fake”, which is connected to 18th and 19th century discussions of optics and physics.²⁹ Thus, virtual has a threshold quality, since the idea of not being totally real is connected to it. Nevertheless, people tend to take virtual worlds dead-serious. “Virtual-leadership” is thus “leadership on the threshold to reality which is rendered by a computer.”

Analytical Framework

Ritualistic discourses and interactions lead the internal processes of cyber jihad. I will use American sociologist Alfred Bergesen’s concept of the “ritual order” as an analytic tool to explain mechanisms of leadership in cyberspace. According to Bergesen, the “ritual order” is the complete sum of practices that constantly reproduce social ties and symbols (which in turn represent these ties).³⁰ But the ritual is also a form of communicative action that abolishes the difference between thinking and doing.³¹ This point is tremendously important for leadership in cyberspace, which tries to elicit actions from ideas. The activity in a threshold zone like virtual space creates threshold identities. Much has been written on this phenomenon in socio-anthropological literature. Threshold states cause strong emotional bonds and a feeling of brotherly/sisterly love among people who belong to the same group or experience the same transition. This feeling cuts across the distinctions of normal society and is called *communitas*. On jihad forums it can be typically observed among members of jihadist forums who exaltedly and ritualistically laud each other. Cyber-jihadists are *threshold people*

29 Calleja 2008.

30 Bergesen 2003: 49 – 77. Also Menzel 2009: 51 – 93. The following discussion and examples on different levels of rituals are mostly taken from Bergesen and Menzel, except for my own interpretations and examples of jihadist rituals.

31 Bell 1998: 37 – 48. As Emile Durkheim observed, “religious phenomena fall into two basic categories: beliefs and rites. The first are states of opinion and consist of representations; the second are particular modes of action. Between these two categories lies all that separates thinking from doing.” See Durkheim 2008:40.

by virtue of having extremist online identities, yet at the same time living quite normal lives. The average “armchair-jihadi” is caught in a liminal state between the virtual and the physical world and thus develops a *liminal persona*.³² This creates tension and a longing to fill the gap between thought and action.³³ The threshold feeling is strengthened by a religious worldview, which postulates that jihadists are “strangers”, who are merely passing through this world.³⁴ Similar to fundamentalist Christians, jihadists are psychologically in a constant *rite of passage*.³⁵ Threshold and liminal states are essential features of an individual’s development in mass society, for example, when adolescents leave their childhood phase and enter adulthood. But even more so, they play a key role for intentional communities, which rely on a much more intense teamwork than mass societies.³⁶ Their members believe in a common social, political, religious and spiritual goal. An intentional community gathers around its shared emotions (*communitas*) like around a camp-fire. But a camp-fire is likely to burn down after a short while and the same goes for emotions. They are short-lived and difficult to sustain. Emotions are fleeting and best suited for short term psychological states such as rites of passage, initiation rituals and revolutionary uprisings.³⁷

Yet, emotional states seems to last differently in virtual networks. Many concepts of traditional group behaviour do not apply to online-networks.³⁸ The

32 The concept of liminality was first introduced to the field of anthropology by Arnold Van Gennep in his seminal work, *Les rites de passage*. Van Gennep described rites of passage such as coming-of-age rituals and marriage, which have the following three-part structure: 1. Separation; 2. Liminal Period; 3. Re-Assimilation. See Gannep 2005. The U.S. anthropologist Victor Turner utilized van Gennep’s model “rites de passage” and Clifford Gertz’ concept “thick description” for his own concepts of “liminality” and “communitas.” See Turner 2008.

33 See Brachman and Levine 2010.

34 This is encapsulated in the Prophetic saying “Islam began alien and it will again be alien like it began – May the strangers be blessed.” In Arabic: *Bada’a al-Islam ghariban wa saya’ud ghariban kama bada’a fa tawba li-l-ghuraba’*. In al-Suri 2004.

35 This not only concerns the myth of salvation, which is typical for monotheistic belief sets, but also the nature of cyberspace, the effects of which on human psychology and society are not yet clear. Some Christians are liminal figures because they believe that they are only temporary residents of the world. They are merely passing through this world; therefore “threshold qualities” may be maintained indefinitely. See Turner 2008: 333. The crowning logical step of this belief is to escape life altogether, which applies to the most radical religious sects, ascetics and monastery orders. See Durkheim 2008: 41.

36 See Brown 2002.

37 Kamau 2002: 24.

38 We know very little about membership, hierarchies and boundaries of online jihadists. Members are frequently leaving and entering online-groups. Many are lurkers and not registered members. For example, jihadist A and B may interact online on specific issues, but jihadist B may also interact offline with person/jihadist C. Other factors are largely un-

highly fluent and participative structures of virtual networks seem to allow a sustained level of emotional bonds. In some Nazi online-groups, extremism and therefore group feelings grow with involvement in online networks.³⁹ Moreover, computer mediated interactions have a dis-inhibiting effect, which allows to foster highly emotional and psychological states.⁴⁰ Dis-inhibited communication like netslutting, nethating and netloving recreates the US versus THEM divide that is crucial for in-group cohesion. In turn, high in-group cohesion creates out-group aggression.⁴¹ These characteristics of Net-communication are also crucial for the cohesion of online-jihadists. Especially if online jihadists are not in physical contact with a jihad milieu, they need to be able to draw online a clear line between in-group members and non-jihadists. Jihadists strengthen their ideological cohesion and the reproduction of their extremist world of thought with rituals. I will use an extended definition of rituals to analyze leadership mechanisms in cyberspace.

Rituals are formal as well as informal repeated social interactions that constantly reproduce social ties and hierarchies. They use and create emotional zeal to create ideological conviction.⁴² Moreover, rituals tie thoughts to actions.⁴³

Albert Bergesen distinguishes three levels of rituals, namely micro-, meso- and macrorituals. Together, they reproduce symbolically, nevertheless very effectively social structures within the smallest as well as the biggest units of society. Rituals are not understood only in terms of public mega events, but also as small scale personal interactions such as greetings, handshakes, certain phrases and celebrations. The three levels of rituals are integrated. Many micro-ritualistic actions form a meso-interaction, and many meso-interactions build a larger macro-ceremony.⁴⁴ The micro ritual, i. e. the formal organization of linguistic elements, must be established before superior ritualistic processes such as meso-rituals and macro-rituals can take place.

The ritual order of Bergesen can be very well illustrated with a campfire.

known, such as growth, diversity, heterogeneity, homogeneity, density, or how virtual networks affect behaviour.

39 The major difference between radical environmentalists and Nazi online activists is that the extremism and false consensus of radical environmentalists is less influenced by their online participation. See Wojcieszak 2008: 781–791.

40 Benschop 2010.

41 Wrangham and Peterson 1996: 194–199.

42 This definition is orientated at McManus 1979: 216–248.

43 Bell 1998: 37–48.

44 Bergesen 1998: 66.

When people sit around a campfire, they perform all three levels of rituals. The ritual order starts on the micro level, where it is relevant to observe who grills, how people move, what their facial expressions and body movements are, as well as the tools being used. Who builds and ignites the fire, who continues bringing wood, who grills his or her meat first indicates hierarchies; how exactly is the meat grilled shows technical understanding; what is the sitting order and amount of speaking time of participants hints at authority, or the wish to be authoritative. Secondly, on a meso-level (intermediate level) it is important to observe why the idea of the ceremony is so important for a specific group. Do they long for harmony, solidarity, defend a certain cause, or plan an attack, etc? Finally, on a macro level, one can define the event and its participants. Thus, the macro ritual “camp-fire” attracts a specific group of people – i. e. is it a group of business-man, a family, or extremists? Through a similar lens, this article looks at the communicative interactions on jihad discussion forums.⁴⁵

Imagine a campfire...

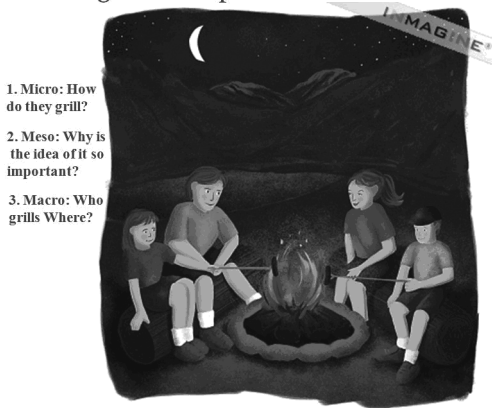


Figure 2.

Source: www.inmagine.com, supplier and distributor of Royalty-Free digital stock photography, accessed February 17, 2011, <http://www.inmagine.com/iz137/iz137020-photo>.

Rituals are fundamentally relevant for explaining and understanding the different models of virtual leadership.

Firstly, micro-rituals, according to Bergesen, are the basis of ritualistic interaction. They are essential symbolic reproductions of group culture, because they guarantee the cultural transmission of group culture from one generation to the next. Micro-rituals are very important for virtual leadership as well, since

⁴⁵ This method of observation is called “thick description” and goes back to the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Geertz 1973: 412–454.

they create solidarity and hierarchy among speakers. Only participants who share linguistic, differentiated or restrictive codes belong to a certain in-group. Others may be discriminated and separated. Restrictive codes strengthen in-group cohesion, which leads to heightened out-group aggression.⁴⁶ Especially “restrictive codes,” which are only understood by in-group members, foster this process. Jihadists exemplify this on their forums by ritualistic expressions that represent jihadist thought. Also movements and gestures may be understood as micro-rituals. For example, the raised right index finger oftentimes displayed in jihad videos, stands for monotheism and the belief in Allah.⁴⁷

Secondly, meso-rituals (intermediary rituals) are oftentimes expressions of hierarchy and authority. They regulate hierarchies through the organisation of social recognition, social status and interpersonal relationships. We acknowledge such hierarchies verbally or by way of gestures. For example, if we open the door for someone, yield to somebody, or allow someone to take part in a discussion. In the moment of the ceremony, the hierarchical relationship is confirmed symbolically.⁴⁸ Thus, meso-rituals are also expressions of authority and can be used for leadership purposes.

In the age of the modern media, meso-rituals also refer to para-social relationships between individuals and their role models.⁴⁹ Individuals and groups over-identify, for example, with their favourite actors in TV-soaps. Individuals start wearing the same shoes or wish to live the same lifestyle as their favourite role models. In online jihad, this process concerns especially the over-identification, iconic admiration and imitation of jihadist role models until a point where the border between virtual and physical world blurs. This aspect is exploited for “discursive virtual leadership.” The features, sayings and characteristics of venerated suicide attackers, for example, are reproduced and copied by participants of jihadist forums. Certain sentences by suicide attackers are permanently lauded and repeated and serve as “discursive icons.”

The ritualistic over-identification with martyrs is supported by acoustic icons such as the chirping of “green paradise-birds” in jihadist propaganda videos.⁵⁰

46 Wrangham and Peterson 1996: 194–199. This point, however, goes for all human societies, not only jihadists. In-groups automatically categorize and dichotomise out-groups, i.e. others. This creates an US versus THEM divide. In biological-anthropology this is called the *ingroup-outgroup bias*. Automatic and pre-programmed forms of hostility can be further ignited by propaganda and ideology.

47 Holtmann 2010b.

48 Goffman as quoted in Bourdieu 1984: 597. Meso-rituals can be divided into rituals of avoidance (prohibitions, taboos) and rituals of performance and presentation (invitations, salutations, compliments, services).

49 Menzel 2009: 51–61.

50 Already in the 1990 s, jihadi media made use of an effective iconography. For example, the audiotapes “in the hearts of the green birds” and “under the shades of the swords” were used

“Green birds” refer to paradise birds, in which the souls of the martyrs allegedly live on. The concept is very popular in jihadist subcultures.⁵¹ There are countless other acoustic and discursive icons, i. e. expressions and sounds, which create an emotional interaction between picture and viewer, sound and listener, text and reader.⁵² In addition, jihadists use central icons to reproduce their collective identities.⁵³ Martyr-posters thus combine the use of the icon for defining the jihadist community and glorifying it.

Thirdly, macro-rituals are the celebration of a defined community. They are key features of interpersonal human behaviour. Group ceremonies like prayer, birthday celebrations, dinners and jubilees are macro rituals. Macro rituals take place among couples, families, multinational companies as well as states. Within a nation, a company celebrates its jubilee, but within a company, a group celebrates and reproduces its collective existence at lunch. For this group, the collective lunch is a macro-ritual. Married couples perform macro-rituals by celebrating wedding anniversaries. The couple may use gestures of respect, i. e. interaction-rituals on the meso level that regulate position, hierarchy and power between them. When both partners converse according to an established lingual code, they also confirm their identities on the micro-level.⁵⁴

to create an ritualistic, iconic and mythic discourse around modern martyrs. Reichmuth 2010: 185–198.

51 For example, German and Uzbek jihadists in Waziristan produced in 2009 the video “Die Vorzüge des Jihad” (the merits of jihad) and explicitly referred to “green birds”. Videos on suicide operations often make use of the chirping sound of small birds to recreate the iconic image of green paradise birds in the imagination of their viewers. The chirping sound is used like an “acoustic icon” that automatically strengthens common identification and calls for martyrdom. The Iraqi born Swede Taimour al-Abdaly, who prematurely blew himself up in Stockholm in December 2010 on his way to a suicide attack, had an obsession for green canary birds. On his youtube account, he had collected dozens of videos of green canary birds. For al-Abdaly, see Aaron Weissburd, <http://internet-hagana.com>, accessed February 17, 2011, <http://internet-haganah.com/harchives/007107.html>.

52 Menzel 2009: 66.

53 Iconic signs and sounds automatically remind a recipient of certain concept, idea, or role model in the jihadi web, so-called media companies have clickable interactive banners that remind of icons. In semiotics and linguistics, i. e. the science of symbols and study of speech and language, icons are signs that are designated a similarity to another object. The similarity can be created visually, by sound, or any other means, but it must not be arbitrary. Often images and motives that resemble real objects such as portraits are counted as icons. In a wider sense, icons can also be ideas and sounds. But the word icon also designates a small graphic symbol which symbolizes a program or file in a graphical user interface (computers). One might argue that this transports the ancient cultural meaning, i. e. icons as triggers of a deep feeling of deep respect, into virtual worlds.

54 Menzel 2009 argues that in civil societies the ideological and cultic influence of rituals is more difficult to see. In line with this argument, one might say that “simple” ideological rituals and icons are easier to discern. German National Socialists, for example, believed in the common central myth that the German race was omnipotent and racially superior. Behaviorally, the myth was supported with micro-rituals such as the Hitler salute, meso-

Jihadists perform macro-rituals when they gather around discussion topics and start participative propaganda campaigns on the Internet. Such activities are an essential feature of their reproduction of identity.

A central idea is metaphorically like a camp-fire; a group gathers around it and performs what we have defined as the ritual order.⁵⁵ In terms of extremist ideology, ideas and symbols can work like viruses, being highly resilient and contagious. To illustrate my argument, the Qur'an is an essential symbol of Islam. However, the Qur'an and the scimitar (but also the Kalashnikov and the keyboard) are central icons of the virtual jihadist subculture. The black flag and on it in classical Arabic calligraphy the Islamic credo "La ilaha illa 'Allah, Muhammad rasul Allah!" is an action leading symbol. The quasi-iconic representation stimulates the idea and discussion of jihad. Thus, ideas or interactions are supported by symbols, as much as symbols stimulate ideas and interactions.

On a final note, Jürgen Habermas in his "Theory of Communicative Action" argues that "instrumental" or "strategic actions" can steer the thinking of people by using words. For example, by using certain rhetoric means, Person A can force Person B to think and do as he wishes. Habermas calls this "strategic action", i. e. an instrumentalized form of communication.⁵⁶ Perhaps this may be a further venue, or analytic tool to understand the mechanisms of communicative guidance in cyberspace.

rituals such as the glorification of the Hitler-figure and macro-rituals such as mass-speeches and collective events that ignited public hysteria and were carefully planned by the Nazi propaganda machine. In addition, icons in the sense of collectively identifying symbols, such as Celtic runes, the swastika, and oversized portraits of Hitler supported the propagandistic myth. The major icon was, of course, the "role model" Hitler himself, with whom people identified strongly in the form of a meso-ritual.

55 Max Weber held that ideas work like switchmen for human action and culture. See Weber 1946: 323 – 359. See also Knoblauch 1999. In contrast, Emile Durkheim argued that symbols [such as iconic representations] and shared socio-communicative processes [such as rituals] are "collective representations" that constitute group life (i. e. culture). For example, the totem-symbol constitutes the Aboriginal-clan and makes it a society. However, Durkheim's approach was highly problematic; since the clan is was not the main social structure in Australia, where Durkheim researched. Furthermore, not all Aborigines practice an intensive totem cult. Durkheim 2008.

56 Rappaport 1998: 191 – 212.

Infrastructure and work mode of the jihadist web

The Internet is the biggest communication and information tool worldwide with around 1,966,500,000 users and a growth rate between 2000 to 2010 of almost 450 per cent.⁵⁷ Around ten percent of Arabic Websites have a “decidedly Islamic orientation”, showing a “uniquely Muslim confluence of culture and religion even in the virtual universe of the Internet.”⁵⁸ For example, Islam Online.Net with broadly branched topics of Islam and culture ranks number 29 in the most popular websites in the Middle East.⁵⁹ Since the late 1990s, al-Qaeda has been running and supporting websites. The impulse came probably from the Chechnyan jihad scene, which already in the mid-1990s operated own websites; as well as from jihadists in London like Ahmad Babar, who was redistributing Chechnyan, Afghan and Bosnian jihad material via one of the first jihad websites in the mid-1990s. Since the Iraq war in 2003 the output of jihad media on the Internet has exponentially risen.

According to estimates, there are 5.000 to 50,000 terrorist websites.⁶⁰ The exact extent of the jihad sites in the terrorist Web remains unclear due to the dynamic nature of the Net, where sites are frequently hacked, closed, shut down and uploaded anew. Many sites distribute and discuss jihad content, but do not exclusively serve jihad, which leads to high results in computer-generated searches like the “Dark Web Terrorism Research”-Project of the University of Arizona. Probably, there are “only” several hundred jihad websites in the full sense of the word, i. e. they support jihadist social rituals, distribute propaganda, lead ideological and strategic debates and offer tactical training. But the sheer number of websites is not the key factor in the strength of virtual jihad. Online-sympathizers play a major role in keeping the ideas of global jihad and its online structure alive. Yet, the number of virtual jihad supporters among Muslims should not be overestimated. A study by the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University mapped the Arab blogosphere in 2009 and found out that only one percent of more than 4,000 blogs supported terror activity.⁶¹

The main function of online jihadism is Propaganda, which often overlaps

57 These data are for June 2010 from “Internet World Statistics”, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>.

58 Atwan 2008: 140.

59 The Data is from Alexa.com, a website which provides information and statistics on the most popular websites worldwide. http://www.alexa.com/topsites/category/Top/Regional/Middle_East, accessed October 12, 2011.

60 There are 5,000 terrorist websites as suggested by the Israeli professor Gabriel Weimann and 50.000 terrorist websites according to the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory of the University of Arizona (Project “Dark Web Terrorism Research”), see <http://ai.arizona.edu/research/terror/>, accessed January 18, 2011.

61 Etling et al. 2009.

with psychological warfare and recruitment purposes.⁶² Training plays only a marginal role in online jihadism. Discussions on training added up to less than four percent of all discussions on jihad forums in 2006 (building bombs and explosive belts, etc.)⁶³ A study by the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) on 800 Jihadvideos mentioned only 27 films with instructive character.⁶⁴ Also the production of chemical-biological weapons is not being discussed seriously among jihadists in the Web.⁶⁵ A further, until now marginal function of Internet-jihad ist hacktivism. Hacktivism describes ideologically motivated hacking. So far, the targets of jihadist hackers are mainly to protect jihad websites and to hack hostile websites, i. e. not to attack public transport, information or supply systems.⁶⁶ However, this may change in the years to come.

Agenda setters of jihad – Jihadist media-companies

Metaphorically speaking, the distribution of jihadist propaganda resembles thousands of ping-pong balls that fly chaotically lengthwise and crosswise through virtual space. The process is initiated by jihadist media companies, which are the media producers and distributors of jihadist organizations. This seemingly anarchic mode of distribution lies in the nature of the Net, which is de-centrally organized and does not have a principal computer. Instead, it is a flat network divided into sub-networks lacking a centre and hierarchy.⁶⁷

Jihadist media companies play an essential role in aligning forum members behind jihad in general and certain topics in particular.⁶⁸ According to a study by

62 Tinnes 2010: 207 ff. Also Rogan 2007. One can also distinguish between internal and external communication, which, respectively, addresses existing followers and potential sympathizers. During the last few years, the number of jihadi videos and statements increased that address western populations directly. In these products, al-Qaeda assumes a reconciliatory tone. Should western populations show reason and exert a direct influence on the foreign policies of their states, al-Qaeda will refrain from further attacks. See Schuck 2009: 455–474.

63 Tonnessen and Stenersen 2006.

64 Finsnes 2010. Of the high-quality instructive videos many were produced in Lebanon. The Lebanese productions excel in quality. From a technical viewpoint they are better than many other videos.

65 Stenersen 2007.

66 A prominent example of jihadist hacktivism is the Website www.al-jinan.org, founded in 2006 and hacked in 2007. Jinan.org propagated the goal and know-how to shut-down websites hostile to Islam and jihadism. A similar website is still online; i.e. “Ansarhackers“: <http://www.al-ansar.virtue.nu/>.

67 Soriano 2009.

68 The central al-Qaeda and its regional subgroups have own media wings. Among the subgroups are al-Qaeda in Iraq (founded 2004), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (founded 2007), the merger of Saudi-Arabian and Yemenite al-Qaeda (founded 2009). Also other

the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), there are at least 28 media-arms which are producing and distributing for more than 30 different jihadist organizations.⁶⁹ The most prominent producer is *al-Sahab Media* with exclusive rights on the messages of al-Qaeda central organization. The most trusted distributor company is *al-Fajr*, which verifies products of other media-groups with its seal.⁷⁰ This kind of branding creates authenticity, identity and cohesion among jihadists.

ادعوا لإخوانكم المجاهدين
 إخوانكم في
 مؤسسة السحب للإنتاج الإعلامي
 المصدر: (مركز الفجر للإعلام)

Figure 3. Example of an authenticity-seal underneath a video published on the Net: produced by *al-Sahab* and distributed by *al-Fajr-media-center*.

Media companies are agenda setters which provoke discussions and determine topics.⁷¹ When a group publishes a video or statement on a jihad forum, the material is picked up by sympathizers and further distributed. In parallel, heated ideological and strategic discussions on the topic emerge. The discussions and the accompanying propaganda output by sympathizers often exceed the content of the original message. Therefore, media groups are essential to steer the activities of sympathizers into a certain direction. But they have no direct control over online jihadists. Sympathizers introspect themselves increasingly as autonomous agents, which is reflected in their discussions: “You are not different from the mujahidin in the physical war!”⁷² Moreover, ideas change shape and content when being processed.

Moreover, media companies are the intersections between terrorist organizations and online-sympathizers. They convert raw material into final products. Some members are directly involved in terrorist groups, others are simply supporters. Often, there is a division of labour between activists who record, edit and upload the final product. A handful of activists, even single people may form a media company.⁷³

regional terrorist and jihadi groups have their own media wings, for example the Afghan and Pakistan Taliban and the Shabab movement in Somalia.

69 Finsnes 2010.

70 Producers commonly are called “foundation” (mu’assasa), while distributors are called “center” (markaz).

71 Rogan 2007.

72 From the jihadist forum discussion “Abu Dujana al-Khorasani wa tanabbu’at Nostradamus” (Abu Dujana al-Khorasani ...and the prophecies of Nostradamus), al-Falluja forum, accessed 25 January 2010, <http://alfaloja1.info/vb/showthread.php?p=706509>.

Distribution-Process (schematically)

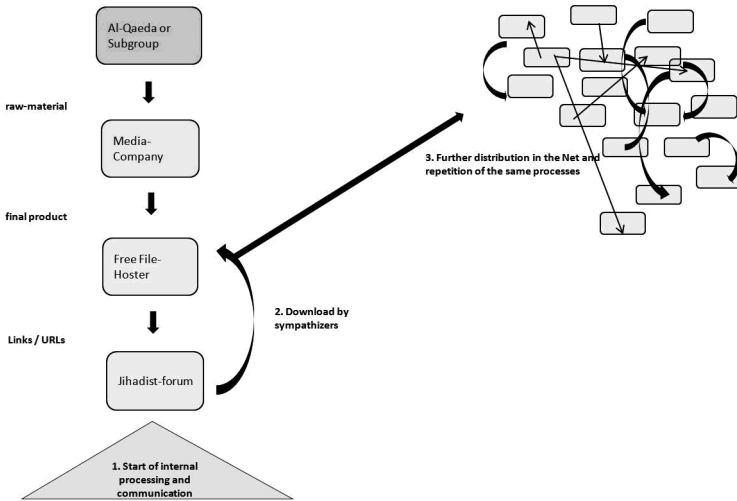


Figure 4.

New products are being uploaded by media groups on the websites of free file-hosting companies like RapidShare, Megaupload, Fileflyer and GettyFile.⁷⁴ Then, media groups publish dozens of links to the material on discussion forums.⁷⁵ Clicking on a link leads forum users to the file-hosting website, where they enter the password and can download the material. The distribution of propaganda videos and other material is nearly uncontrollable. The material is being sent forth- and back between websites, forums, mailing-lists and blogs, or it is republished on free file-hosting websites. Some activists republish productions, such as those of al-Malahim, the media-wing of al-Qaeda on the Arabian Pen-

73 Participants can often be hardly traced because many use software that allows hiding IP-addresses.

74 These sites allow storing massive amounts of data in the Internet, which helps to overcome data restrictions of the host servers of jihadi forums and websites.

75 The links display as URLs, for example, <http://gettyfile.ru/620367/>, and are often accompanied by a password. In addition, they carry neutral names to avoid elimination by the free file-hosting services. Some URLs also appear as “https“. Basically, http and https are identical, but there “are some primary differences between http and https, relating to the default port, which is 80 for http and 443 for https. Https transmit normal http interactions through an encrypted system, so that in theory, the information cannot be accessed by any party other than the client and end server. The two common types of encryption layers are: Transport Layer Security (TLS) and Secure Sockets Layer (SSL). Both encode the exchanged data. See for more information the following website, accessed October 2010: <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-the-difference-between-http-and-https.htm>.

insula“, on YouTube and other popular platforms.⁷⁶ It is not only the material itself, but also the discussions around it that are scattered all over the Net and have lasting effects on sympathizers.

“Collective organizers”⁷⁷ of online jihad – Jihadist discussion forums

The jihadist Web and its social processes are highly participative. The basis is a network of volunteers, who discuss and distribute material published by jihadist media-groups. Jihad websites, discussion forums, but also social service providers serve as collective organizers for the virtual jihad movement.⁷⁸

For example, the Website “Tawhid” by the Jordanian jihadist ideologue Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi serves as intellectual incubator for jihadist thought. The online library contains all major works on jihad in the past and presence.⁷⁹ Among them are theologic-ideological texts like “Terrorism is part of Islam” (al-Irhab min al-Islam) by the Egyptian ‘Abd al-Qadir bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz (Dr. Fadl), but also classics by Muslim Brotherhood figure heads Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. The section “The new Crusader-war” (al-hamla al-salibiyya al-jadida) concentrates exclusively on ideological matters.⁸⁰



Figure 5. Section: “The new Crusader war” containing numerous ideological-theological texts, on Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi’s website “Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad”, Oktober 2010.

76 <http://www.youtube.com/user/asd16666>, accessed October 2010.

77 Collective organizers are methods or carriers of communication such as newspapers, magazines, websites, rituals, or icons. The concept is based on the idea of “collective organizers” by Professor Rüdiger Lohlker, Orientalist Seminary of the University of Vienna, who first mentioned it in an interview with the author in August 2009, referring to Lenin’s newspaper “Iskra” and to the jihadi webmagazine “Sawt al-Jihad”. See also Lohlker, preface in Prucha 2009.

78 I speak about two sorts of collective organizers. Firstly, there are collective organizers in the sense of central ideas and myths. Secondly, collective organizers are also central publications, organs or platforms that facilitate information-sharing and networking.

79 See Lohlker 2009: 155–167.

80 At the same time, the site is an authoritative source for strategic and theological literature inextricably linked jihadi ideology. Standard works are being downloaded thousands of times from the Website, such as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi’s “Religious community of Abraham” (Millat Ibrahim), which propagates a dichotomist jihadist worldview.

But even more important as collective organizers are virtual social networks and milieus. When more than ten individuals gather virtually around a terrorist interpretation of jihad (for example, via a Youtube account that glorifies jihad), such an environment has been created. Barry Wellman argues that virtual networks have important implications for actual behaviour.⁸¹ Assaf Moghadam holds that the spread of suicide attacks is related to the spread of jihadist ideology, especially its culture of martyrdom.⁸² This can only be seen in connection with the growth of jihadist networking on the Internet.

Radicalization in a growing number of cases takes place virtually as much as it does physically. Thus, virtual activity seems to have a strong influence on the actual behaviour of a significant number of terrorists.⁸³ In terms of virtual networking, jihadist discussion forums play up to now the most decisive role. However, cyber jihad is highly flexible and adaptable. Its infrastructure may change, when extremists decide to utilize mainstream social services on the Internet, instead of propagating within encapsulated extremist environments.

About ten Arabic language forums are at present the epicentre of cyber-jihad.⁸⁴ They are called "primary forums," because they are the first publishers of propaganda and statements by al-Qaeda and affiliated groups. Sympathizers grant a lot authority to these forums, some of which have tens of thousands of visitors every day. They have 4,000 to 18,000 active members, which includes employees of security agencies who observe and manipulate discussions. Presently, these are Sanam al-Islam, Shumukh al-Islam, al-Hanin and al-Tahaddi, as well as Medad al-Suyuf, al-Luyuth al-Islamiyya, Ansar al-Mujahidin, al-

81 Wellman 1997: 179–208.

82 Moghadam 2008/09: 46–78; also Moghadam 2009: 11–13.

83 All European jihadists that planned or executed attacks in the last years watched jihadi-propaganda movies. According to Peter Nesser, quoted in El Difraoui 2010: 17.

84 The change from organizational websites to grassroots-run forums as main publishers and distributors of jihadist propaganda took place after the former were constantly shut down. For example, al-Qaeda's pioneering website al-Neda ("The Call"), established in the late 1990s, was constantly hacked after 9/11. Finally, its administrators took it offline. In general, websites of jihadist organizations suffered from constant hacking-attacks by individuals as well as government agencies. Using forums and a network of sympathizers became more practical. In the late 1990s, jihadists discussed and propagated no popular political forums, but also neo-wahhabist discussion forums. In 2003, the al-Ansar forum marked a quantum leap for cyber jihad, since it was the first forum exclusively dedicated to jihadism and the publication of jihadist propaganda from the Iraqi jihad, which caused the explosive development of the jihadist Net. Al-Ansar forum was shut-down in 2004 after it released the beheading-video of the U.S. hostage Nicholas Berg. The quadriga of the forums al-Ikhlās al-Hesbah, al-Firdaws and al-Boraq replaced it in 2005. The described themselves as "organizationally independent" publishing the propaganda of all jihad groups. All four were knocked offline in September 2008. But ever new top-forums are emerging on the Net, plus activists are increasingly utilizing social service providers like Facebook and video-sharing sites like Youtube.

Mujahidin al-Elektruniyya, and al-Ma'arik al-Salafiyya. But also the salafist-wahhabist forums al-Haqq, al-Hisba and al-JazeeraTalk are very popular among jihadists.⁸⁵ Forums frequently raise and fall within the highly dynamic hierarchy.⁸⁶

The popularity of the jihad forums depends on organizations and media groups that post on them, as well as on prominent members. Al-Hesba forum, for example, which has been shut down since 2008, “gave birth” to one of the most effective terrorists from the jihadist Web. The Jordanian physician Humam al-Balawi was an administrator on al-Hesba forum and perpetrated a suicide attack in December 2009 in Afghanistan, where he killed several CIA-officers.⁸⁷

Most jihad forums have similar layouts. Many use the forum software vBulletin, which allows a limited degree of personalization. Main topics and general contents do not vary considerably. The upper sections of jihad forums contain the newest releases of jihadist organizations. The visitor can scroll down and is greeted by a – oftentimes confusing – multitude of colourful, blinking and interactive banners (arranged one after the other, see figure 4). Clicking on one banner leads to its discussion thread within the forum and to links from which the material can be downloaded. Often the forums share similar head-topics. However, this may vary according to the personal choice of the administrators.

The lower sections contain several horizontal frames, one for each sub-forum. The first and most popular sub-forum on all jihadist forums is “General Issues of the Islamic Umma”, followed by the “Islamic State of Iraq”, “Publications of the Jihadi Media Foundations and Centers” and “News from the Mujahidin”.

Concerning their social structure, jihad forums display clear hierarchies.⁸⁸

85 See Musawi 2009. See also the analysis of the popular, allegedly female, online jihadist Mufakkirat al-Falluja (Female Thinker of the Falluja-Forum), “Rihanat al-Jihad – Al-Shahid Abu Dujana al-Khorasani, rahimahu Allah” (The scent of jihad – The martyr Abu Dujana al-Korasani, may Allah have mercy with him), al-Falluja Forum, accessed January 10, 2010, <http://alfaloja.Net/vb/showthread.php?t=99249>.

86 If primary forums are knocked offline, others can quickly replace them and fill the vacuum. Some jihadi forums, which formerly had narrower organizational or regional agendas, may ascend within the hierarchy. For example, the very popular jihadi al-Falluja forum originated from a quarrel between nationalist versus jihadistsupporters of of the Iraqi insurgency in 2007. Initially, both wings were discussing and issueing propaganda on the same forum (al-Boraq). After the quarrel, nationalist supporters represented by the Islamic Army of Iraq (al-Jaish al-Islami fi al-'Iraq) kept issueing and propagating on the Boraq forum. The jihadist wing aligned with al-Qaeda and represented by the Islamic State of Iraq (Daulat 'Iraq al-Islamiyya), a coalition of doctrinaire jihadist groups, founded al-Falluja forum. After the shut-down of al-Ikhlās and other primary forums in 2008, al-Falluja quickly became very popular among the globally oriented jihad forums. Falluja was shut down in summer 2010, and Shumukh al-Islam as well as Sinam al-Islam seem to have taken its place for now (in March 2011).

87 Holtmann 2010a.

88 Soriano holds that roster-programs automatically categorize members of Web-forums and

9,243	2,564	 الشيخ دهاد السبيعي: الدكتور... مؤسسة فكره المجاهدين عدد 5 ساعة واحدة	منتدى الحدث والأخبار (قضايا الأمة العربية والإسلامية) الأقسام الفرعية " الداخلية " : أرسيف المواضيع المصنوية : منتدى الشهداء (الأسرى) : مجلة كتاب شبكة المتطوعين : أرسيف إعلانات شبكة المتطوعين
672	177	 110-15 [جولة العراق الاسلامية...] مؤسسة ابو القناد الجندك عدد 18 ساعات	منتدى بيانات وإصدارات دولة العراق الإسلامية أقسام الفرعية " الداخلية " : أرسيف بيانات وتقارير دولة العراق الإسلامية : أرسيف إعلانات (مؤسسة الفرقان الإسلامية)
1,853	652	 مركز البعث الإسلامي : أفس... مؤسسة أبو رضون عدد 2 يوم عشق	منتدى المؤتمرات والمراكز الإسلامية الجهادية أقسام الفرعية " الداخلية " : أرسيف مركز الفكر للأفكار : أرسيف مؤسسة الشباب لبحث القضايا : أرسيف الجيوش الإسلامية الجهادية : أرسيف مؤسسة المتطوعين : أرسيف مؤسسة التبرير : أرسيف مؤسسة أرسيف كتبة الجهاد الإسلامي : أرسيف مركز البادع للأفكار : أرسيف بيرق المصون الإسلامي : أرسيف مجلة الأندلس والمواعظ : أرسيف مجموعة النصار البردية : أرسيف المؤسسات والمراكز الإسلامية
4,003	1,366	 مؤسسة الأندلس التبرير... مؤسسة حفظ الجزائر عدد 46 دقيقة	منتدى بيانات وإصدارات المجاهدين أقسام الفرعية " الداخلية " : أرسيف المجاهدين في بلاد الشام والشماليين : أرسيف صحيفة المقاومة العالمية : أرسيف تنظيم القاعدة في حرية التحرير : أرسيف شبكة الدعوة في دولة الكويت الإسلامية : أرسيف حركة الشباب المتطوعين (الضوابط) : أرسيف المجاهدين جبهة الضمير الإسلامي : أرسيف بيان وإصدارات صوت المسلمين : أرسيف بيان وتقارير الجهاد الإسلامي : أرسيف البيانات والتقارير المقدمة : أرسيف إعلانات المجاهدين المنظمين

Figure 6. Screenshot of main categories (sub-forums) on the Mujahidin al-Elektruniyya Forum, Oktober 2010.

Participation and function-based ranking systems are common to most Web-forums. Many include categories like “beginner”, “elite member” and “administrator”. Jihadiforums are not different. Members are classified according to the frequency and quality of their contributions, and according to their functions. They are controlled by administrators and can ascend in the hierarchy, if they participate well. Titles reward special contributions. Members gain reputation and administrative rights, when they are promoted. For example, the Jordanian suicide bomber Humam al-Balawi was promoted as a forum administrator due to the quality of his posts.⁸⁹

are largely responsible for internal hierarchies: “Administering the Web forums can be carried out simultaneously by a limitless number of users, who can participate in the administration anonymously. In fact, many site administrators have no connection to actual members of jihadigroups and achieved their positions by being ‘promoted’ through the Web forum’s roster.” However, administrators may as well have actual contact to terrorists. Furthermore, promotion is not always an automated process, especially when members are promoted on basis of the quality of their posts. In this case, not programs, but administrators decide collectively about the promotion of members. For example, Humam al-Balawi, who perpetrated a suicide attack in December 2010, was raised in rank by administrators of al-Hesba forum. Roster-programs can automatically categorize and classify members. See Soriano 2009; see also “Rhumud yaluff shakhsiyat Abu Dujana al-Khorasani: La tubaddiduhu siratuhu ... tabiban urduniyyan” (Mysteriousness surrounds the personality of Abu Dujana al-Khorasani: his biography does not dispel it ... [he was] a Jordanian doctor”), al-Hayat, January 17, 2010, 16.

89 In more detail, the primary jihad forum “Shumukh al-Islam” (Glory of Islam) ranks:
 – new members; 0 – 100 posts (*shamikh jaid*);
 – active and inciting members, 100 – 1000 posts (*shamikh nashit* and *shamikh muharrid*);
 – special members; up to 3000 posts (*shamikh mumayyiz*);
 – golden members; 3,000 posts and more (*shamikh dhahabi*).
 For example, *Beiraq al-Tauhid* (Banner of Monotheism) of *Shumukh* is classified as an “active member” (written underneath the name in the headline). He participated with 945 posts (written to the far left side of the headline). Excellent contributions are credited with additional sub-titles, defining a member’s qualities in more detail. *Ramh al-shumukh* (spear of shumukh) and *qalam al-shumukh* (pen of shumukh) indicate special merits in pro-

Similar to other virtual social networks, there is a 90-9-1 ratio on jihad forums: One percent of the members produce 90 percent of the messages; 9 percent of the member produce 10 percent of the messages; and 90 percent are so-called “lurkers.” They are not registered, but they read contents, download material and further distribute it.⁹⁰

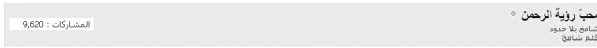


Figure 7. A Member information from the Shumukh al-Islam-forum, October 2010: Name: “The one who loves seeing the compassionate(Allah)”; category: “Member without borders”; Reward: “Glorious Pen”, Contributions: 9,620.

Some forums, such as Shumukh, do not include female members in their ranking systems. Females may participate, but regardless of their participation, they will all carry uniform ranks – “Ukhtukum fi Allah” (Your sister in Allah).⁹¹ Other forums such as Ansar al-Mujahidin do rank female members by adding a female ending to their title (ta’ marbuta).

Administrative rights concern choices of layout and content, as well as the right to promote and to remove members. Administrative-rights vary according to the tasks and importance, displaying clear hierarchies.⁹²

Normally, posts are ordered chronologically on Web discussion forums. This

paganda and writing. “special exertion in continuing topics” is a sub-title for members who followed up on important discussions. The golden member *Hamza al-Najdi* of Shumukh with 3,706 post is distinguished by this sub-title. This motivates other members with fewer posts to compete. The Arabic section of Ansar al-Mujahidin forum, which is issued in several languages, has ranks such as:

- reader (qari’)
- beginner (ansari)
- diligent (ansari mujtahid)
- shining (ansari muta’aliq).

90 Kimmage 2009.

91 An exception is *Mufakkirat al-Faluja* (Female Thinker of Faluja), a high-ranking, allegedly female member of the Faluja forum. Shumukh and other major forums publish her lengthy jihadi-strategy texts. The Shumukh forum attributes to her the subtitle *Shabakat Faluja al-Islamiyya* (Islamic network of Faluja). The allegedly female forum member “Mufakkirat al-Faluja” has acquired legendary status among E-jihadists. Other forums, such as Ansar al-Mujahidin, acknowledge female members by adding the Arabic female ending ta’ marbutah to the ranks (example: ansari mujtahid/ansaria mujtahida – diligent). However, gender, age and identity cannot really be ascertained in virtual characters. Users who use female names could as well be males and vice versa.

92 A “Mudir ’amm” (general director -Shumukh), the “idara” (administration – Ansar al-Mujahidin), or a “mushrif” (overseer) have full administrative rights. A “muraqib” seems to be a member tasked with observing deviant behaviour or infiltration of non-jihadists, who reports to a “mushrif”. A “murasil” is an E-correspondent of a jihad organization who can log in and upload propaganda material. However, he could not change the layout of a forum. Similarly, media production groups of jihad-organizations have forum accounts with special administrative rights that allow them to upload material.

كن عوناً لإخوانك وساهم في رقيّ إعلامنا المبارك عبر التليغ عن المشاركات المخالفة بواسطة أيقونة (تقرير مشاركة سيئة)

Figure 8. Mutual control is at the same time a meso-ritual that centres on the creation of hierarchies and taboos: Members are called upon “to report deviant entries” with the help of the icon “x”, Shumukh, November 2010.

means that the latest entry of a discussion thread appears first. However, jihad forum administrators manipulate this sequence. Posts containing propaganda material or contributions deemed important are prioritized and marked as “sticky” (muthbit). “Sticky” posts remain on top of a discussion thread. This way, the normal chronological sequence for discussion threads on Internet discussion forums is reversed (latest post first).

مواضيع المنتدى : الجهاد الإلكتروني		أبواب المنتدى	أبواب المنتدى
المشاهدات	مشاركات	المشاركة الأخيرة	التقييم
32	4	17:17 10-11-14 بواسطة محمد فاتح	شرح مرني لتوجيه توليد عشرات الروابط بكل من نصف ساعة/مثل المواقع الإعل
440	8	11:12 10-11-09 بواسطة محمد فاتح	مبست: غزو المنتديات العامة بالإصدارات الجهادية (بالصور)
255	3	20:59 10-04-25 بواسطة حنطة	مبست: دور أنصار الجهاد لمواجهة الحملة الصليبية ضد المنتديات والمواقع الجهادية نرجوا التثبيت
250	2	15:43 09-10-05 بواسطة الجهاد الإلكتروني	مبست: لامة ألمانيا الكافرة : لمن عليكم ثلاث مرة بتحديد اليوم الموعود!!!

Figure 9. Example of sticky posts on the jihad forum al-Jahafil, accessed November 23, 2010, topics: <http://al-jahafal.com/vb/forumdisplay.php?f=63>.

In summary, an elite clique of administrators can promote, rebuke, or expel members. They control forum rules and strengthen ideological cohesiveness by choosing and prioritizing topics. This way, social structure and discourse are governed by a strict ideology and quasi-bureaucracy, using a rigorous stick and carrot method, which leads to obedience. Criticizing jihad is taboo. Ranks and medals need to be earned. Ambitious members try to excel each other in propaganda and participation. Internal social processes are psychologically very attractive. It is forbidden, full of tension, yet physically seemingly not dangerous. Moreover, the interaction on jihad touches religious-cultural triggers. Nevertheless, it is totally modern and progressive in terms of informational-technical know-how and Zeitgeist.

Factors that facilitate virtual leadership in Sunni Muslim culture

The lack of central authority and plurality of power centers in Sunni Islam

Modern Sunni Islam, theologically and institutionally speaking, is in a state of virtual anarchy.⁹³ Significant changes concerning Islamic authority and knowledge production have taken place over the last half century. Among the root causes are the lack of central authority and hierarchy and the reduction of the clergy's legitimacy.⁹⁴ Regarding the lack of authority and hierarchy, four causative factors come to mind. First, the egalitarianism of Sunni Islam also extends to equal rights to interpret religion. Second, Different sects and schools of jurisprudence compete with each other. Third, there is no formal hierarchy of scholars. Individual scholars can issue religious edicts. Fourth, numerous different religious-judicial centers bolster official, oftentimes repressive state policies.

This leads us to the second root cause, the reduction of the clergy's legitimacy. Modern Sunni Muslims do not believe in the independence and trustworthiness of official clerics. Among the reasons are: Muslim states have co-opted the clergy and transformed them into salaried employees since the 1950s.⁹⁵ Since then, states control the religious endowments (*awqaf*) that once sustained the clergy. And states use the pulpits of the clergy as a forum to present their own policies, making official scholars look as corrupt as themselves, dependent from and aligned with an all-consuming imperialist West.

Historically, as early as in the 11th century the independence of Sunni-scholars ceased to exist. By then, the Seljuk *wazir* Nizam al-Mulk created his own school

93 From a western perspective, people tend to associate political thought at present with (relative) hierarchy and order and Sunni Islam with anarchy and disorder. In addition, heterodox Islam is much more hierarchically organized than orthodox Sunni Islam. This concerns all its sects, movements, brotherhoods and sheikh-cults, but also jihadi movements. For example, hierarchies and cohesion are often created through the loyalty oath (*bay'a*) in jihadi groups. In terms of anarchy versus hierarchy, debates also tend to speak about underdevelopment, social quarrels and civil strife in the Muslim world in contrast to political, social and economic order in the Western world. If Western colonial, political, economic and military interventions in the Muslim world are the root cause for this situation is a matter of heated debate.

94 It seems that virtuality is more possible in hierarchical structures. One example is the successful and early build-up of internet-presences by 12er Shiite authorities. Maybe the heterogeneity of the Shiite clergy facilitates forms of virtual leadership.

95 Especially drastic was the appropriation of the Egyptian al-Azhar's pulpit by the Nasserist government. As Günther Kassian has lucidly shown us, the Free Officers used the pulpit of al-Azhar and its magazine "Majallat al-Azhar" as a forum to present their own position like statements of the clerics in order to create the impression that the Sheikhs were the keenest advocates of the revolutionary program. See Kassian 1991: 231.

(*madrasa*, pl. *madaris*) for religious scholars in Baghdad to bolster his policies. This process continued all over the Islamic world. Muslim governments have always tried to indirectly exercise power over religious authority and its political dimension. Therefore, they install moderate and regime-friendly scholars as official *'ulama*. With the increasing proximity of religious scholars to worldly affairs also popular mistrust towards the scholars developed. The nationalization and integration of religious institutions into socialist Arab states in the post-independence era since the 1950s led to the creation of alternative and informal centers of learning where ordinary Muslims could acquire religious education. First, these were mosques; later Islamic groups in technical universities, nowadays the Internet has become like a virtual mosque and alternative center for learning. The justification by regime clerics of peace-treaties with Israel, especially Egyptian clerics in 1979, dealt a further blow to their legitimacy and standing among Muslim populaces.⁹⁶

Since the raise of political Islam in the second half of the 20th century, ever more independent scholars have filled the gap created by the lack of trusted official religious institutions. As Lindholm observes, the authority of the learned “has never been completely accepted by the egalitarian masses. Suspicion of the *faqih* (scholar) has been metaphorically expressed in popular discourse through a comparison with secular leadership. Sultans and princes are viewed as frankly self-interested individuals reliant on their personal abilities in their eternal struggle to gain and hold power. Their values are the values of manly warriors: bravery, generosity, honor, autonomy, power. Religious figures present themselves as the opposite, that is, as servants of God emptied of personal ambition. But they can also be accused of being the converse, namely effeminate, cowardly, miserly and dishonorable.”⁹⁷

The reduction of the clergy's legitimacy has been accompanied by significant changes in Islamic authority and knowledge production. Traditional (Sunnī) religious authority is based on textuality, i.e. the Qur'an and the sunna and discursive method, i.e. norms of juridical theory and praxis within Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). This is complemented by the personification and localization of authority and knowledge, which are linked to reputed scholars and schools of learning, such as the famous al-Azhar in Cairo. Modern Islamic authority, however, is based on new forms of textuality and spaces.⁹⁸ Individuals, many of whom are not formally educated in Islamic theology, have adapted Islamic discourses that mix philosophical ideas, modern populism, an ultra-literal reading of the Qur'an and classical sources with personal pious narratives

96 See Holtmann 2009b.

97 Lindholm 2002: 163.

98 Gräf 2010.

and political ideas. Thus, the personification and localization of religious authority have given way to pluralized, and often virtualized forms of authority via the Internet and modern mass media, accompanied by the development of hybrid forms of authority centered on transnational networks and charismatic New Islamist Intellectuals (NII), i. e. laymen who are not authoritative in the classical sense.⁹⁹ In fact, Islamic authority is more and more exercised by laymen (NII), or alliances of laymen and jurists.

A shift from “traditional” to “modern” attitudes and techniques has contributed to a revolution in Islamic authority. Adding to official jurists, so-called “tele-imams” have become prominent figures, as well as virtual fatwa-services and autonomous sheikhs with their own websites. In the 1980 s, tape-recorded sermons of Sheikh Kishk could be heard all over the streets of the Arab world. Nowadays, “tele-imams”, who preach on the Internet and Arabic satellite stations (like the Egyptian ‘Amr Khaled and the Saudi Muhammad al-Shanqiti), represent a new form of clergymen parallel to the “classical” Islamic establishment. Jihadists, with a broad and Internet -based propaganda structure, represent another authoritative theological discourse that is open for all Muslims to participate. The massive proliferation of virtual fatwas via modern mass media – the Internet and satellite television – makes it increasingly difficult for petitioners to discern authentic from spurious legal opinions. Moreover, this facilitates the issuing of extremist legal opinions. Practically, Mandaville has observed that all these phenomena have led to functional pluralization of Muslim authority; i.e. changes in the social purpose and ends of religious knowledge seeking; Spatial pluralization, i.e changes of spaces in which Muslims seek authority; and mediative pluralization, i. e. changes of textual forms and figures through which Muslims seek authority.¹⁰⁰

Virtual leadership works especially well in Sunni Muslim culture due to the lack of doctrinaire centers. Unlike Shiite Islam, Sunnis have no clerical hierarchies, but often ponder on the principle of egalitarianism in personal and religious matters. The direct chain of command between Allah and the believer is manifested in the Qur’an, which is the unadulterated word of God. Jihadists, being a small extremist fringe culture within Sunni Islam, have recognized the appeal of this idea. They have turned it into a doctrine: Closing a contract (‘ahd) with Allah is presented as the truest and most devout model of religious obedience. Sacred words are then equipped with violent and ideological meanings. Therefore, leadership does not even need a leader. Practically speaking, of course, this idea must be created by intermediaries. But it is supposed to look

99 Kepels 2003: 14.

100 Mandaville 2007: 101 – 115.

untouched and natural. People who perpetrate suicide attacks and die under the direct command of Allah are just obedient, the steady propaganda says.

The ideological and theological cohesion of jihadists

Despite their schisms, online jihadists are extremely tight-knit communities compared to Muslim mainstream societies. There are several reasons for the high in-group cohesion among jihadists.

Firstly, a common ideology binds jihadists together. In a nutshell, jihadist ideology reads like this: Currently, the third [sic] Crusade against Islam takes place.¹⁰¹ The U.S. Army leads the Crusade, European powers support it, but Jews control it. All westernized Muslim regimes are accomplices of this constellation. Furthermore, the Western aggression is based on an old scheme to re-colonize the Middle East. It is now the duty of Muslims to defend themselves against a technically advanced, but morally inferior army of “zionised Crusaders”. This can only be achieved by using terrorist tactics.¹⁰² This ideology finds its echo in broader Muslim grudges against the West’s support of repressive Muslim regimes. But also in Europe and the U.S. broader trends of Islamophobia play into the hands of extremist agitators.¹⁰³

Secondly, extremist theology creates an air of sacred legitimacy around jihadists. Muslims, they claim, are not supposed to have any contact to non-Muslims (al-wala’ wa-l-bara’); Muslims, who ignore this and act or rule according to western concepts are idolaters and seduce righteous Muslims to erring beliefs (taghut); transgressions may be judged as disbelief and punished

101 In jihadist theology, the “Third Crusade after 1990“ and after the end of the Cold War is the continuation of the “First Crusade from 1050 to 1291“ and the “Second Crusade from 1798 (occupation of Egypt by Napoleon) until 1970 (taking power of Assad in Syria). See al-Suri 2004 introduction, as well as chapters 1, 3 and 4.

102 This is but a very short summary of the jihadist ideology. For a more detailed description see Holtmann 2009a: 71–89. The roots of anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism in global jihad can be traced back to the 1960s writings of Sayyid Qutb and the 1980s texts of Abdallah Azzam. Osama bin Laden and his Deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri laid a further cornerstone for the ideological component of the “Third Crusade“. They participated together with other prominent jihadists in the “Declaration of War against the United States occupying the two holy sites of Islam [Mecca and Medina]” in 1996 and they founded the Global Islamic Front to Fight the Crusaders and Jews (al-Jabha al-Islamiyya al-‘Alamiyya li Qital al-Salibiyyin wa-l-Yahud), which can be seen as the foundation of “al-Qaeda“. The text of the statement can be read on the website www.tawhed.ws, accessed December 15, 2010, <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=3i806qpo>. See also http://www.homelandsecurityus.Net/america%20threats/declaration_of_war_against_the_a1.htm.

103 See John Feffer, “Islamophobes seduced by Crusader myth”, AsiaTimesOnline, Nov 10, 2010, accessed November 11, 2010, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/LK10Ak04.html.

by excommunication (*takfir*), which means the death sentence. Sunni extremist theology is a relatively recent phenomenon. Its development started only around 50 years ago, when radical groups broke away from the broader Islamist opposition in Arab countries. Repressed and frustrated in their political aspirations, these groups started fighting their local governments, paraphrasing Marxist-Leninist revolutionary slogans and ideas in Islamist parlance and utilizing analogies to the Islamic law of War to justify terrorist tactics.¹⁰⁴ They were inspired by the Medieval Damascene Hanbali school, led by Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) and his pupil Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292–1350), who wrote extensively on *jihād*; when the Abbasside caliphate was under different attacks by the Mongols.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the ultra-literal Sunni fundamentalist school of Wahhabism, which originated in Saudi Arabia in the 18. century, strongly influences jihadist thinking. Since the Afghanistan *jihād* 1979–1989, fighters and ideologues from Saudi Arabia have been exerting a strong doctrinaire influence on the international *jihād* scene. Internal doctrinaire feuds have led to a split between classical al-Qaeda followers and so-called Neo-Zarqawists, who follow a more extremist line oriented at the late leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq. Protest by internal critics against ever more brutal terrorist tactics and the massive killing of civilians have been refuted by the latter strand with pseudo-legal arguments.¹⁰⁶

The most central theological doctrine is the self-reflection of modern jihadists as a pious elite among corrupted Muslim masses, which is based on the Prophetic saying: “One sect (*ta’ifa*) of my *umma* remains that stands up for truth until the Hour of Resurrection.”¹⁰⁷ This entails the idea that only jihadists are qualified to lead “common” Muslims. Historically, it is a “divinely ordained” task to remember and guide the “corrupted” *umma* until Judgment Day: “Then

104 The Islamic Law of War on the ethics of war, declaration of warfare, conduct of warfare, legitimacy of warfare etc. may be comparable in many points to the Western *jus in bello*. See Peters 1996: 103–148. On a sidenote: The local *jihād* concepts originated in the 1970s in the jihadist scenes of Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Palestine. By then, they were interpreted in the contexts of local oppositional and liberation struggles. The jihadist theological doctrines are heavily inspired by the medieval jurisprudential Hanbali school, led by Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), which formulated war doctrines when the Abbasside caliphate was under attack by the Mongols.

105 However, the interpretation of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya is extremely selective and does neither represent their life-works, nor the historical reality. See Michot 2006.

106 Neo-Zarqawists call themselves after the former leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who was killed in 2006. They mainly use the *Medad al-Suyuf* Forum, which was closed in late 2010 and not relaunched by the time of writing. See the excellent analysis by Musawi 2010.

107 “La tazal ta’ifa min ummati zahirin ’ala al-haqq hatta taqum al-sa’a” (...there remains a righteous sect of my nation until the hour [of Judgement Day]), quoted in: al-Hilali 2003: 45.

let those beware who withstand the Messenger's order, lest some trial befall them, or a grievous penalty is inflicted on them" (Qur'an 24:63). Jihadists thus introspect themselves as successors of the classical "victorious sect" (al-ta'ifa al-mansura) or "surviving group" (al-firqa al-najiya), which unlike 71 other sects will not be perished in the Hereafter. A complementary self-view is that of "disciples of the sunna" (ahl al-hadith), who adhere to the body of traditions on Muhammad's exemplary life (sira) and his deeds (athar).¹⁰⁸

The concept of the "chosen elite" is also a main doctrine of literal salafists (al-salafiyya al-nassiyya). This means that there are considerable theological intersections.¹⁰⁹ Salafists see themselves as epitome of the golden age of Islam in terms of piety, morality, spirituality, strength, and guidance. Jihadists follow this doctrine by violent means. But even if central views overlap,¹¹⁰ one should not simply lump the different groups together.

108 The Jordanian salafist-sheikh al-Hilali 2003: 46 states: The majority [of Muslims] have no idea of the *Shari'a*. And Islam is not a republican or public religion, nor about a democratic majority, which is ruled according to the opinion of the public. Islam settles the rule of Allah in every matter. And for the intelligible: The people of truth (*ahl al-haqq*) are only a few compared to the people of falsehood. This is an existential Prophetic tradition which means that the multitude does not have any weight in this course. An explanation of the "victorious sect" and "surviving group" as the majority of the populace, masses, or common people cannot last under the scrutiny of [religious legal] scientific critique. There is no evidence for this, it lacks proof, and it depreciates the right evidence (*dalil*; i. e. evidence from the Qur'an and *sunna*).

109 Theologically, jihadists are a violent subgroup of the salafist movement. The main salafist doctrine (*'aqida*) is to emulate the correct Islamic example of the first three generations of Muslims, called the "pious forefathers" (*al-salaf al-salih*). The theology of jihadism distinguishes itself by an activist, violent approach, while salafists per definition follow a quietist evolutionary strategy.

110 While *'aqida* refers to the sectarian and theological doctrine, *manhaj* means the adherence to certain methodological principles. Salafi-jihadists believe in the main principles of salafism and follow the violent method of jihadism. Salafis deduce where possible from the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition (*sunna*) – They favor transmitted dogma from the Qur'an (*naql*) and *sunna* over reasoning (*'aql*), and reject voluble interpretation (*ta'wil*) as well as personal opinion (*ra'y*) and dialectic debate on Islamic theology (*kalam*), which in their view leads to innovation (*bid'a*) and is seen as a sin. In spite of their rejection of opinion and debate Salafis are heavily opinionated on religious, political and social issues and defend their fundamentalist views in heated debates against moderate Muslims. Main differences to less fundamentalist Muslims concern how strictly monotheism (*tawhid*), deviations from it like sin (*kufir*) and idolatry (*shirk*), and the principle to follow Muhammad's example (*ittiba'*) are to be interpreted and judged. See al-Hilali 2003: 558 – 562.

The breakup of traditional organizational structures

International security campaigns following the 9/11 attacks have made it increasingly difficult to sustain physical organizations and networks. This impedes traditional organizational structures and personal guidance within groups. It has created the need to search for new leadership models. Jihadists have recognized that they cannot keep on fighting guerrilla struggles, especially not against the superior military and especially aerial power of western states, first and foremost the U.S. Thus, jihadists try to re-organize al-Qaeda's movement virtually and to recruit new members online.¹¹¹ The period of shelters is over. That means the lack of safe refugees in allied countries already ended with the fall of the Soviet bloc in the early 1990s. But safe territories for retreat are a condition sine qua non for successful guerilla campaigns. During the Cold War, Islamist terrorists profited from such refugees in secular and Muslim states on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Nowadays, they cannot even maintain secure bases in most Muslim countries which cooperate with western powers. In addition, since 9/11, many domestic jihad networks in Muslim countries have been smashed, or "pacified", which takes away another possibility for retreat. This concerns the Islamic Group in Egypt, as well as the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, for example. Nor can jihadists safely rely anymore on networks abroad, for example in Europe. However, new jihad fronts in Somalia, Yemen, Pakistan and Afghanistan allow the rebuilding of guerilla fronts on a geographically limited scale. Since the 1990s there has been a growing awareness of vulnerability and lack of allies and shelters. This has led to intensive self-critique by jihadist thinkers. The literary output that originated from this trend has been coined "jihadi strategic studies".¹¹² Jihadists have formulated new strategic guidelines for the third generation of Jihadi activists (following the first of the 1960–70s and second of the 1980–90s). This includes the fragmentation of organizational structures and individualization of action, yet globalization of

111 A participant of the forum Islamonline.Net defines the tasks of jihad forums as: inciting discussions, "exchange views" on suicide-attacks, killing bystanders and foreigners, deposing Muslim rulers, stigmatizing Muslims who befriend non-Muslims and especially, provide possibilities to recruit new jihadists, which is proven by the high number of individuals who self-recruited via the forums, simply by reading persuasive propaganda material. Jihad forums and websites are a viable alternative for the successful recruitment of fighters and suicide-attackers against U.S.-forces, for example. Numerous analyses, the Islamist continues, show that Web-recruiting is an alternative to direct contact with jihadist cadres. See Sayyid Zayid. "Al-Muntadayat al-jihadiyya" (The jihadist forums), accessed April 15, 2011, <http://www.lojainiat.com/index.cfm?do=cms.con&contentid=3764> (20.04.2011)

112 The genre of "strategic jihadist literature" has increased since the start of the Iraq-War in 2003 and treats theological and ideological questions only marginally. See Lia and Hegghammer 2004.

common ideology. Jihadist thinkers have been discussing these problems and are constantly devising new strategies how to use the media field. Our main witness is al-Qaeda thinker Abu Musab al-Suri, who was one of the most advanced strategic thinkers of al-Qaeda until his arrest in Pakistan in 2005. Especially al-Suri's call for media jihad carries the idea of virtual leadership forward. Al-Suri early recognized the importance of the Internet and its potential for alternative leadership structures. In his monumental 1600 pages work *Da'wat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyya al-'Alamiyya* (Global Islamic Resistance Call), al-Suri demanded already in 2004: "Kill according to Allah, rely only on yourself and incite the believers!" This is al-Suri's guiding principle for global jihad. As the title of the encyclopaedia already says, propaganda jihad (*jihad al-da'wa*) has a guiding nature. That means, followers of global jihad shall not join organisations, but act autonomously on the ground and participative in terms of propaganda. If everyone acts accordingly, propaganda becomes a form of communicative leadership. Guidance is thus mainly based on the common ideology and strategy, a concept that al-Suri calls "System, not organisation" (*Nizam, la tanzim!*) (See table 1). Activists do not swear an oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) to a leader like in conventional jihad groups, but have a covenant (*'ahd*) with Allah. This obliges them to obedience only toward task of jihad and to the respective leader of their cell, if they belong to one at all. How activists realize this concept is up to them. Al-Suri radically breaks with hierarchical organizations and advocates individualized terrorism (*irhab fardi*).

Thus, al-Suri tries to substitute physical leadership structures that came under pressure with communicational guidance. Much of his strategy is based on Marxist guerrilla warfare and social liberation literature, which al-Suri recommends should be read and reformulated in Islamist terms. Central precepts of al-Suri's strategy are being put into effect on jihad forums. It does not necessarily mean that online jihadists take al-Suri's words literally. But it certainly attests to al-Suri's excellent foresight regarding the communicational element of jihad in the information age.

Interestingly, al-Suri formulated an explicit work mode for virtual leadership, which becomes clear in his organizational theory in chapter eight of his massive encyclopaedia. Al-Suri stresses that belief (*'iman*) is the main starter of action (*'amal*). That means, words ignite deeds and should substitute organisational guidance. "Secret incitement cells" play an essential role in his concept. Three to four people shall look for ways to publish and propagate, for example through mailing lists. They re-distribute propaganda of guidance centres (media companies), or translate texts and statements into other languages. They must be flexible and innovative, for not always are the conditions in their favour. Muslims only "need to believe in the idea" – "Incitement is the twin brother of jihad and its impulse", says al-Suri, which relates to a classical concept, namely that of

jihad bi-l-qalam wa-l-bayan (jihad by the pen and the statement) and jihad bi-l-saif wa-l-sinan (jihad by the sword and the spear).

According to al-Suri, two factors determine the success of propaganda. Firstly, there must be a central authority that issues agendas and topics. Secondly, successful propaganda relies on the voluntary participation of the masses. Every individual, according to his or her ability can form a “general propaganda cell”. Resistance and propaganda takes place on all levels of society. Muslims should not eat fast food, buy foreign cars, spray propagandistic graffiti, use the Internet, incite friends and kin, etc. They are linked by a common name, method and goal. Old and sick people, normally exempt from jihad, must also participate in incitement and propaganda. After all, “resistance is the battle of a nation, not the struggle of elite!”¹¹³ Thus, jihadist propaganda must dominate the Islamic discourse, claims al-Suri.

Al-Suri also devises how to exploit fears and complexes that concern Muslims. The “fear from hell-fire” should be hammered into Muslim minds, i. e. that they will roast in hell, if they do not participate in the jihad. Since medieval times, jihad propaganda has “relied on every form of promise and threat through poetry, prose and rhetoric.”



Figure 10. Subforum “School of the Sheikh Abu Musab al-Suri (may Allah grant him freedom)” on the popular jihad forum al-Shumukh, November 2010. This section contains texts and discussions around al-Suri’s jihad concept.



... however, al-Suri forum is password protected!

In regards to media and propaganda, many jihadist thinkers argue similar to al-Suri. Prominent media strategists like Abu Bakir al-Naji, Abu Harith al-Ansari, Anwar al-Awlaqi, Abu Jandal al-Azdi, Abu Jihad al-Masri, Abu Ubayd al-Quraishi and Ayman al-Zawahiri have developed strategic guidelines how to

113 Youth, intellectuals, politicians, clerics, workers and all classes of society are supposed to take part in jihad, argues al-Suri. In parallel, they should be addressed in their entirety, as well as individually and according to their education and classes, i. e. according to their respective cultural, intellectual and social backgrounds.

lead psychological warfare and exploit the modern media for this purpose. Anonymous thinkers like Mohammed bin Ahmed al-Salim and Abd al-Rahman Salum al-Rawashidi have described practical and participative ways to use discussion forums for propaganda. Grassroot activists like the U.S. citizen Zacharia Adam Chesser have further developed central media precepts. In summary, jihadist media strategists have for the last years been stressing that propaganda is more effective than bombs and that a “newscast will be a more lethal weapon than several armored brigades”¹¹⁴ Especially when the western media is turned against the enemy it becomes effective, they reason. Until a few years ago, online supporters were rebuked as layabouts. But today, online jihad has the same status as physical jihad. The underlying idea is that virtual activity creates terrorist reality.

Virtual leadership models

There are concrete examples of leadership in cyberspace. With the decentralization of jihadist organizations after 2001, organizational leaders have been thinking about ways to substitute for the loss of central physical structures. At the same time, the formation of sympathizers via the Internet has resulted in new, communicative leadership mechanisms, i. e. virtual leadership structures. The Iraq War, which started in 2003, led to the explosive increase of jihadist media and completely changed the role of online followers. Their participation in online jihad has become a respected endeavour. Online jihadists are not “layabouts”, but highly respected in the jihadist scene.

On the basis of their most obvious manifestations, I have defined three models of virtual leadership:

- A. hierarchical leadership (creating hierarchical structures)
- B. discursive leadership (formulating dominant topics)
- C. mutual leadership (grouping around dominant issues)
- D. virtual terrorist milieus

All three models of leadership are interlocked and based on ritualistic communications, which can be clearly observed on jihadist Internet forums. Rituals are here defined as formal as well as informal repeated social interactions, which use mighty symbols that constantly recreated social ties, hierarchies and emotional zeal with the goal to form ideological conviction.¹¹⁵

In the jihadist Net there is a wide range of rituals that create hierarchies. This

114 See Brachman 2010.

115 This definition is orientated at McManus 1979: 216–248.

in turn leads to the emergence of manifold leadership figures. Besides classical rituals and their adaption to the Internet, which I will treat in some more detail, leadership also concerns the veneration of leaders who are or were actual heads of organizations, such as Shamil Basayev, Ibn al-Khattab, Yusuf al-'Uyiri and Dadullah Akhand – just as examples.¹¹⁶ Although these figures come from diverse backgrounds and battlefields, they are all venerated under the broader umbrella of global jihadist ideology. Surprisingly, these former leaders in the Chechnyan, Saudi Arabian and Afghani jihad theatres are all dead. But life and death play different roles in cyberspace. Therefore, they may be defined as post-mortem virtual leaders in the cause of global jihad, similar to frequently quoted theologians such as Ibn Taymiyya. They are being steadily referenced and revived in postings, designs and videos for instrumental and radicalizing purposes. Moreover, actual leaders such as Bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Musab Abdul Wudud of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) are charismatic role models who influence and inspire followers. However, they are not alone. The same role as leaders of jihadist thinking can be attributed to prominent ideologues, such as Anwar al-Awlaqi, or media operatives such as Samir Khan, who are both hiding in Yemen at the time of writing. They initiate and steer debates and have a lot of influence on the jihad scene. However, the jihad scene itself has its own prominent figures, whom online jihadists perceive as relevant actors. Online activists increasingly perceive themselves as important. This concerns, for example, the “legendary” jihad forum member and suicide bomber Humam al-Balawi, who I will discuss in more detail. Yet, the leaders of online jihad are not only outstanding prominent figures. Hierarchies and leadership can be very small, and one may almost neglect their obvious manifestations in jihadist discussions. Thus, small discussion groups also develop

116 Shamil Basayev (1965 – 2006) was the leader of the Islamist insurgency in Chechnya since the mid-1990s until his death. Basayev hosted Arab and Turkish brigades during his time as guerilla commander in Chechnya and he was closely connected to the Saudi Arabian jihadist Ibn al-Khattab (1969 – 2002), a legendary jihadi fighter, recruiter and logistics provider, who participated in the first Afghanistan Jihad in the 1980s, as well as in Islamist campaigns in central Asia and the Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Berg-Karabach, Tajikistan, allegedly Bosnia and Chechnya). Both Ibn Khattab and Basayev were central figures of the International Islamic Brigade (also Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade; the Islamic Peacekeeping Army, IIPB) formed in 1998 and composed mainly by Dagestanis, but also Chechnyans, Arabs, Turks and other foreigners, numbering at times up to 1,500 militants. Dadullah Akhund (1966 – 2007) was a prominent Taliban leader in the Kandahar region and was appointed in the 1990s by the central Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Omar into the Taliban leadership council (rahbari shura), which by then consisted of 10 members. Yusuf al-'Uyiri (1967 – 2003), was the leader of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia, webmaster of al-Qaeda's first webpage (www.alneda.com), as well as a path breaking media operative for his own organization, by introducing the genre of jihadiE-magazines (Sawt al-Jihad (Voice of the Sword) and Mu'askar al-Battar (Camp of the Sword)).

leaders. The discourse around jihad topics leads to the emergence of small-scale hierarchies. These are reflected by the number and lengths of contributions by members, as well as the ranks and laudations members receive from other discussion participants.¹¹⁷ By a growing number of posts and “I like it”-thumbs (icons that represent consent on social service providers such as Facebook), members earn ranks and prestige, since it shows that they are frequent participants in cyber jihad. Also the quality of posts determines a member’s standing. In jihad forums, small-scale discursive leaders can be easily identified. They are the ones who suggest new topics and dominate discussions. High up in the hierarchy are also “strategists,” who contribute to jihad discussions with oftentimes very well thought and deep analyses. Their goal is to exert influence on discussion groups. The roles of “leaders” and “strategists” are best contrasted with that of “lauders“, who praise every contribution that appeals to them, but exert only little agency as individuals. However, the role of “lauders” as a mass is essential for the creation of authority. Lauders consent to others’ contributions, legitimize them and thus help to create small-scale hierarchies by using fixed religious phrases, which they prop up with different text colors and sizes as well as individual comments. The more laudations a contributor receives, the higher his or her standing in the forum hierarchy gets. Laudation phrases are also seen as a sacred art in itself. They bear poetic and aesthetic aspects and help an aspiring member to gather contribution points.

Hierarchical virtual leadership

Firstly, there are virtual oaths of obedience (bay’a).¹¹⁸ They reflect the attempt to substitute physical and hierarchical leadership structures that have come under pressure. For years, al-Qaeda sympathizers among cyber jihadists have been trying to virtualize classical-Islamic election rituals. But virtual oaths of obe-

117 See Pavitt 1999: 313–334.

118 A bay’a is a classical Islamic ritual to elect a leader and goes back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Well known is the oath of loyalty of the Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi to Bin Laden in 2004. This way, al-Zarqawi formally subordinated himself and his group, which perpetrated terrorist attacks in Iraq, under the command of the central al-Qaeda. The oath was directed in the form of a letter to Bin Laden. Another oath that was widely distributed via the Internet was the Algerian Salafi Group for Propaganda and Fighting to Bin Laden in 2007. Afterwards, the group called itself al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb’s (AQIM). See “Bayan wa bushra bi indimam wa mubaya’at al-jama’a al-salafiyya li-l-da’wa wa-l-qital li-l-shaykh Abi ’Abdallah Usama bin Laden hafizahu Allah” (Statement and happy message of the joining and pledge of allegiance by the Salafi Group for Propaganda and Fighting to the shaykh Abu Abdallah Usama bin Laden, may Allah protect him”), available on the Internet.

dience have also been used frequently by jihadists in their attempts to motivate the overthrow of Muslim rulers and the election of Muslim fundamentalists. In the wake of the Arab revolutionary uprising in Egypt in early 2011, for example, a popular jihadist ideologue tried to pave the way for large scale jihadist debate around an Islamic state in Egypt. One of the key-points of his E-article was the classical pledge of allegiance. Peaceful democratic change is nonsense, argues Abu al-Harith al-Ansari on the jihadist website <http://www.snam-s.Net/vb/>. The only solution is an Islamic state in Egypt according to the precepts of the Prophet's life and his companions. Only this is in line with the central "hisba"-doctrine: "Order what is right and forbid what is wrong".¹¹⁹ And this can only be achieved by militant jihad. The legitimacy of an Islamic state derives from

"the special bay'a and the general bay'a. From one side this requires arbitration (tahkim) according to the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition (Sunna) and the obedience to Allah, the most Pure. From the other side it requires compliance and obedience [by the populace]".¹²⁰

Traditional Muslims are sympathetic toward governance based on Islamic precepts, such as institutionalized and just Islamic arbitration processes. Yet, the ultra-literal and radical interpretations of jihadists do not represent the Muslim Zeitgeist. Jihadists are trying to hijack quasi-sacred Islamic notions like the bay'a. If the concept of bay'a was indeed popular, it would elicit much more responses. But even in the jihadist subculture, reactions are often lukewarm. A few senior members of the jihad forum lauded the above contribution, but other members kept quiet. Therefore, one should not overestimate the jihadist influence at this epochal moment in Muslim history. The revolutions fell unexpectedly not only upon regional rulers, but also upon al-Qaeda.

Often one finds in the Internet pledges of allegiance to a fighting interpretation of Islam, instead of pledges to actual persons.¹²¹ The mechanism of the

119 See the Qur'an, Surat 3, Verse 110. The hisba is one of the most central Islamic doctrines and has its origin in the Qur'an. It is not only used by jihadists to justify their goals, but also in highest regard by mainstream Muslims. In no case, hisba may simply be identified with extremist views.

120 Abu al-Harith al-Ansari, "Bayan bi sha'n ahdath misr", accessed March 4, 2011, published in January 2011 by the media company "Mu'assasat al-Nur al-I'lamiyya" (Holy Light Media Foundation), <http://www.snam-s.Net/vb/showthread.php?t=4685>. In February, the Sinam al-Islam network announced the foundation of its own media company, "Mu'assasat al-Qabidun 'ala al-Jamr al-I'lamiyya" (Media Institute of the Holders of the Burning Coal [those who do not give up on jihad]).

121 For example, "Renew the pledge of allegiance during the pact of Tabuk." YouTube-user al7nawey2, "***Jaddidu al-bay'a min 'ahd Tabuk**Nashida jihadiyya hamasiyya ra'i'a", <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QpelCuuxTdE> (04.03.2011). However, one should also not underestimate the perception in Arab Muslim society of the bay'a as a sacred legitimating ritual for personal authority. For example, in October 2010, one of Mu'ammarr al-

classical ritual is the handshake and the personal confirmation of a leader by an expert delegation. However, for the virtual ceremony it suffices to write on the Internet: "I recognize [as leader]" (ana uba'iyu).¹²² The physical micro-ritual (handshake) is exchanged with a virtual one (writing).

The virtual bay'a is a neo-traditional ritual. A classical Islamic concept is applied to modern digital technology.¹²³ Many Muslims, including jihadists, live a selective anti-modernism. They reject specific aspects of modernity and accept particular facets of tradition. For example, the jihadist use of the Internet as a propaganda tool stands in stark contrast to the ban of images in classical Islam. This shows that Islamic fundamentalism is an integral part of modernity. Islamic Romanticism is the counterpart to Western rationalism.¹²⁴ A selective anti-modernism is also mirrored in the virtual bay'a. Jihadists enter intricate Islamic legal debates to justify certain aspects, while they reject others.

However, hierarchical virtual leadership has not been very successful. Also al-Qaeda strategist al-Suri has discouraged traditional hierarchical structures. Several difficulties are connected to the *bay'a* in jihadist groups. Early experiments with virtual, i. e. indirect leadership in clandestine Islamist movements failed, claims al-Suri. In the 1980s, the leadership of the Syrian Muslim Brothers, for example, established itself in Baghdad and Amman, and issued unsuitable encoded military and political directives to the local leadership in Syria. The local leadership obeyed to the written orders because it needed the money that came with the orders and felt bound by the pledge of allegiance, which in al-

Qadhafi's supporters put the pledge of allegiance to Qadhafi by Libyan tribal leaders in 2010 on YouTube. See the YouTube-user "LibyanSpecialForces," "Tajdid al-bay'a li-l-qa'id al-a'la al-'aqid Mu'ammara al-Qadhafi" (Renewal of the pledge of allegiance to the highest leader colonel Qadhafi), accessed March 4, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iy2Pkkg-ZInc>.

122 Jihadists often quote the example of the Ethiopian king al-Najashi, who expressed his loyalty to the Prophet Muhammad by writing him a letter. A more detailed study by the author of this topic and its appropriation by jihadists is under way.

123 According to classical theory, the election of the ruler is based on consensus (*ijma'*) and takes place through a pledge of allegiance (*bay'a*), which is a contract of obedience between the ruler and the ruled. The includes consultation (*shura*) and proclamation (*mubaya'a*), ritualized by a handshake (*musafaha*) and exercised by "the men of resolution and contract" (*ahl al-hall wa-al-'aqd*), who are those formally qualified to elect or depose a ruler (caliph or amir or sultan) on behalf of the Muslim community (*umma*). In the eyes of the medieval scholar Ibn Khaldun, the ritual of shaking hands between Muslims and a newly proclaimed leader resembles the conclusion of a sales contract between a seller and a buyer. Both "*bay'a*" and *mubaya'a* are derived from the verbal root *ba'a*, which means to sell. Ibn Khaldun 2004: 266. For a further analysis of the classical ritual see also Landau Tasseron 2010a.

124 See Lohlker 1998: 117–133. In this sense, fundamentalism is an integral part of Muslim modernity as much as rationalism and enlightenment are parts of Western modernity. However, it is possible to normatively judge another culture which the West has created as much as the Islamic culture helps the West to reproduce its own identity?

Suri's view was contestable given the mismanagement by the exiles, who had lost touch with reality.¹²⁵ That said, also in other terrorist groups the concept of bay'a has been very contested. While Bin Laden always wanted new recruits of al-Qaeda to pledge allegiance to him, he felt extremely uneasy pledging to his host in Afghanistan between 1996–2001, the Taliban leader Mullah Omar.¹²⁶ The classical pledge refers to allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad, which was valid until death. This is the classical bay'a ritual, which jihadists try to revive via the Internet. However, the majority of Muslims cannot come to stakes with such a literal interpretation, not even jihadists themselves.¹²⁷

Also on the Internet, hierarchical leadership models show little success and cannot really replace physical structures and leadership. Over the last years jihadists could not introduce the virtual bay'a as a viable substitute for personal guidance, i. e. to exert direct control. However, the virtual bay'a is well suited for propagandistic purposes and to gather many sympathizers around a central idea and to gear media-effective campaigns.

The bay'a translates into a tight and personal knitting together of a group and strong relationships between followers and leaders. Jihadists have frequently used the bay'a to elect an ordinary person as a group's military leader (amir). While the bay'a ritual is a mere formality in most Sunni Muslim states to confirm the election of a secular ruler, it plays an important role in jihadist groups.¹²⁸ An

125 Al-Suri says that he experienced this first-hand as member of the Syrian al-Tali'a al-Muqatila (Fighting Vanguard). He claims that exiled leaderships lose touch with the local reality. Al-Suri 2004: Part 1, Chapter 7, "Structural Mistakes" (Akhta' fi-al-bunya wa-al-haykal).

126 Brown 2010: 1–6.

127 Present thinkers of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers, for example, interpret the ritual less literally, but in a more liberal sense. It is a commitment to Islam and jihad (not necessarily fighting jihad), not to a personal leaders until death. The Brothers learned from experience. They have experienced violations of the pledge and dilemmas of loyalty. On the one hand, their first charismatic leader Hassn al-Banna in the 1940s did not invoke the sacredness of the bay'a when being challenged by dissidents. On the other hand, in the growing turmoil between rivaling Islamist groups, violations of the pledge were used to expel members from the Muslim Brothers, already in the 1950s, but especially in the 1980s. See Landau Tasseron 2010b: 16 ff.

128 In modern orthodox Islam, the pledge of allegiance is often just a formal issue, the task being to confirm a newly "elected" leader. Neither the clerics nor the broad population do determine the outcome of elections. For example, the Saudi Bay'a Council is made up of sons and senior grandsons of the Kingdom's founder. (<http://www.saudi-us-relations.org/articles/2006/loi/061106-turki-succession.html>) Also the political impacts of other institutions that seem to give weight to religious authority are questionable, like the Saudi Shura Council, for example. Nagi observes: "In the early 1990s, Saudi Arabia began a program of political reform, establishing the appointed Majlis al-Shura, Consultative Council. Nevertheless, this step did not lead to a significant shift in authority or more democratic institutions. In 2005, half of the council seats were open for election, and the other half were appointed by the monarchy". See Nagi 2008.

amir has much less power than a classical *imam* or sultan. His authority is limited to the group and does not expand to the Islamic *umma*. A major question among jihadist thinkers has been, if a bay'a may be pledged under such circumstances.

The Egyptian jihad ideologue Abd al-Qadir bin 'Abd al-'Aziz confirms that question. 'Abd al-Qadir distinguishes between pledges of allegiance to people (bay'at al-nas), which he also calls agreements of obedience ('uhud 'ala al-ta'a); and pledges of allegiance to the imam (bay'at al-imam), exercised by "people of resolution and contract".¹²⁹ The legitimation of imara in Islamist groups is thus based on the bay'at al-nas, which may be exercised by group members.

Furthermore, the bay'at al-nas is less binding. The amir of a jihadist group has no control beyond his group. Obedience to an amir is voluntary, while obedience to the imam is obligatory for all Muslims. The time-span is restricted and elections within an Islamist group should enable a change of leadership.

In reality, however, jihadist strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri observed this as very problematic: The rights and duties of the emir, or the relationship between the emir and the members in jihadist organizations have often been unclear and were abused. At times, different jihad organizations in the same country fought each other over the pledge of allegiance. If a member wants to leave an organization, he may be excommunicated. In addition, the emir or a consultative council (shura) can also expel a member. Leaders of traditional jihad organizations have altogether too much power.¹³⁰

The bay'a on the Internet sheds a very interesting light on this problem. Similar to popular ideologues, also simple forum members "alyasa" debate the issue. Does "alyasa" have less influence than that known ideologues? One example is the forum member "alyasa", whose posts I have been following for a while. Members like alyasa are the second guard of leaders in jihadist thinking. They reproduce and rethink jihad propaganda collectively. This increases the appeal of jihadist ideas to simple people, who are nevertheless interested in justifications for uploading a video or venerating a figure, for example.

In 2005, "alyasa" called on the jihad forum al-Hisba for a "death-bay'a" to Usama bin Laden:¹³¹ Classically, a bay'a means to follow Muhammad or another

129 'Abd al-Qadir bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, *Al-'Umda fi l'dad al-'Udda fi Sabil Allah* ("Laying the foundation for the equipment for jihad in the ways of Allah"), chapter: "fa-hal yajuz tasmiyat al-'uhud bayn al-nas bay'a?" ("Can one call agreements between people a 'bay'ah'", retrieved 17 March 2009 (<http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=85ud42ss>).

130 Al-Suri 2004: Part 1, Chapter 7, "Structural Mistakes" (Akhta' fi-al-bunya wa-al-haykal).

131 Al-Bay'a li amir qa'idat al-jihad al-shaykh Usama bin Laden (Der Loyalitätseid für den Emir der Jihadbasis, Sheikh Osama bin Laden). This call to pledge allegiance to Bin Laden was published in 2006 on the jihadist forum al-Boraq (which in the meanwhile has been shut down). Sympathizers keep on republishing the statement on the Internet.

Muslim leader under all conditions until death. The ritual was sometimes repeated before battle to strengthen the fighting spirit of Muslims (*mubaya'a* 'ala al-maut). In battle, the pledge was also given to field commanders.¹³²

"alyasa" differentiated similar to the popular jihad ideologue 'Abd al-Qadir between the primary *pledge of convention* (*bay'at al-in'iqaḍ*) and the secondary *general pledge* (*al-bay'a al-'amma*). The most famous examples of a primary election are the four Rightly Guided Caliphs. The secondary, general pledge is a *popular pledge* (*bay'a sha'biyya*). Muslims traditionally confirmed the choice of a leader with a popular pledge in their local mosque. Now this can be done via the Internet and by writing (*kitaba*).¹³³

The goal was to build an Army of conscripts in the Internet, who would blow themselves up at a demanded time. In an opinion poll on al-Hesba forum 171 persons voted for the pledge, however, without putting it later into effect.¹³⁴ In general, the death *bay'a*, or any other terrorist pledge of allegiance via the Internet seems not to be very effective as a direct leadership mechanism.

Another example should be mentioned because it concerns the attempt to create a jihadist core state as a political alternative for the time after the U.S.-retreat from Iraq. In October 2006, al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) announced the establishment of the *Islamic State of Iraq (ISI, Dawlat al-'Iraq al-Islamiyya)*, which never really existed, but describes the coalition of Iraqi and foreign Sunni fighters allied with AQI (*Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin*).¹³⁵ ISI has since then been celebrated as a mega-event in the jihadist media. The collective celebration reminds of a macro-ritual, similar to an interactive superstar-contest on television.¹³⁶

I will quickly analyze the electoral mechanics that led to the confirmation of ISI's supposed leader, Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi, via the Internet and the creation of the ISI as virtual entity. Jihadists argued that ISI was institutionally and legally sound, since it was represented by its "Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin" (Consultation Council of Fighters). In Islamic elections, the *shura* is traditionally the consultative meeting where the "the men of resolution and contract" (*ahl al-hall wa-*

132 ...such as before the battle of Yarmuk, when Muslim fighters pledged a "death-bay'a" to a low rank Muslim leader, mentions a jihadi participant in the same discussion.

133 The forum activist "alyasa" quotes the example of the 7.th century Ethiopian king al-Najashi. Al-Najashi allegedly wrote a letter to Muhammad, in which he said: "I pledged you allegiance, and I pledged allegiance to the son of your uncle, and your companions, and I submitted myself under the hand of Allah, Lord of the worlds."

134 Rogan 2006: 31.

135 With the establishment of the ISI a "dual-leadership"-model came into effect. The Iraqi terrorist Omar al-Baghdadi (d.2010) was elected as Emir and the Egyptian Abu Hamza al-Muhajir as war-minister of the ISI. This reflected the attempt to make AQI attractive for both Iraqi and foreign jihadists. See Steinberg 2010: 28.

136 See the definition of rituals in the first chapter of this article.

al-'aqd) meet. They are formally qualified to elect or depose a ruler (caliph or amir or sultan) on behalf of the Muslim community (umma).¹³⁷ Thus, the concept of shura increased the legitimacy of the ISI among sympathizers.

Numerous jihadist sympathizers swore virtual oaths of allegiance to al-Baghdadi. This worked pretty fine on jihad forums, but heated debates on mixed salafist-jihad forums indicated already in 2007 a controversy. Discussions participants regretted that the virtual oath was easy to manipulate. They could never be sure if the person they were voting for really existed. However, jihadists systematically tried to silence such critique. One critique of ISI wrote: "I proposed a topic there [on a jihad forum], but I was surprised that it was deleted and I was stopped."¹³⁸

As the critique against ISI went on, jihadists started posting another round of comprehensive theological justifications.¹³⁹ An interesting discussion developed. It sheds light on how seriously jihadists take the question of virtual legitimacy. For example, one chatter named Ibn al-Imarat expressed doubts about the bay'a to al-Baghdadi on a mixed salafi-jihadist forum. Another discussion-participant under the flag of Senegal responded immediately:

My dear brother, in terms of Islamic law you do not need to know the emir or make his acquaintance at any time. This does not invalidate the bay'a.

[...]

Concerning the condition that the imam of the people must step outside and get to know them by himself and that they see him, so he will not be unknown (majhul): The [fulfillment of this] condition is impossible in the present circumstances where the House of Islam is occupied. Moreover, it is not necessary because the ignorance has stopped without it, blessings to Allah!

In summary, the Islamic legal justification of the virtual bay'a relies on two arguments: The elected must only be known to the closest entourage; furthermore, the virtual pledge is only a "secondary pledge" to confirm the election of a terrorist leader. In the case of Abu Amr al-Baghdadi, the primary pledge was already given by al-Qaeda members in Iraq, argues al-Jarmani.¹⁴⁰

In other discussions, the virtual bay'a was justified likewise.¹⁴¹ The frequent

137 The election includes consultation (shura) and proclamation (mubaya'a), ritualized by a handshake (musafaha).

138 www.muslm.Net is a mixed forum that attracts jihadists, salafists, but also mainstream Sunni Muslims. Referring to the discussion see this entry: "Bay'a 'abr al-Internet!!!" (Pledge of allegiance via the Internet!!!) www.muslm.Net/vb/showthread.php?t=304962, retrieved 16 April 2009.

139 Huna nuba' li amir al-mu'minin (Here we confirm allegiance to the Emir of the believers), accessed May 2009, <http://www.aljazeeraatalk.Net/forum/showthread.php?t=77767v>.

140 The primary pledge is the ritual by which the actual election of the leader takes place (in'iqad al-khilafa).

141 For example, on the forum www.muslm.Net a participant calling himself Abu Yusuf al-

repetition of the argument suggests that a jihadist jurist prepared it for distribution via the Internet. Sympathizers have picked it up to legitimize the virtual election of al-Baghdadi and other figures.

Yet, even within the radical scene the election remained disputed. For example, a discussion participant named al-Muqatil al-'Iraqi (Iraqi Fighter) wrote: "Pledge allegiance to who you want. That is your problem. But do not force any Muslim to pledge this allegiance! Refrain from spilling the blood of Muslims and clerics and fighters! And protect the inviolateness (hurma) of the blood of Muslims and innocents! Do not explode the homes of Muslims with explosive belts claiming that an apostate lives in it – according to your thinking! Listen to clerics who are older and wiser and more pious than you!" He immediately received a death-threat from another chatter.¹⁴²

Until today, the ISI is one, if not the most popular topic on Arabic language jihad forums. The celebration of ISI is a continuous jihadist macro-ritual. Nearly every forum has a section that is exclusively dedicated to discussions and "news" of the ISI. AQI sells many of its videos and statements under the ISI label. Thus, the ISI is an example for the fold between the physical and the virtual worlds, which jihadists aim to create. The creation of authoritative and institutional halos around themes like the ISI, even if they are deceptive, is a brilliant solution to rally sympathizers. But in practical terms, neither the virtual bay'a nor the ISI have much meaning.

Mutual virtual leadership

Mutual virtual leadership models seem to work better than hierarchical models.¹⁴³ They are based on participative activities, whereby online-jihadists coordinate and guide each other mutually. The goal is to bind larger groups of

Bashir argued likewise. See "Bay'a 'abr al-Internet!!!" (Pledge of allegiance via the Internet!!!) www.muslim.Net/vb/showthread.php?t=304962, accessed April 16, 2009, but also "La ajidu audah min kalimat al-sheikh bin Laden raddan 'ala al-ba'd hadahum Allah' (I cannot find clearer words than those of Bin Laden with his answer to some who Allah may guide), <http://www.aljazeeraatalk.Net/forum/showthread.php?t=136357>, retrieved 28 April 2009.

142 <http://www.aljazeeraatalk.Net/forum/showthread.php?t=77767v>, retrieved 1 May 2009.

143 Structurally, the Internet facilitates mutual leadership. Most importantly, it is based on the development of larger propaganda events that we have defined as macro-rituals. The "flat structure" of the Internet puts groups, individuals and nations on the same level. The main characteristics of the Internet are participative and egalitarian structures, which enables informational power-sharing among users, at least, per definition. In reality, users, states and multi-national giants like Apple are rapidly eroding this structure. Moreover, the Domain Name System (DNS), which attributes to each computer and hostname an IP-address, makes the Internet highly hierarchical and centralized. However, the Internet

individuals together into shared activities and discourses. Autonomous propaganda teams and shared media activities on jihad forums are the best examples for this. They resemble al-Suri's "secret incitement cells" (*saraya al-tahrid al-sirriyya*). According to al-Suri, they consist of one to three members, who are supposed to be well versed in Islamic law, politics, ideology and the use of modern media, especially the Internet. With the help of the WWW, they spread and translate everything that helps jihad, but particularly the propaganda of al-Qaeda and its subgroups. In spreading jihadist propaganda, they shall act innovatively and according to their possibilities, which reflects al-Suri's motto "a system, not organization!"¹⁴⁴

There are manifold manifestations of mutual leadership in the jihadist cyberspace. Examples are "media-incursions" into other forums and social networks, workshops to create propaganda, classes to learn design and iconography, Bluetooth groups to make propaganda compatible with cellular phones, upload-groups to put material on the Net, and transcription groups to translate material in different languages. All these groups are organized on jihad forums, which work as "collective organizers" in the mutual leadership process.¹⁴⁵ Jihadi E-magazines initiate agendas, call for contributions and glorify lone wolves.

In this respect, the jihadist Net propagates two paradigms in parallel. Members are supposed to be "lone wolves" in real-life, but tight knit groups and participative actors in cyberspace. Moreover, it becomes clear through their shared activities, that online jihadists are neither passive reproducers of propaganda, nor marionettes of central leaders. They often integrate new elements into the mutual propaganda process, such as watching western media and discussing them for their own purposes.

remains a very useful tool for networked groups with common agendas like jihadists. Gjeltén argues that authoritarian regimes regard information dissemination as the main cyber threat to their stability, while democratic governments mostly fear hacking attacks designed to cripple their computer infrastructure. Gjeltén 2010, see also Hansel 2010: 357 – 378. However, the massive debate around Wikileaks and the arrest of its co-founder Julian Assange sheds a new light on this situation. Also western democratic states increasingly fear the power of information dissemination as an element of cyber warfare. See also Byfield 2010 for the above argument.

- 144 That does not mean that online jihadists have consciously adapted al-Suri's guidelines. But it helps to understand their mutually guiding behavior, for al-Suri's analysis (finished in 2004) is strikingly close to jihadi reality. Abu Musab al-Suri 2004: 2. Part, chapter 8, subchapter 5, "nazzariat al-tanzim wa nizam al-'amal fi saraya al-muqawama al-islamiyya al-'alamiyya" (Organizational theory and practical work mode of the Global Islamic Resistance Cells). Al-Suri's precepts also concord with al-Salim's concept of jihadist media activists and teams. See Mohammed bin Ahmed al-Salim, "39 wasila li khidmat al-jihad wal-musharaka fihi" (39 Wege zum Jihad und daran teilzunehmen), available on the Internet.
- 145 "Collective organizer"s are carriers of communication such as newspapers, magazines, websites. The concept stems from Professor Rüdiger Lohlker, University of Vienna.

Firstly, mutual leadership can be very well observed in “media incursions” (ghazwat i’lamiyya) on jihad forums. Such campaigns are often triggered by statements and videos of jihadist media companies. Forum members and sympathizers call upon each other to form teams and distribute the material in the Internet. In addition, they create design, translate the material and develop background scenarios for terrorist attacks. This happened, for example, after the German jihadist Bekkay Harrach had threatened Germany civil society with attacks in October 2009, should German troops not be withdrawn from Afghanistan after the elections. In a video published by al-Qaeda’s media company al-Sahab, Harrach appeared in a suit and in front of a red background just like U.S. president Barack Obama in his Cairo speech in June 2009. With this iconic self-depiction Harrach tried to reverse the image of power and project it on himself. Members of jihad forums immediately called upon sympathizers to distribute the message on German forums in order to influence German public opinion. In parallel, strategic scenarios dealt with the location and size of German population centres, which was part of a debate, how 100.000 people could be killed.¹⁴⁶ Below is an example of a media-incursion that was promoted on one forum:

“Media-Invasion of Germany
 There is little time ... Allah is the greatest!
 The only thing that is required:
 A team to publish on forums
 And a team to publish via mailing lists
 Topic suggestions for further publications will follow
 Arrange your rows and get ready!
 Revise the list of common foreign forums, especially German forums”¹⁴⁷

All major jihad forums have subsections dedicated to media incursions in order to spread jihadist propaganda. These contain often “sticky” posts that are chosen for further discussion and remain on top of discussion threads¹⁴⁸:

146 “Laiylat al-100,000 qatla – Hadiya li-l-mutaraqqibin” (The night of the 100,000 deaths – A present for those who gather intelligence [on the forums], al-Falluja Forum, accessed October 9, 2010, <http://www.al-faloja1.com/vb/showthread.php?t=86979>).

147 Source: “The media-attack against Germany“, a reaction to a threat video against Germany by al-Qaeda’s media company al-Sahab, al-Falluja Forum, 2. 10. 2009

148 “Sticky posts” (also discussed above) are selected topics chosen for further discussion, which remain on top of a discussion thread. The normal chronological sequence, last post first, is thus stopped. The sticky post here are taken from the jihad forum al-Jahafil, which was probably abandoned in late 2009, yet keeps on floating through virtual space like the “Flying Dutchman” of jihadi forums.

Thirdly, another important element of mutual leadership are design classes (tasmim). On forums, there is a small scale industry of quasi-sacrilege devotional and iconographic pictures, mostly depicting martyrs and icons of global jihad. This activity shows clearly, that cyberjihad is fed by real terrorist activity. Activists teach each other cooperatively how to design. This way, activists acquire and strengthen an extremist mindset. They collectively glorify violent deeds. The outcomes, iconic images, perpetrate and permeate all levels of online jihad, especially in the form of martyr and idol posters.

The grade of participation and quality of designs also determine a participant's position in the forum hierarchy. If the quality is good, he or she raises. Temporary leaders emerge within the design sub-forums, for example. Others want to catch up with them. This way a vivid competition develops. For example, the Ansar al-Mujahidin forum regularly organizes "design contests" and honours the best results. The participants rise within the forum's internal hierarchy.¹⁵⁰ But fame is not limited to the jihad forum alone because graphics are distributed in the wider Internet, which makes designers and forums known and attractive for possible sympathizers.



Figure 13. Place 1 in the "contest for the best design", Ansar al-Mujahidin forum, March 2009, <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=15811> [The picture "Afghanistan: The Imperial Graveyard" won place one for the best design in one of Ansar al-Mujahidin forum's design contests. Clouds arise from suicide bombings and merge with the clouds of heaven, which are being moved by Allah (mujri al-sahab). The Kufi calligraphy refers to piety and right guidance and reminds the viewer of a "true" original Islam between the 7.th and 10th centuries. Among the classical calligraphic scripts used on jihadi forums are Thuluth, Eastern Kufi, old Kufi, Muhaqqaq, Naskhi, Nastaliq and Riq'a. See Figchel 2007: 34–38.].

150 For example, a jihadi design competition, which was organized on the Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum in January 2010. Ansar al-Mujahidin forum, subforum "contest for the best design", March 2009, <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=15811>.

Fourthly, one of the most effective forms of mutual leadership takes place through jihadist E-magazines. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's (AQIP) strongest weapon in the media sector is the E-magazine "Inspire". Technical details, simple messages and a glossy design try to draw media activists, copy cats and single attackers into the ideological milieu of AQAP. The marketing of attacks in such a way is in line with jihadist media strategy to make the message popular. At the same time, it fulfils a double function, since the propaganda frightens opponents. The upload of the magazine on jihad discussion forums triggers intensive discussions. Then the message is further spread in the Net. Professional terrorist media operators like the U.S.-American Samir Khan run and edit the publication, which represents AQAP, but grassroots activists are given ample possibilities to participate. Together they initiate discourses around terrorist tactics, ideology and role-models, which transcend the circle of editors and contributors. The mutual leadership element lies in the competition of supporters who strive to contribute to the magazine, plus in the widespread discussions that process the ideas of "Inspire."

Discursive virtual leadership

Leadership in cyberspace can also take place through discussions and prominent ideas. The permanent discussion of jihadist topics and the mutual motivation, as well as the rejection of critique, create discursive hierarchies and therefore communicative leadership structures that have a guiding effect on online-sympathizers. Within these structures, some contributors become more famous and popular than others. Discursive leaders on jihad forums emerge on the basis of group discussions.

A fundamental element of small-group communication is the development of guidance and emergence of leaders through discussions.¹⁵¹ By definition, functioning social networks are rather small units, the maximum size lying at 150 persons.¹⁵² Everything above that becomes impractical. Just one percent of the users on jihad forums are actively participating.¹⁵³ They choose their leaders by way of discussion and ritualized admiration. On jihad forums, temporary opinion leaders even emerge post mortem.

Differentiated ideas are expressions of individualism, but groups are bound

151 Pavitt 1999: 313–334.

152 The Dutch media theorist Geert Lovink in an interview with "DiePresse.com" – "Interview mit Geert Lovink: Warum Facebook wieder verschwinden wird", accessed December 16, 2010, <http://www.twentytwenty.at/2010/09/diepresse-com-interview-mit-geert-lovink-warum-facebook-wieder-verschwinden-wird/>.

153 Kimmage 2009.

together by a limited vocabulary and lexis. The encoded meaning of words and idioms can only be understood by insiders who share the group culture.¹⁵⁴ In jihad discussions, “linguistic codes” often create solidarity and homogeneity among discussants. They use “restrictive codes” to enhance their cohesion.

If an online jihad discussion participant lauds another contribution with “Jazak Allah khayran” (May Allah reward you) in script size 20, red letters, the message is automatically understood by other discussants: Someone else has greatly contributed to jihad. Also expressions like “sinam al-Islam” (hump of Islam) are only understood by insiders. It means that jihad is the ultimate expression of Islam.¹⁵⁵ Ever repeated expressions transport a sacrosanct meaning, create respect and hierarchies between jihadists. But jihadists are also capable of expressing differentiated ideas. Members who combine laudations with strategic thoughts often become discursive leaders on jihad forums. They enjoy a great deal of respect from other members.

This has become especially clear since early 2010. Finally, wrote a forum member, the goal is to break through the border between virtual activity and terrorist reality. Words shall be followed by deeds. “To demonstrate the honesty of words” became a key concept of discursive leadership. The trigger was the story of the Jordanian suicide attacker and chatter Humam al-Balawi aka Abu Dujana al-Khorasani. Al-Balawi was a loner and lived an isolated life. Jihadist forums were his major reality. He used them as main platform to channel his anger and self-radicalization. The Jordanian secret service allegedly recruited him to pose as a recruit and spy in terrorist training camps in the Afghan-Pakistani border region.¹⁵⁶ Then the Jordanians passed al-Balawi on to CIA. In December 2009, al-Balawi perpetrated a suicide attack during an information exchange at a U.S. forward operating base near Khost in Afghanistan, where he killed several high-ranking CIA-officers and his Jordanian handler. Following his deed, al-Balawi became a superstar of the jihadist cyberscene, whose members compared him to al-Qaeda leaders Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri as well as to al-Qaeda’s main theologian Abu Yahya al-Libi. The jihad forums went insane over his discussion. “Therefore, we call upon our brothers, the lions of media jihad, ...

154 Compare to Menzel 2009: 51 – 52; and Bergensen 1998: 58 – 60.

155 This expression goes back to an allegedly sound Prophetic hadith (oral transmission of the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions), in which Muhammad compares the duties of Islam to the different body parts of a camel, which was an extremely valuable animal in Arab tribal culture of the 7th century.

156 “Ghumud yaluff shakhsiyat Abu Dujana al-Khorasani la tubaddiduhu siratuhi ... tabiban urduniyyan (Uncertainty around the person of Abu Dujana al-Khorasani) al-Hayat, January 16, 2010, see also a description of al-Balawi as a “loner” on al-Falluja Form, Asda’ ’amaliyat al-shahid Abu Dujana al-Khorasani (“The echoes of the operation of al-Khorasani [from the al-Jazeera news website]”), accessed January 2010, <http://al-faloja1.com/vb/showthread.php?t=99060>.

to follow his example. Firstly, participate in the propagandist jihad and then in the military jihad, which may demonstrate the honesty of your words!”¹⁵⁷ On jihad forums, subsections for propagandist design (tasmim) glorified him with hundreds of pictures. His example should be followed, members of the jihadist Net exclaimed.

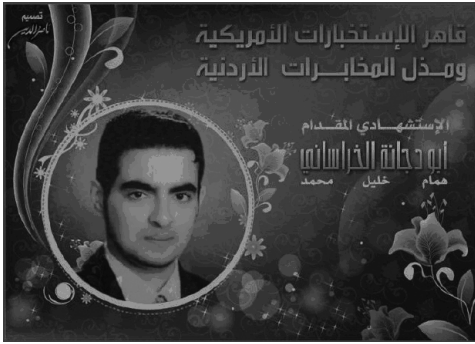


Figure 14. Design (tasmim) that glorifies the suicide-attacker al-Balawi aka al-Khorasani, “Tamer of the American secret services and degrader of the Jordanian secret services”, Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum, accessed January 2010.

The meso-ritualistic identification with al-Balawi is mainly reflected in formulas that refer to passages of his texts. They are only clear to readers of his texts. For example, “When will my words drink from my blood [be put into practice] is the title of one of the last manifests by al-Balawi that has become a major slogan in the virtual jihadist discourse.¹⁵⁸ “My articles will witness against me, if I will not put them into effect!”, “My words will die, if I do not water them with my blood!, “Nothing is more assertive than a saying that is certified by a deed!” Due to their permanent discussion, these words of al-Balawi have become “discursive icons” that create a vivid interaction among forum discussants.

A specific discourse has developed with the goal to copy his radicalization process. Major jihad discussion forums like al-Falluja, Ansar al-Mujahidin and Shumukh al-Islam quickly opened sub-forums to honor al-Balawi’s death. His deed was interpreted as perfect example of “Then fight in God’s cause – Thou art held responsible Only for thyself – And rouse the Believers!”¹⁵⁹ – the epitome of

157 The forum writer “Zarqawi al-Falluja”, refers here to the classical division between jihad of the pen (al-jihad bi-l-qalam wa-l-bayan) an jihad by the sword (al-jihad bi-l-saif wa-l-sinan), al-Falluja Forum, accessed January 19, 2010, <http://al-faloja1.com/vb/showthread.php?t=98931&page=2>.

158 Abu Dujana al-Khorasani, “Mata satashrab kalimati min dima’i “ (When will my words drink from my blood), republished on al-Falluja Forum, accessed January 21, 2010, <http://al-faloja1.com/vb/showthread.php?t=39970>.

159 Quran Yusuf Ali Version, Surat al-Nisa’ 84, for example on Shumukh al-Islam forum sub-

Abu Musab al-Suri's individualized jihad paradigm. Some participants simply posted quotations and lauded al-Balawi. Others observed how the deed of al-Balawi has changed the "meaning of words" in jihad. One member observed, "topics have become time-bombs ... writers can achieve a lot, but only under one condition: They should die so their thoughts will live."¹⁶⁰ "When will we follow him?" asked the title of another post and continued "what would we have learnt from your [al-Balawi's] words, if we don't redraw them with our blood?"¹⁶¹

Al-Balawi's transition from virtual to physical jihad was described as "nafir" (moving out to jihad).¹⁶² Nafir is a key-concept of jihad. The Palestinian jihadist ideologue Abdallah Azzam wrote in the 1980 s that Muslims were allowed migrating to jihad without the permission of their Muslim rulers (nafir).¹⁶³ Also the global jihad strategist Abu Musab al-Suri invokes this hallmark of Azzam's international jihad paradigm and integrates it into his concept of "individualized terrorism" within Global Islamic Resistance.¹⁶⁴ In cyber jihad, the nafir-concept has come to mean the full transition from E-jihadist to suicide bomber.

The second suicide bomber who resembles this paradigm is a former cyber-jihadist known as "Abu Omar al-Shami". Al-Shami attacked a cultural centre in West Iraq, killing 11 people on February 24, 2011. His deed immediately triggered an excited discussion on the Shumukh al-Islam jihad forum. Also al-Shami's deed was glorified as "departure to war" (nafir). The surrounding discussions resembled very much the reactions to al-Balawi's attack. "Here is a

section Ustuwana bi 'idhn Allah al-shahid Abu Dujana al-Khorasani taqabbalahu Allah ("Compact disc, so Allah wishes, of the martyr Abu Dujana al-Khorasani [his writings], may Allah receive him", accessed October 17, 2009, <http://www.shamikh1.Net/vb/showthread.php?t=69710>).

160 See Mufakkirat al-Falluja, "Rihanat al-jihad: Al-Shahid Abu Dujana al-Khorasani.

161 "Khitab al-Gharib", Mata nalhaq bi-l-habib alladhi sharabat kalimatuhu min dima'ih (When will we follow the beloved comrade whose words drank from his blood?), al-Falluja Forum, accessed January 25, 2010, <http://al-faloja1.com/vb/showthread.php?t=39970>.

162 Allahu akbar – Nafir al-akh Abu Dujana al-Khorasani ila Khorasan ("God is the greatest – Departure to War of our brother Abu Dujana al-Khorasani to the lands of Khorasan – Khorasan describes in jihadiideology Afghanistan, Pakistan, parts of Iran, and the central Asian republics bordering Afghanistan. Nafir also means the alarm horn that calls to depart for war), accessed February 2, 2010, <http://al-faloja1.com/vb/showthread.php?t=85247>.

163 Azzam referred to Qur'an 9:41 "Go forth, light-armed and heavy-armed, and strive with your wealth and your lives in the way of Allah! That is best for you if ye but knew." Drawing on the Hanbali jurists Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Kathir, Azzam called this situation "the general departure for war" (*al-nafir al-'amm*). If, according to Azzam's revival of the classical concept described above, the enemy entered Muslim lands, the individual religious obligation (*fard 'ayn*) for defensive jihad duty would spread in concentric circles throughout the world. Accordingly, no Muslim had to ask for anyone's permission to join the fight. Azzam argued that in modern times Muslims were not bound by an Imam's directive to join the jihad.

164 Holtmann 2009a: 45 and 131.

real terrorist man...while we are still sitting around. May Allah be merciful with you, my brother, and let you dwell in the highest paradise!”¹⁶⁵ The discussions around al-Shami revealed again a very flexible treatment of the cyber jihad-issue: On the one hand, participation in cyber jihad is being venerated. Humam al-Balawi himself wrote on the role of online jihadists that one should “not undervalue a good deed, even if it just was to write underneath an excellent jihadist post ‘May Allah reward you with something good’, this way supporting the active brothers and stimulating their energy...”¹⁶⁶ But then, says the tenor on jihad forums, online activity must stop and the radical visions of cyber jihad be realized in real-life. Also noticeable is the direct addressing of venerated martyrs in the first person singular, present tense on jihad forums. Forum participants often enter imaginary dialogues with their role models, either through words, or through images. “May Allah grant you the highest Paradise”, or “Congratulations to your martyrdom” said supporters of al-Shami’s suicide attack. Another characteristic of jihadist discussions is that they are long-lasting and cohesive. This seems to be a feature of extremist and “geek-culture”-discussions in general, which are topic focused and underlie strict rules. In contrast, mainstream discussions water down quickly and lose topic-focus. Examples are readers’ reactions to newspaper articles in the Internet, which after ten or so posts often lose the red line. Yet, the jihadist Net seems to have different dynamics. Within a short time span of several days, al-Shami was lauded consistently on 11 consecutive pages more than 120 times (on the Shumukh al-Islam forum).

Virtual terrorist milieus

Metaphorically speaking, jihad forums are just the peak of the iceberg. The iceberg leaps out of the water, but underneath its body dissolves and mixes with the surrounding salt water, drawing ever wider circles. The dissemination of jihadist propaganda on the Internet resembles this process and creates virtual terrorist milieus. Thus, jihad forums play a role in creating larger terrorist milieus in open social platforms like Youtube, where networks emerge around user-accounts that disseminate jihadist propaganda. Virtual terrorist milieus influence real terrorist actors and are a fourth form of leadership in cyberspace.

Recently, mass demonstrations for democratic change in Arab countries,

165 Shumukh-forum member “Terrorist for the aid of the religion” (Irhabi li-nusrat al-din), accessed March 8, 2011, <http://www.shamikh1.Net/vb/showthread.php?t=97338&page=8>.

166 Abu Dujana al-Khorasani (Humam al-Balawi), Sifat la budda minha li-majahil al-Net (Vital characteristics of the unknown Net [fighters]).

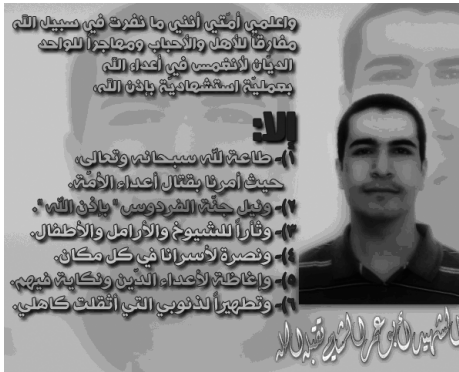


Figure 15. Design (tasmim) that glorifies the suicide-attacker al-Shami, quoting from his will that he wanted to “plunge into the enemies of Allah” (perpetrate a suicide attack), Shumukh al-Islam Forum, accessed March 2011.

which were organized via Twitter and Facebook, have renewed jihadist interest into larger social networks. Shut-down campaigns against hundreds of jihadist user accounts on Facebook even strengthen debates how to use the site more effectively. In fact, Arabic revolutions and their very successful use of social media have rung in the second phase of “jihadi strategic studies.” Jihadists are trying to understand what they must do to gain the same popularity and how they can win and influence as many individuals as possible by jihad via the Internet.¹⁶⁷ As part of a new communicational strategy, jihadists shall offer broader audiences a “lite-version” of terrorist propaganda, which excludes gruesome scenes of executions and beheadings. Instead the task is now to reach the masses.¹⁶⁸ Possible sympathizers should initially not even know that they are consuming jihadist propaganda. User-accounts with simple Islamic names and profile-images such as “The one who loves Islam”, or a picture of the Qur’an as profile do not betray the clear jihadist inclination of their owners. The uploaded material shall first and foremost strengthen the Islamic identity of viewers, and only in a second step introduce them to an extremist interpretation of Islam.

Cyber jihad strategists argue that until now most jihadist messages do not reach broader audiences, but remain largely encapsulated in consensual environments like jihad forums. Since mainstream social networks reach millions of

167 This form of strategic jihadist literature has increased since the start of the Iraq-War in 2003 and treats theological and ideological questions only marginally. See Siehe Brynjar Lia und Thomas Hegghammer, “Jihadi Strategic Studies: The Alleged Al Qaeda Policy Preceding the Madrid Bombings”, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27 (2004).

168 Aba Hafs al-Sunni al-Sunni, “Kaifiyat muwajahat hamlat ghalaq al-hisabat al-jihadiyya” (How to fight the closure campaign of jihadiaccounts [on Facebook]), *Sinam al-Islam forum*, accessed March 14, 2011, <http://www.snam-s.net/vb/showthread.php?t=5203>.

people, they are especially attractive for propagandists. Jihadist messages may get liquefied on mainstream social networks. Moreover, the group and topic cohesion is lower than in hardcore jihadist environments. However, mainstream networks can create open milieus, attract broader audiences and even activate lone-wolf-type attackers. Therefore, from a jihadist perspective the advantages of mainstream networks outweigh their disadvantages. Jihadists are also making peace with the idea that the age of hardcore forums may be over. They must now integrate into and influence larger audiences.¹⁶⁹

The future goal of jihad propagators is to create more “invisible” terrorist environments. There are thousands of sports- and leisure time groups on Facebook, which can be infiltrated by jihadist media activists for this purpose. Undercover jihadists are advised not to attract the attention of the administrators of these groups. Suitable, for example, are videos which display the suffering of Muslim prisoners and women at the hand of westerners and Muslim collaborators. Luring subtitles like “You must see it!” or “Best video on Facebook!” shall attract viewers and cause them to click on uploads without awakening any suspicion as regards to the terrorist inclination of the material. This makes it also possible to circumvent the closure of accounts under the accusation of propaganda. Further possibilities to create invisible terrorist environments from a jihadist perspective are Islamic websites that deal with Salafist-Islam, but actually laude global jihad.

While invisible terrorist environments shall attract large numbers of jihad supporters, a further goal is to steer radicalization processes through these environments.

“So what is better, [...] raising the number of jihad supporters and lovers, or reducing them? Jihad supporters on Facebook are growing and the wicked website makes their lives hard. They will embrace jihad forums which are suffering from a lack of members, then go to closed chat rooms and finally some of them will join jihad fronts, such as Abu Dujana al-Khorasani and Abu al-’Ina’ [two venerated suicide attackers who were first active in the Internet].”¹⁷⁰

There seems to be a growing number of terrorists who are strongly influenced by cyber jihad. For example, Khalid al-Dawsari, a Saudi national who studied in the United States, planned to attack several high profile targets in the U.S. in 2010. He had no operational ties to a terrorist group, but was guided by ideas which he obtained online.¹⁷¹ The Fort Hood attacker Nidal Malik Hassan, an army psy-

169 Ibid.

170 Ibid.

171 “Saudi Arabian College Student Arrested by FBI for Attempted Use of a Weapon of Mass Destruction; Allegedly Planning to Attack Hardened and Soft Targets”, Arlington Police

chiatrist who shot more than ten U.S.-soldiers in November 2009, was influenced by traumatic and traumatizing stories of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan and the jihadist Net in parallel. The action-guiding effects of online radicalization are clearly visible in “lone wolf”-attackers such as al-Dawsari, al-Abdali, Uka and Hassan. But one tends to overlook that also members of terrorist cells and groups are heavily influenced by virtual terrorist milieus and networks. They then pass on their ideas and influence others. All European jihadists that planned or executed attacks in the last years watched jihadist propaganda movies. This goes for the German suitcase bombers 2006 as well as the Sauerland-network that planned large-scale attacks in Germany and was arrested in 2007. German jihadists who migrated to Pakistani training camps since early 2009 were strongly influenced by online jihadist propaganda.¹⁷² For, example, 25 years old Rami Makanesi from the “Hamburg travellers-group” had drug-problems and was violent as a teenager, but then found back to faith during Ramadan 2007. In this very sensitive situation, where a believer undergoes a kind of spiritual and physical cleansing, Makanesi watched jihad videos on the Internet. “Those propaganda videos, I would say, do not cast a spell over someone, but draw you right into it.”¹⁷³ Makanesi’s Net-radicalization started with jihad lectures on Paltalk, where other participants directed him to jihad videos on Youtube. Walid Othmani, a French national was member of a European jihad group that travelled to Pakistan in 2008. After his arrest he told French interrogators: “I don’t think I would have left to fight jihad without reviewing these videos [jihad propaganda videos on the French language pro al-Qaeda Website Minbar SOS]. Until shortly before the gruesome murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004, the perpetrator Muhammad Bouyeri was posting hundreds of extremist contributions on the forum marokko.nl.¹⁷⁴ Also the German Pakistani Aleem Nasir, who provided logistical help and recruited for al-Qaeda, was deeply entrenched in the terrorist thought milieu on the Internet.

As a matter of fact, the effectiveness of virtual terrorist milieus is best illustrated by the suicide attacker Taimour al-Abdaly, an Iraqi national who blew himself up in Sweden’s capital Stockholm in December 2010. He was a former DJ,

Department Homeland Security/Special Events Unit – Situational Advisory February 24, 2011, Bulletin No.1102-069-H.

172 Holtmann 2010b.

173 According to an interrogation protocol by the German police that was obtained by the German broadcast network Südwestrundfunk (SWR). See “ReportMainz”, November 22, 2010, “Wie deutsche Islamisten in den heiligen Krieg ziehen“, accessed November 25, 2010, <http://www.swr.de/report/-/id=233454/did=7198346/pv=video/nid=233454/1n4 t4xa/index.html>.

174 See for this example Benschop 2010. Benschop is an expert on the influence of virtual networks of terrorists and teaches at the University of Amsterdam.

seemed well integrated in Great Britain, and was married to an attractive and intelligent woman with three children. Online-jihad researcher Aaron Weisburd pieced together cross-connections of al-Abdaly's Facebook account. In cyberspace al-Abdaly was not a loner, but a member of a virtual terrorist network whose thought-milieu he tapped for inspiration. Al-Abdaly's Facebook account showed that he was a Facebook-friend of a Facebook friend of Samir Khan. Khan is a U.S. citizen currently hiding in Yemen and one of al-Qaeda's most important media operatives.¹⁷⁵ There were three degrees of separation between al-Abdaly and Khan in cyberspace. Moreover, al-Abdaly and Arid Uka from Kosovo, who killed two U.S. soldiers at Frankfurt airport in March 2011, shared a common Facebook friend.¹⁷⁶ In both cases, it is clear that their radicalization was also connected to real-life factors such as radical preachers, crime and violence experienced in the personal environment. But the virtual aspects stick out.

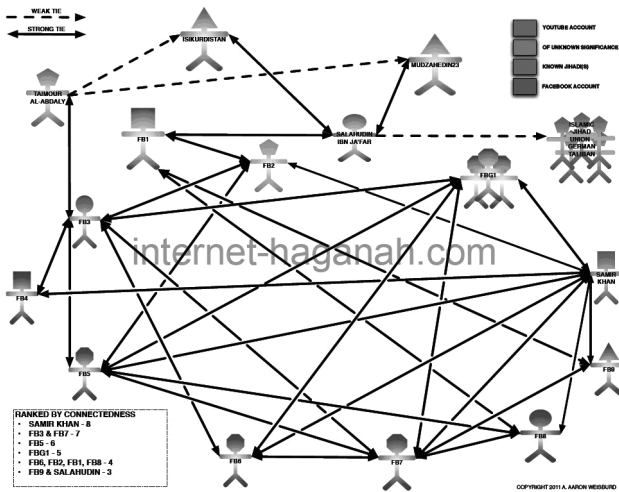


Figure 16: Taimour al-Abdaly-network-Diagram. Source: Aaron Weisburd, Internet -haganah.com, accessed March 8, 2011, <http://Internet-haganah.com/harchives/007103.html>.

According to social network theory, social influence works to distances less than or equal to three tiers or mediators.¹⁷⁷ Indirect links can have a significant

175 As of yet, in how far Taimour al-Abdaly was involved into a physical network remains unclear. His wife Mona seems still of interest to British and Swedish authorities. A man was arrested in Scotland for allegedly being in contact with al-Abdaly. Al-Abdaly probably also received explosives training in the Mosul area of Iraq. Yet, his virtual jihadist presence stands out as a major feature of the case.

176 Aaron Weisburd, "Friends in common: Salahudin Ibn Ja'far and Abu Reyyan/ Arid Uka," accessed March 14, 2011, <http://internet-haganah.com/harchives/007204.html#007204>.

177 Bruggeman 2010: "We should therefore constrain betweenness to paths shorter than or

influence on people. Actors in social networks seem to be influenced in their behavior, attitudes, and performance by other actors to whom they are tied. Intermediaries, mediators and middlemen pass on thoughts and culture within a network. Taimour al-Abdaly's case seems to illustrate that this also applies to cyberspace.¹⁷⁸ Al-Abdaly surrounded himself with a culture of martyrdom, which was enhanced by his virtual connections to a broader jihadist milieu on Facebook.

The graph above by Aaron Weisburd illustrates the cyber jihad network in which Taimour al-Abdaly was involved. Al-Abdaly and Samir Khan, a high-key al-Qaeda media operator, were separated by only three degrees on Facebook. Up to a separation of three degrees the level of influence of central actors on network members remains strong, says social science theory. Al-Abdaly and Khan had no direct virtual contact, but shared a similar thought milieu and ideology like all individuals of the network. Al-Abdaly's virtual links must be seen under this aspect, i. e. their communicative influence. It is noteworthy that the Facebook user by the name of "SALAHUDIN IBN JA'FAR" (centre-right in grey) was also a Facebook-friend of Frankfurt attacker Arid Uka.¹⁷⁹

Conclusion

There are substantial difficulties in coming to terms with the real meaning of modern media and its influences on human behavior. The downplaying of its effects in political and public debates is ample proof of this. However, one of the best arenas to study the influence of communication in cyberspace is the jihadist Internet and its virtual leadership processes. Everyone is together, yet alone. Media jihad online unites with individualized terrorism offline. Both states represent main strategic pillars of contemporary global jihad.

Creating a real-time terrorist is the stated end goal of online propagation, which is reflected in the cyber jihadist motto "qaul wa 'amal" (saying and [then] deed). Numerous jihadist attackers were deeply entrenched in extremist virtual milieus, which guided their thinking and actions. These milieus are created on

equal to three ties in a row, and call it 3-betweenness for short. It thereby fits squarely into Fowler and Christakis' 'three degrees rule,' a stylized fact that various sorts of social influence do not reach further than path lengths of three."

178 Indirect links can have a significant influence on people. Actors in social networks seem to be influenced in their behavior, attitudes, and performance by other actors to whom they are tied. They "choose relation partners on the basis of their behavior and other characteristics." See Snijders 2010.

179 For a further discussion of invisible terrorist environments in the Internet see Holtmann 2011b.

jihad-forums, where propaganda is published for the first time and then spreads all over the Net.

The future danger of online jihad lies in the growing exploitation of mainstream social service providers, as well as the use of mobile phone applications (See Nico Prucha's article in this book) to spread the jihadist message as far as possible. This has two reasons. Firstly, the closure of jihad discussion forums drives online jihadists into larger social service platforms such as Facebook and toward the use of more popular media applications such as Bluetooth. Secondly, the experience of the Arab revolutions, which made an effective use of large online social networks, has been analyzed by jihadists. Their goal is to exploit these networks for jihadist purposes. Cyber jihadists have started to recognize that jihad-forums are encapsulated spaces with little new converts to win. This awareness also impacts on the structure of cyber jihad. The need to revise media strategies requires grassroots-followers to take matters into their own hands and to assume more authority by themselves.

Until now, central organizations have succeeded to present themselves as central leaders of media jihad. But regarding the ever growing power of grassroots-collaboration in the Internet, the influence of central organizations and their media outlets becomes balanced, maybe even overridden by the jihadist grassroots movement. This overturns classical hierarchies and mechanisms of leadership, at least in the Internet.

Self-responsibility, participation and collaboration are the central characteristics of jihadist leadership in cyberspace. Electronic jihad is a satellite network with total flexibility and a multitude of planning divisions, which stimulates decentralized coordination. There are central leaders and dominant ideas in global jihad. However, the mechanisms of the virtual world are different from physical reality. Communicative leadership is highly participative and needs consensual virtual environments in order to work. The most common way to achieve consensus are shared media activities and integration of all participants into mutual concepts. Examples are the creation of virtual hierarchies to substitute for organizational breakups; participative guidance through mutual media activities; distinct jihadist discourses; and the creation of virtual thought milieus that glorify terrorism.

Jihadist virtual networks are especially efficient in steering the thinking and behavior of their participants. There is no centralization of religious-political authority in Sunni Islam, and it is easy to legitimize alternative doctrines. Muslims perceive the Qur'an as the unadulterated word of Allah. Therefore, the text represents an ultimate chain of command, which reaches from Allah down to every single believer. Extremists exploit this idea. They try to enforce the perception of an unquestionable hierarchy based on sacred texts and ideas. Jihad propaganda and leadership in the Internet work on the basis of this principle. An

illustrative example is “Inspire”, an E-magazine published by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Professional media operators like the U.S.-American Samir Khan run and edit the glossy publication. Supporters start discourses around terrorist tactics, ideology and role-models. The actual circle of editors and contributors is quickly transcended, and copy cats start their own publications or contribute to the magazine.

How can virtual jihad be countered? Online jihad cannot be criticized rationally, since it is a largely ritualistic phenomenon. It needs counter-rituals to defuse the message of jihad. However, the Islamic world at this epochal juncture in history is mainly occupied with itself. One can learn from the present social media campaigns of Arab protesters that they are extremely effective in steering social activities toward a certain goal. By this token, Muslims are also the best allies to denounce jihadist terrorism.

It will be a major task for policy makers and agenda setters to lower the impact of online radicalization and devise new policies that acknowledge Islam and regional traditions as integral elements of Muslim political culture. Regarding extremism, one could simply shut down all jihad websites and try to fish every piece of propaganda out of the Net. But a two-tracked strategy may be more helpful. States should use existing laws to prohibit the dissemination of terrorist propaganda from servers that are based on their territories. In addition, media activities around the peaceful aspects of Islam should be supported. Media mass rituals are needed that counter jihad propaganda. Each culture and society strives for a collective and successful representation of itself. Therefore, the ideas of freedom and human rights in Islam should be stressed and media campaigns be supported that openly discuss grievances, but also show that extremists do not tackle grievances. This is a “soft strategy” which includes the communicational targeting of specific discourses. The best solution would be a process unaffected by western influence, which comes from inside Muslim communities. This would be greatly enhanced if western states stop military policies in the Islamic world, the support for repressive Muslim regimes and a one-sided stance in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Without such arguments jihadist ideology will be ineffective.

The Forgotten Swamp Revisited

“The most important to be taken care of is
the protection of the holiness of religion.”
(al-Masri s.d.: 2)

Readers may think the following chapter is just another exercise in academic nitpicking. But since the academic literature on modern Islamic and Muslim phenomena and especially on jihadism still “suffers from a paucity of clear definitions” (Hegghammer 2009: 245) of the terms used in academic literature, it seems to be necessary to rethink the concepts used. The need for clear definitions can be stressed by the jihadists worldview urging clear cut divisions of the chaos of everyday life. As Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi¹ puts it: “the difference of the friends of the merciful [i.e. God] and the friends of the devil” (Nukhba: 52) is of utmost importance for him.

This quotation – and there is ample evidence for this in any other jihadi texts – is an example of the role of religious ideas for the construction of jihadi identity. When talking about jihadism we are talking not only about terrorism², but about *religious* terrorism. As a working definition for religious terrorism we may use what James W. Jones wrote: “I propose that it involves the use of violence, often in symbolic but deadly actions in the service of sacred goals or values.” (Jones 2008: 5) Sacred is to be understood here as relating to human communication with non-human, non-empirical, transcendent, or ‘supernatural’ pole at one side, not as sacredness as an essential part of our definition of religion. The use of violence involved takes place in the context of transnational networks (Reinares 2005). Talking about sacredness leads us to reflect on religion in contemporary societies.

1 Al-Zarqawi quotes in his prison diary a lot of Islamic religious traditions to reflect his situation – and includes a lot of drawings, very interesting examples for the importance of kitsch in jihadi worldview.

2 There is not enough space to follow the endless discussion on terrorism.

Religion and globalization

In the contemporary globalized world religion (and religions) appears more and more in standardized forms, formatted as Olivier Roy (2010) puts it, as a specific (sub-)system of communities, to modify the Durkheimian concept of “moral community”, based on a specific kind of communication. Other subsystems (e.g. politics, economy, science) are thisworldly, stand for the material.

“Put in lightly different terms, the other functional domains are all of *this world*, they are immanent concerns. Religion thereby comes to be more or more sharply, not simply that what is concerned with *the transcendent*, but that which specializes in rendering access to the transcendent through a peculiar type of communication: one in which a symbolic centre of agency represents the transcendent communicating with immanent human partners. So long as one pole of the communication has this *non-human, non-empirical, transcendent, or 'supernatural'* character, the communication may count as religious.³ It is the negative definition of this other might be that gives religion in modern global society its fluidity and ambiguity, allowing the construction of cultural entities as religion if only they can be convincingly established as such. Giving the fluidity, the best way to do that is inductively, but conforming more or less to those cultural systems that already count as religion.” (Beyer 2001: 143–144)

We have to include in our definition the “organic-cultural flows” Thomas A. Tweed is talking about, denoting the interaction of *constraining organic channels* and *shifting cultural currents* (Tweed 2006: 66) as part of the dynamic movements of modern religion(s).

Jihadism uses references to Islamic “cultural systems”, i.e. the tradition of scholarly discussion of Jihad as a violent practice, to build a system of religious communication of its own occupying a well defined space in the fluid sphere of discussions about what it means to be Muslim today. The possibility to produce discourses called religious depends on one factor we may call credibility or authority to proclaim what is Islamic. The jihadist credibility is a potential weakness of any jihadi communication.

This fluidity of discussions and practices produces a need for identity constructions leading to a twofold homogenization: internal and external. The internal homogenization is based on a deculturalized form of religious communication transforming the traditions of the older religious systems into new forms of orthodoxy often established by individuals becoming newer incarnations what Max Weber so aptly called religious virtuosi; the external homogenization producing an orthopractic uniformity of beliefs as religions

³ I will not concentrate on the sophisticated reflections on it within the various religious systems. What concerns me here is the social form of this communication.

having a clergy, institutions, theology etc. Thus new forms of communities emerge, older forms (churches, e.g.) are reconfigured.

For Islam, of Sunni Islam in our context, the process of homogenization has been called by Thomas K. Gugler (2010) *Sunnaization* producing a kind of “Super-Muslim” no more affected by the contexts of local Muslim cultures.

New, pure religious identities require the use of clear symbols, playing the game of religious markers (Roy 2010: 107 – 155). These religious markers may be sartorial, linguistic or, in our case, certain ideas, i.e. the idea of violent jihad as the most important element of true Muslim identity. There are other elements forming the “new jihadi theology” (Lohlker 2006) but all these elements are attached to is violent jihad.

The deterritorialized religious communities today are not only globalizing, at the same time they are producing new forms of locality, “as a structure of feeling” (Appadurai 2001: 119), even at the level of computer mediated communication using the media of the internet.⁴ Part of this (g)localization is the creation of the jihadi online subculture and its diverse communities, fora etc.

So jihadist movements, the jihadi theoretical production, and jihadi use of the media of the internet fit into the overall development of religion today.⁵ But how are we to categorize the practice of jihadi movements, groups, and individuals?

Islamism, jihadism & al. conceptualized

Two of the most interesting contributions to the conceptual discussion are from Thomas Hegghammer (2009) and Gilles Denoeux (2002). Gilles Denoeux tries to drain the swamp” of analytical confusion “surrounding the use of words such as ‘Islamic fundamentalists’ or ‘Islamic radicals.’” (Denoeux 2002: 56) Drawing on scholarly literature on political Islam he tries to present key concepts and issues in “required to analyze political Islam, particularly in its more radical manifestations” (Denoeux 2002: 56 – 57). At first he distinguishes between ‘Muslim’ and ‘Islamic’. Then he discusses ‘Islamic fundamentalisms’ referring to some critical views of this concept: The origin of the term in the cultural context of American Protestantism making it difficult in the context of Islam, the fact that going back to “the fundamentals” is not confined to extremist or radical Islamic circles and the selective use of “the fundamentals” by the people called ‘Islamic fundamentalists’, the suggestion that fundamentalism is a monolithic movement

4 There are other media used by technically less sophisticated people, e.g. audio cassettes or CDs (cf. Appadurai 2001: 118).

5 All forms of religion are not integrated into the process of standardization, but its a phenomenon that is hegemonial.

despite of the diverse thoughts and modes of expressions of the movements discussed, and, finally, arguments that “take into account the critical differences within which these trends have emerged” (Denoeux 2002: 59). As the concept that comes closest to the Western term ‘fundamentalism’ Denoeux then discusses Salafism adding an overview over the development of the Saudi brand of Salafism, called Wahhabism, and its political consequences. ‘Islamism’ or ‘political Islam’ are recent terms coined for movements and ideologies trying “to articulate a distinctly political agenda” (Denoeux 2002: 61) and criticizing the existing order by using Islamic referents. They are, e.g., reflecting on ‘Islamic economy’, an ‘Islamic society’. Though Islamists present “a powerful, comprehensive critique of the West and of what Islamists see as the corrupting political and cultural influence of the West” (Denoeux 2002: 61) on Muslim societies, these movements are genuine modern phenomena, the cadres and ideologues formed overwhelmingly by modern educational institutions and very skilled in using modern media. Denoeux compares Salafism and Islamism stressing the importance of political activity aiming at the transformation and the overall modernity of the Islamist habitus. He says, fundamentalists, i.e. Salafists, “are primarily concerned with issues of morality and personal behavior, and /or with theological issues.” (Denoeux 2002: 62) The “failure of political Islam” (Roy 2004) marked the end of the Islamist project of transformation of state and society and the beginning of neofundamentalism, another concept developed by Olivier Roy. Neofundamentalists, Denoeux says following Roy, are “concerned with grass roots action aimed at the moral regeneration of the individual and the gradual transformation of society into a more ‘Islamic’ one.” (Denoeux 2002: 65–66). Interestingly Denoeux leaves out Salafism as a representative of this trend. Roy himself mentioned the Salafi current. Neofundamentalism for him is characterized only relative to political action, here staying away from it.

In passing Denoeux discusses “radical Islam” or, preferring the plural, “radical Islams” distinguishing “radical Islamic groups, which have had a primarily nationalist and country-specific agenda” (Denoeux 2002: 68) from transnational networks like al-Qa’ida. These networks have identified the United States and the West as its main enemy, but tend “to portray its action not merely as a war against a well-defined, narrowly circumscribed opponent, but rather as a cosmic struggle against evil forces bent on Islam’s destruction.” (Denoeux 2002: 68–69). Though acknowledging a transcendent, non-human dimension Denoeux stops reflecting about it.

Jihadism or, as Denoeux puts it, jihadist Salafism is applied to the movements that emerged during the 1980 s, rose to prominence in the 1990 s and especially after 9/11. “The war in Afghanistan war in Afghanistan (1980–89) served as the incubator for this explosive mixture of Salafi outlook and call to violence.” (Denoeux 2002: 69) The violent Jihad becomes to the jihadist Salafis “through

which the 'Salafi' desire to 'return' to the original message will be turned into reality." (Denoeux 2002: 69) Denoeux then discusses at length the different strategic options for jihadis: to fight the near or the far enemy. He tries to distinguish between jihadist Salafis and Taliban hinting at the importance of the Deobandi influence. Focusing on Middle Eastern Politics he misses to a certain extent the importance of the South Asian (cf. Devji 2008).

Denoeux reflects at length about the difference made between "moderates" and "radicals" in the Islamic camp and closes with thoughts about policy implications. His approach is based on political studies interested in getting insights from the scholarly debate on political Islam and related phenomena since 2002. He seems not to be aware of the specific religious dimensions of the trends he discusses.

Hegghammer, one of the most important researchers in jihadi studies, discusses in his contribution to a volume on Salafism several terms of Arabic origin currently used in academic literature and gaining access to mainstream media: jihadi, Takfiri, Salafi, and jihadi-Salafi. The first three terms are criticized for being imprecise and not adequately suitable for purposes of political analysis – mainly for their theological character. It's a discussion providing interesting insights.

He then turns to the term Salafi-jihadi. Hegghammer criticizes Arabic definitions of this term, referring to the Arabic *Wikipedia*, as "practically devoid of political content" (Hegghammer 2009: 253). The article of *Wikipedia* refers to jihad as an obligation (*fard*), thus pointing to the theologico-juridical discussion on the individual or collective obligation to wage jihad, it refers to the Sharia, to the important Islamic principle of committing right and forbidding wrong, and to Islam in general. We may agree that part of the definition is not political concerns, but important Islamic theological concepts. But: the definition of this *Wikipedia* article stresses the importance of exactly the religious aspects, central for a jihadi identity.

To provide a sound political studies approach Hegghammer advocates a system of preference-based terms as "descriptors which match the principal patterns of behavior displayed by militant Islamic groups more closely than do theology-based terms. This improves our ability to explain and predict the actions and strategies of jihadist groups." (Hegghammer 2009: 261) These terms should "provide a basis for nuanced thinking about the causes of Islamist militancy." (Hegghammer 2009: 261) and facilitate the comparison between Islamic and non-Islamic groups.

Discussing several lines of criticism Hegghammer argues critically against positions stressing the neglect of the "theological dimension of militant Islamic ideology or the social dynamics of violent behavior" (Hegghammer 2009: 263). A theological typology leaves, Hegghammer says, no room "for dynamics of a

religious or theological nature” (Hegghammer 2009: 263). This may be true for a statist conception of theology, but new approaches in religious studies are very well aware of the dynamic nature of religious movements, groups, and individuals, and have developed methods and concepts to deal with the difficulties arising from these dynamics (Jones 2008) or the radicalization of religious groups and subcultures into violence (Kippenberg 2008), making fruitful comparisons with non-Islamic phenomena possible. The typology Hegghammer is certainly useful for the problem of political decisions concerning jihadi activities but will not be able to explain jihadi phenomena in its entirety.

Contrary to other scholars in the field Hegghammer is well aware of a certain religious dimension but tries to integrate this dimension into his political studies approach by declaring that not religion matters, but “ideology matters. However ideology – even religious ideology – is not the same as theology. Islamist has both theological and political dimensions and may be analyzed from both perspectives.” (Hegghammer 2009: 264) This biased view of theology and religion may be based on self-made experts of Islamic theology in the terrorism industry, it nevertheless ignores basic conceptions of religion in contemporary societies and seems unaware of the possibilities to analyze religious thought and practice in other ways than theologically.

Being a scholar in religious and Islamic studies my inclination to religiously based explanations is understandable. But there are more practical reasons to use an approach focusing on religious dimensions of the actions of jihadis without neglecting other aspects of this multidetermined, multifactorial phenomenon. Researchers in the field of new Islamic movements talk about the emergence of religious subcultures as the foundation of a lifestyle motivated by a certain religious ethos (Riesebrodt 2004: 27). Following James W. Jones we might say that the mingling of religion and politics in religiously motivated terrorism (and not only in jihadism) is one foremost challenge of the 21st century. The divine master plan claimed by these subcultures and movements gives them the mandate to act against societies at large and can effectively countered by taking into account this ‘divine’, ‘non-human’, religious dimensions,

“Religious terrorists from every tradition are often motivated by a political theology that fuses moral, religious, and political goals and seeks the reformation of society. So issues of national liberation, resisting domination, and economic justice are often intertwined with and sacralized by religious and spiritual motivations that cannot be ignored if contemporary terrorism is to be understood.” (Jones 2008: 28)

Contrary points of view are based on Robert Papes analysis of a database profiling 462 suicide bombers pointing out that until, 2003, most suicide bombings were conducted not by religious groups but by activists he sees “as strategists making rational calculations for political gains.” (Juergensmeyer

2008: 253) This is a distinction based on the assumption religious actors are not able to make rational calculations, a secularist prejudice demonstrating a surprising inability to understand religions, believers, and their rationality. Religious activists are not merely “religiously motivated madmen” (Juergensmeyer 2008: 253).

Pape has been criticized by Jones for his “tendency to insist on a single motivation” (Jones 2008: 22), i. e. national liberation, and ignoring religious motivations. Even writers supporting Papes view have to admit: “Yet, though religious ideas do not initially provoke the conflicts, [...] they play an important role.” (Juergensmeyer 2008: 253)

In other words: switching from religious language advocating violence to violent action depends on recoding conflicts in a religious language enabling the believers to perceive themselves as threatened by satanic forces, by apocalyptic powers, by Babylon etc. and thus legitimizing violent resistance and changing the way these conflicts will go on. This depends on specific situations, but religious language and symbolism advocating violence is necessary for the process of recoding (Kippenberg 2010).

Somewhat heretically Faisal Devji (2008) points at the supra-political character of movements like al-Qa’ida but denies the importance of its religious aspects. Stressing the global aspect of jihadism and comparing it to other globalized movements he is implicitly hinting at what we called before homogenization and standardization (or Sunnaization) as a results of the process of globalization. To repeat it: Even in a globalized world religion matters.⁶

Which kind of categories may be useful for an approach exploring the religious aspects of jihadi phenomena?

Islam as a category

The first category seems to be, quite naturally, Islam. But:

“Muslimness is an elusive state of being. There are watertight strictures of the theological identity by men, interpreted as the *Sharia*, on the one hand; and the broad political and cultural sense of the self, on the other. Identity, in any case, is a messy affair: shifty, shifting and, eventually, imagined. [...] So what is it to be a Muslim? An inflexible bag of rituals? Or a cultural sense of belonging or a deeper dogma ingrained in your brain?” (Razi 2010: 53)

⁶ It’s not surprising that some scholars think the scholarship on new religious movements is useful to understand individual terrorists and the internal mechanics of jihadi groups (Sedgewick 2007: 16).

So there are some difficulties we encounter on the way to find a definition based on the essence of what is Islam. It may be better not to try this kind of conceptualization to avoid discussions aiming at the Islamicity of terrorist actions.

But there is nevertheless a distinction referring to Islam that is useful. Gilles Denoëux (2002: 57) writes about the terms Muslim and Islamic:

“The two terms are often used interchangeably. For instance one may refer to “Islamic civilization” or to “Muslim civilization”. [...] But there are also more subtle differences in the usage of these two words as adjectives. For instance, one of the leading students of political Islam⁷ observes that he uses “Muslim” when he refers to a fact, a cultural reality, while by “Islamic” he means to convey political intent.”

Following Denoëux (2002: 57) according to this distinction a “Muslim country” is simply a country where most of the inhabitants are Muslims without reference to their religious practices or non-practices, an “Islamic country” is a country where the central concern of the state is to guarantee the conformity of behavior, organization etc. with Islam (whatever is understood as Islamic). A “Muslim intellectual” is an intellectual of Muslim origin, originating from a predominantly Muslim society or community, an “Islamic intellectual” may be used to describe “an intellectual who consciously organizes his thought within the conceptual framework of Islam” (Roy 1994: viii).

Fundamentalism as a concept

The other concept used in our context is fundamentalism. The editors of *Fundamentalism observed* state that the authors of the volume have been uneasy with the term (Marty / Appleby 1991: viii). But for them fundamentalism “is here to stay, since it serves to create a distinction over against cognate but not fully appropriate words as “traditionalism”, “conservatism”, or “orthodoxy” and “orthopraxis”. If the term were to be rejected, the public would have to find some other word if it is to make sense of global phenomena which urgently bid to be understood.” (Marty / Appleby 1991: viii) So the concept of fundamentalism has been constructed to deal with certain phenomena older concepts could not. Twenty years later the problem is in need of a reformulation. This two decades witnessed a distortion of the scholarly discussed concept of fundamentalism into a weapon in the arsenal of defamation and polemics making it doubtful whether it is possible for the term to become an analytical tool again.

There are strong advocates of the concept of fundamentalism (Riesebrodt 2000) but there are still reasons to object to this concept. The main reason for

7 Olivier Roy (R.L.)

objecting is not the fact that the concept of fundamentalism originated from Protestant discussions in the USA in the twentieth century and so a very specific concept determined by specific political, cultural and religious contexts. Concepts can be reconstructed and applied to circumstances other than those they originated from. That is a common scholarly practice.

But the main problem is that fundamentalism is *fundamentally* a theological concept claiming a monopoly on the fundamentals of any religious belief system. Accepting the term fundamentalism means changing the field of discussion from scholarly analysis of religion to theological debates, e.g.: Which part of religious traditions count as fundamental and is to be revered? Which part of the tradition is an abominable innovation? Who is to be followed as the leader into a future when the pure religion is reestablished? How are we to interpret the sources of our religious tradition?

To avoid these pitfalls it is useful to focus on the practice of so-called fundamentalist movements. Fundamentalist movements emerge when societies change and this change is perceived as crisis. This crisis can be survived by returning to the sources of the religious tradition, a sound diagnosis of the reasons for the crisis we are living through and following the right way. What is right (and wrong) is determined by referring to complex theories based on religious traditions (cf. Riesebrodt 2000: 52–57). The movements are stressing the necessity of moral reform of the individual, the internalization of a specific behavior, the need for – in the Sunni Islamic case – for the “Sunnaization” (Gugler) of the individual – and reforming by the reform of the individual self the society. Thinking of this kind of social *cum* individual reform I propose to use the term “reform movements”. These movements have to be categorized by their practice, e.g., political quietist, ethical reform movements, political reform movements, and even violent reform movements. If religiously motivated these movements refer to standardized variants or formatted forms of religion (Roy 2010). What has been called fundamentalism can be reformulated in terms of differences in the general process of standardization of religion supported and practiced by religious reform movements.

Neofundamentalism as a concept

Olivier Roy coined some years ago the term neofundamentalism to analyze certain contemporary forms of Islam:

“By neofundamentalism I mean a common intellectual matrix that can nevertheless be manifested in various political attitudes. If all radical Islamic groups are indisputably neofundamentalist in religious terms, many fundamentalist are simply conservative

and law-abiding, even if they explicitly condemn the westernisation of Islam. I refer here not to a structured movement articulated around a coherent doctrine, but to a form of religiosity that has spread among different milieus. Moderate Muslims call it Wahhabism by referring to the official creed of Saudi Arabia, while most of those involved prefer to call themselves Salafis [...]. But others (like the Tablighi) reject such denominations and simply call themselves Muslims.” (Roy 2004: 232) Their call for the return to the true sources of Islam and the rejection of affiliations to specific groups is not new. “But there are some new elements that make a difference: contemporary neofundamentalism is coping with deterritorialisation – the end of Dar ul-Islam as a geographic entity. Even if it retains a traditional terminology, neofundamentalism deals with a new situation. The discrepancy between, on the one hand, its ‘closed’ terminology and vision, on the other, the totally new situation it addresses is not a contradiction. [...] It has internalised and addressed the changing form of religiosity. [...] it is also dealing with a religion that is no longer embedded in a given society and thus open to reformation.” (Roy 2004: 233 – 234)

Neofundamentalism as fundamentalism is referring to theological concepts, too. So the critique of the concept of fundamentalism applies to neofundamentalism.

Salafism and Wahhabism

In the quotation mentioned above Roy refers to two other concepts: Salafism and Wahhabism. From a religious point of view Salafism

“is viewed primarily as the belief that the historical legacy of the Prophet’s interpretation of the Qur’an as understood by the most eminent authorities belonging to the first three generations of Muslims (al-salaf al-salih) is normative, static and universalistic in nature (in terms of methodology/manhaj and its by-product, the creed/‘aqida). As such, these teachings are to be literally adhered to and imitated in a temporal and spatial vacuum by all subsequent generations of Muslims, primarily by being faithful to a literal and decontextualized Qur’an-Sunna hermeneutic epistemologically and methodologically anchored in Hadith-based literature.” (Duderija 2010: 76)

The main features of the Salafi interpretational model include:

“textually- and philologically-centred interpretational orientation; textual ‘intentionalism’ – the subscription to a voluntaristic view of law, ethics, morality and ontology; belief in the fixed, stable nature of the meaning of the qur’anic text residing in totality in the mind of its Originator, and, as a corollary, the principle of qur’anic semiotic monovalency; decontextualization and the marginalization of qur’anic revelatory background; a ‘voluntarist–traditionalist’ view of the relationship between reason and revelation; textual segmentalism; and the lack of a thematic, value- and aim-centred [...] approach to qur’anic hermeneutics.” (Duderija 2010: 78)

These hermeneutical principles have been used “in order to construct the religious Self and the Other” (Duderija 2010: 78) following the imagined example of

the first Islamic community. Salafis are thus proclaiming a preeminence of Arabic as sacred language. “Yet because of the emphasis on the Qur’an as an Arabic document [...] Arabic itself becomes disproportionately privileged in the creation of a pure Islam.” (Reinhart 2010: 108) This should not be seen as a result of Arab nationalism (Reinhart 2010: 108), mastering the Arabic language becomes another marker of religious identity (cf. Devji 2008) enabling the Salafi believer to understand “the fixed, stable nature of the meaning of the Qur’anic text” (Duderija 2010: 78) by simply reading it.⁸

Salafism is a movement of self reform based on a decontextualized, homogenized idea of what is Islam making it a standardized formula to be applied in the life of its followers. The practice of Salafis is quietist not aiming a political action. But there are political alliances born out of Salafi movements, e.g., the Islamic Salafi Alliance in Kuwait (Brown 2008) or the Umma Party (Lahoud 2008).

One particular brand of Salafism – the Saudi variant – is known as Wahhabism. The adherents not calling themselves Wahhabis the name is drawn from the founder of the movement in the 18th century, Muhammad ibn ‘Abdalwahhab preaching in Central Arabia the return to the true monotheist Islam and turning away from superstitions of every kind. Muhammad ibn ‘Abdalwahhab can be seen as part of the worldwide Islamic reform movement in the 17th to 19th century. His thoughts laid the religious foundations for the subsequent three Saudi states in Saudi Arabia until today. Being criticized and attacked by an internal reform movement and by Salafis of several kinds (including the Salafijihadis; cf. Hegghammer 2010) the Saudi clerical elite is now claiming to be the representative of true Salafism. So Wahhabism may be seen as part of the broader Salafi movement with a specific relation to Saudi Arabia; several Wahhabi scholars are often referred to by other Salafis.

Islamism and political Islam as concepts

As an alternative concept to Salafism the term Islamism⁹ has been coined to grasp ideological forms of Islam, especially that of political Islam (e.g. Lohlker 2004).¹⁰ We may adopt Denoëux’ view that at the core of Islamist ideologies and

8 Even the way of reading sacred texts in modernity has changed (Reinhart 2010: 14–105) becoming the gathering of information not a practice embedded in the routine of life, thus the putatively “fundamentalist” religious act became fundamentally modern.

9 To put it ironically the difference can be seen the length of the beards, Salafis sporting a longer one, Islamist the shorter variant.

10 Recently Fradkin obscured this distinction using the term Salafism for the Muslim Brothers, a movement by the majority of scholars as Islamist (Fradkin 2008).

movements lies the idea of immediately seizing political power to start a complete transformation of Muslim societies. At the most general level adherents of political Islam believe “Islam as a body of faith has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary Muslim world and implemented in some fashion.” (Fuller 2003: xi) The failure of political Islam, Roy wrote about, at least in its putschist form left space for the development of other movements: Islamic parties trying to integrate into the system of parliamentary democracy, moral reform movements, and even “progressive Islamism” like Esack’s (Esack 1997). For these new developments has been coined the term Post-Islamism, meaning tendency to develop new non-political approaches to act within societies and not against (e. g. Schiffauer 2010 for Milli Görüş in Europe), even the creation of an Islamic society of the spectacle (Boubakeur 2010) to adopt the Debordian theory of consumer societies.

Sufism

Often Sufism, Islamic mysticism, is regarded as the antithesis of “radical Islam”. There are differences among the diverse trends of Sufism, contemporary and historic, and jihadists, Salafis, Islamists etc., but there are also Sufic elements discernible in these contemporary currents despite a certain enmity against Sufism. To complicate our search for “clear definitions” we might mention that the reformist zeal we find among Salafis can also be found among Sufis, followers of the devotional and mystical tradition of Islam, e. g., in Indonesia (Day Howell 2010). Even a Salafi-jihadi orientation can be found among groups named after the Sufi tradition of the Naqshbandiyya in Iraq (Bakier 2008).

The words jihadi, jihadism etc. are used throughout this chapter and have been discussed talking about the approaches of Denooux and Hegghammer. Evidently these categories are preferred by the author of this chapter. But what is meant by “jihadism”?

Jihadism as a concept

The term jihadism is the shortened form of Salafiyya-jihadiyya or jihadiyya-Salafiyya, terms discussed for instance by Hegghammer. It’s a concept based on the methodology of Salafism and the centrality of violent Jihad, “striving to fight the tyrants and their helpers, the Jews and their allies to free the Muslims and their lands” (Maqdisi 1430: 273) as al-Maqdisi once put it.

From an analytical point of view we have to accept that there – leaving aside peaceful concepts of Jihad as self improvement relevant to most Muslims – there

are other concepts of Jihad prone to legitimize terrorist violence: Jihad as self-defense and Jihad as offensive warfare (van der Krogt 2010).

The classical doctrine of Jihad was formalized around the tenth century CE as part of the general process of formalization in the realm of Islam. It became part of the broader framework of Sharia related thinking. This doctrine codified rules of conduct of war:

“Since one of the motives behind codification was the need to answer practical questions as they arose, sharia rules on jihad naturally reflected the conventions of warfare of the times, which were similar in Muslim and non-Muslim worlds. Among the practical questions that were addressed were the division of plunder and the circumstances under which prisoners might be ransomed, enslaved or executed. The sharia rules also reflected the geopolitical circumstances of the times, and so included an assumption of a state of intermittent but more or less continuous warfare between Muslim and non-Muslim states [...] No real attention was paid to the justification for, or the objectives of, jihad: its fundamental objective was, fairly obviously, victory. In its classic formation, then, sharia doctrine on jihad was not so much about war and peace as about the conduct of war—in Western terms, *jus in bello* rather than *jus ad bello*. It was a mixture of the Army Regulations and the Geneva Conventions, appropriate for the circumstances of the times. Developments in international relations gradually reduced this classic doctrine to virtual irrelevance.” (Sedgewick 2007: 8)

In modern times five varieties of Jihad may be distinguished to modify the categories of Rudolph Peters (1979): Jihad as propaganda, modern defensive Jihad, anti-colonial Jihad, pacifist Jihad and jihadist offensive Jihad. The discussion of these varieties of Jihad often lack the sophistication of older debates of Islamic religious scholars.

There are several other key concepts in jihadist Jihad, e.g. loyalty and disavowal (*al-wala' wa'l-bara'*), accusation of other Muslims of apostasy (*takfir*), the pledge of allegiance to the leader (*bai'a*), the belief in one God (*tauhid*) and the need to establish his supremacy in all worldly affairs, apocalyptic ideas, paradise, even wonders (*karamat*) have been ascribed to the fighters in Jihad (for details cf. Lohlker 2009, Brachman 2009). The regulations for military actions are another important issue; the question whether military Jihad is to be an individual (*fard 'ayn*) or communal duty (*fard communal*) is important for the new jihadi theology (Lohlker 2006). Questions of Islamic dogma are discussed in details in jihadi texts, too.¹¹

Most of these concepts are common for all Muslims, but jihadis proclaim they are the only group that is able to realize the true rule of Islam on earth, being the “victorious group” (*al-ta'ifa al-mansura*), an eschatological concept with a long

11 Most famous may be al-Maqdisis text on *'aqida*, but there is a lot of other texts by individual authors or organizations (cf. <http://tawhed.ws/c?i=28>), some of them by Salafi/Wahhabi authors.

history. And this “victorious group” is the jihadi current, the only “group with religious knowledge and leading [violent] jihad” (al-’Iraqi 1425: 6).

There are other elements important for the jihadi movements, groups and subcultures. We may mention the genuine transnationality emerging in the specific Afghanistan–Pakistan situation, or especially Peshawar, called the “place of hybridization” (Rougier 2008: 80), transcending the national and ethnic boundaries of extremist Islamic groups. The transnationalization of jihadism is still increasing and by now the former Arabocentric jihadi current became a multiethnic network.

The androcentric structure aims at building a weak identity depending on collective structures of the jihadi groups. If these structures are weakened or destroyed jihadis fall into a black hole, their imagined solid and hardened bodies disintegrate, flowing apart (Lohlker 2009, 2006, 2002).

The jihadis themselves are aware of the differences of contemporary Islamic movements. Nobody else put it in a more neutral way than the “architect of global Jihad”, Abu Mus’ab al-Suri (Lia 2008; Holtmann 2009). In his book “My Concise View on the Jihad in Algeria” he numbered several and organizations of the Algerian Islamic movement: the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and its components the Students Group in the tradition of the Maghrebi Reformism of Malik Bennabi (1905 – 1973), a group of followers of the Salafi movement, lead by ’Ali Belhadj, later a leader of the FIS, the Movement for an Islamic State, *following the thought of the jihadiyya-Salafiyya*, a group of independent Islamic preachers, hundred thousands of ordinary Muslims joining the FIS. Outside the FIS were the Muslim Brothers, the branch of the international organization in Algeria, the local Algerian Muslim Brothers, the traditionalist Salafis, following the ideas of the Saudi Salafi preacher Rabi’ al-Madkhali (b. 1931), *the militant Salafi Youth, one faction of the Movement for an Islamic State staying outside the FIS* for its participation in democratic elections and the Algerian Arab Afghans¹². (Suri 2004: 11 – 12) Very briefly al-Suri is hinting at the theoretical/theological differences of these groups. It is evident that for him there is a jihadi consciousness about the core element makes the jihadi tendency different: the focus on military Jihad (then in Afghanistan, Algeria, and globally). Al-Suri mentions two factions of the Movement for an Islamic State, followers of “the thought of the jihadiyya-Salafiyya”, acknowledging internal divisions based on tactical grounds.

Recently these ideological divisions and internal schisms inside the jihadi currents are getting more attention than before in scholarly literature (see the articles in Moghaddam / Fishman 2010). This leads us to stress the heterogeneity of the jihadi currents with its flows, swirls, eddies etc. This heterogeneity will

12 A label for former Arab fighters in Afghanistan returning to their countries of origin – if possible.

increase in the process of embedding transnational jihadism in local or regional insurgencies (Maghreb, Somalia, Yemen, Xinjiang etc.) while continuing to act and think on a transnational level.

It is not a question of “labels and more labels.” (Rumi 2010: 54) but of different spheres of analysis. The political dimensions of jihadism are to be analyzed in terms of the political preferences of the actors, but ignoring the religious character of jihadi communication obscures central elements of the discourses produced by the jihadi-Salafi tendency and especially the function of the concept of military Jihad as a religious marker in a still emerging jihadi-Salafi global subculture. To be added is a theory able to grasp the implications of the practice of and the communication about religion in the media of the internet. To focus solely on the political aspect of jihadism makes it difficult to develop alternative religious views of Islam, necessary to counter radicalization into violence as clearly demonstrated by exit programs e.g., in Singapore (Lohlker 2009: 189sq.) that grew to “a full-fledged programme trying to ‘negat(e) misunderstood theology” (Abuza 2009: 202). Abou El Fadl puts it slightly different when he writes that common social, socio-psychological or political explanations of the radicalization into violence of Muslims, “do not adequately explain the theological positions adopted by radical Islamic groups, or how violence can be legitimated in the modern age. Further, none of these perspectives engage the classical tradition in Islamic thought regarding the employment of political violence, and how contemporary Muslims reconstruct the classical tradition. How might the classical or contemporary doctrines of Islamic theology contribute to the use of terrorism by modern Islamic movements?” (Abou El Fadl 2001: 29) Hence a thorough knowledge of contemporary and historic Islamic thought is indispensable to open ways out of jihadi terrorism, to block ways into it, and to develop counter-strategies. jihadi theology is obviously not very valuable from a theological point of view and poor in comparison to the older Islamic tradition, but it is a somewhat emblematic thought linked to the history Islamic theological in a broader sense – this can be easily proven by a look on internet platforms like *Minbar al-tawhid wa’l-jihad* –, and a counter strategy has not to be seen only in a political, military, social or economic perspective, but also a religious one has to be borne in mind – in close cooperation of Muslims and non Muslims.

YouTube Jihad: A Rhetorical Analysis of an Islamist Propaganda Video

Despite operating own Internet sites, activists of jihadi¹ groups are more and more using neutral platforms like YouTube to convey their ideals and ideas to potential sympathizers. YouTube clips are often less aggressive and mostly parts of longer original productions that can be found on jihad websites.²

This paper peruses one YouTube jihadi video³. The main focus will be the video's message and its rhetoric,⁴ i. e. the argumentative strategy employed to transport his message. Analyzing this video, the two rhetoric main questions shall be answered: What is the rhetor (author) trying to convince the audience of? And: How is he doing that? I argue that jihad propaganda is based also on the ethos⁵ dimension of the rhetor, i. e. the jihad propaganda's success may be sometimes drawn rather from credibility and sympathy than logical argumentation.

1 What jihad is will not be discussed here. A simple definition might be: Struggle for the right cause (that can be in war but also in keeping one's self on the right path). See: Jihad in: The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Leiden. Jihad is not uncontroversial as shows for ex. the fatwa of Sheikh Tahir ul Qadri, 2010. Minhaj-ul-Quran International (MQI) UK.

2 Lohker 2009.

3 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IS359YXh0HE&feature=related>.

4 There are numerous definitions and concepts of rhetoric. In this paper I chose to follow the Aristotelian definition as reconstrued by Perelman, i. e. rhetoric not as beautiful words but as technique to build the most convincing arguments enabling the author (called rhetor) to achieve his communicative aim. A rhetoric case is whenever a person (or many people as cooperated authors) is trying to influence an audience. Cf. Knappe 2000.

5 Arguments shall here be analyzed according to: ethos, pathos, and logos.

What does the author intend to demonstrate?

Who is the rhetor?

This YouTube video has at least two rhetors: The first is the young man featured in the video. He conveys his message speaking directly into the camera. The second rhetor is the person (alternatively group or institution) who produced the video. She⁶ chose which parts of the interview to display, its music and effects. She is apparently the main rhetor although she remains hidden behind the first rhetor.

Both rhetor levels have to be analyzed separately to understand their action and effect: How do they aspire to impact on the audience? How effective do they convey their message? And in particular: How is rhetor2 exploiting rhetor1 for her purposes?

The first rhetor is Abu al Ina al Muhajir (pseudonym). The video shows no details that could help to identify him precisely. He seems to be around 25 years old and his accent indicates he originates from the Arabian Peninsula. The second rhetor is Al Furqan Media.⁷ Its logo is portrayed on the left upper side of the screen. The logo of Al Furqan alternates with the logo of Dawlat al Iraq al Islamiya.

The addressed audience

Anybody clicking on this YouTube video is either randomly watching it, searching through keywords for similar clips and then referred to this clip from the list of related videos (coincidence- interest), or an “expert” looking for jihadi videos.

Experts are most likely not the main target group addressed through YouTube as they find much more material searching specialized Internet sites. However, the target addressed viewer is a definite one and has at least following characteristics: Arabic language skills, a basic understanding of Islamic belief systems and interest in an alternative viewpoint on jihad (different from what mass media propagates).

In particular young – Internet is yet mostly a youth medium – Muslims from Arab countries and second and third generation Arab-Muslim immigrants in

6 I'll use the feminine pronoun for the second rhetor in order to avoid confusion.

7 Al Furqan Institute for Media Production is one of al Qaeda media organizations that operate inside Iraq. It is “the primary media production center for ISI [Islamic State of Iraq]/Al Qaeda.” so a recent Radio Free Europe Study.

Europe might be the main target group on YouTube for this kind of videos: 1. They know at least some keywords and concepts of Islam. 2. They speak Arabic. 3. They are experienced in internet communication.



Description of the Video

The present video has a length of 10:40 minutes and is titled “Wassiyatu muhajid qabla istishhadihi bidaqaiq” (Last Will of a mujahid few minutes before his martyrdom). The video shows an Arabic speaking man defending jihad and explaining why he is about to do a suicidal attack. The video is part of a serial production of Al Furqan Media i.e., there are on YouTube similar videos, featuring other jihadi. All such videos use the same layout, cut etc and have mostly the same parts.

Video parts:

1. 0 till 0:15 Title/Nashid⁸1
2. 0:15 till 1:10 Images of the parting/rhetor1 commenting +Photo+ background: Nashid
3. 1:11 till 1:51 Images depicting the parting/Nashid2
4. 1:52 till 2:00 In the car (that is supposed to explode) rhetor1 commenting+ background Nashid2
5. 2:01 till 2:55 Speech rhetor1+Nashid2
6. 2:56 till 3:10 Title Alwasiya + Nashid3
7. 3:11 till 3:53 Speech: Risala Tahridiya I
8. 3:54 till 5:00 Speech: Risala T. II (story of Umair)
9. 5:01 till 5:32 Speech: Risala III to the parents.
10. 5: 33 till 8:29 Speech: Risala IV
11. 8:31 till end film Nashid4 in Meeting

⁸ Nashid is a song using few or no music instrument.

The video seems incomplete on YouTube as it ends abruptly. Furthermore videos of the same series have another last part: The *tanfid* (execution) including a suicidal attack portrayed and commented.

The message

The message of this video is unambiguously pro jihad and in particular in favor of martyrdom missions. Abu al Ina Al Muhajir is speaking about his own *istishhad*⁹ and his happiness to conduct it. He invites other Muslims to follow his example. In a large part of the video he justifies jihadis.

Through rhetor1 rhetor2 conveys the same message: Invitation towards jihad, apology of suicide attacks and justification of the jihadist.

How are the rhetors doing that?

According to Aristotle the three main ways for persuading and impacting on any audience are: 1. Logos: rational reasoning, 2. Pathos: emotional appeal, and 3. Ethos: the portrayed character and reputation of the speaker¹⁰; his *Image*. In other words, those three ways are: 1. Convincing through clear informing and arguing, 2. Influencing through subtle or open pathos and 3. Through showing the speaker is credible, authentic and trustworthy. These are interwoven strategies. How does this apply to the video?

Logos: The arguments

i. In the spoken words of the jihadi

The only speaker¹¹ in this video is Abu Al Ina'Al Muhajir. The following lists the main arguments brought forward by him during the video:

9 Istishhad is martyrdom. Istishhadi is basically shahid (martyr), only it is more prudent concept: Since only God can accept or deny the martyrdom, only God can know who is a real shahid and who not. So the form Istishhadi says he is doing the act of istishhad (sacrificing himself) without pretention to decide he is a shahid.

10 Aristotle, Rhetoric.

11 Even if he tries and often succeeds to speak classical Arabic, his dialect is still dominating. As soon as he begins to talk more quickly it becomes difficult to follow for people who are not from his region.

In (2):

1. What is awaiting the good ones by God (means after death) is better than life.
2. The devil is playing on us making us think we shouldn't do the right things.
3. Hurry up to God as Moses did. He explained his hurry to God with the words: "and I hastened to You, my Lord, that You be pleased" as reported in the Qur'an.¹²

His words in part I are all references to texts and ideas Muslims generally know. He merely underlines the same religious and cultural background shared by the addressed audience and the speaker. This could be interpreted also as a reminder for the viewer not to forget basic Islamic values. The citation¹³ 3 is not necessarily a plausible argument since anyone who knows this part of the Qur'an realizes Moses has been wrong to hurry up and besides, the whole story has no connection to death or jihad.

In (5):

1. The jihadi way is a great blessing for Muslims.
2. This is happiness! I never was as happy as I am now that I'm doing it.

In this part also, he claims, asserts and reminds without theological proofs¹⁴. The most fascinating aspect of this part is that he ascertains his personal happiness after the motto: Tried and true! Affirming his feelings, he discloses a new dimension that enables him to exercise significant influence as outlined in the ethos paragraph.

In (8):

1. To mother and father: You should have patience (sabr).
2. Martyrdom is a great opportunity.
3. We'll be reunited in paradise (I'll testify for you to get there- shafa'a¹⁵)

The speech to his parents is obviously directed to parents of all jihadis and its arguments can be cited against any unconvinced or sad mother and father of any

12 [20:84].

13 Citing Qur'an, Hadith and stories of the "salaf assalih" is in conformity with Islamic traditional rhetoric of sermons since no religious "do's or don'ts" can be build without those authorities.

14 There are many Qur'an Sure and Hadith Texts that can be considered clear proofs of the duty of jihad.

15 Shafa is a special ability that, following Muslim belief, the prophet and some very special people - like martyrs - will have on the judgment day. It is the permission to ask God for forgiveness and paradise for other people (family, friends etc).

istishhadi. He reminds of patience, which is a high praised value for Muslims, and of reward that not only the jihadi benefits from but any person he loves and prays for (Shafa'a)

In (9):

1. The story of the sahabi¹⁶ who couldn't even wait the time to eat 3 dates to die. He paraphrases that story in colloquial language: If someone told you about a woman and all you desire is awaiting her somewhere, would you go directly there or wait? This analogy explains his impatience to testify as martyr.

The analogy in Part 8 is probably the strongest argument he puts forward. As the sahabi who couldn't wait to die, he also can't wait to die and enter paradise. How can he hesitate being aware of all that is awaiting a martyr?

In (10):

1. Stop propagating wrong and negative images of jihadis.
2. They left everything they had in life for Allah's sake to defend the Muslims, us, and the ("Arad" of) besmeared women- naming two examples.
3. Islam began as a stranger and will become a stranger again: We are those strangers! (Hadith)¹⁷
4. Mujahidin pray, fast, remember and speak of God and that he realized while living with them.
5. The actions of the mujahidin are considered excellent as Abu hurayra¹⁸ said: The reward of what they do is higher than any other (Hadith cited incorrect)¹⁹

The testimony in favor of the jihadi shows he is aware of anti-jihad propaganda. For the first time in this video he is responding to arguments contra jihad. His description of the jihadi is full of praise. The two citations are meant to support his argument.

In the first case, however, the "strangers" hadith is too vague and too general

16 A sahabi (pl. sahaba) is a companion of the prophet. They might have been close to the prophet as Abu Bakr or have seen him for a short time. In this case it is the story of Umair bin Hamam. The story is, during the battle of Badr, Umair bin Hamam picked up some dates and began eating. Suddenly he said, "It will be too late if I remain alive to finish all these dates." He put down the dates and started fighting until he died.

17 A well-known hadith that nearly anyone can interpret for its own purpose: "Islam began as a stranger and, then, it will return as it began. Then bliss to the strangers!"

18 Abu Huraira (603–681) was a companion of the prophet and an important narrator of Hadith.

19 This hadith figures in the "Sahih el bukhari". It is narrated by Abu Huraira: I heard Allah's Apostle saying, "The example of a mujahid in Allah's Cause – and Allah knows better who really strives in His Cause – is like a person who fasts and prays continuously..."

to be clearly pro- jihad and in the second case he confuses the prophet's words with the words of Abu Huraira and cites them incorrect.

ii. In the Anashid

This Video contains 4 Anashid²⁰ which come to the fore for 3:20 minutes and as background for another two minutes. The last sequence of the video is a 2:10 minutes long nashid video recording which displays a group of mujahidin sitting around a nashed as he is singing. The songs contain clear messages and come to the fore for circa 1 / 3 of the total video time. The following is a translation of the main parts of these songs.

First song

The first song is a 15 seconds part of a certainly longer song saying:

"...the ones, who, with the horses, reached the thrones (arch) of the non-Arabs (A3ajim)

The word is up to the strong men (sawarim) that the injustice might be removed (tustarada l madalem)..."

This is either the "title song" of the producing institution or the motto of the series. Its main message is: Here the strong men come – or: this video is about the strong men stepping up for justice.

Second song

"Sabilou Allah" 40 sec.

"They call death, may it come – the way of God is the sweetest of all.

They are away from badness (danaya) and from the merchandises of the Bad (mafassid wa mujun) "

Third song

"La budda" 15 seconds

"The expensive dowry (mahr) is essential,

so you can unite with the women of paradise (Hur al 'Ain) "

The nashid reminds of the necessity of Istishhad to be rewarded by marrying the Hur.

Fourth song

"Sabran ya nafssi" 2 minutes

"Patience o my soul (nafs)!

20 Music and songs can have as well logos- as pathos dimension. The pathos dimension is when it serves emotional influencing of the listener (soft music to calm etc). The logos dimension is the one of the song words when they contain a message.

And all parts (rihab) of Quds (Jerusalem) are screaming out loud!
 Patience then my way is made of fire
 And the hur are calling happily? (birridwan)
 I remember when I said goodbye (wadda3tou)
 And you cried for me, you said, my son, don't break my heart with longing (ashwa9)
 And I left because I saw all this unbelief (kufr) winning terrain in my land
 I took my weapon and flag (liwa') and I began to fight the enemies
 I seek heaven: and I sing and read the Qur'an in the right way (rattilou)
 I will meet there my spouse and children, and ... my mother and ... brothers”

The last song is a summary of the reasons motivating mujahidin to leave their homes. The song names several stereotypes: Mujahidin depart due to injustice and kufr in their own land or in the destination land (like the Quds) and because of the promised rewards in paradise. The jihadi proceeds on a path of fire but it is the right way as he continues reading the Qur'an, respecting its adab etc.



Pathos: The emotional appeal

i. On the rhetor1 level

1. “Wa Allah”:

“I swear by God” are the most used words in this video. “Wa Allah” is a common way in Arabic to indicate a specific importance of the spoken words. People swear by Allah to underline their honesty not only in religious contexts, but in daily life as well. The consensus is, the lesser you use this phrase the better.²¹ More skilled and sophisticated preachers do not need to swear often.

One plausible explanation for these strong expressions can be found in the

²¹ Based on the principle of “La taj'alou Allah 'ourdatan liaymanikoum” (prohibition of swearing and too often).

dialect of his homeland. Some Arabic dialects, like the one spoken in the Arabic peninsula, are using swearing formulas more frequently.

A second reason might be grounded simply in his personality: A desire to demonstrate his enthusiasm might have made him forget the non-swearing manners.

Another explanation is that he might have never learned it, which could be an indication of his origins and time of engagement as jihadi.

In any case, from a rhetorical point of view, this abundance of pathos by numerous swearings might have a contra-productive effect on the more educated participants of his audience.

2. Smiling and demonstrating happiness:

Staged bliss is a well-known and often used way by Islamist preachers to demonstrate they're at peace with themselves (cf. Osama bin Ladin's permanent smile). There is a long preacher tradition of acting as someone who is at peace with himself, to convince the audience of their moral superiority and trust in God.

3. Anger and indignation:

Speaking of the dishonored Arab Muslim women, the author intends to manipulate the emotions of the audience and spark anger. He specifies the name of two women and the name of the rapist once and the number of them in the other case to portray their suffering more detailed.

The pathos strategy used by the jihadi can only be chosen by an inexperienced and relatively naïf person (e.g. his ideas of paradise, swearing very often and seeming exaggerate angry when talking about two rapes).

This, however, characterizes the featured aspect in this video. The second rhetor is using this to "catch" the viewer's attention. This means she calculated that there are similar people in the audience. This gives us more information about the addressed audience as stated in the beginning: The addressed viewer too is naive and kind of "immature"²²

ii. On the rhetor2 level: Audiovisual effects

The camera is zooming in and out as in latest video productions. It is not static, which gives the pictures more vivacity.²³ This can be interpreted as an attempt to make the audience feel closer to the jihadi.

22 On similar videos the characters of the featured mujahidin are very different and so probably, the target audience. Analyzing other such videos and comparing the results would definitely help draw a complete picture of this kind of propaganda.

23 Video rhetoric. Cf. latest research currently carried out by Knappe.

The slow motion of several scenes – for example when the jihadi says goodbye to his companions – serve to amplify the emotional appeal.

The chosen songs are melancholic and praising the actions of the mujahidin. There is plenty of pathos in the words as seen in the lyrics translations above as well as in the melodies and the music.

Ethos: the Image of the rhetor

The second rhetor is behind the camera. She invisible, but all that can be seen in this video is her work: she constructed a coherent and “attractive” image of a young self-confident mujahid. She portrayed him embracing his companions before leaving for the attack, listening to the singer with a weapon in his hand and smiling most of the time. She used his words and his efforts for an own pleasant image in the interviews to produce – with digital technique and her own concept – the final image of the jihadi figure, his ethos.

A highly important dimension of this ethos is credibility. The young man is about to die for what he is preaching.²⁴ Saying that any Muslim should fight and die for Islam just before the speaker does it himself strengthen highly his words. In Arabic many proverbs praise “saying and doing” i. e., following one’s words with corresponding actions. Islam too renders all honors to those people acting as they preach. Therefore, for an Arab or Muslim audience, this ethos aspect is highly impressive.

Another aspect of Abu al Ina’s ethos is that he acts convincingly naive: Knowing few religious texts, exaggerating emotional reactions and seeming simply happy. Naivety (that can easily be confounded with innocence) might not be the most attractive quality, but it earns surely more sympathy than the stereotypical image of the wicked or nervous fanatic.

It is the ethos of Abu al Ina al Muhajir, even if he obviously knows few (for a part of the audience) and even if his argumentation is not sophisticated, that might still convince some. Doing what he preaches and seeming so enthusiastic about it are the main features of this figure. Those two ethos elements are the rhetorical keys of this video, i. e. in case this video will influence someone, it will be due to those two aspects.

²⁴ One could question this and consider the video a fake but this is irrelevant regarding the findings about its impacts on viewers in case it does affect them.

Conclusion

Studying how this video is trying to convince of the jihad message, tells much about whom and how this video is supposed to influence. It is interesting to see that, surprisingly, this whole video lacks any strong theologically established argument. This shows that the jihad propaganda doesn't *always* need *strong* theological fundament – At least not for all addressed audiences. The producers of this video believed the target audience is easier via ethos than via logos to be reached and therefore used sympathy, authenticity and credibility more than theological grounded argumentation.

Analyzing more videos is necessary to have a clearer idea of the internet jihad propaganda; it would show which other rhetorical strategies exist, how often they are used, on which channels they can be found and for which audiences.

Nico Prucha¹

Worldwide Online Jihad versus the Gaming Industry Reloaded – Ventures of the Web

“In a similar way, thanks to the Internet, there is no shortage of individuals who want to be the next al-Qaeda Idol.”²

“What makes the US-forces best: We can put accurate fire on our enemy. Look at where we are going, don’t show anything to the enemy. Again, that is how we use cover and that is how we are going to go ahead to use cover in this game as well. We always want to make sure we are using these things using real-world tactics because our game is made of real-world tactics [and will] help you survive.”³

With abundant jihadist material freely available online and with an ever present crowd of sympathizers at hand, the nature of al-Qa’ida’s (AQ) spheres on the internet have changed, adapted, increased and simply synchronized with the technical developments of the World Wide Web over time. Independent of AQ’s actual size and its operational status, the genre, the corpus, the narrative of its online published jihadist materials remain both active and effective. Pseudo AQ members and sympathizers can have a double life, adhering to the jihadist narrative and iconography online while remaining – more or less – subjugated to their individual surrounding and social environment. This phenomena, described as “homegrown radicalism” or “homegrown terrorists”, if decisive enough to attempt to undertake actual operations in the real, offline, world, is certainly the next major burden for security agencies. As Jarret Brachman and Alex Levine put it, “there is a lower barrier for entry to becoming a practicing extremist on the Internet than there is in the real world” (Brachman/Levine 2011: 32). Citing a posting of the member “AbdulMatin” (aka “Abu Sayyaf”) of the English-language *Islamic Awakening Forum*, Brachman and Levine further

1 The author would like to thank Terry Pattar for reviewing the article and for his never-ending patience.

2 You Too Can Be Awlaki!, Jarret Brachman and Alix Levine, <http://jarretbrachman.net/?p=1157> (11.02.2011, this date applies to all links in this document, unless otherwise noted).

3 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zgakP9ckIq0> – David Tractenberg is a military consultant with combat experience for the gaming industry. In this video, he introduces the first-person-shooter “Breach” which innovatively uses real-world-physics, enabling players to use real-world military tactics.

underline the need to carefully watch and monitor the internet in all its aspects in regard of online-radicalization:

“Islam is not about big talk, those who engage in it in life and esp. online without backing it up are deficient in one sense or another, you can see it clearly when people say things to extreme you have no doubt that this is just an outlet for their frustrations. Oh you who believe why do you say that in which you do not do? It’s easy to live a double life these days – a virtual life and a real one.” (Brachman/Levine 2011: 32)⁴

As AQ & co⁵ are utilizing the internet to its outmost means, the intention of this article is to provide the reader with some observations of this *modus operandi* and to provide a comparison with another, similarly adventurous as well as industrious group online: The worldwide Gaming Industry (GI). As the internet, with all its channels and by all its means, is open to anyone and any organization, it provides a public room for followers and members of any genre.

“Individuals can openly and loudly cheer for al-Qaeda’s ideology by replicating its content in the form of videos, audio files, composite images and monographs.”

The most important aspect, however, as Brachman and Levine further note, is that

“beyond replicating content, users can actually replicate themselves, or at least virtual projections of themselves. They can register an unlimited number of accounts on social networking websites. They can start as many blogs as they want and tweet without constraint” (Brachman/Levine 2011: 34)

Therefore, it may be surprising – and surely somewhat controversial – to compare the worldwide online jihad with another avant-gardist, in a purely technical stance, sphere of the internet who professionally and innovatively promote their content online (=publicly). Paired with an attempt to ‘recruit’, at least ‘bind’ and somewhat ‘indoctrinate’ users, the (GI) deploys pop-cultural artwork and slogans on all channels of the internet. Ranging from classical websites, to forums, blogs, gaming platforms and all outlets of the social media, users reproduce within and without ‘official’ webspaces. The GI’s mechanisms to use the Internet are closely related to how another technically adept generation

4 Brachman and Levine provide the source of the following posting by AbdulMatin, “Abu Sayyaf” as: *Islamic Awakening Forum*, November 2008, <http://forums.awakening.com/f18/abu-sayyaf/18624/index3.html>, (accessed November 1, 2010).

5 By al-Qa’ida & co I comprehend and grasp ideological related sunni jihadi groups such as the “Islamic Army of Iraq” (<http://iaisite.org/>), “Jama’at Ansar al-Sunna” (Iraq – <http://www.ansar11.org/>), the Somalia based Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahidin (active primarily within AQ affiliated jihad-forums) and other torrents. This includes various propaganda subgroups directly related to AQ, such as – for example – the Sada al-Malahim Media Foundation (al-Qa’ida on the Arab Peninsula, Yemen), al-Fajr (Qa’idat al-Jihad (global)) or al-Furqan (Islamic State of Iraq, AQ in Iraq).

understands and considers the internet, namely the followers, the armchair jihadists and actual fighters, bomb makers and the whole leadership caste of AQ. Together with user input and user generated content, which is more than welcome and a logical evolution of the participation enabled internet. While AQ sympathizers define the internet as the new technology for modern missionary work and in order to “convey jihadist deeds into a sophisticated phase, enabling us to compete and to successfully challenge the media of the enemies” (al-‘Amili 2010),⁶ the GI is part of a young medium that dwells within the spheres of its innovative global multiplayer games. Both groups move within their individual specific genre-based cluster or web-genre (Stein / Meyer zu Eissen 2006).⁷

The sympathizers of the GI as much as of AQ or any other online genre use all available channels of the contemporary internet for consumption. AQ primarily uses online forums for its sympathizers and adherents as platforms for exchange and as the first go-to areas to acquire the newest jihadist propaganda (‘official’ writings, statements, guidelines and, most important, *jihad* videos). Moreover, AQ also uses social media sites such as Facebook (personal profiles and groups) or YouTube (individual users and channels) to promote its ideology and reasoning. The GI does this as well, while online forums of forthcoming games are created where its fans and potential buyers acquire the newest info and development status while gaming companies just as much promote its products by all means of the web with web-based advertisement: professionally made pictures, trailers, gameplay movies on YouTube; advertisement on social media sites. Fans of either genre have reactionary abilities by producing their own videos or pictures favoring their individual genre. For the GI this includes fan-made-movies of popular games, such as Valve’s “Left 4 Dead”⁸, in which a group of four survivors team up against hordes of attacking zombies.⁹ Some highly devoted fans have uploaded an “official teaser with actual footage for the upcoming

6 Abu Sa’ad al-‘Amili is a regular contributor within jihadist forums, publishing primarily for a media group calling itself al-Mas’ada. In this document al-‘Amili writes about “Realities and the Future of Jihadist Torrents.” Brynjar Lia calls him “a prolific “Internet Shaykh” who has gained very high standing on jihadi webforums over the past few years” in his posting *Jihadis Debate Egypt* (3), Jihadica, <http://www.jihadica.com/jihadis-debate-egypt-3/> 08.02. 2011.

7 http://www.uni-weimar.de/medien/webis/publications/downloads/papers/stein_2006k.pdf.

8 <http://www.l4d.com/l4d/home.php>.

9 The game is highly successful and had its first sequel, about a year later. “Left 4 Dead 2” has generated about 36 million US Dollars, <http://news.bigdownload.com/2011/02/03/study-claims-steam-generated-970-million-in-revenue-in-2010/>. Part of the success of the “Left 4 Dead” games is the gameplay. It is essential to cooperate in order to survive, players are highly dependent on the fellow players good will and support.

unofficial movie” on YouTube¹⁰, providing updates on the forthcoming movie on their Facebook group.¹¹

The main observation is threefold:

1. The phenomena of (individual) armchair jihadists online,
2. Who move freely throughout the Internet and also employ
3. Elements taken from popular and mainstream games and distort these elements for the sake of jihadists online propaganda.

All level access: The Internet as the medium for armchair jihadists

One of the first “armchair jihadists” was perhaps Babar Ahmad who gained some fame for promoting radical views and who was arrested in 2004 (Musharbash 2006: 104–107). Allegedly, Ahmad “solicited funds for rebels in Chechnya and Afghanistan on the internet during the 1990 s.”¹² His supporters have started an online campaign entitled “Free Babar Ahmad – British Justice for British Citizens”¹³ with corresponding communication channels via Twitter¹⁴ and a Facebook group.¹⁵ The internet is not necessarily a safe haven for the ‘free radicals’, but it certainly is a huge and growing database, a corpus and a genre of its own, of jihadist materials of all kinds that infiltrate every aspect of the contemporary web. Thus, immediacy as well as interactivity is granted. One of the most renowned, and more recent, armchair jihadist is Younis Tsouli. He gained fame with his alias “Irhabi 007” (“Terrorist 007”) and he was one of the first generation of online jihad sympathizers who used his technical skills to become one of AQ’s chief networkers in the West.¹⁶ Yusuf al-‘Uyairi, one of the co-founders of the Saudi AQ branch in 2003, also ran a website with highly radical content which may best be described as a test run for the subsequently

10 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-aEbujsjfQ>. In the case of “The Lord of the Rings”, a fan movie, by a group calling itself “Independent Online Cinema” scored nearly 6.5 million clicks on YouTube with their 40 minute long “The Hunt for Gollum: Prequel of the Lords of the Ring”.

11 Which is scheduled for Fall 2011: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/LEFT-4-DEAD-THE-MOVIE/183947398465>.

12 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/aug/12/babar-ahmad-timeline> (21. 12. 2010).

13 <http://www.freebabarahmad.com/> (07.01.2011).

14 <http://twitter.com/#!/FreeBabarAhmad/>. The Twitter account is described as “Babar Ahmad @FreeBabarAhmad / London / Babar Ahmad is a 34 year old British Muslim and the longest detained-without-charge British detainee held as part of the global ‘war on terror’. <http://www.freebabarahmad.com>”.

15 <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2487557572>. Both Twitter and Facebook accounts are also linked.

16 http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4156/is_20080120/ai_n21206775/.

developed media campaign, including an Arabic e-zine, *The Voice of Jihad* (Prucha 2010).

The phenomenon of the armchair jihadist has subsequently evolved with AQ's extensive use of the Internet. Any user within the virtual spheres of AQ can consume and participate by all means. If a user chooses to reflect intellectually on specific writings and notions of *jihad*, he certainly has the potential to do so within online forums. The forums are also the main place where not only AQ ringleaders and media institutions disseminate their content first-hand but also where individual members can contribute by uploading and sharing any home-made material with the like-minded.

While fans of certain games make their own movies, the *online jihad* side of this phenomena is expressed equivalent in regard of fan-made *jihad*-movies, praising (alive) or eulogizing (killed) outstanding AQ leaders and commanders or by simply refurbishing sequences of 'official' jihadist movies, depicting violent operations and placing these sequences in a different context of the ideology. Mostly, such home-made videos are a mash up of sequences taken from other movies of *jihad*. These films, I will refer to as 'compilations' include a movie uploaded by a sympathizer of the now defunct *al-Ekhlaas* forum in 2008. The 42-minute long video is entitled "Pain of the USA Army" and is a compilation of various jihadist videos, starting with the, at the time, logo of the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). Sequences of wounded US-Soldiers in Iraq being rushed to military doctors follow with the actual Arabic title of the video "*fa-innahum ya'lamuna*" ("so they are suffering hardship"). This is a reference to the Quran 4:104, which states:

"Do not be faint-hearted in pursuing the enemy: if you are suffering hardship, so are they, but you hope to receive something from God for which they cannot hope. God is all knowing and wise" (Haleem 2010: 96)

By just cherry-picking a short part of the verse (*Surah al-nisa'*) a common notion is reflected and scenes of extreme violence are subtly (and in the video directly) justified. Any setback or pain endured is part of a greater religious duty and worship whereas any *Mujahid* shall rest assured that his enemies – the enemies of God – are suffering likewise, but are not to expect any reward after departing this world (*dunya*) (al-'Amili 2005).¹⁷

The first sequence is accompanied by a *nashid*, a-cappella styled chanting. Crying uniformed American servicemen, severely wounded combatants are rushed to a emergency room, body parts are amputated and fatally wounded US-soldiers are placed in the morgue of a US-Army operated field hospital in Baghdad. This sequence is followed by the first and only video of Abu Mus'ab al-

¹⁷ <http://tawhed.ws/r?i=rqy4nyeo>.

Zarqawi, who addresses the Islamic *umma*. The logo of this sequence changes, as, at the time (2006), Zarqawi operated as leader of the *Shura al-Mujahidin*. The video is edited and followed shortly after by the third sequence, which is taken from an older video, whereas al-Zarqawi had been initially the leader of the Iraq-based group *Tawhed wa-l-Jihad*, depicting “military preparations [of the *Mujahidin*] in al-Madi”. What subsequently follows is in great parts taken from an American made documentary. The US-based private channel *Home Box Office* (HBO) aired its documentary “Baghdad ER”¹⁸ in 2006 – the documentary was obviously seen by jihadist sympathizers and hence distorted for jihadist propaganda. Pictures of wounded soldiers are displayed while Zarqawi’s voice is constantly present. Whoever edited this movie then decided to show Abu Yahya al-Libi preaching in Afghanistan (taken from a *Labayka* video) as well as Abu Nasir al-Qahtani, with whom al-Libi managed to escape the US-Army operated prison at Baghram Air Force Base, Afghanistan.¹⁹ The video is concluded by Ayman al-Zawahiri’s eulogy (*as-Sahab* video, 2006) of the “*amir al-istishhadiyyin*”²⁰, Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi. First the viewer reads “Watch the sadness of the pigs over a colleague of theirs after he perished” with the camera showing a dead soldier despite the ER treatment. “In a place where the Americans have killed thousands of innocent Muslims.” The deceased is brought away in a black body bag, we read: “The annihilated pig is being transported into hell and [cast into] a miserable fate. This is your fate, soldier of the Cross.” After this short sequence, Ayman al-Zawahiri speaks:

“As for the Americans, I say to them: Yes, our heroic, fearless, the daring *istishhadiyya* seeker, death embracing chief, Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi – may God have mercy with him – has been killed among us. So, tell me, how your drunken deserters die. Tell me, how many of you have really been killed and how much your economy lost and how the morale of your troops is collapsing. And tell me about the extend the Muslims hatred of you and moreover the extend of hatred shown to you by your oppressed victims worldwide (...). You are facing neither individuals nor organizations, rather, you are facing the Islamic *ummah* in which flows the spirit of *Jihad*” (al-Zawahiri, *as-Sahab* video, 2006).

According to the individuals’ ability and the personal favored appeal of the jihadist propaganda spectrum, the personal propaganda is formed, created and then (re-) loaded within the genre of the online jihadist sphere. While to some

18 <http://store.hbo.com/detail.php?p=100243>; for a description: http://www.democracynow.org/2006/5/17/baghdad_er_documentary_on_us_military.

19 Four men had fled Baghram prison and later appeared in two videos telling their tales (*innahum qadimun* part 1 and 2). Besides Abu Yahya, Abu Nasir al-Qahtani (re-captured in late 2006), Faruq al-Iraqi (killed by British forces in Iraq, 2006) and Abu’l-Layth al-Libi (killed by a US-Predator drone in 2008/09) tell their tales.

20 “The leader of the suicide-bombers” is the name mostly accrediting al-Zarqawi.

extent fan-produced video compilations as described above had been quite popular and frequent, the majority now has shifted to home-made propaganda pictures. A popular image is the display of killed children as the ultimate argument to justify violent, terrorist, reactions – defined as justice.



As the *Shumukh al-Islam* user “Zinad al-Haqq” (the hammers of truth) displayed graphically by a gif-animation containing four pictures: “They destroy our houses; they kill our children; The terrorist. I am a Muslim. I am with him.”²¹

21 A picture of a wounded boy lying on a stretcher reaching out in direction of the viewer, his face in terror, is without any text.

<http://www.shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=93146> (10.02.2011). The slogan “the terrorist; I am Muslim; I am with him” has become somewhat popular in the last years, whereas the jihadists attempt to hijack the notion “terrorist” for themselves. It runs along the lines that if terrorism is the term applied by the enemies than I am a terrorist, fighting for justice and against injustice, tyranny and oppression. Hamad bin Abdallah al-Humaydi, *We are terrorists, so, who are you??* The Voice of Jihad Series, 2006.

A note regarding organization via the Internet

The individual users, who favor their individual genres have the ability to repost, republish and re-upload, in short: to multiply any web-based content by their behavior and according to their skills online. This includes posting links, pictures, texts on Facebook profiles, creating special Facebook groups, on individual YouTube channels, participating in 'official', 'semi-official' and 'non-official' forums, by blogging or by simply republishing content out of conviction on individual websites.

This may sound familiar to any contemporary surfer of the Internet. Using all channels of the internet, particularly popular ones where one's voice and conviction is most likely received, is, naturally, open for any individual or group. Social media is used more and more frequently by social or protest movements, who just as much use all levels and all channels of the internet, ranging from Facebook to YouTube, from blogs to online forums, from Twitter to MySpace and so on. The "followers" and "clouds" are free in their specific "free culture"²² of the internet (Lanier 2010: 77–79).

The Internet as a medium is naturally being used and exploited by all kinds of interest groups, organizations and genres. It must be noted that the jihadist sphere of the Internet is quite assiduous and particularly driven to exploit other groups online, claiming, for example, protest-movements in Arabic countries as their product or simply attempting to hijack legitimate civil movements by proclaiming these as potential future AQ members who are trying to dispose dictators in the Middle East. Or by simply claiming that the goals are the same, whereas the wave of protests in Arabic countries of January 2011 has absolutely nothing to do with fundamental Islam, AQ or *jihad* in any sense. Jihadist forums discuss the developments and post within their forums the links to the Facebook groups of "The Day of Anger" (*yawm al-ghadab*). This is also a natural expression of the Internet, a link is quickly posted and a posting is quickly written.²³ In regard of social movements, the Internet is the key-driver of communication of exchanging useful information. This includes the flow of non-controllable information bypassing repressive governments to the outside world as

22 To use a modern terming of the contemporary internet – "followers" is derived from the online service "twitter" (www.twitter.com) while the "clouds" are in its sense the spheres crafted and maintained by individuals who, within a specific cloud or sphere, adhere to a certain genre of any kind.

23 For example the *Shumukh al-Islam* forum member Qannas al-Hesbah issued a posting with a link to the "Day of Anger" in Libya. Only in Libya it was called "the day of the shuhada". "The Day of Anger" was sparked by a Tunisian, non-jihadist, non-religious, social movement of angry citizens tired of living under the oppression of dictators, <http://www.shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=92168>.

well as “important tactical findings” by fellow revolutionaries in Tunisia to the Egyptians on January 29, 2011, just four days after protest erupted at Cairo’s Tahrir Square.²⁴ Jihadists attempt to utilize the situation in Egypt but these are

“popular uprisings [and] are just about the complete opposite of everything al-Qaida stands for: they are non-violent, mass-based, popular, all-inclusive, mostly secular, democratic, and perhaps most important: they work!”²⁵

When riots in Tunisia broke out, the AQ department for North Africa (AQIM) was quickly to respond when its leader issued a message to “support and aid the *intifada* of our people in Tunisia”. Its leader Abu Mus’ab Abd al-Wudud read out in a audio message published in jihadist forums on January 13, 2011 to “send us your sons, so that we can train them in handling weapons and to obtain military knowledge”. In a parallel move, al-Wudud attempted to capitalize on the unfolding civil protest movement against the Bouteflika regime by issuing “a call to avenge our people in Algeria.” While the social movements of Tunisia and Egypt are quite successful and make use of social media to express their demands and rights, AQ seems to be a step behind and yet desperately uses its online channels in a move to hijack these social movements, but to no avail.

Similar behavioral patterns online – overlapping worlds

As an example on how the Internet is in motion and a passageway for each and every potential user on the planet, we shall now exclusively focus on the two online entities, namely the Gaming Industry and al-Qa’ida’s endeavors in cyberspace. In the meantime, both are established cultural subgroups who are in great parts exclusively using the Internet. Without it, both groups would have less influence and potential in the offline world. And both are somewhat a product of this specific fast changing and influential development. The bonus of the GI is its vast amounts of (online/multiplayer) games offering complex platforms for users to hook up, join and play with or versus other human players.²⁶ At the same time, specific games and products within specific gaming

24 <http://werebuild.eu/wiki/Image:1296299426067.jpg#filehistory> – a broad civil movement started peacefully protesting against the Mubarak regime on January 25, 2011. After peaceful protests in Tunisia led to the ousting of long-term dictator Ben Ali, Tunisians are keen to disseminate useful findings. This includes to protect oneself against the potential police brutality as well as advice such as carrying black spray paint to blacken to windshields of armored police cars.

25 Lia, *Jihadis Debate Egypt (3)*, <http://www.jihadica.com/jihadis-debate-egypt-3/>.

26 But also against Artificial Intelligence, computer controlled opponents and such. In the meantime various game modes are almost standard for most games of, for example, the shooter genre.

platforms or forums are advertised, marketed and favored by the crowd present. Political interest groups such as AQ & co use the Internet by all means to disseminate their content (writings, videos, audios) and enable the users to contribute to the growing corpus of the *jihad* genre. Both groups can attain feedback and react to criticism. While surfing the Internet over the past years, being within AQ's online spheres as well as keeping track of recent developments of the GI (out of personal curiosity, of course), the similarities of both of these characteristic groups is their apparent appeal to a particularly younger generation, who possess an outstanding IT-fluency. With the jihadist sympathizers increasing in size and always being up to date in regard of technical developments, games have also entered the spheres of AQ – while in parts the virtual iconography of military-style shooters have influenced in some cases the design of jihadist propaganda and are sometimes even enthusiastically described as 'training' outlets for the future *Mujahid*.

The technical diversity with the possibilities of colorful, intercultural and multilingual filmed and audio recorded data as well as writings in general make up wide parts of the richness of the contemporary internet. The mentioned possibilities are in parts developed and carried by those who use the Internet, namely the individual user and specific online groups. Innovation is inspired and crafted by "user generated content" or, by user demand, with individuals voicing their complaints and aspirations in their forums and within their online societies.

Worlds and elements appear to be overlapping. One could rely on Betsy Book's list of "six features of virtual worlds", where she lists common denominators for gaming worlds and social worlds (Book 2004).²⁷ The term "virtual world" applies for both genres, namely, (i) "gaming worlds" as well as (ii) "social worlds." Both of these gaming elements, or genre of the playful side of the Internet, are part of what is widely known as "MMORPG" – *Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games*.²⁸ MMORPG are games that consist of a particular world (fantasy or real, or a mixture), whereas the player, via his avatar, assumes a specific role. "Gaming worlds" usually consist of a

"popular medieval, literary, fantasy genre, or science fiction setting of MMORPG, [while] the settings of social worlds are based on modern-day realistic environments like tropical islands, gardens, suburbia, hotels and tourist attractions" (Book 2004)

27 http://www.virtualworldsreview.com/papers/BBook_SoP2.pdf.

28 <http://www.mmorpg.com/>.

In some cases, the worlds are overlapping, with real-life money spent on virtual avatars or by buying “virtual t-shirts for customers’ avatars along with matching real t-shirts for the offline bodies”²⁹ and so on.

In the meantime (2011), I argue that this list is also a description of common denominators of various genres of the Internet in general. By this I mean that the Internet has expanded (culturally as well as technically, with users spending more time online, not just at home or at their computers) with more potential and more options. Betsy Book provided the list of six common denominators in 2004 for “gaming” and “social worlds” as:

“Shared Space: the world allows many users to participate at once.

Graphical User Interface: the world depicts space visually, ranging in style from 2D “cartoon” imagery to more immersive 3D environments.

Immediacy: interaction takes place in real time

Interactivity: the world allows users to alter, develop, build, or submit customized content.

Persistence: the world’s existence continues regardless of whether individual users are logged in.

Socialization / Community: the world allows and encourages the formation of in-world social groups like guilds, clubs, cliques, housemates, neighborhoods, etc.”

In the meantime, however, the interaction as a participant on the Internet has greatly improved, even when individual users are *not* part of *any* “gaming” or “social world.” Rather, the Internet *itself* has turned into a “world” of its own, with multiple layers and indefinite channels – that can be consumed, altered, authored, edited by individuals worldwide. It is one ‘mother’ virtual worlds, into which any user connects, with common (mainstream) platforms available as much as highly specific nodes. With “gaming” and “social” world providing both the graphical as well as the ‘physical’ (virtual) environment to act and re-enact certain elements and aspects, the (armchair) jihadists hook up just as much within their specific online based worlds, enabling them to contribute and consume all forms of *jihad* related propaganda.

While both, “gaming” as well as “virtual worlds” are different by its “cultures of play”, the individual is more than an observer. “By re-enacting them, re-inserting themselves into storylines as actors rather than viewers, and changing the storyline to suit their own whims” (Book 2004), each and everyone online can be a greater part of individually favored aspects, political sentiments, musical torrents and so on.

If we understand “virtual world(s)” as an applicable term to describe the contemporary Internet (2011) as a whole, we can perhaps agree to define the six common denominators for almost any genre / culture / sub-culture. In respect of

29 Book, reference note 7, describing “Second Life”.

al-Qa'ida (AQ) and the Gaming Industry (GI) as genres of its own within the “virtual world”, common factors exist between these sub-genres:

- *Shared Space*: all levels and layers of the Internet. There is no room online not yet used for advertisement (GI) or hardcore propaganda (AQ).
- *Graphical User Interface*: both groups deploy a similar node for its users. While there are forums by fans for games, we find forums for jihadist sympathizers. With the GI disseminating advertisement via YouTube, AQ does so as well. The graphical user interface (originally intended by Books to describe the handling of social games) can also be understood as the graphical means provided as a interface by public spaces such as social networking sites MySpace or Facebook. The handling of these sites are identical for most users and most content is acquired by similar to same means.
- *Immediacy*: life online goes on, with or without extreme fans and sympathizers participating. There are simply too many.
- *Interactivity*: user generated content is highly effective and common for AQ as much as for the GI.
- *Persistence*: the propaganda of AQ by its senior to mid to low leadership circles continues. It is only a question of frequency. The GI is online 24/7 with players active around the clock. What Betsy Books had in mind was that gaming worlds and social worlds never sleep – the same can be said about the growing materials and chatter on AQ channels and the GI.
- *Socialization/Community*: for both groups, AQ and the GI, we have sub-sub-groups and cultural sub-torrents within specific genre-based clusters. This process, as part of the above described elements, also concludes personal identification and spurs a feeling of joint possession. This takes place in shared spaces and due to interactivity of community members.

Entering the Jihadists' hunting grounds – Never mind the Copyright

Both torrents are online actors and both are sub-groups of the Internet deploying their specific advertisements, propaganda, promotional trailers, their ideology and filmed or animated clips online, within their genre-based specific cluster (Marin et al. 2009) and within a characteristic framework. However, and this is the main observation and the underlying fundamental principle of this article, both groups, like many others on the so called “web 2.0”³⁰, have very

30 By the so called “web 2.0” the contemporary form of the internet is widely understood. This version is less statically html bound and allows a higher level of action, interaction, participation and new formats such as social networks, online videos and audios and much more. Please consult the yearly ongoing Web 2.0 Expo for next generation technical prophecies:

similar means of promoting their specifically notions, ideas, products, videos and writings, with a similar effect on what users are contributing in terms of technical proficiency within a cult or pop-cultural context. Worlds can overlap, particularly with the jihadists' potential of being within both of these virtual worlds – AQ transforms elements of the GI for its propaganda. The products – and along with it the iconography as well as some pop-cultural aspects – of the Gaming Industry has indeed entered the realms of the jihadists' genre-based cluster. Screenshots of games, in most cases of first-person-shooters, are taken by *jihad* sympathizing players, modified with Arabic jihadist slogans and icons of real terrorist groups and are subsequently published within its genre-based specific cluster (mostly jihadist forums). Both spheres are highly persistent and dependent on the socialization/community effects combined with personal identification processes of their members, fans, sympathizers.

One recent– and controversial – example is a picture disseminated via the jihadist forum *Shumukh al-Islam*, by the user “Abu Qatada al-Libi.” He praised the “Islamic State of Iraq” by graphically defacing³¹ an advertisement of the highly successful and popular first-person-shooter *Call of Duty: Black Ops*.³² Abu Qatada, a certainly talented individual who has contributed greatly to ‘home-made’, Adobe Photoshop created, AQ propaganda took the original advertisement and branded it accordingly to his liking. He is the product of

“fans [who] have been transformed from passive consumers into active reproducers of al-Qaeda content: anyone can now be an al-Qaeda propagandist” (Brachman/Levine 2011: 27)

Abu Qatada al-Libi branded the picture with the logo of the “Islamic State of Iraq” (ISI), which he professionally managed to engrave on the left weapon as well. He signed the picture (left picture, in the lower left) with his name. The original US-Special Forces character, who the player controls in the game during the 1960 s, is transformed into a *Mujahid*, insinuating fighting for the ISI. Abu Qatada remained in the Special Forces genre by writing “assassination battalions to annihilate the despicable [elements]” (lower right side). While some pictures, stolen from the gaming-genre, adapted with jihadist logos and slogans are widely accepted in the jihadist forums, the above shown picture by Abu Qatada was removed by the *Shumukh al-Islam* administration. In the forum Abu Qatada wrote in a posting where he published his picture:

<http://www.web2expo.com/webexsf2010>. Another platform, including summits, can be found at <http://www.web2summit.com/web2010>.

31 <http://shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=82222>.

32 <http://www.callofduty.com/hub>.



“When I saw the news that the [Islamic] State [of Iraq] had announced a campaign of a hundred days for annihilating the despicable and as we have seen the start of this blessed campaign with the military campaigns yesterday, we are yet to see [what’s to happen] today. I decided to make a untraditional picture and ask God to grant success.”

The second response already criticized the picture as “innovations/novelties” (abda’), with forum-member Abu Usama al-Baghdadi asking for “God to obstruct your errors, my beloved brother.” While most other members found the picture either “wonderful” or stated, “it would have been better, if the guns had silencers”. Nevertheless, the above shown picture had been removed but Abu Qatada al-Libi has remained a highly active user on the forum, continuing with his activities inside the shared space.

Other, approved, examples include modified screenshots of the freely downloadable “Insurgency” for Valve’s “Counter-Strike”. Being based on the game “Counter-Strike” any user can freely download the add-on entitled “Insurgency – Modern Infantry Combat.”³³ Here the individual “armchair jihadist” can indeed get a feeling as a sniper or a loosely organized member of a cell fighting against a troop of US soldiers. Every virtual soldier and *Mujahid* is controlled by a human player. This game consists of several multi-player maps that have an Iraq like setting whereas two teams play against one another: The US Army, with different soldier characteristics (engineers, snipers, heavy machine gunner et al) versus an insurgent group that look like a gang of prime time Hollywood *Mujahidin*.

33 <http://www.insmod.org/>.



“Insurgency – Modern Infantry Warfare” – from an jihadists perspective.

A picture taken from the “Insurgency – Modern Infantry Warfare” game (during the loading process). However, this picture was stamped by an online jihadist sympathizer. The ideological and theological implication as based on religious and historical sources has its expression by the “frontier of Islam.” Again we see a brave *Mujahid* carrying the banner of *Jihad*, with the *shahada* [the Islamic creed] written on it. The “frontier of Islam” is attributed to a comprising ideological mindset of AQ globally – basically meaning the defense of “Islamic borders” and “Muslim territory” as set forth by specific religious and religious-historic sources within the jihadists’ sentimentality of *ribat* (Prucha 2009).

It may be logical to find that with the GI and its fans developing so called “modifications” (mods), add-ons or enhancements for already published games – to keep certain games attractive and thus popular –this software also resonates within jihadist circles. A great deal of such mods provide purely multi-player based scenario of dominating “Western forces versus Oriental looking Insurgents”. For the jihadist, the graphical and role-playing elements published by mostly Western GI branches regarding the ‘Arabic-Muslim Insurgent’ is nevertheless highly appealing. Any form of warfare, preferably against American or Western soldiers, may serve as a parallel to actual conflicts around the world,

especially within the Islamic countries that AQ vows to defend and ultimately liberate from direct as well as indirect occupation.

One's intense violent fantasy of being or becoming a real-life *Mujahid* may of course be fueled by the products of the GI and the resonance one may receive by publishing professionally made pro-jihadist pictures within the forums. Besides the publications of AQ's warfare (both military and ideological) concepts, armchair jihadists may exploit online what was taken by the Lebanese Army as lessons learned in the conflict with the jihadist Fatah al-Islam movement in the Palestinian refugee camp Nahir al-Barid in 2007 (Dagher 2009: 99–106). The Lebanese army was surprised to encounter a highly sophisticated enemy using guerrilla tactics and ambushes, who knew how to operate and move according to theoretical handbooks and practical videos in an urban- and guerilla warfare situation. This includes understanding the enemy's intended movement, setting up concealed positions for sniper attacks, using high grounds (inside the camp: buildings) to lay strategic suppressive fire, planting improvised explosive devices (IED) and by setting up booby-traps.

Fatah al-Islam had their real war in an urban setting against the Lebanese Army. The battle may serve as an example for armchair jihadists who in some cases perceive specific military games as a training outlet and find, individually, their own role-models there. The more input armchair jihadists have, particularly with filmed real-military operations of armed jihad groups, they more they can build up their imagination. Naturally, it is always the question, with what intend armchair jihadists actually play military-styled shooters. With most armchair jihadists remaining simply online sympathizers, products of the GI can be seen as a further virtual outlet to re-enact and to role-play – with real-life *Mujahidin* ever present by *jihad* videos and pictures.

We can also observe that jihadist users are grasping all available means to further their propaganda. In this picture, two animated *Mujahidin* are seen, the figure on the right has simply been taken from the loading screen of the game "Insurgency." The standing *Mujahid* on the left appears to be praying, while the fighter on the right is on the watch (ideological connotation). "Rise up or die, if you want to be a *shahid*" is written in bright letters by the creator "gharib." Anyone can contribute and thus be interactive by all means, including personally crafted output by graphics.

With the Fatah al-Islam movement termed and portrayed by some jihadist forum members as "Fatah al-Islam, the men of al-Qa'ida in the Levant"³⁴ (*fatah al-Islam rijal al-qa'ida fi bilad al-sham*), this notion found its expression, again,

34 Levant is not the correct translation for the region al-Sham. However, in the jihadists' notion and perception, the greater region of Syria, Lebanon and northern Israel (Palestine) is referenced by this historical connotation.



by home-made pictures. The real world meets the virtual one. The evolved shared space.

Two elements are striking in this picture: (i) A real photograph of a Fatah al-Islam member, armed with an Rocket-Propelled-Grenade launcher (RPG) holds a Quran and meets (ii) the virtual world. In the foreground an animated, masked and armed (AK-47 assault rifle) *Mujahid* implies further military preparedness and seems to be in a state of alert. The bottom line reads:

“Indeed, they act on behalf of the *shahada* and they reject humiliation and defeat. Therefore, they please their merciful protector. Your achievement is due to God (*fa-li-llahi darrukum*), o lions of Fatah al-Islam.”

The picture is subsequently concluded by “Islamic al-Faluja Forums > ::technical [sub-] forum:: > pictures and graphics (Photoshop and Flash), <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb>.” The al-Faluja forum is defunct and the content as well as the users have simply shifted to new, lively, forums. This form of persistence was not granted to the Fatah al-Islam movement, which was subsequently defeated, after “a war of 106 days in Nahir al-Barid, 2007” (Rihana 2008).

While the crowd of jihadist followers, forum-members and participants are consuming mostly Arabic based videos, writings and other forms of propaganda, such as pictures, the majority can best be termed as “armchair jihadists” who live and dwell within the online spheres of AQ and have the ultimate wish to



join the real-life *Mujahidin*. It must be noted that this phenomena is not entirely new, but rather has become a global and more mainstream due to the possibilities of the Internet. It has become a reality that, on a increasing scale, for loosely organized, if at all, individuals are becoming adherents of AQ's defined way of life and its mindset. As long as these sympathizers and ideological adherents are not carrying out any attacks or may not even have the wish to actually join a terrorist training camp, they may remain undetected and vitally virtually active. Socialization and community is leaving the virtual boundaries, entering the real world – and vice versa. With the desire of joining the *Mujahidin* in a real battle-field, thus conducting the jihadists' defined one and only proper 'worship', some individuals within the virtual will naturally always attempt to be a *real* part, perhaps appearing themselves one day in a *as-Sahab* video production. But it is important to consider both aspects, the wanna-be *Mujahid* who remains in his armchair contributing and those of the virtual world who try to plug-in to real and existent jihadi networks.

The primary goal of the freely available – and easy to find – materials that in some cases depict extremely violent scenes, is to enable a process of radicalization and a division of the world among the consumers. This is to be understood in combination with a long-term aspired outcome of being recruited or at

least inspired to undertake individual operations³⁵ (al-Suri 2005) and is crafted in a professional and ideological adherent manner by the Senior and Junior Leadership circles of AQ. Individual operations are mostly termed *al-jihad al-fardi*, relying on the principle that *jihad* is an individual obligation valid for all capable Muslims as implied by scholars such as Yusuf al-‘Uyairi (Al-‘Uyairi 2004).³⁶ Many “armchair jihadists” adhere to the specifically determined interpretation of chosen religious concepts by the ideological authoritative circles of AQ and can see a practical and mostly military output of these definitions within AQ’s extensive library of videos³⁷ (Hafez 2007).

Dipping into the Gaming Industry, or: Playing as an ideologue

The GI’s fans, on the other hand, the so called “gamers”, are the ones using the internet with all its options and possibilities to meet and mostly play multi-player games online. The GI could be termed as the present avant-garde of the “web 2.0”, an industry that has over the recent years subsequently designed games and gaming products that are in some parts exclusively played with others over the internet. The avant-gardism set by this particular industry is bound to the core technical developments and foundations of the worlds hardware and in wide parts software manufacturers, that are being professionally and for purely

35 Plenty of mostly Arabic documents and sources openly advocate on how to set up, maintain and establish cells of Mujahidin. Most prominently the 1600 page long writing by AbŪ Mus’ab al-SŪrī, who considers practical implications and possible threats to ambitious secretly operating –whether active or as “sleeper cells” – worldwide: <http://tawhed.ws/dl?i=f3r0098v> (Arabic). A translation of excerpts has been done by Brynjar Lia (2008) with a biography of al-Suri. Additionally, Osama bin Ladin describes the importance of well established and connected cells of Mujahidin to carry out operations in general according to the example of the 9/11 hijackers in the as-Sahab Video production “High Hopes, part II”.

36 Frequently calls are made to the individual members of AQ’s online spheres to become active and “strike the enemies of God”. *Jihad*, with all its military interpretation and obligation, is an individual obligation (*fard ‘ayn*) – a concept often repeated by jihadist groups in general. The “Fort Hood Shootings” in Texas, USA, had been instantaneously celebrated by the online jihadists, with Major Nidal Hassan being a “Muslim hero”, a “true *Mujahid*” according to some statements in jihadist forums, who defended and avenged the Muslims within the heart of the enemy. The implication is that this was an operation accordingly entitled *al-jihad al-fardi*. Allegedly, Major Nidal Hassan was an online sympathizer of AQ internet spheres and had e-mail contact to Anwar al-Awlaki, an open sympathizer and alleged recruiter for AQ: <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/13/blogging-imam-who-knew-fort-hood-attacker-and-911-hijacker-goes-silent/?scp=6&sq=fort%20hood&st=cse>.

37 These videos can be highly appealing to anyone who has read and consumed specific AQ related writings or listened to pro-jihadist sermons (khatba). Some of the videos are of a purely militarily nature and show jihadist implementations of their proclaimed “proper” life as a “Muslim”, committed to God and the alleged divine command of undertaking armed preparations and operations against “the enemies of God.”

commercial reasons exploited by the GI. With the dawn of blogs and online forums³⁸, Facebook³⁹, YouTube⁴⁰ and Twitter⁴¹, besides the “classical” websites⁴², the GI was one of the first enterprises with its popular branches and genres that extensively used this “web 2.0” functionality in a comprehensive way for its entrepreneurial purposes.

The GI is one of the pioneers when it comes to using the complete spectrum of the internet for its promotions to reach out to a maximum amount of potentially interested people online. The offerings range from promotional tours within

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- 38 Forums are of general great value, whereas the individual members have the possibility to freely open discussion topics (“threads”) and reply to other members (“postings”). Both subgroups GI and AQ heavily rely on the individuality of their members while by “official” postings and threads members are encouraged to engage themselves in a wanted direction. Within the spheres of AQ as in the GI, the forums particularly are responsible for the unfolding of relevant questions, suggestions, demands and claims by its members that have forced a response as much as from AQ Senior Leadership or the adaption of gaming products by the GI. Forums are often mistaken for chat rooms. Unlike a chat room, however, where information is provided by the participants in real time, by typing or speaking, a forum shows the individual postings submitted by its members after an indefinite period of time and are thus longer lasting than a chat room.
- 39 www.facebook.com – a “social networking” site, whereas the individual member can (re-) connect with old friends and join specific groups, become a “fan” of, for example, TV-shows, rock bands, electronic entertainment products, merchandise and so on. All of this is public and by becoming a “fan” of a TV-show, all your friends will know of this and perhaps pick up your taste and follow the very same TV-show as well. In the past years products have been specifically advertised via facebook, promotional trailers of Hollywood blockbusters for instance can be played as well as web-based interactive mini-games. Besides local and global media on facebook, the GI is using facebook just as much as political parties, like the “Future Movement” of Lebanese Sa’ad al-Hariri, Hizbullah, torrents of AQ (“Uzbekistan Martyrdom Academy”) or the al-Huthi movement of Yemen/Saudi Arabia. Almost everything can be found on facebook.
- 40 www.youtube.com – an online portal that houses billions of videos. Again, various branches of the international industry advertise their products on YouTube as much as the GI or people, who submit their own, private home-made clips they want to share with the online world. Users have the possibility to comment and rate videos. Hizbullah videos can be found as easily as any AQ related video or the YouTube Channel of Hamas (“HamasTube). Various computer manufacturers have discovered that private users publish commented home-made videos on the type of hardware they are using and have begun to, in some parts, exclusively host their official advertising videos on YouTube. For a nicely written overview of YouTube: http://www.surfnetskids.com/safety/YouTube_what_is_it_and_why_use_it-19026.htm.
- 41 www.twitter.com – a relative new, but nevertheless interesting, format of the internet: each individual can contribute his/her thoughts or “status” by providing an SMS-long (156 characters) input. Various international news outlets use twitter for instant news, with links leading to their main websites, as is the GI and various GI related sites and fans in general. Jihadist influenced members of twitter are using it as much as, for example, the Lebanese Army, who is using twitter and blogs as a service for their members of the Lebanese Armed Forces.
- 42 By websites I understand sites that are found throughout the online world, which could best be described and termed as classical, first generational, non-interactive, purely based html sites – the “web 1.0”.

Facebook to meticulous updates regarding specific game developments, upcoming publication dates to announcements within official and non-official forums and a wave of websites and blogs that publish general information to the immense gamer communities. Common denominators may be specific games or genres and also initiatives taken by the developing software company. In most cases the GI has during stages of new games released demos, video clips, graphical impressions and level designs for the fans to comment and to react to the fans' desires and ideas – this is a free service for the developing software companies. By listening to the fans, the product is more likely becoming a success. In many cases official forums exist where the various gamers can comment, rate or criticize the game – and are moderated by official administrators and read by the development team.⁴³ But the Internet also enables plenty of critical thought that is freely disseminated. The broader and civil spectrum of gamers has its effects on the various gaming dedicated news outlets and blogs that pick up current trends from the forums and websites of clans⁴⁴ who are in some cases heavily criticizing the GI and have in the past even forced the industry to respond. This is one important area of difference between the GI and the AQ controlled online spheres, where most criticism is immediately edited or even banned.

Games affect jihadists as well. Being online and having a computer, it is quite logical to enjoy playing a game every now and then?

A *fatwa* issued on the website “Salaf Voice” (*sawt al-salaf*, maintained by Shaykh Yasir Barhami) responded to an interesting question on June 2, 2008:

“Question: What is the [legal] ruling of the [electronic soccer] game for adults “FIFA”⁴⁵; a game depicting real humans as soccer players?

Answer: All praise be God, peace and blessing upon the messenger of God. These games are legitimate for children (...), regarding adults, the overwhelming proof prohibits pictures (drawings and sculptures) and prohibits playing such games.”⁴⁶

This fatwa spurred some discontent among the *al-Hanein* forum, another jihadist platform, whereas several users responded after the above stated fatwa was posted there. Responding to the fatwa banning soccer video games:

43 For example the “Left 4 Dead 2” official forum on the online gaming and publishing platform Steam: <http://forums.steampowered.com/forums/forumdisplay.php?f=611>.

44 A clan in the gaming terms is a loose organization of online players who meet to play together (on- and offline). In most cases the various clans have their websites, blogs, forums and facebook groups as well as videos of their great achievements on YouTube. For example the “Left 4 Dead” and “Counter Strike” dedicated Clan119: <http://www.clan119.com/>.

45 <http://www.ea.com/uk/game/fifa-08>.

46 <http://www.salafvoice.com/article.php?a=2461&back=aHR0cDovL3d3dy5zYWxhZnZvaWNlMnVhS9hcnRyY2xlcY5waHA/bW9kPWVhdGVnb3J5JmM9NDE=>.

“mohamedforces: “All praise be God – I don’t like soccer [games]... well, [what about] strategy games ﷻ, wars and such...?”

Abu Talha: “Games depicting pictures of humans, men and women or even playing music is not permissible.”

Shahid ‘ala-l ‘asr: “Pictures??? [of] Humans??? And bodies??? What is this fatwa that will afflict me with boredom, o Abu Talha??? Who issued it??? These games are a waste of your time and do not remember God with their passive means, these games are neglected in this fatwa, concentrating only whether or not humans are depicted??? Need for Speed shows cars!!! Wasting time with it is not forbidden (*haram*) for this game, as it teaches you to drive whereas we need to learn to shoot, with games like Medal of Honor, swimming, shooting and riding the horse (Need for Speed).”⁴⁷

What the member “Shahid ‘ala-l ‘asr” implies, is that he is considering games as a legitimate form of acquiring jihadist relevant knowledge (“shooting and riding the horse”). By riding the horse, he refers to the dominant jihadist visualized attribute, the *Mujahid* embarked on horse, the *al-mujahid al-murabit* (Prucha 2009). Considering any means for military preparation an alleged divine command, based on Quran 8:60, men on horses also have a strong visual link to the historical epochs of Islamic conquest. This is also reflected in such branded pictures taken from the above mentioned example “Insurgency” with the remark “Frontier of Islam.”



These are the aspired male role models for the generations of armchair jihadists in combination with their real-life male *Mujahidin* role models (either

47 <http://www.hanein.info/vbx/showthread.php?t=69435>.

fighting, struggling, praying and alive or deceased, killed “on the path of God”) in the various romanticizing *jihad* videos published by AQ and its affiliated groups. This is the output of the romanticized, idealized, ideological side in virtual pictures, inspired by (mostly) Western created games. Ideals are mixed with ideological sentiments and rulings set by the senior AQ leadership as much as any jihadist legal decree online.

Online jihadists are in some parts fans and followers of the GI product range that may be just as much appealing to them as it is to anyone else seeking fun, without a jihadist or political agenda. But what is striking, is the deliberate “user generated content” published by various online jihadists, who use games such as “Insurgency – Modern Infantry Warfare” or, “Call of Duty – Modern Warfare”⁴⁸ (2007) to place manipulated screenshots of such game freely within the online forums, mostly in the specific “pictures” section. These pictures are altered according to the genre of *jihad* and equipped with the iconography of jihadist groups and elevated with religious slogans suggesting an active combatant role within AQ’s ideology. These pictures could be you or me – with a virtual alter ego, a avatar in an aspired role. In contrast to the videos of actual real-life *Mujahidin*, the online armchair jihadist can have the feeling of participating in an actual war that also affects their personal and private lives as “Muslims” – and as it is being proclaimed by AQ’s huge library of online documents and videos.

Games for jihadists – by jihadists

What makes this type of propaganda dangerous is the combination and the mix of AQ’s ideology that is openly and freely disseminated over the internet, via its various media departments. Calling out to spread such propaganda, as it is perceived as the only true interpretation of “Islam”, forum members frequently advise to reach out by all means of the internet: Infiltrating, thus committing “missionary work” (*da’wa*) in favor of pro-violent and radical interpretations on all layers of the Internet. AQ can be termed as an avant-garde user of the Internet (nevertheless, so as a terrorist group), as it considers itself, because it has been using this medium professionally for several years and it has proven to be capable of adapting to changed circumstances, may they be virtually online or real-life offline. It is likely that new generations of armchair jihadists will continue to learn from and adept the techniques used by the GI to increase the diversity and impact of AQ influenced propaganda.

This dissemination and this borderless virtual free public space grants the individual followers, fans or adherents the exact same means and potentials of

48 For a review, <http://pc.ign.com/articles/832/832795p1.html>.

replying and becoming an interactive (counter-)⁴⁹ part of the individual genre-based cluster. But the important development may be, that AQ with its vast amount of online sympathizers can attract new sympathizers, potential recruits among them, by also promoting *games* of its own – within its genre on the Internet. While the Lebanese based Hizbullah has developed several professional games of its own, such as Special Force 1 and 2⁵⁰ or “The People of the Border” (*ahl al-thughur*)⁵¹ and even the (early) modification for “Counter-Strike” entitled “The Men of God” (*rijal allah*), the sunni AQ *jihad* media was slow to pick up this trend. Despite the influx of some branded pictures in the forums, AQ affiliates have not yet managed to compete with the extend of Hizbullah or Hamas games available.⁵² Two examples of AQ affiliated games, however, are distinguishable and are highlighted. In 2006 a game was released within the AQ sphere of the Internet entitled “The Night of Bush Capturing.” The game can best be described as the attempt to release some anger in a badly made single player environment, whereas the user had it all: from hunting down US-President George W. Bush to killing Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and ambushing Hizbullah’s Hasan Nasrallah. Each level was accompanied by a *nashid* while the player was responsible for “the American Hell”, a term mostly used for Iraq, in jihadist discourses. While this game cannot be taken seriously, it was a first – even hopeless – attempt to host a new virtual layer for sympathizers. Most interestingly, the game was found by members of the BitTorrent site *The Pirate Bay* who, out of amusement, shared the game as well. Uploaded in September 2006, *The Pirate Bay* member GM.Yitzhak writes:

“NOTE: I DO NOT ADVOCATE ANY OF THE VIEWS OR ACTIONS DEPICTED IN THIS GAME. I AM UPLOADING THIS FOR HUMOR PURPOSES ONLY.

This game was downloaded from a bona-fide terrorist site, so I cannot guarantee that is free from spyware or malware. It was downloaded on a Mac and scanned with the latest updates of both Norton and McAfee, so I believe it’s fairly secure, but don’t sent [sic] me any angry emails blaming me for any issues. INSTALL AT YOUR OWN RISK!”⁵³

49 By counter-part I understand the ongoing trend of parts of the Internet: For any establishment, culture or social standards groups emerge online who claim to be the exact opposite of such. *Jihad* forums, blogs and websites may serve as an extremist and pro-violent example on how key concepts such as “statehood”, “democracy” or “the West” can be opposed by authoring a different worldview and understanding.

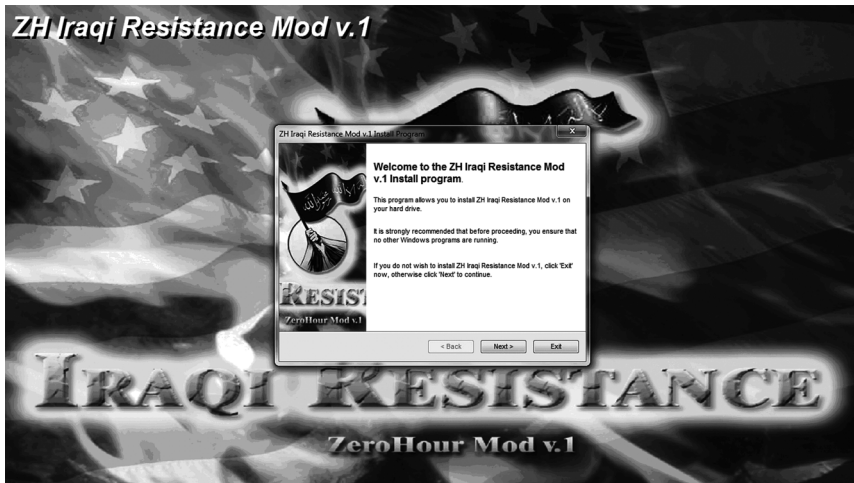
50 www.specialforce2.org.

51 <http://lpt-lb.com/games.html>.

52 Hamas published several games in the past, among the titles “Under Siege part 1 and 2” or the “Heroes of Jenin”.

53 [http://thepiratebay.org/torrent/3526673/Night_Of_Bush_Capturing_\(Terrorist_Re_cruiting_FPS\)](http://thepiratebay.org/torrent/3526673/Night_Of_Bush_Capturing_(Terrorist_Re_cruiting_FPS)).

A much more interesting game of the jihadist genre is a modification for the highly successful *Command and Conquer Generals – Zero Hour*. Originally published by Electronic Arts, who created the popular gaming genre “Real-Time-Strategy” (RTS), *Command and Conquer Generals* enabled players to either chose the *Western Alliance* (US looking combat troops and military equipment), the *Asian Pact* or an obscure, Taliban-like, terror group *Global Liberation Army* (GLA). In a modification for *Command and Conquer Generals*, published in 2006, players had the possibility not to play as the GLA but as the “Islamic State of Iraq.” It remains unclear, whether highly engaged fans of *Command and Conquer* programmed this meticulous set-up modification, or if online jihadists fulfilled their dreams. The website remains active⁵⁴ and shows the – at the time – effective iconography of Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi’s “*Majlis al-Shura al-Mujahidin*” that would later render itself into the ISI. The mod was called *Iraqi Resistance*⁵⁵ and basically enabled the player to fight as an *amir* (commander) of the *Mujahidin* of the “Islamic State of Iraq” with all subversive, guerilla style tactics of the GLA available, including suicide-bombers, setting IED’s, preparing ambushes and having armed mobs to repel foreign armies.



Installing “Iraqi Resistance” with the iconography of jihadist groups active in Iraq in 2006.

54 <http://iraqi.byethost12.com/>.

55 http://commandandconquer.filefront.com/file/Iraqi_Resistance_Mod_ModToaster_Package;61778

The coherent presence of AQ in the virtual world

As stated, the same means and mechanisms offered to a global and local audience by the abilities of the internet and specifically the “web 2.0” have been systematically penetrated and exploited by AQ. After the dawn of the internet and its discovery by AQ, the group systematically began hosting its propaganda and magazines under the auspices of the Saudi AQ branch in 2003 (Prucha 2010). Since then the internet has become vitally important for AQ and its related torrents and other jihadist – primarily Arabic speaking – groups worldwide. With blogs established, forums created, facebook profiles and groups set up and YouTube available as a free and easy to use platform to quickly spread jihadist videos, AQ has substantially infiltrated the internet and proudly calls this the “raids on websites, blogs and forums”⁵⁶ and has incorporated the Internet as *the* vital backbone for radicalization, motivation and recruitment of potential siblings. Another important aspect for AQ and its sympathizers are the various groups that in most parts seem to be publishing exclusively online and exclusively via jihadist forums, such as the *Global Media Front* (GIMF), or the *Ansar Mailing List Newsletter*, to name two of many. Furthermore, a number of “media” and “language departments” strive to supply a growing community of online jihadists with non-Arabic material, increasingly in German next to English, Urdu, Dari, Pashto or Russian translations of videos and ideological writings. But other languages are also covered by jihadist “media departments” with non-Arabic language forums working in unison with their Arabic counterparts.

Over the years sub-torrents adhering to the global AQ ideology have deployed local messages and threats in local languages.⁵⁷ Just as the GI has certainly discovered the multi-lingual setting of the internet, so has AQ and seeks to speak out for and to all Muslims, hoping to recruit as many as possible with al-Qa’ida’s radical creed and militancy. The Internet does not only enable AQ to rapidly respond to claims made by either Western media or governments, but it allows AQ to issue its “truth” as in contrast to the “lies” and terms this an universal debate between “the program of truth (*al-haqq*) versus the program of falsehood

56 AQ has over the years also published a wide variety of hacker manuals and programs that enables its members to communicate securely with PGP encryption and other tools.

57 Such as a group of pro-jihadist AQ affiliated individuals, based in Austria’s capital Vienna, who claimed to be members of the GIMF and opened the “Caliphate Voice Channel”. In 2007 two videos in German demanding a withdrawal of German and Austrian troops from Afghanistan had been issued while threatening the corresponding government in case of non-compliance. For a detailed report in German: <http://onlinejihad.wordpress.com/2007/03/11/terrordrohungen-gegen-osterreich-und-deutschland-auf-soldaten-in-afghanistan-als-auch-gegen-wirtschaftl-und-tourismus-ziele/>.

(*al-batil*).” The up-to-date responsive character of AQ in a highly professional ideological as well as technical manner may be one of the reasons for its success as a global terror brand which has led to various mergers with other radical-Islamist or jihadist groups (and / or online forums) in the past. When the Taliban kidnapped a group of South Korean Christian missionaries in Afghanistan, it was the leadership of AQ under Abu Yahya al-Libi who defended, justified and praised the action of “our fellow *Mujahidin*.” Also the notion was systematically reinforced and emphasized by al-Libi that AQ and the Taliban are indeed fighting together for the same cause and the identical sake (al-Libi 2007).⁵⁸ This writing was published while the international media focused on the hostage crisis and served as a response to quiet potential criticism that was sparked in the forums by members calling for the execution of the South-Korean missionaries. In a somewhat joint Taliban / AQ declaration, AQ member ‘Abdallah Sa’id praised Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar and addressed the virtual *ummah* of the “Cheerful news of victory beaconing from Afghanistan”, propagating the inseparability and the close cooperation of AQ with the Taliban, further strengthening primarily within the Arabic online spheres the unity of both groups and their ‘allied’ objectives against the invaders (Sa’id).⁵⁹

AQ has what the German Red Army Faction could only dream of and what was frequently emphasized in their writings and statements in the 1970 s, in planning “the next steps” (ID-Verlag 1997):

“Comprising propaganda for the armed struggle; explaining to the masses why it is necessary and unavoidable and how it can be prepared (conspiratorial leaflets and graffiti).”

From a technical standpoint, AQ is like most online actors, including the GI, as it has taken the next steps that are perhaps a logical result of the contemporary technological development. Both groups are part of what can be termed a youthful “pop-cultural movement” that draws attention on the Internet by specific messages and products and both groups have a specific language, graphical symbols in a highly individual iconography limited within its culture that is confined to the individual influence zones. While the same AQ related videos can be found within Facebook, there are also specific groups that use

58 In this writing al-Libi builds his arguments on various historical arguments and religious sources to legitimize hostage taking in Islam. Some of his arguments are in accordance with jihadist operations in Grozny who in 2003 asked the Saudi AQ chief ideologue al-‘Uyairi for his legal opinions that had been used to justify the execution of seven captured Russian Special Police members.

59 This document was published 11 April 2009. Both groups, AQ as well as the Taliban, frequently respond to changes of Western, mainly US, policy and propagate strategic aims and goals.

Facebook to upload, host and propagate their personally made graphics, pictures and videos.

With particular “products” openly broadcast, and which are always easy to download and install, a specific “corporate guideline” has unfolded that makes sense for the GI but is somewhat odd to find within AQ and its subgroups. One could say, AQ has adopted industry standards and established guidelines for its online materials. These guidelines, logos, symbols and the specific rhetoric provide a product authenticity and identification. The used icons, names, symbols and general layouts of documents and videos provide a coherent guideline that is used and respected. However, it must be noted that the graphical violence addressed by AQ as well as the purely virtual mode of violence hosted by the GI is different and remain distinct even if some icons and pictures may suggest a greater relationship – material that AQ exploits for its own purposes and within its specific strategic settings. Contrary to the fact that both groups have intersecting elements, the sympathizing online jihadists are the ones exposed to extreme forms of real violence – with a real-life ideological jihadist agenda and actual battle zones portrayed in romantic pictures⁶⁰. As such, it is the jihadists who, unlike the gamers of online or multiplayer games, are propagating the various forms of shown violence within a tight radical ideology (Prucha 2010; al-Batash 2009; Bonney 2004) using similar practical and technical methods as the gamers. Gamers are consumers of legal content. This may naturally include so-called “first person shooters” (FPS), or “killer games” and are neither exposed to real forms of violence and bloodshed and do not advise to commit such acts in real life (Williams et al 2005). Nevertheless, such games have a certain reputation, despite various studies and assertions.

“A longitudinal study of an online violent video game with a control group tested for changes in an aggressive cognitions and behaviors. The findings did not support the assertion that a violent game will cause substantial increases in real-world aggression” (Williams et al 2005)

It may be asked, how jihadist sympathizers approach games, which are played by most gamers simply for fun. For, as described, the indoctrinated and virtually radicalized armchair *Mujahid* does indeed understand violent games and even racing games (Need for Speed) as training. Confined to the virtual realms of the Internet, where the individual has been recruited by AQ’s worldviews, games may serve as a shallow boundary between virtual fantasy and would-be reality.

The overwhelming majority of the consumers of the GI simply enjoy various

60 Part of this “romance” is the extensive portray of killed Mujahidin in battle, the *shuhada’*. The *shuhada’* are a vital center of AQ’s ideology and propaganda. Pictures of deceased Mujahidin are frequently shared and countless *as-Sahab* and other AQ videos are purely dedicated to the element of the *shuhada’*.

games and genres although some controversial games have been publicly branded as having inspired or enabled real forms of crimes, such as the worldwide school shootings.⁶¹

Conclusion: The best of all worlds – the broad bandwidth of contemporary online jihadists

It may be true to best describe the situation as AQ having the best of all worlds online, as they may freely use, modify or simply propagate specific ideas and concepts within a framework the contemporary jihadist see fit to use in order to further their cause. Again, the main promotional tool and platform for the armchair jihadists as well as for real-life battle-hardened leaders are the online forums, and perhaps will remain so over the coming years. Facebook, YouTube and blogs are free, easy to use⁶² and provide a practical add-on to spread what the RAF termed “leaflets and graffiti” to reach out for the hearts and minds of a younger generation. While the GI is of course – like other cultural circles – influenced by the current political conditions of the world, the followers of AQ have the freedom to choose what products may seem useful for their jihadist endeavors and what deserves to be condemned and thus banned. Gaining practical experience in military training is a divine command according to AQ’s ideology and so it may be natural that some armchair jihadists in their fantasy world play online games. Besides the consumption of mostly Arabic handbooks on mines, sniper-rifles, grenades, guerilla and urban warfare tactics, some elements freely roam the GI’s product scale, using whatever games and mindsets suits them.

61 <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,614558,00.html>.

62 All you need is an e-mail address – which can be obtained very quickly and anonymously.

Jihad via Bluetooth: Al-Qa'ida's Mobile Phone Campaign



IslamicJihad | Ibn Ali al-Turki
Allahu Akbar!! Congratulations to the Mujahideen and Ummah for the successful strike in Sweden. Recompense for Afghanistan and cartoons.
53 minutes ago

“His desire was to undertake a ‘suicide-bombing’ operation (*al-‘amaliyyat al-istishhadiyya*) and he was not equipped with patience, as he kept saying: “if you don’t allow me, then I will just leave and not come back to you. Maybe I will undertake it somewhere else and there won’t be those stopping me to attain the reward [in the afterlife].”
(Doctor Ayyub)

One may say that al-Qa’ida (AQ) is a smart, flexible and technical able movement. It has managed to remain active as both an enemy and a threat, despite the increased pressure on the network since 9/11 and the following military interventions. Furthermore, AQ – and with it ‘Islamist and jihadist terrorism – is on almost every countries political security agenda. Somehow and somewhere. Including a never-ending discussion about “Islam” and “immigration.” With the increased (prominently US-) military pressure on the AQ network and its affiliates¹ in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and in some parts Somalia and now Yemen,² the ideology seems to have increased almost in a response of defiance. While the groups and networks certainly have endured losses and suffered setbacks, its media departments, video outlets and corpuses of texts even more roam freely on the internet nowadays with the online jihad forums remaining the mains gates of disseminating the propaganda and ideology of AQ & co. The genre of *jihad* remains active and well, independently of the networks actual condition. By utilizing the internet-based (social) media outlets³ and by spreading both

1 Primary affiliates are, besides the Taliban, also the German/ Turkish dominated Islamic Jihad Union. Eight German members of this group, that plotted attacks in Germany in 2007, had been killed in October 2010 showing both the pressure and the threat posed by US-drones operating in volatile regions: http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/11/8_germans_killed_in.php [01.11.2010].

2 Particularly after the al-Qa’ida Yemen-based wing attempted to down a US-bound passenger jet in December 2009 and after sending highly explosives packages via UPS and FedEx to various destinations in October 2010.

3 Ranging from Facebook to YouTube with main (and mostly multilingual) forums as prime sources besides websites such as www.tawheed.ws that host thousands of primarily Arabic (and partially English) documents of *jihad*.

highly ideological as well as pseudo-theological writings with a historical/psycho-religious sentiment, the jihadists provide an appealing and highly indoctrinating outlook of their self-chosen alternative lifestyle which can best be termed as idealistically re-enacting primarily the lives of early Muslims under the commandment of prophet Muhammad. The proclaimed and defined sense of ‘piety’ and ‘fearing God’ is also expressed to a global online audience by publishing professionally made videos. In these filmed publications, the ideology of jihad receives a voice, a face and a tongue whereas young fighters, members in general, and particularly individuals, who carry out ‘suicide-bombing operations’ (*istishhadiyyun*)⁴ recapitulate consumed ideological sentiments that is often offered with guidance by depicting sermons or statements made by senior leadership elements of al-Qa’ida, featuring prominently Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri or Abu Yahya al-Libi. By doing so, a coherence in terms of ideological as well as political and strategy is formulated by high-standing individuals. Of importance are of course also the announced statuses where specific social-religious attributes, such as *shaykh*, *Mujahid*, *qa’id*, ‘*alim* or *istishhadi* serve as another form of authority by members, who subsequently – according to the propaganda – are adherents of the enormous corpus of jihadist literature and rulings. Thus, members are broadcast and portrayed who execute the military stance of the ideological fundament of the global jihadist corpus and narrative.

The genre of the jihad-videos include, prominently, eulogies for fallen *mujahidin* who are, according to the jihadists’ creed and definition, “alive and not dead.”⁵ Furthermore, mostly young Arabs as well as multinational converts and supporters are depicted to underline the claim of defending oneself against defined and perceived enemies, who “wage war on Islam.”⁶ Such commonalities exists particularly in jihadist filmed propaganda elements, freely disseminated

4 Translations of this term vary. “Suicide-bombing” is certainly next to “martyrdom operations” (*al-‘amaliyyat al-istishhadiyya*) the most common used term used by media outlets. The jihadists, however, in their translations from Arabic sources often use “martyrdom” themselves while most Arabic-language media outlets refer to “suicide-bombing operations” (*al-‘amaliyyat al-intihariyya*). Sometimes the term “self-inoculation” is used to describe such attacks. For an English description of a German translation of an Arabic document regarding such attacks: <http://www.jihadica.com/the-continued-focus-on-german-language-materials-elif-medya-justifies-martyr-operations/> [12. 12. 2010].

5 As implied by the inflationary use and recitation of Quran 3:169, whereas any killed believer who died on the path of God is deemed a *shahid*, dead in this world and alive in a higher existence, namely Paradise. “Do not think of those who have been killed in God’s way as dead. They are alive with their Lord, well provided for” (Haleem 2010).

6 As suggested in numerous writings, statements and videos published by the *mujahidin*. One source, as published by the ‘mobile phone package number 3’, is a statement by the Taliban stating that “the foreigners are against Islam and against all of Afghanistan”. A typical slogan by the jihadists’ sources is the terming of “war against Islam” as the true nature of the “war against terrorism”.

via all means of the internet, and are another bond of connecting the jihadists' hotspots such as Iraq, Somalia, Yemen, Chechnya, Afghanistan or Turkistan while increasingly uttering threats to host-nations of commissioned troops stationed in Islamic countries.⁷ In the jihadists' perception, the global war against Islam is fuelled by an international conspiracy, only existing to wage "war on Islam" – on all fronts (culturally, ideologically, politically and religiously) and who "declare the blood of Muslims as legal" (Prucha 2010).⁸ Attempts to diffuse the jihadists' definition of key principles by, in some cases, pro-governmental Muslim scholars (*'ulama'*), has led to the sentiment that the proper interpretation of the "religion of God" is under attack by the "*'ulama'* of the Marines"⁹ while the "youth of Islam" (*al-shabab al-Islam*) is endangered of being brainwashed by "Crusader", "Zionist" and sometimes "Iranian and Shi-ite" lobbyists, agents, politicians and so forth. Part of this comprising campaign includes, besides active military suppression and the alleged persecution of Muslims worldwide, also the beforehand mentioned threat of a re-interpreted Islam which is deemed contrary to the true teaching and the mind-set of the jihadist. This re-education is being imposed by outside actors, mostly termed "occupants" (*al-muhtallun*) and is implemented by defined vassal-governments, henchmen¹⁰ and in general "apostates" (*al-murtaddun*). The term *al-murtaddun* is applied usually to individuals working for or with the vassal-governments, and thus they have lost their status in the jihadists' notion of being fellow Muslims. The *murtaddun* are by their own choosing and in their governmental function (mostly Police members, secret service agents and soldiers) legitimate

7 Main actors are Arabs, but Arabic, the "language of God" (*kalimat allah*) is the main denominator. In the case of Turkistan, West China, Arabic and Uighur language videos and writings are published, claiming the Uighur Muslims are victims due to their faith just like the Palestinians or Muslims elsewhere, who have to endure occupation while 'Islam' is considered being systematically extirpated. By using Arabic and by citing Arabic passages of the Quran, individuals seek to strengthen their authority and position themselves as 'scholars'.

8 This sentiment is also often expressed and used to sanctify and justify 'reactionary' violence against non-Muslims and Muslims alike. For example, Sawt al-jihad no. 2, pp. 33 – 36. For an analysis of "The Voice of Jihad" as well as a complete translation of all Saudi al-Qa'ida branch issued statements and memoranda: Nico Prucha, *Die Stimme des Dschihad – al-Qa'idas erstes Online Magazin* (2010). In the meantime this sentiment has become mainstream in the jihadist' online centre of gravities and is also one of the main arguments uttered by Anwar al-Awlaqi for the proposed defensive jihad.

9 A notion often deployed, particularly within jihadist online forums, for example the "Dangers, not being warned against by the '*ulama'* al-Marines": <http://www.hanein.info/vb/showthread.php?t=144214&page=1> [12. 12. 2010].

10 *adhnab al-mabahith* a frequent found coinage in jihadist writings and videos. See for example the posting by the member al-Muhajir in the *al-Shumukh* forum warning of the Saudi al-Sakina Campaign: <http://www.shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=81804> [02. 12. 2010].

to kill as they are part of the alleged war against all Sunni Muslims. In the technical context of the professional abilities of the globalized online jihadists, it should be noted that such videos have swapped into the general platforms of the internet, including a collection of 119 execution videos by several jihadist groups, conveniently downloadable (1.19 gb) via BitTorrent.¹¹ With the *murtaddun* in place, vassal-governments had begun to expand the propagated “war against Islam” by conversing religious principles hijacked by the jihadists in a move to counter the violent narratives. With re-education programs and institutes such as the Saudi al-Sakina Campaign,¹² the jihadists even more take into plight to warn about the distortion of Islam and caution surfing certain ‘deviant’ websites and TV-stations (al-Arabiya) where “agents” are sought of influencing the consumers by feeding them false statements and facts. The jihadist online forums are, once again, the prime basis where supporters also attempt to monitor such ‘enemy activity’, whereas Arabic TV-stations try – by the agenda of outside actors – to further distort the jihadists’ perceptions.¹³

The firm belief is that the individual *Mujahid* is part of a greater, a universal, war of “the program of truth versus the program of falsehood” (Meijer 2007). This principle was expressed by prominent figures such as Yusuf al-‘Uyairi – a former bin Laden bodyguard, (co-) founder and first leader of the Saudi based AQAP, (co-) founder of “The Voice of Jihad” and an inspiring ideologue (Prucha 2010; Ramadan 2009; Meijer 2007)¹⁴ – and has since become somewhat mainstream and a further common denominator in the jihadist genre.¹⁵ Writings,

11 http://isohunt.com/torrent_details/158778205/Islam+muhamed+avi?tab=summary [12. 12. 2010]. Filmed executions, both western hostages as well as defined *murtaddun*, are a main propaganda tool for terrorist groups in general. Here, the group stages three main elements: (1) Staging a kangaroo-trial, (2) executing a transgressor, a ‘convicted’ criminal, (3) promoting ‘justice’ and the presumed show of authority, according to the groups religious-political agenda.

12 <http://www.assakina.com/> [02.12.2010]. This program is in parts controversial, as, for example, prominent former detainees of Guantanamo renounced jihadist ideology and violence, however, resurfaced in Yemen to join the new al-Qa’ida branch of the Arab Peninsula in January 2009.

13 <http://shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=84337> [12. 12. 2010]. In this posting, issued by *Shumukh* forum member Saqr al-Biqa’a, warns of a contribution by Lebanese TV station *al-Jadad*. In this piece, *shaykh* ‘Umar Bakri claims that the AQ media outlet *al-Fajr* is infiltrated while *Hizbullah* is being promoted. Furthermore, the Sunni, pro-AQ, ‘*Abdallah* ‘*Azzam Brigades*, who operate primarily in Lebanon, are portrayed as being infiltrated as well and thus ‘deviate’ in their creed and political aims.

14 His writings to this day remain of great importance and are frequently re-distributed by the jihadists’ media outlets. He was killed by Saudi security forces in 2003, Prucha 2010: 56.

15 For one, the “Sharia-law Judge of the Islamic State of Iraq”, Abu Sulayman al-‘Utaybi addressed this topic in a propagandist manner with theological allures in his highly received writing “The Difference between *al-haqq* and *al-butlan*”, published in early 2007 (<http://tawhed.ws/r?i=f3dkkksv>).

religious decrees of all kind and thoughts following the line of the jihadists' school are being broadcast on all fronts and by any technical means possible. This includes Smartphones and Bluetooth as much as social networks and online forums – it's the same data being disseminated, but only reflected by users with different technical means and preferences.

Copy-and-paste Jihad

Part of the “program of truth” is naturally the need to conduct missionary work in the jihadists' sense – by all means available, while refuting and denouncing any perceived element of “falsehood” (*al-batil*). The exploitation of such key notions have also been stated as one of the main motivational factors by prominent fighters in the recent past who claim to conduct military operations of all kind in the name of promoting the “truth” (*haqq*) while opposing “falsehood” (*al-batil*). When on 31 December 2009 the Jordan-based Palestinian Hummam Khalil al-Bal'awi, known by his alias Abu Dujana al-Khurasani, was invited into the CIA run forward operations base Chapman in Khost, Afghanistan, his true intentions came to light when he carried out his *istishhadiyya* operation killing seven CIA agents and his Jordanian handler (Hegghammer 2010).¹⁶ After his *istishhadiyya* operation, the filmed testimony (*wasiya*) of Abu Dujana was released by the notorious as-Sahab media foundation and several interviews followed. This material had been released over a lengthier period of time to maximize the propaganda effects and capitalizing on the successful blast against the CIA.¹⁷ Abu Dujana, an industrious member of jihadist forums and contributor to jihadist e-zines, became now an even more appealing figure within the jihadists' online spheres. In an interview with as-Sahab, released January 2010 after the *istishhadi* attack by Abu Dujana in Afghanistan, Abu Dujana is speaking directly to the audience of the internet jihad followers and sympathizers. The interview starts with an introduction by as-Sahab that

16 According to Abu Dujana, his handler of the Jordanian General Intelligence Directorate (GID), Abu Zayyad, told him that GID chief 'Ali Burjaq had been responsible of the assassination 'Abdallah 'Azzam. For the complete English translation of the interview with Abu Dujana by as-Sahab member Adam Ghadan: <http://onlinejihad.wordpress.com/2010/02/28/as-sahab-videotranscript-of-abu-dujana-al-khurasani/> [12. 12. 2010].

17 As-Sahab used a similar, but lengthier, timeframe to release the *wasiya* of each 9/11 operative. By doing so, the attack was remembered, re-honored, re-enforced and adapted to the contemporary global circumstances (the Iraq war or recent events in Afghanistan).

“the new Crusader wars¹⁸ have entered their second decade, while the battle of truth (al-haqq) and falsehood (al-batil) continues at its fiercest. This battle has exposed the scandalous and hideous face of the people of falsehood which is typical for the disbelieving West, the western henchmen and the apostates (murtaddin) in the Islamic world.”¹⁹

By re-deploying such key sentiments and notions by active *mujahidin* and operatives in general, appealing role-models are depicted that furthermore serve as a function that must idealistically be re-enacted by the consumers. The case of Abu Dujana, who was a medical doctor and supposedly ‘turned’ by the Jordanian General Intelligence Directorate to spy on AQ and the Taliban, took this opportunity to strike at the heart of the jihadists’ worst enemy – the Central Intelligence Agency. Announcing future attacks in the US homeland, he portrays his operation as a revenge for slain Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan leader Baytullah Mehsud²⁰ who was killed in a drone strike. Abu Dujana, however, has also gained fame in the *Ansar al-Mujahideen* issued data-package intended to spread by sympathizers as part of a greater commitment for the “truth” as well as “missionary work” by using Bluetooth capable mobile devices for the sake and the defense of ‘properly’ interpreted religious sources. Such sentiments, the violation of described sacrosanct elements of Islam, the endangerment of pious Muslim women by western influences and their cultural wickedness, and the political reality of occupied Islamic countries are naturally main drivers of primarily Arabic jihadist writings. Such sentiments are also handed down to non-Arabic jihadist translations and portrayed within non-Arabic videos. This is a key argument in most published sources, but correlates with the basic notions of a greater threat to the jihadists’ proclaimed Islamic obligations that enforce, for example, the segregation of women in order to remain ‘pure’ and subsequently righteous believers (who in turn also further the males conviction of being a ‘proper Muslim’ himself outside of his individual actions).

The military reaction within the framework of waging a violent jihad in contested and/or occupied territories is, however, frequently embedded in a diffuse system and particularly found as a whole in most *shahid* stories. One example, also promoted to disseminate via Bluetooth, of summoning justifications and creating a narrative of legality while issuing hagiographic attributes is

18 The expression “the new Crusader wars” is an indirect reference to Yusuf al-‘Uyairi who coined this in his writing *Haqiqat al-harb al-salibiyat al-jadida* (“The Truth of the new Crusader Wars”), <http://tawhed.ws/dl?i=jo4qx3jj>.

19 Nico Prucha, “The Jihadists’ Motivation for Suicide-Operations”, *Journal for Intelligence, Propaganda and Security Studies*, Volume 4, No.1 (2010). The excerpt is based on the Interview with Abu Dujana (“Liqa‘ ma’ al-shahid Abu Dujana al-Khurasani – rahimahu l-llah.” As-Sahab video, January 2010).

20 <http://onlinejihad.wordpress.com/2010/01/09/abu-dujana-video/>.

“the biography of the *shahid* Mullah Dadullah.”²¹ He was killed in a battle with US-troops in May 2007 and had been a *Mujahid* for twenty years and is described as a brilliant leader and tactician. Born in 1967, according to his older brother, al-Hajj La La, “Dadullah moved out into the armed *jihad* against the Russians in 1983. He entered the first battle against the Red Army in the village Shahin in the Province of Arghandab” where Dadullah impressed “experienced *mujahidin* who came to know him for his valor and proficiency during combat.”²² Having joined the Taliban, while in the beginning fighting under the command of Mullah Muhammad Omar, Dadullah lost his right leg when he stepped on a mine. Nevertheless, he participated in the conquest of Kabul and kept on fighting against rival Afghan and Uzbek²³ generals and factions. His “*Jihad* began anew against the Americans and the marionette-regime [of Karzai]” and “he was kept safe by God of great dangers by keeping him for the new *jihad* and another fierce war. [This time] against the global Crusaders, led by malevolent America.” In this writing (a video was also published by as-Sahab)²⁴ a sub-section considers “his concern about the Islamic cause” as commonsense triggering factors that are part of the overall justification of resistance. Given that Dadullah had been a person of high-standing, being as a commander and a believer who set out on the path of *Jihad* as deemed a divine commandment, the “autobiography” includes a wider angle for his motivation of armed resistance. “His endeavors in regard of the Islamic cause” consist of:

A matter of occupation and injustice:

“He [Dadullah] wasn’t just a man of war and action, rather he followed the cause of the Islamic *ummah*, like the cause of Iraq, Palestine, Chechnya and other places of subjugated and tyrannized Muslims.”

21 Published in the second edition of the data-package, “The Autobiography of Mulla Dadullah”.

22 Ibid.

23 The betrayal in question happened, according to the “autobiography”, in 1996. “Dadullah and 1600 *mujahidin* had conquered Baghlan during the catastrophe of Mazar-i-Shareef, a result of the betrayal of Uzbek general ‘Abd al-Malik, whereas about ten thousand *mujahidin* had been sacrificed.”

24 Ayman al-Zawahiri appeared in a as-Sahab video entitled “Eulogy for the leader of the *istishadiyyun*, the Mulla Dadullah.” The video can be viewed on YouTube, on the channel of the member “almasri002”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XasU9lltFP4> [10. 12. 2010]. The video is introduced by Quran 3:169, a part often deployed in such publications to eulogize the *shahid* while providing another outlook to active *mujahidin* as those who fight on the path of God.

Exterior conditions:

The need to defend the “Holy Sites Islamic” (for example the al-Aqsa Mosque)²⁵ and the conviction to respond to the cartoons depicting “the Messenger of God in 2006 by the criminal Danish-Crusader newspaper, that drove Millions of Muslims out [on the streets] to demonstrate.”

Reactionary stance and the need to act:

“The *shahid* Dadullah announced the offer of 20 kg of pure gold for whoever kills this [Danish artist], this criminal perpetrator. That is how his fury manifested in his deep-rooted belief in the defense of the *hurma*²⁶ of the noble Messenger.”

Such personal commitments, that are part of a collective within specific theological and historical lines, are found frequently in both the narrative of jihadist videos as well as the literature genre. The jihadist, primarily Arabic sources, contain specific common denominators, that are especially referenced in alleged personal statements, motivational factors or autobiographies. This not only includes the approval and a main identity set by senior leadership functionaries, but also works for mid- to bottom-level members, including ‘common’ *mujahidin* as much as *istishhadiyya* operatives. With the publications, particularly the videos, these role-models are further crafted by the individual member in the vast array of the determined, defined and justified act committed. Here, the perception of the jihadist, independently of highly complex narratives and ideological content, is summoned up and his actions are justified, ranging from revenge (“occupation”, “violation of sacrosanct values”, “insults towards God and the Prophet” etc), to alleged proper worship, to following the historical example of Muhammad and early Muslims (*al-Ansar*) or, generally, the defense of “Islam”. The framework also includes, in the meantime, lashing out against democracy, against any form of secularity and the products of western foreign policy implications (i. e. the “vassal-governments”), to restore a romanticized ideal that is understood as the only applicable salvation for both the conditions of Muslims as well as the Islamic world. This perhaps is to be comprehended as restoring a golden age, that is by all means being prevented by anti-Islamic forces.

25 *nahnu qadimun* is the title of the first Yemen-based AQAP in January 2009, whereas the main intention of the proclaimed jihad is besides the liberation of the al-Aqsa Mosque the safeguarding and protection of Muslims who are suffering under the US-presence in the Gulf of Aden and the alleged drone reconnaissance missions violating the jihadists’ definition of sacrosanct elements (such as women or the exposure of Muslims in general, with the intention to shed Islamic blood).

26 “That which is holy, sacred. Sacrosanct, inviolable, or taboo” (Hans Wehr). In the jihadists’ perception, the inviolabilities are systematically targeted, including insulting God or the Prophet, or by violating the *hurma* of women, which in turn are part of the *hurma*.

The jihadist, also by all means, is outside of those alleged conspiracy of anti-Islamic forces and therefore has the right, the freedom and the necessity to speak out the 'truth' within his framework and as such undertake responsive actions.

“Democracy is the contract of cliental of the Jews and Christians. They are ruling contrary to what God sent [to mankind]. They are torturing our brothers, the *mujahidin* and are testing them in their religion and by their captivity. Our brothers are detained in prisons, their ‘ird (honor) violated and their *hurmat* (inviolabilities) are brutally attacked while they insult God – mighty and exalted is He – and His Prophet Muhammad – peace and blessing be upon him – for no one undertook anything against this. Therefore, we, the youth of Islam (*shabab al-Islam*), are setting out – with the permission of God – to support our Prophet Muhammad; what are we waiting for? Are we waiting for the Jews and Christians to wipe out and triumph over our religion? No, by God! We are men, *mujahidin*, on His path!”²⁷

With the ongoing development of the so-called “War against Terrorism” and the increasing threat posed by AQ to strike, again, within western countries²⁸, the argumentation and justification has also turned into a language of defending the jihadist principles that completely correlate with the specific interpretation of Islam in their stance of being the only true Muslims. As the already comprising and vast corpus of jihadist radical writings increases, it remains in great parts uncontested with the claim of a self-appointed new ‘Islamic school’ that has its students, professors and *madrasas* in all angles and forms of the internet. “The caravans of *mujahidin*” in videos here serve as the ultimate role-model and are the output of the appeal online – the *mujahidin* are, after all, the graduates and understand the true notion of ‘Islam’. Men, who actually undertake these heroic acts and subsequently are the ‘true believers’, the archetypes, fulfilling their covenant made to and by God. With the all-access strategy of AQ & co., chosen parts of its ideological documents, role-model videos, pictures and a-cappella style songs have naturally entered the realm of mobile phones years ago, but with the here described Jihad via Bluetooth, the intention of conducting jihadist *da’wa* from pocket to pocket ventures into a new level.

As Nigel Stanley, a specialist in business technology and IT security at Bloor Research²⁹ points out,

27 Al-Malahim, a video production for the al-Qa’ida on the Arab Peninsula organization (2010): *Wa-yatakhkhuḍh minhum al-shuhads’*. Filmed testimony of Abu ‘Atta’ al-Hudaydi – a suicide-bomber who targeted the US-embassy in Sana’a’, Yemen.

28 As may have been the case on 11 December 2010, when a jihadist orientated suicide-bomber carried out his operation in Sweden, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/dec/12/stockholm-suicide-bomber-profile> [12.12.2010]. It is perhaps not a randomly chosen date, as jihadists usually ‘commemorate’ other attacks (on 11.12.2007 the Algerian capital was rocked by suicide-bombers).

29 http://www.bloorresearch.com/about/people/Nigel_St Stanley.html.

“Bluetooth has been used as a short range wireless communication technology since it was first released in the late 1990’s. The range of devices that now support the Bluetooth standard is significant and most if not all mobile phones currently available this communication standard. This popularity and ubiquitous nature has inevitably attracted the attention of criminal hackers and the jihadist community. In many instances the spread of jihadist material via Bluetooth connection has occurred due to users placing their devices in discoverable mode and accepting any invitation to connect, without fully understanding the origin of the connection or the nature of the material being delivered. Users can be fooled into accepting an anonymous Bluetooth connection using simple social engineering techniques such as spoofing a network operator update message or maybe sending a fake dating request message.”³⁰

With sophisticated data-packages designed for mobile phones, the jihadist propaganda has yet occupied another – and most popular – technical niche with the aim of spreading their messages. Most interesting is the selection of audio, visual and mostly text sources that have been deemed as fundamental documents of ultimate importance by the jihadists that every sympathizer should have ready in his pocket – stored on his personal mobile phone. Perhaps the fundamental advantage of having jihadist materials ready for both consumption and dissemination on ones mobile phone is the fact that mobile phones are highly individual gadgets. Arguably the mobile phone is the most intimate form of computing we have ever seen. What other computer will accompany a person at all hours of the day or night, providing a unique environment in which to view content privately?

Entering a new dimension, the “Mobile Detachment”: *Fariq jawwal al-ansar*

With the data of *jihad* along with its filmed, audio and picturesque agitprop materials of the various technical stages of the internet (Hakim 2009)³¹ have been roaming freely online, the *al-Ansar Mujahideen Forum* covered yet another niche of dissemination: Enabling the sympathizers and adherents of the jihadists’ principles of religious conduct and warfare to download specific data-

30 Nigel Stanley and Nico Prucha: Jihad in your pocket – Mobile Phones as carriers of terrorism, unpublished manuscript (2011).

31 Including the so-called “web 2.0” whereas greater interaction by the user is permissible on – for example – social networking sites such as “Facebook” or with jihad sympathizing users being able to rapidly disseminate radical content on various “YouTube channels” and, increasingly, twitter. For a jihadists’ strategy on the importance of Internet blogs and the need to expand the realm of their online outreach by leaving comments on various blogs the writing of online jihadist sympathizer ‘Omar ‘Abd al-Hakim is worthy to read. His document was published in the notorious (and now offline) al-Falluja Forum, September 2009.

packages designed for mobile phones. Provided with a special (open-source software) the mobile users can access the documents or watch videos on their portable device while being able to send out these highly indoctrinating and radicalizing sources via Bluetooth to other, mostly unwary, Bluetooth enabled portable devices. The data offered in these conveniently downloaded and administered packages provides nearly everything of the grand-genre of jihadist materials.



The first package was introduced as *Fariq jawwal al-ansar* (FJA) in October 2009. Embedded with a special logo/icon, the file was downloadable as a compressed, win-rar (*.rar), format, and a coherent structure. Since the first data-package, the total number of five published packs (as of 2011), remained loyal to the same layout, logo and structure consisting of the following:

Programs: In this folder the program Symbian³² is available to install on your Bluetooth capable mobile phone, including a Quran and *tafsir* program as well as a special software to search the text based Arabic files. By incorporating specially designed programs for mobile phones (based on Symbian, the main operating system for mobile devices and Smartphones), these agitprop packages can be transferred to a mobile phone for re-dissemination via Bluetooth to unwitting mobile phone users in a given proximity. Bluetooth software enables wireless and fixed devices to exchange data over short distances by radio signal. Being aware that individuals are being inspired to store incriminating content on their personal mobile phones – that may be used at some point against them in courts – the data-packages also offer encryption software.³³

Audio: This section has three subfolders a) *anashid*³⁴, b) *tilawat*³⁵, c) *kali-*

32 An open-software program, that seems to be incorporating into a greater body by 2011, http://developer.symbian.org/wiki/Symbian_Foundation_web_sites_to_shut_down [12. 12. 2010].

33 <http://www.smartphoneware.com/crypto-for-s60-product.php>

34 Male voices singing in a-cappella style.

*mat.*³⁶ The mix consist of indoctrinating politico-religious sermons such as the “interview with *shaykh* Abu Mus’ab al-Suri” (Lia 2008), the “Biographies of the *shuhada’*”, “There is nothing like Falluja³⁷”, or “Various Speeches by Shaykh Osama” (Lawrence 2005).

Pictures: Here a great number of – partially professionally made – pictures are available for the user(s). Most pictures (jpeg and gif formats) depict renowned figures of international jihadism, such as the Jordanian *mujahidin* commander Khattab in Chechnya, the 9/11 attacks (sometimes with bin Laden) or simply show various logos and in general the iconography of Jihad groups worldwide. A picture showing the burning towers of the World Trade Center reads “19 +1” with the smiling face of would-be aircraft bomber Faruq present. Completely veiled women are also portrayed, “the Muslim sisters”. The *Fariq jawwal al-Ansar* logo is included in most pictures.

Videos: All the videos in this folder have been converted into the 3gp format, a playable version specially designated for mobile phones. It should also be noted, that since several years now, the jihad-videos are disseminated in multiple sizes and in formats, one being 3gp.³⁸ The videos disseminated by the *jawwal* data-package are adherent to a particular layout and corporate identity. Each video starts with a short introduction depicting the *jawwal* logo flying into the screen before the actual video starts. The offering, for example, includes a video from the *al-Malahim* Media group by Yemen based AQ offshoot. *Anashad* with filmed sequences, ‘Jihad Music-Videos’, are also available such as “The Men of Iraq”, showing footage of masked *mujahidin* of the Iraqi-based *al-Ansar* group firing their guns at various targets in unison with a-cappella music providing further means of indoctrination. “A *shahid* eulogizing another *shahid*” by the Somalia based Harakat al-shabab al-mujahidin or *as-Sahab* videos showing the *is-*

35 This sub-folder contains mainly mp3’s of chosen parts of the Quran. *Tilawa* usually means the recitation, particularly of the Quran.

36 Interviews, tales, speeches by leaders etc.

37 The Iraqi city of Falluja plays a dominant role in most Iraqi *shuhada’* stories, where a great deal of *mujahidin* perished in two major fierce battles against US-soldiers. The Saudi AQ branch undertook a revenge operation (April 2004) in Saudi Arabia, claiming of having killed three American soldiers. In June 2004, American Air Force contractor Paul Marshall Johnson was kidnapped and subsequently beheaded by *mujahidin* who, according to their statement, belonged as well to the al-Fallujah Brigade, Prucha 2010: 196–7, 202–03.

38 One example is the video “Juba, the Baghdad Sniper” published by the “Islamic Army in Iraq.” This video was – as usual – disseminated in various forums and it was openly advertised for on the IAI’s homepage (<http://www.iaisite.org/>) as well as by “Juba’s blog” (content available in multiple languages, <http://juba-online.blogspot.com/>). The media was already offered as the 3gp format which is also smaller in size and hence quicker to acquire, and perhaps somewhat more private to consume on personal mobile phones instead of (shared?) computers. Due to the popularity of Juba, a series of three movies had been published.

tishhsdiyya operation against the Danish embassy in Pakistan cover most niches of the contemporary output and notions of the online published centers of gravity of jihadist propaganda.

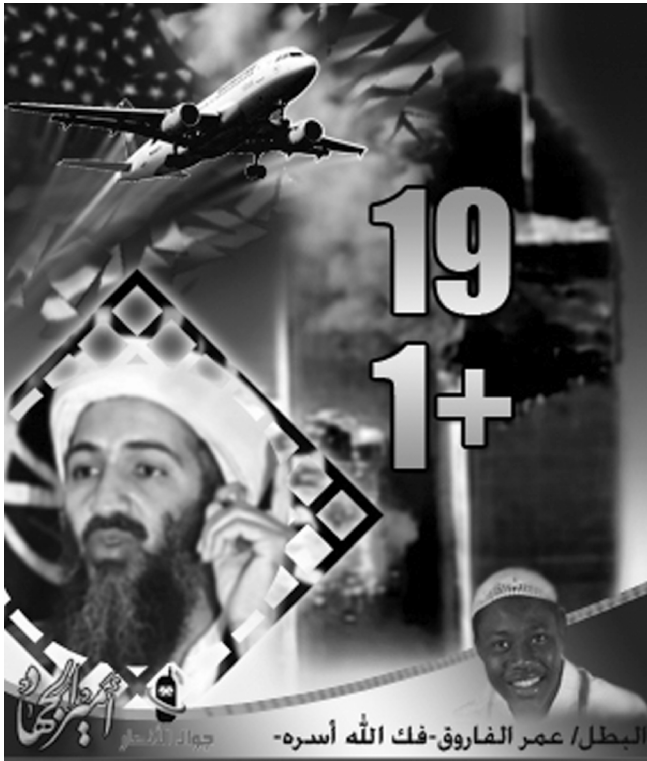
Texts: The Arabic writings are offered in three formats: a) MS-WORD (*.doc), b) Adobe Acrobat (*.pdf), c) Text-format (*.txt). This guarantees that these texts can be read and made available via any mobile phone or computer by a simple standard text editor. All texts files, except the text-only based *.txt files, have the *jawwal* logo incorporated as a watermark, which is not always beneficial for the reader.³⁹ The texts include all genres of the flourishing jihad literature. Predominantly the stories of slain *mujahidin* and the testimonies of the *istishhadiyyun* (the *shuhada'*-genre) are sought as a main driver of radicalization and indoctrination of these appealing role-models. Literature is offered that tells the stories, once again, of outstanding and prominent jihadist figures and leaders from all over the world. This includes, for example, the biography and outstanding military and terrorist operations of Chechen commander Shamil Basayev, the architect of the Nord-Ost Musical hostage taking (Moscow, 2002)⁴⁰ as well as the Beslan school massacre (2004; Phillips 2007). The focus sometimes was clearly evident, as the case of the 5th data-package shows, which re-disseminated the *shuhada'* tales of fighters of the "Islamic State of Iraq" (ISI). Also complete electronic magazines, so-called e-zines or webzines, are found in some data-packages, such as "*as-Sumud*" ("Resistance") published in Arabic by the Afghan branch of the Taliban or the "*Sada*" ("Echo") of Jihad" which was brought to light by the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). Another main element are the various statements of jihadist groups, such as declarations and memoranda of the al-Qa'ida offshoot in Africa, AQIM, or statements made by ISI claiming highly diverse attacks, military operations or simply refuting "lies made by the government of the Green Zone", a reference to the highly secure – but nevertheless penetrated – governmental area in Baghdad. Handpicked books, transcribed sermons and interviews are, however, also among the files, which are deemed of great importance that should be submitted to potential receivers. Books and lengthier writings include highly ideological titles written by deceased Saudi scholar Hammud bin 'Uqla' al-Shu'aybi or "How to Prepare for your Afterlife" by the newcomer-ideologue Khalid 'Abd al-Rahman al-Husaynan⁴¹, "And Incite the Believers" by Saudi first-Generation AQAP member

39 In the second data-package, the watermark handicapped the reader gravely, but it has since been improved.

40 Yusuf al-'Uyairi, who advised the Chechen *mujahidin* on the legality of kidnappings and executions of hostages, also provided an Arabic assessment, entitled "The Moscow Theatre Operation – What have the *mujahidin* gained, and what lost?": [http://tawhed.ws/dl?i=sr6 s0 m85 \[07.12.2010\]](http://tawhed.ws/dl?i=sr6 s0 m85 [07.12.2010]).

41 All of his writings, up to date (2011), can be accessed via tawhed.ws/

Abdallah bin Muhammad al-Rushud, or “The Letter to Muslim Sister” by al-Zawahiri’s wife Umayma Hasan Ahmad Muhammad Hasan.⁴²



The content of all data-packages is well chosen and partially comprises new, up-to-date materials, and partially includes and builds on fundamental documents that are of ultimate importance in the jihadists’ mindset. The general characteristic of these packages are described in the posting on the *al-Ansar*

a?a=husainan. He appeared first in a video entitled “A Quite Talk with Obama”, published by *as-Sahab* in mid 2009, and has since been shown sporadically, including as a *Mujahid* in charge of firing grenades into western military bases in Afghanistan: <http://onlinejihad.wordpress.com/2010/02/26/not-so-new-as-sahab-video-reclaims-shelling-of-foreign-military-base---and-khalid-al-husaynan/>. During Ramadan 2009 al-Husaynan delivered a number of written and filmed guidelines to the *virtual ummah*.

- 42 Besides addressing specific attributes of the ‘pious’ woman, she also clearly states the role of women in *jihad*: 1. Teaching kids to defend and obey to *jihad*; 2. Support the male *mujahidin* by whatever means possible (financial aid, taken care of wounded). “We [the women] place ourselves for the services of the *mujahidin*. What they [the men] demand of us, we fulfil – no matter if its financial support, by helping out, by providing information or by participating in combat and even by undertaking self-inoculation operations.”

Forum by the member *Jawwal al-Ansar*, who posted under the title “invitation to participate ## {proclamation of open registrations to merge with the FJA}”⁴³ a call to join while offering at the same time, in a different posting, to download the fourth package. Besides the invitation, the posting included a clear ‘mission statement’ along the need to have enough brothers of the forum for technical support (“Photoshop – film editing – sound engineering – transcripts”).

The Mission statement

The mission statements ultimate goal is to have a

“specialized detachment / unit (*fariq*) in the crafting and dissemination of all content, that is intended to work on mobile phones. The content [includes] knowledge, incitement (*tahrid*) and *da'wa* issued under the sponsorship of the *Ansar al-Mujahideen* forum’s administration.”

The basic line of thought is broken into four simple categories:

1. “The *fariq* of audio-engineering:
Engineering and dissemination of audio fragments of speeches and sermons given by the scholars and leaders. [Furthermore,] this includes recitations [of the Quran], poems, songs and other formats.
2. The *fariq* for transcripts:
Selection, transcribing and publication of jihadist magazines, affecting stories, unique articles and the most important statements in a visible format or by any format that mobile phones support.
3. The *fariq* for designing propaganda pictures:
The design and dissemination of jihadist pictures and unique styling of any format supported by mobile phones.
4. The *fariq* of conversion and upload:
The conversion of jihadist movies into any format supported by mobile phones and by uploading parts [of the converted videos].”

The goal is clearly described as “disseminating the jihadists’ mindset by the means of mobile phones (...) as well as developing the propaganda.” This may be part of a two-folded appeal by AQ’s online sympathizers: 1. Appeal to Muslims living either in or close to zones of conflict;⁴⁴ 2. Attract Muslims (native Muslims

43 <http://www.asansar.info/vb/showthread.php?p=79985> [26.05.2010].

44 Mainly Arab Muslims are addressed in Arabic. Zones of conflict include primarily theatres that are defined as “occupied by non-Muslim forces” and that can be travelled to (especially Iraq and classically Afghanistan / Pakistan). Palestine is naturally on the jihadists’ agenda, however, the focus for factual participations is set on Iraq and Afghanistan for the time being.

as well as converts) *outside* of the Islamic countries and increasingly *within* the West (by non-Arabic jihad media institutions, translations). Even though all of the FJA (re-) published files are in Arabic, particularly many writings are available in English. Most stories of the *shuhada'* are published by the English branch of the *al-Ansar al-Mujahideen* forum, such as the tales of the *mujahidin* of the "Islamic State of Iraq" or some videos of Abu Dujana with English subtitles. This is of course not a new practice, as early as 2003/04 *as-Sahab* videos surfaced with English subtitles⁴⁵ and in some cases (as for some *al-Kata'ib* films by the Harakat al-shabab al-Mujahideen in Somalia) a narrator speaks in English while Arabic subtitles are provided.⁴⁶ The fundamental principle of the FJA is to simply promote and spread chosen materials of *jihad* by all means. In this case, the *modus operandi* is sought that sympathizers are enabled by these data-packages to check their individual surrounding for Bluetooth enabled devices and hence blindly send out these catchy documents, videos and audio files to primarily Arab users. In some Arab countries, due to the harsh enforced segregation of the sexes, communicating and setting up 'secret dates' has mainly turned to the use of modern technology.⁴⁷ AQ in its never-ending endeavor is also always keen to capitalize on newest technology, providing the downloadable means combined with data taken from the spine of the ongoing online jihadism. In such a manner the FJA can be understood. As described in the mission statement,

45 One example is a video of the filmed *khutba* by Saudi AQAP ideologue 'Abdallah bin Muhammad al-Rushud entitled *wa-harrida al-mu'minin*. This was one of the first major subtitled videos exported to other – non-dominant Arabic – web spheres. This title, a part taken from Quran has in the meantime fused as a main part into the foundations of the greater jihadist corpus. This includes videos, such as from Somalia, with this title to justify their forms of combat while actively reaching out to potential recruits in late 2010.

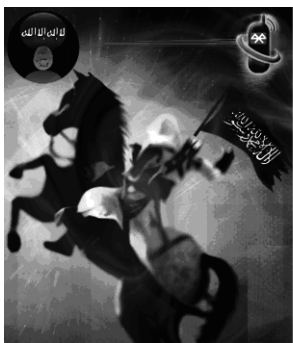
46 This, also, is not new. The *Jaysh al-Rashideen*, who operate in Iraq, published an English narrated, Arabic subtitled, video entitled "The Code of Silence" (published November 2006). This video starts with a warning that it has specifically been made to find its audience in the West, hence it includes music, in parts Vietnam-movie-styled pan-flute tones and reminds the viewer in parts of *Hizbullah* videos. The style and the narrator seems having been inspired by US moviemaker Michael Moore, who was popular at the time with US war critical movies such as "Fahrenheit 9/11" (2004). In an attempt to re-enact Moore's criticism as well as cynicism, the *Jaysh al-Rashideen* documentary depicts both, the war by US forces in Iraq (with news footage taken from international media institutions), as well as the war against the US forces with self-made films (showing the production and planting of IEDs or sniper attacks).

47 "So when you want to date a girl in the Emirates the best is by Bluetooth because society doesn't accept that men talk to girls?" asks a female reporter two men in the street. They reply: "Yes, it is something secret that shouldn't be done in public." [12.12.2010].

“the jihadist forums rise up for the firebrand assaults and oppose the enemies of God, His messenger and the believers (*al-mu'minun*) with their hopeless attempt to wage war [against us] with our judiciary efforts by such means. These have progressed – slowly but surely –, all praise be God, with the development of the propaganda and by technical aspects. And this is the benefit of God. That's what the brigades and media groups are about, who convey the methodology (*manhaj*) and fundamentals of faith (*'aqida*) of the pious Salafists.”⁴⁸

With vast amounts of contents and data⁴⁹ flooding the Internet on a daily basis of the jihadist genre, the “brothers [of the FJA] decreed to expand its jihadist medial outreach while infiltrating other spheres with the help of God.”⁵⁰ The general statement, however, is that of a defensive stance by protecting the “program of truth” in the ultimate and universal battle against the proscribed “program of falsehood”. With the jihadists increasingly local governments are trying to ‘whitewash’ Islam according to Western demands while claiming the “youth of Islam” is being brainwashed due to outside influences, the FJA considers itself as yet another platform to disseminate, proselytize and hence protect the true version of religion.

“What else are these projects then an answer to our noble *shaykhs*, stressing the need to develop the jihadist media” the FJA concludes with the call to “thus help your brothers by whatever means you can.”



Reactions within the sentiment of having to defend oneself as much as one's religion are also expressed in the English branch of the Arabic mother-forum,

48 <http://asansar.info/vb/showthread.php?p=79985>.

49 These “publications” (*isdarat*) are either digitalized, mainly until the subsequent development of online jihad prior that unfolded in 2003/04 onwards or, as usually, especially crafted to being disseminated via jihadist forums, blogs, Facebook groups and YouTube channels. This, naturally, includes also content created by users (*user created content – UCG*) which in turns adds to the already vast amounts of ‘officially’ and ‘semi-officially’ released *isdarat*.

50 <http://asansar.info/vb/showthread.php?p=79985>.

whereas members strengthen the conviction of being particularly vulnerable in non-Muslim majority states and who fall in line with the globalized AQ propaganda (and rhetoric). An alleged religious rooted sentiment has since been introduced, which is frequently repeated by (as they claim) Muslims in the Diaspora painting a grim picture of the future. In this near future, Islam is not only being forcefully alternated by local regimes *within* the Islamic countries, but, rather is also being persecuted *in the realms* of the “Crusaders” home countries:

“The crusader west in cooperation with the Jews and the Christians in the middle-east, Africa [sic] and Asia are planning 24 hours how to weaken Islam and its followers. You don’t need to travel to Afghanistan, Iraq or Somalia to see the crusaders fighting Islam and Muslims. Turn on your TV and count the channels which are fighting Islam by their tongue. You will hear them say;
we need to stop islamization! [sic]
We need to stop immigrants from Muslim countries!
Ban the Quran! Bomb mecca! [sic]”⁵¹

With the jihadists’ having hijacked⁵² specific elements of Islam to utilize their political goals and to justify all means of violence, the fear expressed online is one of deeper meddling into religious matters by the so-called “*ulama*’ of the Marines” to ultimately distort the ‘true religion’ specifically among the “youth of Islam” in Islamic countries. This is sought as a prime strategy to cut potential recruits for AQ and its affiliated torrents. It is also sought and portrayed as nearly impossible, as the Muslims are deemed ‘resistant’ to such mingling by infidel circles. As each and every Arab government is regarded as being a vassal or a marionette-regime of the West, the authority of broadcasting and issuing religious texts, interpretations and legal decrees (*fatwa*) is only for the ideological caste of the jihadists. Anything else is perceived as an attempt by the illegitimate governmental rulers to remain in power by exercising control over religious and social domains and hence the online corpus of jihad is portrayed as a first and last line of defense of ‘true principles’. Nevertheless, in the meantime the jihadists’ claims their own authority over anything else (as had been the case prior), but with the jihadist genre only minimally contested⁵³ and the jihadist corpus ever increasing (and widely not-removable from the internet), more and more niches are covered with alleged answers and alternatives to the conditions of the Islamic world.

51 Posting in the English section of the *Shabakat al-Ansar al-Mujahideen* Forum, <http://www.ansar1.info/showthread.php?p=102431#post102431> [26. 11. 2010].

52 For a note on “Hijacked Islam” and how – in this case – Islamic holidays are utilized by AQ to promote both terrorist operations as well as the specific online propaganda: <http://online.jihad.wordpress.com/2010/11/18/hijacked-islam/>.

53 <http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=3&id=23218> [12. 12. 2010].

The, as of writing, five data-packages by the FJA show the self-image and the self-confidence of the jihadists, who, by their choosing, summoned the most important elements and documents of the alternative school of thought of jihadism. In this context, the compilations of texts, pictures, videos and *anashid* can be seen as yet another front in the 21st centuries defensive jihad, operated and maintained by AQ, to counter the “tongue” of the enemies “fighting Islam.”



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